IT'S NOT JUST ART
A “COMPLICATED CONVERSATION” WITH TEACHERS
ON THE COVER

Arts at the Center of Teaching and Learning is the primary arts program at the Center for College Access and Success at Northeastern Illinois University. We arrive at this exhibition with over 20 years of working within the Chicago Public Schools using the arts to deepen student and teacher thinking and learning. Since 2011, Arts at the Center has been working with a group of dedicated art and content teachers in the Chicago Public Schools using our model of arts education alongside Lois Hetland’s Studio Thinking Framework as a lens for critically examining teaching practice and understanding student thinking. This learning community is an adaptive, thoughtful and responsive group of teachers committed to learning from and sharing with each other. Together, we have grown as teachers, as educators, and as artists.
It’s Not Just Art: “Complicated Conversation” With Teachers is a teacher created exhibition that invites conversation. We come to our understanding of the concept of a “complicated conversation” through the work of William Pinar (2011). What are our preconceived notions around the role of the art teacher within public education today? How can we better understand the complicated and rich teaching practices of teachers within the art studio and core content classrooms? A new understanding is created through this rigorous conversation. We invite you to come and participate.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Northeastern Illinois University
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Richard J. Helldobler, Ph.D., Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
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Funders
Lloyd A. Fry Foundation (2011-2014)
Polk Bros. Foundation (2011-2014)
Terra Foundation for American Art (2011-2013)
DeNicolo Family Foundation (2011-2013)

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Welcome to an exciting evening for the arts and educators! Twenty educators who have taken part in the Studio Thinking Learning Community/Project offer their work as a starting point for a conversation about the role of art artist in the classroom. The work shown at this gallery opening is a reflection of their shared experiences.

The Center for College Access and Success of Northeastern Illinois University is an innovator in programming that enhances teaching pedagogies, strengthens community engagement, and increases student achievement. We are nationally recognized as a leader in creating and supporting programs for teachers, students and their families. Our goal is to strengthen the pipeline to college by providing support for all our shareholders.

The Center of College Access and Success seeks to integrate standards-based arts disciplines across the academic curriculum and find connections within and among the various disciplines. Arts at the Center of Teaching and Learning is central to this mission and, with funding from multiple partners, pilots new programs. In this case, the Studio Thinking project works with teachers and artist teachers, to create arts curricula that enables them and their students to engage in rich learning together.

The Center for College Access and Success is very proud of the work of the teachers who have been part of the Studio Thinking Project over these past three years. I invite you to enjoy this excellent exhibition and learn about their experiences working together to improve educational outcomes for Chicago students.

Wendy M. Stack, Ph.D.
Associate Vice President, Access, Innovation, and Research and Executive Director
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A “COMPLICATED CONVERSATION”
In order to understand the potential of a “complicated conversation,” we must first examine what we mean when we say that we seek to have a “complicated conversation.” In the field of curriculum studies, William Pinar’s (2011) notion of curriculum as a “complicated conversation” is explained as “efforts at understanding through communication—among students and teachers, actually existing individuals in certain places on certain days, simultaneously personal and public” (p. 2). The art room invites opportunities to linger in thought and probe meaning expressed through objects and ideas. Pinar (2011) further elaborates on the “complicated conversation” through his notion of the “currere,” which involves “the running of the course wherein the curriculum is experienced and enacted” (p. 2). The “currere emphasizes the everyday experience of the individual and his or her capacity to learn from that experience, to reconstruct through thought and dialogue to enable understanding” (Pinar, 2011, p. 3).

It is the act of coming together in conversation within this gallery space to work through ideas embodied in objects and writing that allows us to challenge preconceived notions of arts learning and the role of the art teacher. We’ve noticed a conspicuous lack of “complicated conversation” around teaching in recent years and yet we expect teachers to actively increase student thinking and academic performances. How can we arrive at this elevated practice without “reconstructing through thought and dialogue” our own experiences as educators and students? Teachers are yearning for a substantive conversation around practice and curriculum, connect with one another, and to deepen understanding around what they do each day. A “complicated conversation” advances both teachers’ and student’s knowledge of self and the other.

Pinar (2011) suggests that “orality” is central to this complex conversation; “orality” references the temporally structured – a structuring – expression of subjectivity through text and/or, more broadly the text that constitutes the ongoing class discussion” (p. 21). In other words, students and their teachers come forward with their subjectivities and engage in challenging ideas connected to the text or artwork through conversation. In the case of many of our classroom studios, the artwork and the critique session becomes the text and the site for conversation. “Orality” involves referencing other texts (artworks), activating our own prior knowledge, touching on our past, present, private and public lives to reach out to others. Art can open us up to more experience, richer dialogue, and a proliferation of ideas. To arrive at a new understanding we need time and space, through guided conversations to experiment, challenge, and play with ideas. The “complicated conversation” cannot happen when teachers and students are squeezed for increased performance measures, crammed into classrooms, and given less time to dialogically expand their thinking. This exhibition invites conversation around what else an arts education can be.

EFFORTS AT UNDERSTANDING THROUGH A “COMPLICATED CONVERSATION”
By Kate Thomas
Director, Arts at the Center

How can a collection of diverse teaching practices represented through objects, ideas, and writing exhibited within an art gallery invite a “complicated conversation?” Our group asked ourselves this question as we set out to share our experiences within a learning community of 20 art teachers and their partnering content teachers. The isolation of a teaching practice held behind closed doors, monitored and regulated by increasing standardizations of practice, urged us to step forward and invite a “complicated conversation.” What do we really know about what goes on in the art studio? Who is the art teacher?
IT’S NOT JUST ART

Teaching is a paradoxical profession. Classrooms are full of active minds and bodies, but within these classrooms there is a sense of isolation. How can teachers see each other’s practice? Is there only a sensed feeling of what goes on in each other’s rooms? All too often colleagues pop into the art room to borrow an art supply or they see the art teacher from outside the room preparing materials during a prep period. What perceptions do they have of the qualities of thinking that go on within the art studio or in an arts experience? What do they think the art teacher does all day? Some colleagues, parents, or administrators mutter “it’s just art.” Within this exhibition, we wondered how might we see teachers as artists and artists as teachers if we exhibited teaching practices and questioned the role of the art teachers beyond the confines of the school walls? How might teaching practices exhibited within the gallery help us look at arts learning differently? Perhaps to see differently is to open ourselves up to unanticipated experiences. A teaching practice remains invisible or unrecognizable as it blends into the everydayness of school life. We have been students in the classroom. Some of us have taught, many of us have visited classrooms in our professional life and yet, what do we really know about the role of the teacher, especially the art teacher? This learning community wanted to address the questions of how we teach, process versus product, the development of curriculum, the role of experience, relationships with students, the space itself, and the development of the students’ mind over time.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WHO WE ARE

We arrive at this exhibition with over 20 years of working within the Chicago Public Schools using arts integration to deepen student and teacher learning. Our program, Arts at the Center of Teaching and Learning at the Center for College Access and Success at Northeastern Illinois University, grew out of the Lakeview Arts and Education Project known as LEAP. This partnership brought together three elementary schools including Blaine, Audubon, and Ravenswood with Lakeview High School. This unique network of a university partner, local businesses, arts organizations and schools set in motion our model for arts education, which has been replicated and tested with organizations and schools set in motion our model for arts thinking within the school-based studio. Hetland and her colleagues propose that perhaps these habits of mind and dispositions go beyond the art room. Our learning community met almost monthly for the past three years. Initially our learning community consisted of 27 art teachers and their content partners, however, several teachers moved out of the district, or found that they were over-committed. The majority of our group stayed together and deepened their practice, continuously returning to their students’ work to better understand arts thinking and deepen the conversation.

Our work as a community has explicitly stated goals and objectives, but much of our learning has emerged in unanticipated places. The nature of our community has remained open to what teachers have been most keen to address; student learning, shared practice amongst each other, and shedding new light on experiences in the art room. It takes significant time to build trust, responsiveness, break down the isolation of teaching, and validate each other as experts. This has been our ongoing commitment to teachers and each other. This project has been an enormously satisfying experience. We have grown in unimaginable ways. We stepped into each other’s classrooms, collectively examined student work and asked difficult questions about ourselves as arts educators. We thank you for joining us in this conversation. To witness this project’s ongoing evolution of a “complicated conversation”, visit our blog at everyarteverychild.blogspot.com.

REFERENCES


EVALUATION AS CLASSROOM-BASED CONNOISSEURSHIP IN INTERPLAY WITH A COMMUNITY OF CRITICAL INQUIRY

By Cynthia Gehrie, Ph.D.
Project Evaluator

The evaluation approach I describe here is unusual. It evolved through twenty years of work with arts integration projects at the Center for College Access and Success (formerly the Chicago Teachers’ Center). Features from our current work are integrated with an evaluative and historical development of core discoveries connected to classroom instruction and the emerging role of both art and content teachers.

BACKGROUND

I have worked with Arts at the Center’s gifted professional development and program design team of Matt Dealy and Kate Thomas for two decades. Naturally, our thinking and our methodologies migrated as we faced new professional requirements and interacted with thoughtful classroom teachers, artist teachers, teaching artists and their students in K-12 classrooms across the Chicago metropolitan area. I began as a video documenter for the Lakeview Education Arts Project (LEAP) and the Annenberg Challenge projects out of Arts at the Center. I was then their external evaluator for Arts Impacting Achievement (AIA) and ARTS Berwyn, both U.S. Department of Education grants.

In LEAP, I developed a collaborative system in which I video-recorded classroom lessons and interviewed teachers, teaching artists and students. By selecting clips from the raw footage, I was able to facilitate meetings with the program and professional development team to review clips and video drafts. Early on we discovered that students from primary grades through secondary school were able to clearly discuss both their process artifacts and culminating artwork. By referencing artwork physically or in photograph/video media, they could identify the materials and techniques they used, the sequence of their creative process, choices and decisions they made along the way, the ideas and knowledge embedded in the work, how they envisioned their work in an exhibit, and how their sense of themselves as artists was reflected in the work.

In our current Studio Thinking project, Thomas integrated this collaborative process with her prior experience using videography to videotape students as they worked in classrooms. She would interview students as they revisited their creative process while referencing their created artifacts. These video interviews were then used in our professional learning sessions to demonstrate interviewing techniques and prepare art and classroom teachers to conduct their own student interviews.

In AIA, I conducted teacher interviews in classrooms and photo-documented student-produced knowledge artifacts and artwork present in the learning environment. As we continued our evolution into ARTS Berwyn, I added classroom mapping and a complete photo profile to the environmental archive. In an initial classroom interview I would ask teachers to identify artifacts and student work that most reflected their normal teaching practice. In the Studio Thinking project, Dealy and Thomas continued this ethnographic research process conducting classroom...
visits and interviewing project art teachers in their working context. They photographed teachers teaching a lesson, documented their classroom environments, and asked about their normal teaching and reflective practice.

From the start, art and content teachers in the current Studio Thinking project developed a conversation about a wider educational role for art teachers.

HOW DO OTHER TEACHERS IN THE SCHOOL UNDERSTAND THE ART CLASSROOM AND THE ROLE OF THE ART TEACHER?

Do they see the art teacher as a resource for more creative and autonomous projects associated with their classroom studies? Content teachers pursued these questions alongside their art teacher colleagues.

HOW DO OTHER TEACHERS INCLUDE THE ARTS IN CLASSROOM STUDY, AND HOW MIGHT THIS BE ENHANCED?

HOW, PHYSICALLY AND PRACTICALLY, IS IT POSSIBLE TO ACTIVELY COLLABORATE WITH OTHER TEACHERS?

HOW CAN EXHIBITS IN THE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CHANGE THE SENSE OF THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF ART IN ESTABLISHING DIALOGUE THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT?

In previous work I created instruments that helped me describe, synthesize and score large bodies of qualitative data. Dealy and Thomas developed and refined data-generating, active instruments such as a lesson planner and a rubric for the Eight Studio Habits of Mind developed by Lois Hetland and others in their Every Art, Every Child project, which immediately preceded this Studio Thinking project (see www.everyarteverychild.org). This scoring instrument was paired with a reflection form the students and teachers completed after an art session. Using writing and drawing, K-8 students wrote about what they did, the materials they used, how they responded and what they discovered. The vocabulary from the Studio Habits served as catalyst, helping scaffold metacognition as normal practice into the learning community.

Early in this Studio Thinking project we adapted the Studio Habits reflection form developed in the Every Art, Every Child project and presented it in a professional development session. Content and art teachers were asked to use these student reflections as a primary assessment tool in their collaboratively developed lesson plans. Art and content teachers documented and studied an art project in their classrooms. By the end of year one, project teachers developed at least one classroom project, explored collaborating with other teachers in the school, integrated the Studio Habits into their project, asked students to write up their learning experience in a variety of ways, and prepared photo slide shows of their projects to present at a professional learning session. Yet, after so much work, the teachers found themselves in the doldrums - stalled and uncertain. Two questions informed a professional development presentation I delivered between the first and second year of this project designed to help the teachers see more deeply into the students’ metacognitive process:

HOW DO WE GET BENEATH THE SURFACE TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN USING THE EIGHT STUDIO HABITS AS REFLECTIVE LENSES, AND PROMOTE DIALOGUE TO AUTHENTICALLY FEED CREATIVE PROCESS?

HOW DO WE RESPOND WHEN STUDENTS REFLECT ON THEIR ART MAKING PROCESS?

SUMMER INSTITUTE 2012

In ARTS Berwyn, teachers created documentation archives of each arts-integrated unit they taught, leaving us with a total of 100 gigabytes of visual data archived by 27 teachers teaching 91 arts integrated units. During this massive process of qualitative analysis, we saw that focused self-documentation provided a data reserve to authentically mirror the learning process. Teachers used these data to provoke their own reflective process and classroom dialogue with students. Teachers wrote up multiple examples of new understandings about their students discovered by reviewing documentation and student reflections, which would have otherwise been unnoticed.

In the 91 units analyzed from ARTS Berwyn, the strongest meta-cognition was found in classrooms where teachers worked with students to build a rich process vocabulary, or where teachers and artists co-created strong visual experiences with students that generated sensory imagery and an emotional response.

This critical discovery was used to bring teachers and students though a modeled creative and reflective process (see Improvisation essay on p. 10). In ARTS Berwyn, the first Studio Habit reflecting new vocabulary
was **Develop Craft**. Even very young students were able to draw the materials they used, adding labels such as “paint brushes, oil pastels, camera or pencils.” Students easily placed themselves in their drawing of making art, represented other children making art, or did both. This developed into a process, or sequence, of describing how art is made and the feelings that surface while making. Nearly all students were able to verbalize three reflective levels aligned with the art they were making. These three levels are: materials they used, what they did with the materials, and what feelings they have while making. This is exactly where students begin when using reflection in conjunction with their art making. Teachers can then respond to this beginning reflection by asking for more information or tracking reflection to be sure all three levels are addressed.

Using the three levels of action, materials, and feelings, students move on to verbalize about the next image they might make, or ask about a problem they have in making the next part of an image. **Studio Habits of Mind** begin to emerge. They **Envision** an extension of their work and begin to scaffold how they will do it. The work becomes non-linear as they envision more than one possibility. These reflections open possibilities for dialogue with the teacher and other students about the options for different directions and materials or techniques they might choose.

As we are making art, we constantly recall sensory imagery and emotional memories. They evoke in us feelings and suggest images and materials for our work. This is the basis for internal verbalization. Internal verbalization is the mental conversation we have within ourselves about our making, and the response we anticipate it might evoke in others. Internal verbalization is an essential component of metacognition.

The process of making art and the internal verbalization it provokes enhances the students’ capacity to be aware of their mental imagery and attendant feelings. It supports developing reflective language created during this process. This is an important component of critical thinking.

Internal verbalization is externalized during dialogue and conversation. Conversation is open-ended and freely associated, whereas dialogue is focused on a topic or question. In the art classroom, both are enriched when students verbally externalize their creative process by sharing with each other their internal verbalizations about making art.

The internal process is enriched when students import information they can use when making art. Much of this information derives from **Observation**. It can be from closely looking at or sketching notations for something one will draw. Or it can be from graphic or written knowledge sources like maps, diagrams, scientific illustration, and text. The process of notation and observation is a direct link that students use to bring knowledge or mediated information into their creative process. This deep connection can be used to link the art studio to other content classrooms and aligns with essential knowledge resources used in contemporary art.

While making art, one observes his or her creative process and the alchemy of using materials on the emergent image or object, which generates another thread of internal verbalization. It feeds the emergent sense of what is possible and the critical sense of what is working or not working. Internal verbalization is a mind tool that helps the student stay with a project and re-engage when they get stuck or bored by careful repetitive actions.

The dispositions of **developing craft** and **observation** hone the artist’s capacity through internal verbalization to intentionally **express** what they envision while making art. Gaining control of the technical process helps the artist to **engage and persist** over the complex steps that comprise a creative sequence of art making.

Art making is intrinsically engaging because it takes place on three levels of connection: feelings linked to mental images, materials manipulated physically or virtually, and the emergent sensory image(s). Each of these levels is doubly connected to a desire to communicate with an audience to evoke feelings, demonstrate mastery with materials, and astonish with a powerful image. At all stages of metacognition, it can be intrinsically satisfying to playfully **explore** new materials or **stretch** familiar materials in new directions.

We can align the metacognitive process associated with **studio thinking** with language from academic research in critical thinking and problem solving. Consider for a moment how selected research vocabulary presented here associates to dispositions of **studio thinking**: monitoring, self-correction, self-appraisal, awareness, alert consciousness, problem representation, self-discovery, self-understanding, task completion, mental imagery, strategy identification, suppositional thinking, inquiry process, introspection, awareness of feelings, meaning making, metaphor, knowledge of self in the world (Tarricone, 2011).

### HOW CAN WE MAKE VISIBLE THAT THESE COMPONENTS, SO ELUSIVE AND VALUED BY THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH COMMUNITY, ARE DEEPLY EMBEDDED IN ART MAKING?
SUMMER INSTITUTE 2013
The artist teacher researcher as connoisseur, critic and curator

After two years intensively working together as a learning community investigating Studio Thinking, artistic and critical thinking, and the role of the arts in public education, project teachers came together for another summer professional development series. Together, we spent two days mapping the program, and envisioning and strategizing about classroom based research where:

Documentation and evaluation of art making and artist growth are conducted by artist-teacher researchers;

Data are students’ art and documentation of their reflective writing, conversation and dialogue;

Researchers are connoisseurs and critics, working in an alternative system parallel to academic research;

Data analysis is approached through critique and curation; and

Publication is exhibition.

HOW DO WE CONVEY THE VALUE OF CLASSROOM BASED RESEARCH IN A SCHOOL DISTRICT FOCUSED ON ACHIEVEMENT TESTING AND ACADEMIC, QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH MODELS?

This question led us to look at the two systems of research as a Venn diagram where there are areas of overlap. By finding these areas of overlap, we identified elements within the proposed research that have value in the dominant system. An important area of overlap is in the discovery of teaching approaches associated with student achievement.

In 23 meta-analyses of “implementation that emphasize feedback” in 1,287 studies, “feedback” was “among the most important influences on student achievement.” (Hattie, 2009, pp. 171-178). A surprising discovery in Hattie’s own study of feedback was that the feedback teachers “provide to students” is less powerful than “when it is from the student to the teacher.” Other meta-analyses of important teaching approaches to student achievement are metacognitive strategies and metacognitive study skills. Study skills most influential on student achievement are “organizing and transforming” (such as preliminary sketches), “self consequences” (such as working toward a public exhibition), “self instruction” (verbalizing internally or externally the steps to take while envisioning how to move to the next stage of a sequence), “self evaluation” (close observation of technique and constructive alterations), and “help seeking” (such as peer dialogue, teacher consultation or classroom critique.) (Hattie, 2009, pp. 188-192).

A reflective teaching and learning practice is rich in internal verbalization, student feedback, classroom dialogue, and teacher feedback. They are used to perceive how students develop artistic capacity, as well as identify gaps that interfere with continued growth. As connoisseur, teachers use their ability to discern where the students are, and search this learning profile by mentally scanning a career’s worth of art making, study and teaching. The teachers match the student’s profile to an appropriate demonstration of craft, recommendation of resource, dialogue about technique, story or direct bit of information that they share. Students use this response to fill in gaps and develop skill. Each encounter deepens and diversifies the context and experience of the teacher. This is the essence of critique – a mutual process of inquiry focused on student feedback and teacher response.

Elliot Eisner (1991) wrote extensively about the researcher as both connoisseur and critic. He understood that the connoisseur has skill and experience of such subtlety that it is unseen and unknown to outside observers. This leads to conversations about the mutual support where connoisseurs thrive and about the public role of the critic. Eisner (1991) tells us,

“The task of the critic is to perform a mysterious feat well: to transform the qualities of a painting, play, novel, poem, classroom or school, or act of teaching and learning into a public form that illuminates, interprets, and appraises the qualities of that experienced” (p. 86).

The artist teacher researcher is a connoisseur, critic, and curator. Exhibition is the public form.

REFERENCES


IMPROVISATION AS A CREATIVE ENGINE

Students’ work and reflective journals from previous Arts at the Center projects, facilitated by Kate Thomas and Matt Dealy, made us aware of the role of mental imagery in metacognition and critical thinking. We watched as visual artists rubbed shoulders with theater and dance artists, sharing techniques that encouraged children to use their bodies to express mental images, and to project new mental images as body gestures.

As teachers and artists gained confidence with imaging, they moved into deeper realms of improvisation. Improvisation pre-supposes that students already know how to express using their bodies, and are able to construct moving images using compositional elements of theater and dance/movement. Soon teachers were able to use improvisation as a tool in interdisciplinary projects like creative writing. They used tableau and improvisation like a sketchbook, working out characters, actions, props, and expressions. With these co-constructed mental images, students wrote stories independently and compared their stories with members of their improvisation group. With music artists, the students began to improvise with sound using percussion with body parts and objects.

In all of these explorations, what surfaced was the importance of initiating a project with vocabulary for both art and content, and generating mental imagery students could draw upon as the project developed. As we moved into our current project using the Studio Thinking Framework, we wondered how we could introduce improvisation and mental imagery building to visual arts teachers in Chicago Public Schools.

To bring these ideas to a new group of artist teachers, I reflected on our experiences with mental imagery in interdisciplinary learning and improvisation. In particular, I made connections to complex concepts articulated by Damasio (2000) in his book The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness. I began to understand that during improvisation one engages multiple layers of self and responds in a way that spontaneously draws from a wider self than in everyday activities. In the spirit of interdisciplinary imaging, I saw three layers of self that emerge during improvisation.

ESSENTIAL SELF

Mental images of the essential self divide into the conscious and the unconscious. We are aware of, and able to focus upon, those which are conscious. The unconscious mental images must be brought into consciousness in order to engage them in thought. Like an iceberg, most of our mental images are underwater, with only a small percentage actually visible by our conscious self. So, what is invisible in the unconscious? Damasio (2000) suggests that the unconscious includes:

“...all the fully formed images to which we do not attend; all the neural patterns that never become images; all the dispositions that were acquired through experience, lie dormant, and may never become an explicit neural pattern; all the quiet remodeling of such dispositions and all their quiet renetworking that may never become explicitly known; and all the hidden wisdom and know-how that nature embodied in innate, homeostatic dispositions” (p. 228).

The unconscious is a vast reservoir of unused experiential material. But what is the connection between conscious and unconscious? Is the unconscious active or dormant until called upon by the conscious? These are questions of a modern mind resembling Dr. Freud’s postulation of an unconscious state, and
conception of psychoanalysis as a method of putting the conscious mind in contact with its own unconscious counterpart.

The Surrealists, parallel to psychoanalysis, used games and drawing techniques to extract mental imagery from the unconscious. In *Paris Peasant*, Aragon (1926/1994) offered these thoughts on the unconscious and its relationship to the conscious:

“Obviously there can be no true sense of the unconscious if we limit ourselves to the general conception of this faculty. At least, one could not have more than an abstract knowledge, or rather a logical intuition, of it. But if we consider that the conscious can derive its elements from no other source than the unconscious, then we are obliged to agree that the conscious is contained within the unconscious. It is thus a preliminary sense by the conscious of the unconscious, a sense (of direction) which starts off figuratively but extends itself logically, and which in this way occupies the whole mind, that we may justifiably name the sense of the unconscious” (p.125).

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SELF**

Damasio (2000) speaks of the autobiographical self as a sense of self that “appears to remain the same... because it is based on a repository of memories for fundamental facts in an individual biography that can be partly reactivated and thus provide continuity and seeming permanence in our lives” (p. 217). It is the source of a mental image we construct of ourselves and constantly remodel. Who directs this process? Damasio (2000) asserts, “I believe that much of the building occurs nonconsciously and that so does the remodeling” (p. 224).

When students work with mental images through the arts, and step through the frame into a virtual reality within the art form, they are often surprised to find themselves knowing what to do, how to pose, or how to move. Inspiration and new “ideas” flood into their conscious minds, feeding a fluid and plastic process of exploration and expression. They express surprise at what they can do, as do their teachers and peers. Where does this newfound capacity come from?

**POTENTIAL SELF**

I call this capacity that suddenly emerges when students engage in the arts a potential self. Somehow, parts of their self become conscious and available as we make or do things.

“The heart of improvisation is the free play of consciousness as it draws, writes, paints, and plays the raw material emerging from the unconscious.”

—Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990), *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*

How can improvisation be used in visual arts classes to build strong images in student artwork? Thomas, Dealy and I began to imagine how to use improvisation as a source of strong visual images. We began to think of setting up a zone of experience where art teachers would step through a frame into a visually rich environment. We would present them with an improvisational situation within which they were obliged to respond. We hoped to stimulate a response by the whole self, at all three levels: the essential self, both conscious and unconscious; the autobiographical self, drawing on prior knowledge and experience; and the potential self, emerging with a new perspective and responding with fresh images.
During our session, after introducing project teachers to the psychoanalytic foundation we were coming from, we engaged them in an improvisational activity. Thomas and Dealy introduced large red balloons into the meeting space, inviting everyone to join in keeping the balloons in the air. They continued to bring out more balloons until the room was filled with red balloons, as everyone batted them and kept them aloft. We did not rush through the balloon float. The energetic movement of these large, buoyant, red objects was calming and hypnotic. As they all eventually dropped to the ground, Thomas and Dealy quietly removed them from the room.

ENVISION #1
Everyone stood together as I read instructions for the first mental imagery exercise. In a peaceful tone, I asked the participants to envision themselves observing this activity from three different perspectives. With my verbal guidance, I had them develop mental images of what this sea of red balloons looked like as a bystander in the corner, as someone floating above and looking down, and as someone standing in the middle of all these people tapping the red balloons. I asked, “What images do you see?” The teachers then used black charcoal to draw one image from each perspective on a 6”x6” piece of white paper, adding one descriptive word to go with each drawing. The drawings were collected and hung in groups according to the represented perspective. One artist teacher was asked to lead the group in selecting images and words from each set that represented the strongest images. Selections were set aside into sub groups from the perspective of a bystander in the corner, floating above, or in the center of the improvisation. When a drawing was nominated, the sponsor was asked to explain why they had selected the drawing and to articulate its appeal and strengths. In each case, the nomination process was allowed to continue as long as people continued to nominate new drawings. Each defense stimulated responses from the group, which generated a sense as to whether the drawing should be advanced to a “selection” for future work.

The next activity began when Thomas and Dealy brought a few balloons back into the room. This time the balloons had short strings tied to them. Thomas and Dealy held the string at one end, and punched the balloon to make it move the end of the string and then spring back. More balloons with strings were passed around until everyone was working with the balloons, trying to bat them out and pull them back using the string. When everyone was successfully bouncing the balloons, Thomas and Dealy began to use the outward stroke to gently bounce the balloon off of another person. This started a mildly aggressive period of playfully bouncing the red balloons off of each other. Suddenly, a balloon popped. Then another POP. And another POP. Thomas and Dealy concealed pins and conspicuously began to pop the balloons. Soon most of the balloons were popped, while a few remained. The surviving balloons were vigorously protected by their “keepers.” As Thomas and Dealy tried to reach a balloon, the rest of the group cheered on the “keepers” to prevent the balloon from being popped. The atmosphere in the room was electrified as each remaining balloon was tracked down and popped. When the last balloon popped, a shout of outrage erupted.

ENVISION #2
Once again, I verbally guided the artist teachers through the visualization activity. I asked them to envision that the activity was still happening; the people are batting their balloons to the end of the string, and yanking them back to bat again. Envision yourself floating up to the ceiling and looking down
at the balloons bouncing off all the people and everyone batting the balloons at one another. Imagine yourself dropping down until you are standing on the floor. Imagine walking over to the corner and turning around and watching the balloons bouncing off one another in the center of the room. Now imagine you are walking into the balloons and standing in the middle of all the people. Imagine the loud pop as balloons burst. I asked, “What images do you see?” The teachers then used black charcoal to draw one image from each perspective on a 6”x6” piece of white paper, adding one descriptive word for each drawing.

COMBINING MENTAL IMAGERY WITH VOCABULARY
The improvisation with the red balloons created a shared event that immediately allowed mental images to surface from three perspectives (above, from a corner, and in the center of the action). The mental images are transformed into expressive black charcoal drawings with a word or phrase associated with the experience written within the drawing. By grouping the images by perspective, it is possible to view common threads and the range of images, and vocabulary generated. Both vocabulary and mental images become artifacts.

KEEP THE BALLOONS IN THE AIR
The vocabulary list from the above perspective during the first “Keep the Balloons in the Air” improvisation included such terms as jumping, boing, pop, trajectory, bouncy, flight, movement, and calming. The images and words are dynamic as they incorporate movement and sound into the mental image. In “Jumping,” the spiral circles and filled in circles give the sense of rising and falling spheres, which is how the balloons rose and fell. This is enhanced by perspective as smaller, more distant circles, are in the center. By varying the diameter of the circles, a sense of nearness and distance is communicated. “Pop” brings in the audio image of a balloon bursting, which happened spontaneously during the first improvisation. The star and balloon are boldly drawn, giving an impression of impact. Other circles near the word “pop” recede in size like an echo of the single explosive “pop.” The audio “pop” becomes a visual “pop.”

From the standing in the corner perspective, the vocabulary list included react, dance, floating, circles, boiling, waiting, and pop. These words attached to their black and white images captured the suspended rising of the balloons, the way the moving balloons interacted as in a “dance.” “Circles” and “boiling” suggest the movement of the balloons and the movement of the participants as they kept the balloons aloft.

Terminology attached to the images from the center of the action during the “Keep the Balloons in the Air” improvisation included bump, surrounded, looking up, molecule, central, caution, impact, and eye protection. “Surrounded,” “central,” and “bump” communicate the sense of crowded action in the center of improvisation. People and balloons were bumping into one another, competing for space as balloons moved haphazardly and people lunged to bat them up before they fell to the ground. This sensation of spontaneously responding to unpredicted action is a key element of improvisation. “Eye protection,” “caution,” and “impact” all carry a concern for safety in the midst of a chaotic, improvised moment.

BATTING BALLOONS AND POP
Artifacts from the “Batting Balloons and Pop” activity provided a new set of vocabulary and mental images. The vocabulary list from the above perspective included push-pull, reverb, vibration, mingling, collision, and snap. The “Push
and Pull” drawing used arrows pointing up and down. It abstracts the power in punching the balloon away, and its quick return from the end of the string. Yet, the string provided a limit, which added control to this dynamic action. “Reverb” and “vibration” reference the sound of punching that filled the improvisational space. In journal reflections, participants wrote about finding a rhythm, or using a pom-pom, or returning to their childhood.

From the standing in the corner perspective, the vocabulary list included terms like afar, energy, concentration, finding, pulse, and attack. The “afar” drawing focused on being distant from the balloons, their compression, and vibration. “Energy” shows movement in the balloons, and the ceiling fan above. “Concentration” and “finding pulse” illustrate the energy created from the balloons and makes visible the process of gaining control of the bounce, and establishing a rhythm that is efficient and consistent. “Attack” shows this energy in a different way, expressing confusion and shock.

Images from the center of the action in this second improvisation included game over, threat, disappointment, frenzy, hunting, amid, and attach. This new image of “attack” (different from the standing in the corner perspective) shows the balloons beneath a dark shape of confusion and aggression. The emotion shows the balloon as prey, “hunting” each balloon with a pin. A moment ago we were “amid,” but now there is “threat” and “frenzy.” With the bursting of the last balloon, there is “disappointment” and a sense of “game over.”

**MURAL DRAWING – SESSION ONE**

The improvisational activity transformed into a collaborative mural making exercise. The 6”x6” drawings, previously selected as the strongest images, were placed around two large pieces of brown craft paper. One paper was surrounded by the selects from the “Keep the Balloons in the Air” improvisation while the other large paper was surrounded by the selects from the “Batting Balloons and Pop” improvisation. Everyone was invited to pick a mural to work on, to meet with the others who selected to work on that mural, and to decide how to go about creating a mural using black charcoal, white chalk and red pastel sticks. Each group was instructed to reference the drawings and vocabulary to create a complex visual image of their respective improvisation.

**MURAL DRAWING – SESSION TWO**

After each group completed the first draft of their murals, they switched places so that the “Keep the Balloons in the Air” group was now working on top of the “Batting Balloons and Pop” mural, and vice versa. They began to alter the images, tone, and mood of the other group’s original draft by adding images from their own mural. The first mural was attacked with images from the second. The second mural was relaxed and hidden behind a veil of white chalk and circles. Images from the 6”x6” improvisational drawings were woven into the second mural, including the whirling fan, broken balloons, words and strong arrows. Through this exchange, each mural came to express a fusion of both red balloon improvisations.

**REFLECTION**

When the murals were finished, artist teachers had a chance to reflect on their experience of using improvisation as a source of mental images. One artist teacher said that she worked more slowly the second time around when creating the individual images. Several agreed that the visions were getting more exciting and interesting with each experience. Here are some of their thoughts:
"I was made very aware, through the essential self exercise, of how we all see differently, how we connect to different ways of kinesthetic activity. The Studio Habits of Mind work differently with each individual."

"I was reminded to use drawing as notation, as well as to create situations that allow students to respond openly and improvise."

**ANALYTIC INQUIRY**

A day later, the artist teachers returned to find the murals on a wall and all of the 6”x6” images placed on large tables. They formed groups and were asked to examine a section of images in order to organize them into categories. They began by selecting images that went together, deciding on characteristics the drawings shared and which categories they represented as a group of images. One teacher asked, “Can we look at the skills involved as a place to start?” This group located images and brought them together according to certain criteria, for example, setting aside those that were linear drawings, representational, or abstract.

Working in two groups, artist teachers shared their inquiry into the database to generate vocabulary around art skills. The vocabulary was transcribed onto a whiteboard and key images were added to the list. The art skills vocabulary list from the first group included pattern, representational, narrative, unique, quality, express, provocative/evoke, mood, emotion, energy, contrast/space, negative value, positive value, use of medium, engagement, shape/form, line, quality, and impact. Art skills vocabulary generated from the second group included mark making, movement/composition, directional lines, technique, line quality, value-contrast, application for expression, risk taking, stretch and explore, unique interpretation, and visualizing experiences.

As a final step of analytic inquiry, each group created critique questions based on the art skill vocabulary that emerged in the analysis of the set of images. The first group asked, “What engages you as a viewer? Why do you think the artist only used black? How do artists use elements and principles of art making? Create a narrative for this image - what provoked the artist to make it?” Critique questions from the second group were, “What mood does this involve/provoke? What about the work causes those feelings? What common thread is there between these images?”

As they continued to engage in a dialogue around the assessment of these 6”x6” images, the categories became more and more filtered. The artist teachers generated vocabulary from an open-ended inquiry into the image database of these drawings. They developed emergent questions for critique informed by the artwork and the data embedded within them. The artist teachers used their own process made artwork as material to be mined for further evidence of knowing. In their reflective writing, the artist teachers discussed this process.

"Is learning a linear process? Is learning a more disparate global process? A combo? How do we capture the deep/complex multi-level learning that happens in art without reducing it to measurable components?"

**REFERENCES**


The conversation evolves as Cynthia recalls a section of text from a book she is currently reading (The Taxonomy of Metacognition)...

“Metacognition refers to one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, e.g. the learning-relevant properties of information or data... Metacognition refers among other things, to the active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these processes in relation to the cognitive objects or data on which they bear, usually in the service of some concrete goal or objective” (Tarricone, 2011, p. 2).

Cynthia pauses, then goes on to quote Flavell and reads...

“For example, I am engaging in metacognition (metamemory, metalearning, metaattention, metalanguage, or whatever) if I notice that I am having more trouble learning A than B, if it strikes me that I should double-check C before accepting it as a fact; if it occurs to me that I had better make a note of D because I may forget it; if I think to ask someone about E to see if I have it right. Such examples could be multiplied endlessly. In any kind of cognitive transaction with the human or nonhuman environment, a variety of information processing activities may go on” (as cited in Resnick, 1976, p. 232).

CYNTHIA: I think we try to make (reflection) into “a thing.” It’s really a constant pushing and effort to expand our awareness, our awareness of ourselves and who we are, how we approach things, how we do the work that we do, what things we tend to do all the time, and what things we might be doing that we never do. All of that is part of that and then it gets extended into all the things we are trying to learn about and all of the things we want to be able to do successfully. Another thing across the board in reflection is that it almost always has a specific problem, and so the reflection process is a process where we are constantly referencing a goal that we have.

KITTY: If you make that goal explicit then... I just think about today. We took the kids around to see the school show and I didn’t really go with a goal in mind other than to leave a note for the artist and maybe to generate some ideas for their own work and understanding the art world; the kids understanding that the kids in our building are artists. I guess that is the goal: understanding that you have all these artists around you that are resources for you.

CYNTHIA: To become aware of all the resources around you...

KITTY: Yah, I wasn’t complicit about that.

CYNTHIA: A goal. I don’t think that we are talking about outcomes here. I think we’re talking about more strategies, more strategic thinking about things. Reflection is about planning.

KITTY: Like planning how to start to talk to kids...

CYNTHIA: All of these things, all of these things.

KITTY: So this is the meta-cognition piece. My research when I was in grad school was on autonomy in the middle school and I think the developmental piece of meta-cognition needs to be talked about because it’s all about presence, being present and what you’re present for. And the distraction developmentally of a middle school child and their hormonal nightmare, the fluctuations, whatever it is... they are so not about quiet reflection in these settings.

CYNTHIA: But meta-cognition
would be naming what they are about rather than saying, “Now stop being how you are and be more like some image we have of how reflection should be.”

**KATE SCHICK**: And, how do you help them to reflect?

**KITTY**: It won’t necessarily look like what we want it to look like but we’re still reflecting. Like I think the activity I did with the 7th graders was a reflection of a word, but it was reflection. It was extremely social. It has to be at their age.

**KATE SCHICK**: Right.

**KITTY**: Interactive and social... that was maybe reflecting, but that was their brainstorming or maybe their envisioning.

**CYNTHIA**: Reflection is not brainstorming. Brainstorming is not reflection.

**KITTY**: I’m trying to figure out what it is. Were they reflecting on this social issue or concept?

**CYNTHIA**: Here is the problem with reflection, because reflection has come to mean so many things. In psychology reflection has specific kinds of meanings, where as we use it as any time when you just sit and go (she gestures looking off into space) explore something verbally. Brainstorming is not that. In fact, brainstorming is going into the off list.

**KITTY**: I don’t mean... I guess I mean in the way that Lois talks about how reflecting appears in the envisioning process and that’s what I’m talking about. Maybe brainstorming is not the word but the process where they are generating how they are going to possibly approach this problem that is put to them.

**CHRISY**: Aren’t they also assessing prior knowledge when they’re doing reflection?

**CYNTHIA**: Reflection is about problem solving; at least in the literature reflection always begins with prior knowledge. So those things, in terms of what the literature says, are definitely in the zone of reflection.

**KITTY**: Are you talking about Lois’ literature?

**CYNTHIA**: No, I’m talking about the literature in the general field of psychology on meta-cognition. That’s what I’m talking about.

**KITTY**: I see. I was just struck by Lois’ conversation when she talked to us in October and she said reflection appears throughout the process.

**CYNTHIA**: Exactly.

**KITTY**: And it’s not this final assessment piece.

**CYNTHIA**: Exactly. It’s not something you do and then you’re done. Reflection is a side bar to everything we do, every minute. So it’s not like now we’re going to reflect. It’s not like that. The reflection is built into every single part of it. It wears a different face at different parts and phases.

**KITTY**: So how important is it to name it?

**CYNTHIA**: To name it as in label it?

**KITTY**: Oh, “now you’re reflecting.” Catch them in the act of reflecting.

**CYNTHIA**: I think it’s better to be generating lots of questions that are reflective modalities. You can say to someone, “What are you doing with your feet right now?” or “What are you doing with your hands right now?”

**MATT**: Rather than labeling it, creating opportunities for it.

**CYNTHIA**: And ask questions that will guide them in the process of doing it. You know if part of reflection is about prior knowledge then you can ask thousands of questions about prior knowledge and listen to the answers. If it’s problem solving, there’s all kinds of questions that can be asked about the problem solving process.

**KITTY**: So I’m metacognitive right now and I’m watching my brain think, and I’m thinking to myself, “How does this apply to the practice of teaching art?” You know I’m always sort of at this next step. I get what you’re saying, how does that apply to my... there’s a nuts and bolts piece to teaching. What is it that we need to do, or not do, to make that known? Or does that get too lofty and esoteric for the young kids? You know my action research is all about scaffolding. How do we begin this conversation when they are three years old so that by the time they’re 13 it’s so natural the conversation just rolls off their tongue because they’ve been using this vocabulary and language for so long? Is it about naming it? Is it about teaching it? What’s it about for us as teachers? How does that play out for us?

“Reflection is a side bar to everything we do, every minute. So it’s not like now we’re going to reflect. It’s not like that. The reflection is built into every single part of it. It wears a different face at different parts and phases.”

**CYNTHIA**: The thing that comes to mind right away is all the kids’ drawing they do when they are reflecting in arts integration, where they are showing through drawing the process that they are aware of themselves being in a certain situation, using certain materials, doing certain things, making certain decisions, and being in certain states
such as embodiment. So, I would say that one of the things is . . .

Kitty: An awareness.

Cynthia: ...is building awareness of yourself as a learner.

Kitty: There, you are doing it now.

Cynthia: You think that? What I see in a lot of classrooms with kids is that they have no idea what (gestures to her head)...

Kitty: Well, my daughter said something really interesting the other day. She said, “Mom, I really don’t think that many of the kids in my class have a thought process.” I said, “What do you mean?” and she said, “They just do stuff, they don’t really think about it and I do because you and I talk all the time. And you are always making me think about why did I arrive at this decision to do this.”

“Without reflection you don’t have higher order thinking. Is that something that art teachers should be assessed on, teaching children the ability to reflect?”

Katherine Thomas: Education has to be higher order thinking. If you are given a task that you really don’t have to think about, that you can complete without a lot of thought, then you know, well probably if you’re a 7th or 8th grader, you’re not going to give it a lot of thought given that opportunity.

ChriSSY: But I think if you set down higher expectations, it’s going to force them to have a thought process, with multiple steps to the process...

Cynthia: Okay, so how do you know when a student can think? What tips you off to the fact that you’ve got a thinker?

Kitty: The way they answer things.

ChriSSY: The way they question too. When they are asking what can they do differently. But then I think back, in the fall, I went to a two-day symposium about the art of science. Did anyone go to that? It was interesting because we had these little breakout sessions where art teachers got to sit down with engineers and this one engineer was saying that when they were interviewing people out of college they found that the people who had some arts background had a better understanding as how to think.

Kitty: How to approach science?

ChriSSY: How to approach science and even how to think. He said himself as an engineer that the way that he thinks and how he does preliminary sketches is important and that the two rely upon each other.

Kitty: My cousin is a chemistry teacher at Virginia Tech and she said she has these brilliant kids and they come in and do the same experiment over and over again and keep getting the same result and they don’t understand why it’s not changing. She said, “I don’t understand how these kids are so smart and yet they can’t be reflective at all in that process... in saying that I have to reframe this or try it a new way.”

Cynthia: Well, the research says if you can’t reflect you cannot get to higher order thinking and you can’t do higher levels of reasoning.

Kitty: Who says this?

Cynthia: That’s what the literature says in psychology with reflection, so reflection is kind of in there like the bridge between your self past and your knowledge, everything you bring to something and where you end up getting and going. And then there all these things that your brain is grappling with, finding its own ground and its own understanding of what it’s trying to do and how it’s going to do it and the strategies it’s going to bring forward and then how it’s going to monitor itself. And another part of reflection, by the way, is regulation.

Katherine Thomas: What does that mean?

Cynthia: Regulation is watching...

Kitty: Like self-watching.

Katherine Thomas: Can you talk about more what that looks like?

Kitty: Let’s go back to the middle schoolers.

Cynthia: Okay. Let’s go back to the middle schoolers and the whole idea of having them aware of when they are out of sync, not able to engage in anything because they are so jittery and so off the wall.

Kitty: That they can’t self-regulate.

Cynthia: They can’t self-regulate and so bringing them into the ability to reflect is like this (gestures fingers slipping through each other) with their ability.

Kitty: So, let me say we’re going to sit on this committee (on how to assess arts instruction in CPS). And hopefully they’re going to listen to us and talk about assessment and the arts, which we will then be evaluated on and then our students... basically assessment is going to define the curriculum in Chicago Public School arts because whatever the assessment, instruction follows. I mean, I see such a marriage between what they’re trying to do with Common Core and the whole metacognitive piece and the arts. And, it’s not about the craftsmanship piece, it’s the behavioral piece, it’s the reflective piece, it’s the
engaging and persisting. How do we bring that into the dialogue with what the literature says about this metacognitive thing? Without reflection you don’t have higher order thinking. Is that something that art teachers should be assessed on, teaching children the ability to reflect?

CYNTHIA: Exactly. I think so, but the problem is that we’re stuck with a word like reflection that is used by everybody all the time to mean all kinds of different things...

KITTY: We need to define it.

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KITTY: We need to define it.
only people who have certain kinds of internal verbalizations. We all have internal verbalizations, if we have any inner life at all, but we think we’re the only person who does or that we’re the only person that has that particular internal verbalization.

**KITTY:** You see that’s what is so powerful about the Writer’s Workshop, Lucy Calkins. What they’re talking about is giving voice to inner conversations in your head. So artists think about these things, this is what they do.

**CYNTHIA:** Yes.

**KITTY:** So this is what they do, they ask themselves these kinds of questions all the time. So maybe in an instructional capacity it’s a lot like those where you’re mentioning that skill. So you say, “Today when you’re writing or painting or drawing in the studios... I want you to think about any kind of internal conversation you have and bring that back to the rug at the end of the class to reflect and talk about that and say who had a conversation in their head about a choice they made.”

**CYNTHIA:** I think that would be wonderful and it would not always lead to something, but every now and again it would.

**KATE SCHICK:** I always found with the studio thinking reading... when kids get frustrated I really try and ask them good questions like, “why do you think...?” So they can think about, “well, you know, I just don’t have an idea” or “I just can’t get my idea on the paper” to try and get them to see what’s really stopping them by asking them the right question so they can go, “oh, yah, it’s not working because...”

**KITTY:** There was this really powerful moment the other day with this boy in first grade. We had this thing about understanding your classmates as artists where students go around and ask two questions: “What do you like about my work?” and “What do you think needs work in my work?”

Just get some feedback from people and sort of talk about that, and this boy is always “I’m done, I’m done.” This is why we were doing this. You know stretch yourself, go and ask some people and see what they say and this boy was so frustrated and I said, “Well, have you talked to people?” and he said, “Yah, and I don’t like any of the answers I’ve been given.” And so I said, “Talk to me and let’s see what the problem is.” It was about space. He’s a first grader and he has a horizon line (Kitty draws a line with her fingers on the desk) and he has these objects, these swords, and he’s drawn this horizon line behind the swords so they’re not overlapping. So, he’s really wrestling with perspective and space and then the line stops and there’s this space where there is no horizon line. And I said, “I’m just wondering why you haven’t finished the line?” and he says, “Because the space over there is different.” He didn’t have the language for it. You could tell he was frustrated because he didn’t have the language.

So, this little boy was behind me and I didn’t know it was these “Ninjago” swords or whatever he had. I didn’t know the story behind the “Ninjago” swords. Sam stood up behind him and said, “Yah there’s this swirling space behind it” and we’re having this conversation about space. But he said, “it’s too late. I’ve already drawn the objects. I can’t draw that swirling space.” I said, “What did you do down on the horizon line? You didn’t draw through the swords; you drew around the swords, like a dotted line through the swords. Can you use that same idea with the...” He was so excited. And his mom just happened to walk by that day and I told her the story, because he’ll have meltdowns a lot when he gets really frustrated with things. This was a groundbreaking moment. Those are moments that when we share back at the rug, I often share those with the kids and I’ll ask the kid, “I noticed that you were struggling today. Can you talk to the class about what was going on for you and what amazing solution you came up? Can you tell us the process you went through?” So, often times they will sit in the chair and they will tell their story of what happened.

**CYNTHIA:** That’s solid reflection, but he’s not doing it all by himself, because he can’t.

**KATE THOMAS:** That’s why Lois says what we are doing with Studio Thinking is “thinking with support.” That’s the whole reason we bring all of this forward... is to give people a structure to coach and support the thinking that needs to go on.

**CYNTHIA:** And we’re really at the beginning of learning how to do that. It’s a mysterious process and there’s nobody who can tell you how to do that or . . .

**KATE THOMAS:** How to coach it?

**CYNTHIA:** All of that.

**KITTY:** But there are models out there that lend themselves to that like this writer’s workshop that’s going on at Burley and here, the reader’s workshop. I think that’s a model that lends itself to it. And that’s why I’m curious. So not the subject matter nor the technique were relevant to what was going...
on in the “Ninjago” student’s mind and his experience. It was about that struggle to take his art to another level. It could have been penguins. Do you know what I mean? It could have been a painting. It could have been a drawing. So when we go to these assessment groups, I shudder to think that it would be printmaking in first grade, drawing a hand in 4th grade. That’s what I shudder about because that has nothing to do with the value of what we’re trying to do here.

CYNTHIA: I think there is not just subject matter in art, but there is also the artistic process and this is all about the artistic process. The artistic process is applicable far beyond using the subject of art to make art.

KITTY: It’s the glue.

CYNTHIA: It’s greatly needed across the board by everyone and it’s not taught because of the subject driven schools that we have, so that the only place that it’s maybe going to happen is in art.

KATE THOMAS: Can you explain to me the difference between subject and . . .

CYNTHIA: Process driven. And the difficulty with process driven work is that it’s hard to enter into it.

KITTY: What do you mean?

CYNTHIA: You can’t just enter into a process because somebody says we’re all going to do this. The way into process work is . . .

KITTY: That everyone has to do it.

CYNTHIA: ...has to find their own door in.

KITTY: So you have to provide the opportunities.

CYNTHIA: So, a big part of reflection is finding your way in. And then once you’re in, how do you move along through the process in a way that will provide results that you will find satisfactory? What I see in art classes is... let’s take color mixing. You can work your color wheel out and start to get the relationship of these two colors and how they impact on one and another, but then you can set a criteria with a student who is maybe going to paint an animal that he has drawn and he can see the color it should be and he wants to get that color and that color...

KITTY: ... isn’t on the wheel.

CYNTHIA: And that color isn’t on the wheel. I’ve documented first graders, second graders not only struggle, but succeed in nailing the color as they work their way through because the ones they wanted weren’t on the wheel. So it’s not one thing or another. If they hadn’t had the color wheel to get them started, to start to understand how the colors work together and were just given a bunch of paint and the criteria to match the color, I don’t think they would have succeeded. So, you have to introduce certain kinds of information so that people have what they need, but I would hope that it’s not just about doing the color wheel and then going on to something else. But, how do you set up criteria based art instruction that requires all that problem solving and that is set up so you can really develop strong reflective practice? Because they’re trying to solve a problem and to reach a goal. Now every kid isn’t trying to make that color. Every kid has picked his animal and has been drawing it and has been invested and now he’s not satisfied with the “out of the box” color. He wants the right color and he’s got a goal and he’s got a problem he has to solve. So that’s how I understand it: it’s either or.

KITTY: It’s both.

CYNTHIA: There are layers, and the art of it is knowing how to put it all together . . .

KITTY: I think it’s messy. It’s a sloppy messy process.

CYNTHIA: It’s a fabulous process.

KITTY: Let’s go share this with the class because wow, that was an amazing experience. Some of them will get it. Some of them will be like (Kitty gestures something that has just flown by you) over their head.

“...a big part of reflection is finding your way in. And then once you’re in, how do you move along through the process in a way that will provide results that you will find satisfactory?”

CYNTHIA: But I think that the process you’re using of students understanding when they have some kind of important moment, that they’re going to verbalize it to the group and hearing each other’s verbalizations, that’s way beyond labeling it, way beyond labeling it. And that’s what’s going to begin to move that process within the group. You work with these kids for three or four years and they’re going to be knocking your socks off in terms of how they can think about what they’re doing. Keep going. You’re going to get there.

REFERENCES
HOW DID I GET HERE?
I am an artist and socially active. I decided to put these two qualities to work for new ideas, since they have a lot to do with why I am a teacher in public schools. I believe in working towards all children having access to the arts, regardless of economic status.

I teach in the neighborhood I live in, not far from where I grew up. It’s largely a struggling working class neighborhood. I relate to my students and I know our community. On Chicago’s southwest side, art is a luxury. I am referring to not just visual arts, but music, theater, performance, etc. as well. It is expensive to buy tickets to any of these venues. In an economy where many are struggling to eat, one can’t afford an $18 ticket to the museum or a $50 seat at the opera. Let’s face it; the art world is elitist when it comes to economic status.

Our neighborhood doesn’t have much in the way of art programs. As a teen, that fact drove me to search outside the ‘hood for art. But, what about the kids who don’t get out? When I discovered street and guerrilla art back in the 1980’s, I was excited by its accessibility. The idea that art belongs to The People was exhilarating. What if we could walk through the neighborhood and see art all around? What if we, the artists, could engage our community directly? How brilliant that would be!

I decided to incorporate the ideals of guerrilla art into the needs of the students. My premise; the students are artists, and have the need to express themselves and create.

THE STUDENTS—WHAT DO WE WANT?
I started asking them questions about their education.

WHAT DID THEY REALLY WISH FOR DURING THEIR EDUCATION?
WHAT DID THEY WANT FROM ME?
say. They want me to tell them less, and show them more. They want me to help them learn to create and be expressive. If you asked, they would tell you about their frustrations at feeling powerless. Public educators and students are under siege in Chicago. We must produce, prove, test and pass the judgment of others. This provides intense stress for students, without showing them how to grow. What I want is for my students to be active, decisive, and reflective. I want them to explore, experience, debate, and create. I want them to take ownership of their creation and curation of the work. I fight for them to be independent and find their voice!

THE ARTISTIC PROCESS AND STUDIO HABITS
Giving the students autonomy is no easy task. At the beginning of the year they are certainly not used to being in control and have no idea what to do, relying upon me to tell them. I spend much of the first quarter teaching them the artistic process as they create. This is a delicate time, they are frustrated and I try to be a facilitator as well as a teacher. Being aware of their process helps them to be thoughtful and independent creators.

I learned about Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM) at a workshop with Lois Hetland, Kate Thomas, and Matt Dealy back in 2011. This Framework was developed as a way to describe how artists make art. It follows the natural process of habits that an artist experiences in the studio as she creates: from the germ of an idea to the reflection of a finished product. I chose to use SHoM as my framework for the classroom because it is most natural for me to teach art in the same way that I create art. By making the students aware of each habit they are in, it helps them to own their process and reflect upon what they are experiencing. The SHoM Framework gives my students the language to speak and write about their creative process and to be self-aware. If they are aware of their processes, they can think deeply about their experiences and make better artistic decisions. As my students create, we use the habits to engage in discussions about their experiences. They also use the habits as a lens to focus their writing about their work. I find that it has helped my students to be able to step away from my direction and begin to be in control of their own work. This directly led to them thinking and creating more autonomously.

THE GUERRILLA CLASS
Guerrilla artists display art directly in the community, in places where people are every day. The idea is to make art not just accessible, but unavoidable. By viewing the work, people are affected and it makes them feel and think. They share their discovery with others. Often the viewer is as much a participant as the artist. The best part is, no one has to take a special trip to the museum. The art is directly in the viewer’s world. People tend to think guerrilla art refers to only graffiti murals, but it is more diverse than that. Guerrilla artists do all kinds of projects from yarn bombing to flash mob performances. Some projects are collaborative and involve not only a specific group, but also anonymous artists who join the project via the Internet or mail. The use of informational websites, social websites, blogging, and texting helps guerrilla artists communicate, instruct others, and plan.

So, this re-envisioned course was to be a class of guerrilla artists. We would display our art in everyday settings like the street, abandoned buildings, the community center, and the local ice-cream shop. We have also used the mail system to send art to others and the library to smuggle art in checked-out books. I took my inspiration from guerrilla artists and I wondered how I could do some of the same things, but legally. Look, it would be exciting to be an outlaw artist, but I need my job to survive. Permission from the community is essential, as is using the Internet to communicate with a broad audience. I borrowed ideas from guerrilla art projects that I admired, and tweaked them to be legal. In our class, the art is intended to build connections between the artist and the neighborhood. Students work towards autonomy in not only their creative process, but also the curation of their work in the community. They keep a blog, posting their work and artistic writing. They find unorthodox ways to distribute & display their art in their everyday world, connecting that work to the blog with QR code stickers.

The first day of school I tell the students that we will think of ourselves as a collective of artists. Instead of teacher-driven assignments, we will work together to develop our projects. Students have input and get to make decisions. I, as the teacher, will focus on facilitating their creations and providing them with techniques, skills, and inspiration. For each project, we start with a central theme. I introduce new media and some ways to use it. I show them other artists who work in a similar genre. There is a certain amount of choice-based learning in each project. In addition to whatever new techniques I am teaching, they can continue to explore new ways to use other media. So, while we might be addressing a central theme together, students will approach it, interpret, and develop their craft according to their personal choices.
This particular project came directly from student choice. It is important for students to have a voice, be heard, and feel validated. Since they do not generally encounter this in their experiences, we decided to make ‘zines to correct that. ‘Zines are self-published booklets that use visual art and text to express a particular point of view. We explored and were inspired by ‘zines from the 1970’s through today. Students enjoyed the political topics in addition to more personal ones. As I mentioned before, Chicago Public Schools are going through a lot of political upheaval; overcrowded classes, closing schools, increased standardized testing, longer school days with less resources, and slashed budgets. The students are part of the maelstrom; yet feel as though no one listens to what they want. They collectively brainstormed lists of educational issues they felt were affecting them the most. They researched, gathered evidence, and held debates about their personal views of the issues. Each student chose a topic for their ‘zine and set to work.

I showed them how to make three different basic one-page folded ‘zines. This is essential for easy photocopying and distribution. However, two students begged to construct larger booklets and I couldn’t turn them down. Students used a variety of media for their ‘zine and the choice was entirely theirs. I asked them to make decisions thoughtfully and explain why this was the best process for their vision. They had access to: collage, drawing, and painting media; stamps, tape and gel transfers; altered photos they manipulated on computers; and basically anything they could find in my cabinets.

Travis is a thoughtful and analytical student. He is the kind of person that is first to speak up, which I love because what he says is usually profound, as well as clever and funny. He is a leader in the class, and knows how to nudge other students to think deeper. His ‘zine topic was an “Unjust CPS System.” He wrote in his artist statement, “CPS takes the voices of their students and teachers and won’t listen. So it’s up to us to make them see our voices matter. The only way to do so is to come together to make a loud enough noise that they have to hear us.” Travis talked a lot about student activism and wanting to make a difference. He intended that his ‘zine could give him the power he feels is being taken from him.

Samantha is a very intense young woman. She connects emotionally to her issues and wants to make a strong stand about what she believes in. She chose “Lack of School Funding” as her topic. Samantha was very distressed about funding cuts for our school this year. She was particularly concerned with how this affects the art programs. In her artist statement she said, “not having money directly contributes to lack of involvement in the students. School officials that handle the money do not give money to the arts. The reaction I hope to get from this is to have people understand that losing money for the arts, whether it be performing or visual art, directly influences the students and will have them think there is no point to even try.” She has strong drawing skills, but chose to explore collage. I enjoyed her use of text both as words to deliver a message and as a way to provide visual texture.

Maria is one of the more quiet students. While not the first to speak up, when she does, it is a strong opinion. She dominated the discussion in her group regarding her topic. I could tell that it was a powerful issue for her. Maria chose to express her feelings about being dehumanized as a student. She wrote, “Standardized test scores make it feel like students are just a number. This dehumanizes students and takes away their individual identity. I think students are more than a score and should be treated as humans, not as ID numbers.” Maria talked about the needs of students to see their potential and she blames the student drop out rate on this “dehumanization.” She wants to be seen as a productive individual, free to have her say. She expressed significant anger in describing that she does not believe students are validated.
The ‘zines created by the students will be copied many times. The students will distribute them through a variety of methods: personally giving them away (using some unique tactics); distributing them through supportive organizations such as Firecat Projects gallery, Quimby’s bookstore; and reaching out to Chicago parent/education activist groups like Raise Your Hand, More Than A Score, and SWside Parents Alliance. Their goal is to have their voices heard. They are documenting this process through their blog. Students post images of their ‘zines, writings about their intentions and process, and images of the distribution. Each ‘zine has a QR code sticker attached so that recipients can connect to the blog and experience the creation of the ‘zines from the students’ perspectives.

THE RESULTS OF OUR EXPERIMENT
This is but one glimpse into the many projects we have done the past two years. There are altered road signs, paste-ups, postcard art, videos, micro-installations, trading cards, and more. You can see it all documented on our blogs:

www.Guerrillaart4.blogspot.com
www.Guerrillaart5.blogspot.com

As their teacher, I couldn’t be happier. To see the students creating as an artist collective, owning their creative voice, and taking control of their own curation, makes me feel as though I am doing right by them.

We still have a lot to learn in our experiment. A lack of working technology and loss of supply money has hindered us in our pursuits. I am working on raising funds to better supply us with iPads, cameras, and scanners for art making, documentation, and blogging. I’ve been acquiring recycled materials to build public sculpture installations (which we have not tried yet). We struggle with getting permission for displays out in the community. A lot of business owners are skeptical of our intentions. I am planning for a curation team within the class to help the students take better control of displaying art in the neighborhood. I have made connections with some new community organizations that will help the students connect to property owners and legitimize our efforts. I hope to continue to build a more choice-based classroom setting. I’d like to see increased diversity in the materials the students choose. Lastly, I want to focus on getting students to act on their art making outside of the classroom and in their everyday lives. I'm working on getting students to use field notebooks to gather ideas, thoughts, and inspirations when they are on their own. The challenge is for this to be a natural part of their individual artistic processes and not “homework.”

Overall, creating this class was the best decision I have ever made as an art teacher. It is the class I enjoy the most, and I look forward to planning and working on it every day. The students continue to amaze me with their powerful art creations and independent thinking. I hope to explore, grow, and expand the class. It will change every year, as the students need it to. I want them to look back upon it and know that this was the start of their artistic journey, and that they independently forged on ahead to become thoughtful, creative beings.
I peer through a small window to see bodies in the midst of intense looking. From where I stand peering from the outside through a small glass frame, there are gestures of stillness and motion simultaneously occurring within bodies seated on chairs. Students are hunched over, gripping the edges of large boards, and moving their arms in gentle motions up and down, back and forth. This moment of pause, before I enter the room, is the place where I begin positioning myself in proximity to the students and their teacher within the art studio (O’Donoghue, 2013).

Distance and proximity are concepts taken up by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty within his book *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty (1958) suggests we are always putting ourselves in the optimal position to look at the object. This positioning is central to the experience of perceiving an artwork. Hubert Dryfus (1988) further expands on Merleau-Ponty’s conception of distance by saying that we want to get a “maximum grip” on the situation and alleviate the “tension of a deviation,” meaning we put ourselves in a place to get the optimal distance to an activity or object (p. 11). Our bodies seek out this optimal position. The body plays a key role in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. In perceiving an object, we are not separated from our bodily experience; rather, plunging oneself into looking at the object occurs through the body. As I walk through the door to enter the classroom, I am taking a position with my body to get in relation with the students, their artwork and the teacher—not too close, not too far. How shall I perceive the experience of being in the art room?

The phenomenological method requires a descriptive account of the lived experience. Slipping off into reflection takes one away from the embodied experience. Merleau-Ponty (2007) says, “when I begin to reflect, my reflection is reflection upon my unreflected: my reflection cannot be unaware of itself as an event” (p. 58). Rather than reflecting back on or getting ahead of the experience through daydreams or imaginary wonderings, phenomenology requires being present to the moment and capturing that experience through thick description. One must attend to the details of the experience in order to perceive.

**FINDING THE OPTIMUM POSITION**

I am bit late for this 9:00 a.m. Art One class taught by Liz Chisholm. I try to be inconspicuous as I slip through the door. I find a corner to tuck into, nestled next the teacher’s desk. Murky windows face westward into the backside of the school where there is a large complex of buildings attached to other buildings. This place in the corner is a safe space to peer outward from. I scan the room. Students are seated in blue plastic chairs in groupings of four or five per table. Light streams in from
the westward windows. The room is marked with various signage including a white dry-erase board with the day's assignment: “Art with Ms. Chisholm. Bellwork: Get out your Charcoal Drawing, charcoal, boards, clips, etc. Make sure still life is set up for your needs, demonstration on using compressed charcoal and FABRIC. Continue working on your drawing –adding darkest darks.”

I enter into a moment preceding the lecture-demonstration on charcoal shading techniques for their still life drawings. Students quietly gather around Ms. Chisholm. Several students wear ROTC uniforms. Bright yellow ID cards dangle from lanyards around each student’s neck. There is an air of studiousness within the studio. All eyes are on Ms. Chisholm. She is perched on a chair at a table with a large clipboard and a variety of charcoal sticks, paper, and a chamois cloth. In front of her are a series of objects intentionally placed to form a still life arrangement. A deep sky blue silk fabric cascades over a box-like structure. A smiling skull rests on top of an open book placed on the fabric. White windows reflect off a dark vase with an artificial orchid bloom. The arrangement elicits sensations of musty art classes gone by. Ms. Chisholm gently molds an eraser in her hand as she begins to talk about the quality of charcoal. “Today we’re going to be shading.” Absolute attention is on the teacher. Ms. Chisholm begins speaking quietly, ensuring that everyone is in proximity and appropriate distance to see the drawing she is working on. “Can everyone see? I cannot see someone’s head back there.” Students crowd in. They too are positioning themselves to get into appropriate distance to the objects and their teacher.

Merleau-Ponty (1958) suggests this act of getting in appropriate distance allows us the maximum visibility to the object;

“For each object, as for each picture in an art gallery, there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction viewed from which it vouchsafes most of itself: at a shorter or greater distance we have merely a perception blurred through excess or deficiency. We therefore tend towards the maximum of visibility, and seek a better focus as with a microscope” (p. 303).

Ms. Chisholm announces, “Okay. So, today you get to explore working with compressed charcoal. So far you have been working with fine charcoal and I would recommend when you are working with a new material, you get a piece of scratch paper and play around with it a bit before you put it on your drawing.” She gently slides the large clipboard holding her well-developed drawing into her lap. She squints towards the objects and explains, “The compressed charcoal is for the darkest areas of your drawing.” Her arms wave in circular motions as she talks about not adding too much darkness to the drawings. She looks intently at the still life and then glances down at her drawing, carefully lifting darkness off the page with her eraser. “I’m pulling the reflections from the window out of the darkness of the vase.” Students seated next to her turn their eyes downwards, watching her circular motions. “Fabric is like a waterfall, it has its starting place and flows from there and it happens in angles.”

A return to the intentness of looking and being in close proximity to the object (O’Donoghue, 2013); in this case, Ms. Chisholm’s drawing. We “delve into the thickness of the world by perceptual experience” (Merleau-Ponty, 1958, p. 237). We cannot separate out the mind from the bodied experience. In order to view the object Merleau-Ponty (1958) says “we take up a position in space” and “from that moment we see it in perspective” (p. 236). Students in this Art One class gently adjust their positions throughout the drawing demonstration, shifting in stance to get a better view. Eventually they return to their chairs and take up their own position in relation to their drawings. The steadfastness of their gaze at the still life and then back at their paper is remarkable. There is a constant return to the object through the body.

REFERENCES


Studio Thinking reflective journal responses emerged in year two of our project out of a need for a universal template for capturing layers of student thinking and feeling in an arts experience. These journals provided us with a window into the interior verbalizations of students. The journals were a turning point in our project allowing us to connect the language of Studio Thinking to evidence of complex thinking captured through drawing, schema, and reflective writing. Students began to see themselves as learners, taking a position in space to see themselves in a new perspective (Merleau-Ponty, 1958). Teachers collectively analyzed the students’ responses, generating new insights and deeper levels of understanding connected to student art-making. The process of reactivating the sensory experience awakens students to an evolved consciousness. Here, within these examples, you are presented with a glimpse into their awakenings.

REFERENCES
Composition, eyes cropped in half, facial expression is often shown, don’t see facial expression, just all her thoughts

Posing a question–problem representation with wings and brads, laying out what she’s dealing with.

She’s in the foreground here. What decisions was she making about what goes in the foreground, background, zooming in and out?

Holistic representation of how she was feeling—adding in stages, trying to communicate everything that was important.

Multiple perspectives to show her thinking.

See Yourself Thinking: Map yourself doing this activity. What are you doing? Step outside of your body (focus on a specific part or see yourself from the other side of the classroom). Use schema to illustrate what is going on.

Critical Thinking: Explain how your design developed and changed during the process.

How will the wings work?

It developed by me thinking about wings then figure out it was going to be an angel.

It changed because I kept messing up but I kept trying.
**Nature is the artist to our world and all we see in it**—transfer to scientific connections; developing metaphor.

“**That is nature, and it’s our nature to have fun.**”

“**Exploding with joyfulness embedded in our understanding of who we are as humans; we are animals.**”

“**Sense of abstraction and wonderment – his own discovery!**”

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**Teachers’ comments in connection to “Critical Thinking Related to Studio Thinking” prompt:**

“**Deeper layer of self is revealed.**”
Exhibition: A Potent Structure for Learning

By Lois Hetland
Author of Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education, Professor at Massachusetts College of Art and Design

Exhibition meets the criteria for a studio structure – it organizes time, space, and interactions to support student learning, is topic-neutral (any content can be developed within it), and is central to artists’ practice. My co-researchers and I saw it in our initial data but didn’t name it as a structure, because it felt different from Demonstration-Lectures, Students-at-Work, and Critique. It operates differently, at a different scale. The basic structures function interactively within art classes; they do so in exhibition, also. Other structures, such as portfolios, residencies for visiting artists, long-term projects, contests, and performances, also operate at this grain size. Each of these over-arching structures uses the basic structures as internal organizers. In the future we may explore this group of “super-structures” further. But for now, Exhibition seemed the most pressing. Its importance is all too easily overlooked, and identifying it helps to keep us from neglecting its potential. Let me offer two quite different examples of its potential and the ease with which that potency can slip from view.

The curriculum class I’m teaching now to student teachers is their third. The first emphasized lesson design, the second, design of units. This third class addresses course- or year-long curriculum planning. Each student designs a year’s worth of units centered on dispositions they select as important, engaging, accessible, and broadly relevant. Learning goals and experiences must align with one another and with assessment, both formative and summative. We co-design a rubric, developing it iteratively from analysis of models and assessment of drafts into a finished form to assess their final curriculum plans. A month from completion, the rubric includes criteria for idea, audience, language use, and design/layout. But we need some critical additions: the inclusion of Exhibition and the Contemporary art and artists we can learn from. We forgot exhibition initially in the flush of other important considerations, even though I just wrote two chapters on it for the second edition of Studio Thinking and see that format as essential to quality curriculum. It can drop out of sight all too easily! Thankfully, the new national standards corroborate its importance by including “Presenting” as one of four “artistic processes” (creating, presenting, responding, connecting).

The second example comes from my visit this past year to the 55th Venice Biennale. For my first international art fair, I got lucky and stumbled into Massimiliano Gioni’s curation, which has been reviewed as “a 21st-century Venice Biennale that entirely, ruthlessly, outlandishly leaves the 20th century behind” (J. Wullschlager, A Picasso for the Facebook Age, May 31, 2013, acquired November 20, 2013 at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/6baa6c04-c881-11e2-acc6-00144feab7de.html#axzz2zX8kLxfz).

My colleague, Steve Locke, once asked why teachers didn’t attend biennales for their professional development, and now I know what he meant. Biennales are exhibitions where art worlds are made manifest. At these “art world fairs,” visitors engage with contemporary art and artists firsthand, and it’s impossible not to expand educational visions of what might be taught to students. This year, for instance, I saw complexity addressed over and over. Nostalgia was a theme, transgression across boundaries of all sorts (e.g., roles, nations, expertise, consciousness), and political, economic, and social critique. Artists in the exhibition claimed as their own the content, processes, formats, and rationales of every discipline. Visual art vividly included new media of all sorts and music, theater, and dance appeared regularly in installations and performances. The role of artist was represented broadly, from special needs to outsiders to an international elite. Modernism’s dictate that “work speaks for itself” is gone as signage points to meanings and connects works to particular contexts, audiences, and purposes. And these observations are merely cream skimmed from the surface – the experience profoundly energized and shaped my thinking about what and how we might teach as art educators. It was the Exhibition that taught me, and it suggests the potential of asking our students to design and curate exhibitions of their own work using professional exhibitions as their inspirations. Biennale exhibitions also offer a platform for engaging educational colleagues – both in visual art and in every other subject area – in conversations about art’s central role across the curriculum. Focus on exhibitions, and learning expands. Viva l’esposizione!
I think of my quilt as a metaphor for my teaching; it consists of 16 blocks representing my 16 years as an arts educator in the Chicago Public Schools. Referencing their personal memories using maps of their neighborhoods, my students repurposed articles of clothing of significance to them, to construct individual quilt blocks. I sewed and bound their blocks into a quilt that beautifully represents the layers of their overlapping experiences and connected memories.

I view the quilt-making process as analogous to the complex building of knowledge that occurs in the art room. The work of reflecting on memory, location, and experience allowed my students to construct their personal understanding of the artistic process. I like the metaphor of students building their blocks to construct a larger piece and the individual pieces being bound together to complement and support each other. Studio Habits is the thread binding together the thoughts, actions, and feelings essential to their individual and shared art experiences.
When I was in school for my teaching degree, I loved visiting diverse schools around the city. I could not believe the range of teaching approaches, classroom design, and daily experiences I observed. I felt an affinity for each teacher as I realized that most of us have similar motivations for choosing this career and remaining passionate about it over the long haul.

As teachers, we are never given time to collaborate and truly pause to discuss our work. We are hungry for this. This feeling drew me to the Studio Thinking learning community, wherein I have found inspiration, and deepened my teaching practice through the lens of the Framework and the ears of other educators. Each unit I design is now focused on students understanding the cycle and process of being an artist. The group determined that too much emphasis is placed on students learning finite skills. We realized our role should be making sure students have an expansive view of what it means to make (art)work, and the importance of other “habits” like expression and envisioning.

“Voices” is inspired by my continued desire to understand the role of the art teacher, and my identity as such. It seemed important to visit numerous schools and offer snapshots into the world of several classrooms and the minds that tend them. I also wanted to include and connect us to other teachers who were not in the Studio Thinking group. Few people understand what teachers, especially art teachers do, and how they feel about their work. This project calls to attention how we are unique and united.
Through this collection of documents, I have discovered the scrawls of an inner consciousness. Seemingly mindless and theme-less, these images populate the pages of my responsibility as an art teacher and employee of the Chicago Public Schools. Over the 21 years that I have worked for the children of Chicago, I have found myself in so many roles in and outside of the classroom. These pages have come to represent a self-portrait of sorts. The explorations of these images have uncovered drawings and notes that express my inner soul. There have been many times when I find myself listening and reflecting, so the images pour out from me onto the page. There are other instances when these drawings represent ideas envisioned to communicate my thoughts to others. At times, these drawings are observations that capture my perspective of a moment in time.

The images juxtaposed on these documents tell a story of me in my multiple roles; defining my commitment to keeping the role of the Arts moving forward over many years within a system that has been in flux between support and the verge of abandonment. My role has always been to maintain a consistent experience of the Arts to the youngest stakeholder in our schools, the children, regardless of resources. Enjoy my tireless story through these pages.
As a primary student, the study of art as line, shape, form and texture began as soon as paper was divided into 4 quadrants and color was added to create refrigerator art. Within the elementary experience, outlining and coloring within the lines evolved into the study of patterns, proportions, perspective, light and shadow. Along this progression, the difference in tactile skills among students begins to separate the artists from the students that like to draw. Entering secondary schools, the study of art transforms into art as a practical application of math and science. My responsibility as a secondary teacher of art is to impart to my students that creativity is not based solely on their ability to paint or draw well. My teaching the creative process includes the study of art and architecture throughout history, as well as the social and cultural impact that artist and art had and has on societies. This process develops the critical thinking and working that supports the kind of behavior students will need for future career and life endeavors supported by Arts at the Center. “Art is more than staying within the lines” is my montage of images which includes digital art created by the students, student photography documenting the creation of art, as well as a collection of “selfies.” Grant Wood painted the “American Gothic” that captured the essence of life in America in the 1930’s, the selfie will become the next American Gothic that captures the essence of life in America in 2014. Art connects the present to the past to imagine the future.
HELENA CROWE

“Crossing Cultural Borders”
Lincoln Park High School

The theme of this interdisciplinary project was “Crossing Cultural Borders” created by Honors Drawing & Painting and Spanish 3 students at Lincoln Park High School. In my Spanish class, we discussed immigration, emigration and obstacles that immigrants face. Students watched a documentary about teenagers who tried to enter in the United States illegally and the different obstacles or borders they faced in their own country. Students viewed artworks on the varied themes of “borders” and analyzed visual imagery and written resources. They brainstormed borders they had experienced, including legal status, social cliques, and language. After reflecting on their own lives, students created collages to represent their experiences. Students made their borders visible with photos. Combining these images with ideas and words from reflections and discussions, students developed multimedia collages. The final artworks reflect the multifaceted experiences of LPHS students as they navigate their world and cross cultural borders to see what it is like on the other side.

The Studio Habits transfer to language classes. Students reflect on their learning and creative process, as well as think about “why” or “how” they know something or do something. In our school’s study group, we have adapted this and created the “Eight Linguistic Habits of Mind” that our teaching team is implementing as a metacognitive strategy. It is extremely important that students become aware of their own learning processes and learn how to explain it to others. As a result, they are more proactive in their learning and more aware of themselves and the type of learner they are.
Over the course of the Studio Thinking project...I went from working as a teaching artist with participating teachers to having my own classroom where I utilize Studio Thinking everyday.

“If you are an artist and you want to make good art, I urge you to go into your studio and make good art. What you need to do as a teacher of art is create kids who make good art, create kids who think well as artists, who have an artistic mind.” – Lois Hetland

This quote has stuck with me throughout my teaching experiences. I teach art to develop kids that make good art, who are able to express things they can’t say verbally with their artwork, and to help kids feel like they have a place in the world. Giving them the tools to develop craft, engage, envision, express, observe, and reflect is something they take with them in the future whether they pursue art or not.

“Box of Secrets” was inspired by the teachers I’ve worked with as a teaching artist and as a full time classroom teacher. As a new teacher, I have found it difficult to give objections or opinions. I asked teachers in my building to submit secrets they have to the box. These are the things teachers have to say, but not everyone gets to hear them. The “secrets” aren’t told because teachers are fearful of losing their jobs, are too reserved to say what is on their minds, or don’t know whom to tell. Behind the “Box of Secrets,” there is the juxtaposition of secrets shared by my students.
Although I have loved 10 years of teaching art, it can be a lonely business. There is no one to bounce ideas off of, inspire, or even challenge you. This was the appeal of the Studio Thinking learning community, a group of teachers collaborating. Being a part of this group totally transformed my view on teaching. One conversation sparked months of self-reflection and research that continues even today. I realized that the beautiful work my students made was not really their work. I had controlled too much of their creative process for them to feel much ownership. This year, thanks to my understanding principal, I piloted a student inquiry based model for teaching art. It allows students the freedom to create whatever they choose utilizing a variety of media “studios.”

A blog post by another Studio Thinking teacher, Valerie Xanos, inspired the piece I made. She posted her frustrations about the amount of ridiculous paperwork she felt bogged down with. I related to the idea of feeling overwhelmed, not just by the actual paperwork, but also the virtual paperwork, via computers, and other teaching related responsibilities. If we, the art teachers, feel this overwhelmed, then how must the general education teachers and even the students feel. With just the reams of used paper around the studio, we created an actual tidal wave of paperwork to represent the massive amounts of work and pressure put on art teachers, and everyone else involved in education.
ELIZABETH A. DRAKE
National Board Certified Teacher

“Retro/Introspective”
Lincoln Park High School

The process of teaching through the Studio Habits framework has made the intimidating, and often abstract, definition of “artist” accessible to all of my students. During this project, I have observed student-artists of all academic and skill levels develop a better understanding of how artists work to solve visual problems, and critically think through the creative process. I observe more understanding of, and respect for, artists, students and professional artists alike. The approach to assessing process and product versus a final product has transformed my art studio into a more cooperative and collaborative environment because the anxiety surrounding the creation of that perfect final piece no longer exists. The process is as important as the product. It is OK to make mistakes, and learn from them. This can seem like a conflict of interest in an educational climate currently driven by data and high-stakes testing. While I work tirelessly to provide positive, authentic experiences in the art studio, the stress and pressure placed on teachers is growing. I will open the school year in September 2014 as a 20-year veteran art educator, more than half of that experience with Lincoln Park High School. Over the years I’ve dealt with many challenges, and I’ve learned valuable lessons (sometimes the hard way). I’ve walked out at the end of the day discouraged and disheartened at times. How did I make it this long? Am I making any difference at all? Can I do this for 20 more years? My answer: Yes. It is through the students that I know this. My students, self-defined artists or not, keep me coming back. You, students, are my inspiration.
There are few things in life that don’t require at least a little creativity. I believe that art making reveals a creative connection to our communities and our inner selves. It is a continual process of observing closely, envisioning ideas and experimenting, investigating, and then reflection. As an educator, I aim to help students develop an artistic practice that will enable them to become independent creative producers based on their personal truths.

My piece represents my thoughts and experiences having worked with students through the lens of the *Studio Habits of Mind*. Deep observation during art making is an active process, a dialogue between your brain, eyes, and hand about what is being seen. This constant internal dialogue is a “seeing conversation” that reveals how we experience the present moment and the past. This is represented through my direct observations of foundational drawing and other images, thoughts, and concerns expressed by current and past students who are my collaborators in this project. I chose the bonsai tree as a symbol of Fine Art’s place in public education because it represents growth as well as manipulation to inhibit growth.
I intended for this piece to be a metaphor for how using *Studio Thinking* has transformed my practice. As teaching becomes more bureaucratic, I feel like I am trying to get somewhere, but there are more and more things clouding my vision. *Studio Thinking* has allowed me to see my students’ abilities, as well as my own, much more clearly. In the past eight years I have spent as a teacher, I have grown along with my students and traveled along this road further and further with them as things turn and change along the way. I have begun to see how aware my students are of their own metacognitive processes and how natural it is for them, yet messy and disorganized at times.

As I travel on this path as an educator and artist, I find myself looking for meaning in a world that is more concerned with the end result rather than process. When we travel, we tend to focus equally on the journey and the destination. On our journeys as educators, we are told to simply focus on the destination, not the process of getting there. *Studio Thinking* has helped me appreciate the journey, regardless of the weather, as well as enjoy the results.
As I approach my retirement from teaching, I think back to my very first interview in 1994 when I was asked what I wanted my students to learn. I was a very naïve middle class mother of two trying to pay for my MFA. I was convinced that through art my students could gain self-confidence and, more importantly, learn to think. Not having had any education classes or any previous teaching experience, I was unaware of Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the work of Lois Hetland, and the importance of critical thinking as a focus of instruction. All I knew for certain was that art is about problem solving, and there had to be a way to tie creative and critical thinking into the process of making art. From the beginning, my students wrote reflections and critiqued each other on their processes and their finished work. *Studio Thinking* has given me a structure for students to think about their processes. It has also given my students the vocabulary in which to frame their thinking. And, it has given my colleagues and me a consistent way to assess our students.

As for the unfinished work exhibited here, I am a firm believer that we should not assign anything we cannot do ourselves. So, I often do the assignments as examples to show along with past student work. This self-portrait is the start of one of many examples I have made. It was actually a piece that I demonstrated on for my students. I am still thinking about what I want to do with the unfinished piece.
There is a saying, “use them or lose them” regarding neuron connections. If we don’t teach, students’ brains lose out on making connections. Teaching requires flexibility, high energy, and the ability to make connections. To live requires fluidity and the rapid transmission of neurons. Billions of neurons are responsible for the connectivity within our bodies and provide us with the possibility to do just about everything: learn new things, maintain memories, love, create, learn, inspire, etc. Without neurons, we would not exist, and without teachers, no other job would be possible. As a teacher in Chicago Public Schools for the past five years, my neurons have been firing in every direction to address the constant budget shortfalls, changes, and negative attacks on our schools. On the contrary, they have been firing to recognize the beauty in my students, their drive to learn, their curiosity, and their excitement for the future. The connection I make with my students in the classroom is what keeps me teaching even when struggles ensue. Being part of the Studio Thinking learning community for the past three years has provided a rare and rewarding opportunity to collaborate with and build connections with teachers across the city in various disciplines that I might not otherwise have ever come in contact with. I have used this experience to personally enrich my teaching experience, become more inspirational to my students, and to be more creative in my teaching practice. When space is created for cross-discipline instruction, a more holistic teaching approach is possible. This allows teachers to reach their full potential, make connections, and create a learning environment where students win. Much gratitude to the process…may this be the start to something beautiful.
There is no better way to propagate the essence of humanity than through art. I am truly happy every day to enter my classroom as an instrument of that dialogue.

“Voyeur’s View”
World Language High School

PAULA MATELA

What is an artist? A person who sees? A person who inspires others to see? How does one inspire others to see? One needs to create something compelling enough to cause people to take a moment to look. The dialogue that happens as a result of creating is part of what it is to be human. Our experiences drive our messages for the world. There is no better way to propagate the essence of humanity than through art. I am truly happy every day to enter my classroom as an instrument of that dialogue.

It’s not easy to teach others how to have their own vision, their own message, to speak about what’s important, and to take the time and effort needed to exhibit a piece of themselves that comes from deep within. It’s demanding to dig deep. It’s demanding to take the time to see, to really look, ponder, and respond. It’s demanding to take time to create, to go back, re-think, and jump off the cliff fearlessly as we put pieces of ourselves in full view for the world.

Teaching is demanding work. It’s difficult to inspire when, sometimes, it’s hard to inspire myself. On the other hand, it’s most rewarding when I know that I have inspired, so I keep going. I find inspiration from my students, my life, my world, and I keep jumping, fearlessly, finding new pieces of myself along the way. Like this storyboard... it has no beginning, it has no end. It’s a continuum... of growth, change, experiences, and the demanding work of seeing, communicating, and inspiring those around me.
“Newton’s three laws of motion” was the theme for our 7th grade’s physical science interdisciplinary project. We wanted to integrate a personal social choice into the students’ piece so they could make personal connections to Newton’s three laws. In health class, we also discussed how social choices have consequences. This concept easily applies to Newton’s Law. In Newton’s 1st Law of Motion “An object will remain at rest, and an object moving at a constant velocity, unless it is acted upon by an unbalanced force.” Students showed the social choice they were presented with in health class and then represented their choices within the second law, “Acceleration depends on the object’s mass and on the net force acting on the object.” Students reflected on this piece by brainstorming ideas and taking those ideas to paper in drawing. We documented how the work progressed over time. To visually represent this concept we turned to triptychs. Historically, triptychs were “portable stories” illustrating biblical and historical stories to those who couldn’t read. Students were encouraged to create simplified illustrations for each panel. Newton’s 3rd Law of Motion states, “If one object exerts a force on another object, then the second object exerts a force of equal strength on the first object.” As the triptych social choice piece progresses, we see the students ending consequence, result, or benefit from the situation.

I have always had a passion for creative and artistic thinking. The process of this interdisciplinary project allowed me witness deep higher order thinking from my students. The Studio Habits have become a spoken language between classes in our school, as we teach how all subjects are connected and intertwined.
CHERYL REYNOLDS-FEFLES
National Board Certified Teacher

“Essence”
Carl Schurz High School

Essence. This is what I strive for in my work. This is what I hope to guide students to find in themselves, and then, communicate in their artwork. It is the most important thing.

Art maneuvers students into deep thinking. They do it when they are creating, but often they are unaware of the aesthetic choices they are making, and compositional decisions they are making. Pushing students to do this deep thinking is the essence of teaching, the essence of the creative process. The concept of essence, originating with Aristotle, to ti esti, refers to the what it is. This is not easy. It’s not easy for an artist or a teacher. It’s hard work. And it’s especially challenging for students.

Recently, I’ve been teaching digital imaging, creating art on the computer. I have my students become comfortable using the technology, so they are not blinded by the ease with which the computer can do certain things. Good art still takes time. And requires deep thought. Having students think and reflect before they click and scroll is crucial.

My piece is about essence and what I do when I teach. There are these nuggets, these gems, these kernels of truth that I am trying to get at in my work. I try to do the same in my teaching. These gems have to be uncovered, exposed. I use Studio Thinking as a kind of lens to help focus thinking, a way to unearth these gems, in myself, in my teaching, in my students. My work is about the physicality of the glass, the transparency, the seeing through, the perfectly placed accidental bubble. The essence of glass.
“What do we want our students to walk away with?” As art educators, we have resources to guide curriculum, but we also have the luxury to pursue this question. Students complain that they have poor drawing skills or question how art can apply to their interests. We all have ready to go responses, but the question still stands, “What do we want them to walk away with?”

My mother’s words (also an educator) come back to me, “Every experience, whether good or bad, is a lesson to be learned regardless of how it turns out.” The Studio Thinking group has given me insight on how to assess and foster process vs. product. Collaboration with art teachers has given me tools to push students “to question” and “find their voice.” We have shared ideas on how to improve our practice, but one teacher stated she still longs to see the “fruits of her labor.”

This persuaded me to question and investigate further. What are our students gaining from our teaching? The structure of the art room provides us with insight into who our students are and the ideas that mold them into individuals. We foster the development of belief systems. How do we know this? Is there evidence of not only our teachings, but our mentoring as well? As teachers we are not always in tune with what we are truly instilling in young minds. Many of us are fortunate enough, however, to have students reflect on the education they received beyond the color wheel and our job description. The evidence may be a simple conversation, a visit, a card or other artifact. These are the fruits of our labor. This is what I relish.
Together, we work through the everyday challenges and struggles we all face as we “prove our worth” as art educators in a hierarchy that may or may not appreciate the essentialness of art in the education of a person.

“155 Marks”  
John F. Kennedy High School

Collaboration is at the heart of teaching and learning. Our Studio Thinking learning community provides a welcoming, supportive structure for our group. Together, we work through the everyday challenges and struggles we all face as we “prove our worth” as art educators in a hierarchy that may or may not appreciate the essentialness of art in the education of a person. We figure out the myriad of ways the Studio Habits of Mind can help our students think, feel, and reflect more meaningfully about the complex work they create in our art rooms.

This painting is homage to all the ways art teachers collaborate and work, with one another and with our students. I made the base layer of the painting in cooperation with 12 art teachers during an abstract painting workshop. The surface marks are made by all 155 students in my classes this school year. The marks are suggestive of the lasting traces we make upon one another in all our interactions together.
“Flow” represents 20 years of teaching, in 20 feet of knitted silk. Seeing students grow over seasons, years, and decades, is one of the rewards of teaching two entire student bodies at two different schools over many years. But rewards come with hard work. As art teachers, we see hundreds of students and are responsible for their grades, exhibition of their work, and most importantly their creative self-esteem.

My Hamilton students and members of the Hamilton community created the clay heads in this piece. Within the flow of the work there are many different individuals, all with different talents and different needs. At 19 feet the work is compressed to half to represent the loss of my half-time position at Burley School at the end of the 2013 school year. As is many other schools, budget cuts hit hard and the arts were the thing to go. I had been at Burley for 19 years and this loss was devastating to me, as I had worked hard over the years to build a robust program, and to be a part of the strong community.

Yet the river still flows and who knows where it will take me next. They say that you never step in the same river twice. This is a lot like teaching art; everyday brings new creative challenges and new opportunities to grow.
“Art on a Cart” hinges on two principal factors: a) careful consideration for lessons you can present; and b) a collaborative relationship with the classroom teachers to gear art lessons to units. Students learn the importance of all subjects through visual art.

ELIZABETH SCHNEIDER

“Art on a Cart” has been my CPS assignment for the past five years. What a difference for both teacher and student! Students loved coming to the ART ROOM! It was always loaded with creativity and new surprises, and we all loved the vitality it provided. Now I transfer this passion and vitality of the art room into the classroom environment. Surviving and thriving!! “Art on a Cart” hinges on two principal factors: a) careful consideration for lessons you can present; and b) a collaborative relationship with the classroom teachers to gear art lessons to units. Students learn the importance of all subjects through visual art.

The 2013-14 school year was my first year at Otis. During my first year at this new school, we have created 18 interior school murals. My 4th – 8th grade students helped create murals in the cafeteria, the hallways, and all over the school. As Otis was a CPS welcoming school, this mural painting project helped create a great environment for 230 new students. Being a new teacher at this school with 230 new students, I have a real understanding of the word NEW! I also have been teaching Art for 18 years and come to this new position with vast experience... My Art piece honors my Art Cart loaded with art materials that I push from room-to-room everyday. The Mural Brick Road displays some of the murals I have created as a practicing artist over the last 18 years. The two together merge the old with the new.
I have been teaching in Chicago Public Schools for 17 years. As an artist, it is a calling to teach art. I share my love of the creative expression that art gives us. I chose to teach in the public system due to a strong belief in the ideals of free education. My father, a former CPS teacher, was a strong influence on me. I saw how he changed lives through his teaching. I remember older students returning to tell him what he had meant to them. I wanted to be that kind of teacher. I have been honored to have past students return to show me what brilliant people they have become. They are beautiful and creative beings. They often tell me what art class meant to them; that it changed their lives. I have been honored to be part of their growth, their realization of self. Teaching art is a sacred act for me.

I have been working on a series with the bird as a symbol of freedom and the freedom being limited. The two works here show birds tied up, chained, and boxed in. The paintings reflect my frustrations at being “tied up” and “chained” by the policies in our system. Like a bird, an artist should be free to fly. As an art teacher, I want my students to soar with me. I’m fighting to fly with my students and struggle against the bonds that hold us back. I have another painting planned. It will express the transformation I envision for myself. It will present an evolved bird that I wish to become, a bird that breaks the chains.
SPECIAL THANKS

Arts at the Center within the Center for College Access and Success at Northeastern Illinois University would like to extend their deepest thanks to Lois Hetland for the support and generosity she has provided throughout this three-year Studio Thinking project. We are grateful to Cynthia Gehrie for guiding our thinking throughout the process and elevating the level of discourse. Our team is thankful for those teachers and educators throughout the country who have participated in the national Studio Thinking Online Network (an online conversation facilitated by Matt Dealy, Kate Thomas and Lois Hetland) and for their contributions to our understanding of the Studio Thinking Framework.

Arts at the Center would also like to thank all the Chicago Public School teachers who participated in this project throughout the years beyond those featured in this exhibition. We are especially thankful to all the CPS students who have opened themselves up to the experience of working with Studio Thinking.

We offer a special thank you to Firecat Projects for their support and the generous donation of their gallery space for our It’s Not Just Art: A “Complicated Conversation” with Teachers exhibition.
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