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# The Interrelationship of Identities: How Artistic Practice Informs Teaching in the Visual Arts

Karen G. Adams Edwards

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**THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF IDENTITIES: HOW  
ARTISTIC PRACTICE INFORMS TEACHING IN THE  
VISUAL ARTS**

**BY**

**KAREN G. ADAMS EDWARDS**

**B.A., STUDIO ART, LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY, 1999**

**THESIS**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

**Art Education**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May 2010**

## **DEDICATION**

This graduate thesis is dedicated to all of my teachers and students over the years. From each of you I have learned something unique, something that has led me here, and for that, I am grateful.

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**Karen G. Adams Edwards**

**B.A., Studio Art, Lawrence University, 1999**

**M.A., Art Education, University of New Mexico, 2010**

**ABSTRACT**

This research is an investigation into the relationship between artistic practice and art teaching in secondary art teachers. After an examination of various perspectives on this relationship that have appeared in scholarly journals over the last several decades, some of which argue that artistic practice is essential to the quality of an art teachers' teaching, and some of which regard the two practices as being separate, I interviewed five secondary art teachers to find out more about this relationship. I conducted the interviews in a semi open-ended fashion, asking questions that invited participants to discuss teaching preferences and priorities as well as their own work and processes as artists. I considered the interviews through a lens of both phenomenology and Arts-Based Education Research. The interviews with these five art teachers, all of whom identified themselves as practicing artists, revealed that there was a great deal of consensus on the importance of continued artistic practice and the many ways that this continued practice led to being a better art teacher.



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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

#### *Research Questions*

The identities of artists, art teachers and those who are both have always been of interest to me as an art educator. Specifically, my curiosity has led me to wonder about the relationship of these two specific and sometimes separate identities, being an artist and being a teacher of art, and the ways these two identities can, and often do, coexist within the art educator. This curiosity was the primary source of my inspiration to begin graduate level studies in art education. It was also at the heart of my research into the various ways in which one or both of these identities manifest themselves in art educators and affect their approaches to teaching in the visual arts. In this investigation, I hope to understand this dynamic relationship more deeply. The questions that inspired and compelled my research were as follows:

- What is the relationship between being an artist and being an art teacher?
- More specifically, what is the relationship between involvement in artistic practice and the philosophies and approaches of a secondary visual arts teacher?
- Are art teachers both artist and teacher? Should they be both?
- How does one identity inform the other, and what impact does it have on the quality of art teaching?
- Based on the experiences and accounts of practicing art educators, is it important to practice as an artist?
- How could this impact the world of art education?
- What implications do the answers have for the training of art teachers?

- In what ways does this reflect our culture, our school policies and/or our school environments?

### *The Beginning*

Identity is defined in the American Heritage College Dictionary (Berube et al, 1993) as “the set of characteristics by which a thing is recognized or known” (p. 674). For the purposes of this research, the set of characteristics by which I recognize people as artists includes simply the participation in art-making as a process of creation and artistic practice. The artist may be involved in artistic practice privately and for the sole purpose of creating works of art, they may be involved for the requirements of an assignment for an art class, or they may be involved in creating works of art with the end result of selling or displaying the artwork in a public setting. All of these levels of involvement in art-making qualify a person as an artist; the range of involvement may vary in intensity and have differing end results, but the fundamental definition that I will use requires only artistic practice, or the active creation of works of art.

All art teachers are, or have been, artists at some point before or during their teaching career, or both. Art teachers usually study art in a studio setting during their teacher training, although the importance placed on this experience in the art studio, creating art and being an artist, may vary according to the teacher preparation program. This is one way of being an artist and engaging in artistic practice that all art teachers are certain to have shared. Art educators sometimes begin their artistic practice even before this, with the creation of art beginning early in childhood or adolescence. However, gaining licensure as an art teacher nearly always requires that one take studio art courses in a variety of media, which requires utilizing one’s artistic skills to create art.

Teaching art at the post-secondary level entails an even more rigorous and involved participation in art-making. However, it often requires little, if any, training in educational pedagogy or theory, and often limited or no involvement in internships or practice teaching. Teaching art at the post-secondary level requires an art teacher's continued involvement as an artist, and includes the more public aspects of artistic production, which are exhibiting and possibly selling finished works. Elementary and secondary art teachers seldom have these requirements in their positions in the schools, and their identities as artists are not called upon specifically when they take on art teaching jobs and pursue art teaching careers. Continued artistic practice is usually not a requirement of their professional role as art teachers, and it is probably for this reason that their participation in artistic practice and involvement in being an artist varies so widely from teacher to teacher. All art educators at the elementary and secondary levels must be teachers, as that is their role and the nature of their job, but not all art teachers must continue to actively be artists. I am concerned with investigating the ways that being or not being an artist informs an art educator's teaching, specifically at the secondary level.

In secondary art educators who have begun their teaching careers, these two identities, artist and art teacher, evolve and exist in a number of ways. After obtaining licensure, some art teachers go on to teach in the visual arts without continuing their artistic practice, perhaps never taking time to create works of art outside of the occasional example for a class lesson. Others continue their practice, but do it privately or perhaps rarely and never share or exhibit the finished work. Some art teachers go on to produce works of art for exhibition in galleries, museums or markets where they may also be sold,

in addition to fulfilling their roles as art educators. All secondary art teachers have some familiarity with both the identity of the artist and the art teacher. However, the ways that these identities exist and coexist within art educators varies with each individual. These identities may vary widely from art teacher to art teacher, and may change dramatically both in the short term and over the course of their teaching careers.

External notions and ideas about the roles and identities of artist and art teacher at the secondary level vary as well. Professional expectations for art educators and their artistic practice may vary widely based on the location or type of school setting.

Secondary level art teachers must have educational training and a strong identity as an art teacher, however, opinions vary greatly about whether elementary and secondary level art teachers are, or should be, practicing artists. In my research, the question that I am investigating attempts to examine how these two identities, the artist and the art teacher, relate and inform one another for secondary art teachers. I want to know what impact, if any, artistic practice has on an art educator's teaching of art, and discover more about the interrelationship of artist and teacher, the two identities within the art educator.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

#### *Overview of the Literature*

There has been much scholarly writing in the field of art education on the subject of roles and identities in art education and the relationship of those roles and identities to the teaching of art. Those that were of the most interest to me in the context of this research examine the impact of the artist identity or the role of artistic practice on the quality of art teaching. However, the range of analysis and understanding of this impact is diverse. The interpretations of the relationship between the artist and teacher identities and the ways this relationship influences the quality of art teaching vary widely.

From one perspective, being a good teacher and being an artist are not necessarily related. For example, an art teacher might be an accomplished artist, but not a good teacher, or she or he might be a great art teacher but no longer be engaged in artistic practice. From another perspective, continued and active artistic practice is an asset to an art teacher, as something that might enhance or inspire their teaching, but it is not necessarily viewed as something that is vital or essential for good art teaching. In yet another more radical view, which is in some ways an extension and more extreme interpretation of the notion that continued practice is an asset, art teachers who no longer continue their artistic practice are considered doomed to become stagnant in their profession. All of these views provide an important theoretical foundation for my investigation into the interrelationship between being an artist and being an art teacher in the visual arts, and how this interrelationship might impact the teaching practices of individual art educators.



*Context for Perspectives on the Interrelationship of Identities*

In the late 1960's, Jerome Hausman (1967) wrote that "all who are skilled as artists may not necessarily be effective as teachers" (p. 13). In discussing the effectiveness of art teachers, Hausman was mainly concerned that art teachers have clear goals about what they want students to accomplish. In this instance, the author considers simply having good teaching skills to be what makes an effective teacher, and he does not discuss being active in artistic practice as something that enhances an art teacher's teaching. It follows in the context of this writing that to teach art from this perspective, an art teacher must be familiar with various art media, which would allow her or him to have goals about what to teach, but it seems to be irrelevant whether or not the art teacher maintains a continued engagement in artistic practice. According to Hausman, "persons who are not themselves practicing artists can be effective teachers of art" (p.14), implying that the primary measure of an art educator's quality and effectiveness is not necessarily linked to their activities as an artist.

Almost a decade later, Fred R. Schwartz (1975), in a similar position, stated specifically that people who did not have notable artistic accomplishments can "become inspiring mentors" (p. 208) to students who go on to become recognized and notable artists. In this case, Schwartz was writing about the cycle of students of art becoming teachers of art and therefore creating a cycle of involvement in the art world that he compares to apprenticeships of the past. However, in writing that the ability to teach and the ability to achieve artistic success are not necessarily related, Schwartz, like Hausman (1967), failed to examine the specific relationship of art making to art teaching, which is at the very heart of my research. Hausman did make assumptions about experience as an

artist and knowledge of art and the art world, implying that it is important to know of these things as a teacher of art, but there was no specific discussion about how artistic practice informs art teaching in the long term, throughout an art teaching career.

In another case, Michael E. Parks (1992) echoed the sentiment of Hausman (1967) writing that “the talented and successful visual artist is not necessarily a talented and successful teacher of art” (Parks, p. 51). Once more the roles of artist and teacher were considered separately. The role and identity of the art teacher was examined in depth, and the primary focus was the artistry of teaching, with teaching itself seen as an art. Any potential for an examination of the interrelationship of the two identities, that of artist and that of teacher, in the art educator was not examined.

The writings of Hausman (1967), Schwartz (1975) and Parks (1992) maintained that within an art educator, the identities of teacher and artist are separate. The authors did not necessarily examine the ways that they might inform one another after an art educator has embarked on a teaching career. According to these writings, the two roles or identities are exclusive beyond that point, and being good at one is not necessarily related to being good at the other. The possibility that one art educator could identify as both an art teacher and an artist and have it be relevant and meaningful was not discussed.

However, what remains interesting to me is that all implied that the art teacher must be familiar with the artistic process in order to teach it, and have some experience working as an artist in a variety of media to gain that familiarity. Indeed, to teach is to be familiar with what is being taught, but it also implies that one possesses the skills to teach it, as well. In this context, however, no active involvement in artistic practice beyond the classroom is necessary. So, the successful art teacher is able to understand the creation of

art and how to teach this to others, in these cases, whether or not they are actively engaged in continued artistic practice throughout their teaching careers.

From a different perspective, artistic practice is considered an important and necessary part of teaching art. John A. Michael (1980) wrote about the importance of the studio experience in the teaching of art. Specifically, Michael wrote about the role of art teachers as models for understanding “the problem of the artist” (p. 16). Here Michael was referring to the experience an artist has of working in the visual arts and creating works of art, an experience that all art teachers have presumably had by the qualifications of their teaching license. Michael went on, however, to state that art teachers “need to refresh ourselves by analyzing the process as we do our own art” (p.16). By stating that continued artistic practice is necessary to good art teaching, Michael was redefining the relationship of the two identities. He was indicating that one identity does not lead or change into the other, as was implied before in the artist that becomes a teacher of art. Instead, he claimed that the identities of both must coexist in some way in order for the artist to achieve success as an art teacher. There was no underlying rule that stated that the art teacher must achieve success in the art world, just an understanding that the art teacher must maintain a connection to the process of making art, thus being an artist, which, according to Michael, is at the heart of teaching art.

Barbara Hammer (1984) also maintained that artistic production is necessary for successful art teaching, though she was writing from the context of a post secondary art teaching position, where continued artistic practice is a requirement of the art educator. Hammer stated that she has “always felt that it was important to be making art at the same time that I was teaching about the art-making process” (p.185). However, she

advocated specifically for an art educator to not be involved in artistic practice at the same time that they are teaching, and pursuing the two identities separately. According to Hammer, teaching is also an artistic endeavor, and she suggested “[w]hen teaching, teach; when making art, don’t teach” (p. 186). In her writing, Hammer placed great value on the art teacher maintaining a familiarity with the process of making art, even though she believed in pursuing each identity at separate times because of the importance of each to being a good art teacher. The difference is in the way that Hammer approached the interrelationship of the two identities. In her writing she created more specific criteria for the ways that one should pursue and be present, separately, within each identity, while allowing both identities to inform one another and enhance one’s teaching process.

In yet another approach to understanding the issues surrounding the interrelationship of the identities of artist and teacher, a view emerged that differed significantly from the views I have discussed thus far. In their exploration of the ways these multiple identities converge within the art educator, these authors (Szekely, 2006; Anderson, 1981) presented the role of the art educator as an ‘artist-teacher’. This was an attempt to describe more accurately, from their perspective, what it truly means to be an art teacher, as well as the roles that are involved in both the teaching of art and the continuous involvement in art that comes from creating it. In this context, the two identities were considered to be more than just related. Artistic practice, or being an artist, does more than just inspire the art teacher. The two identities were integral to one another, which takes us beyond Michael (1980) and Hammer (1984).

George Szekely (2006), a secondary art educator, wrote that in the sketchbooks where he plans his lessons visually, “an art lesson is a work of art” (p. 48), and just being

in the classroom as an art teacher involved “many small creative acts” (p. 53). Here Szekely touched upon the notion that one’s art teaching might inform one’s identity as an artist, which begins to expand into my notion of the interrelationships of the two identities of artist and art teacher, implying that not only does being an artist impact how one is an art teacher, but being an art teacher might impact how one is an artist.

In her article about the identity crisis of art educators published more than two decades before Szekely’s (2006) work, Constance H. Anderson (1981) contended that the roles of the artist and the teacher in the world are defined differently. She claimed that the crisis of identity comes from “the underlying implications of our profession” (Anderson, p. 46) and that art educators should focus less on the identity roles that exist, the artist and the art teacher, and more on allowing for crossover and interrelationship of the identities. Anderson viewed this interrelationship as essential, and stated that without it the art educator is doomed to “creative, intellectual, personal and professional stagnation” (Anderson, p. 45). Both Szekely and Anderson seemed to agree that an art teacher must also be an artist, and that they must continue to be both in order to allow those two, at times seemingly separate, identities to relate to and inform one another.

In a somewhat reactionary position, Michael D. Day (1986) claimed that “[t]he notion of an artist who is also a teacher is historically, geographically, and culturally common” (p. 39). Day used the term “artist-teacher” throughout his article (p. 38), apparently following in this attempt to redefine and combine the two identities of artist and teacher. Day, however, also noted that the “artist-teacher model becomes problematic” (p. 38) at the elementary and secondary levels because art teachers are expected to do more than teach about the making of art, they are instead expected to

teach a broader approach that focuses on understanding art. Day proposed that in the artist-teacher model, there might be many difficult challenges for the artist-teacher who does not teach at the post-secondary level because of notions about the agenda and expectations of the artist-teacher or the institution where the artist-teacher may be teaching.

Jeff Adams (2003) and Alan Thornton (2005) independently discussed the development and outcomes of a project in England to provide artist-teachers opportunities to pursue professional development in their artistic practice. However, Adams and Thornton did not find this artist-teacher role problematic at all. In fact, while Thornton defined this artist teacher much the same way that Day (1986) did, saying that she or he is “an individual who both makes and teaches art and is dedicated to both as a practitioner” (Thornton, p. 167), both Adams and Thornton agree that the artist-teacher identity is important to maintaining quality art teachers. Adams wrote that this identity will “encourage, revive and maintain the creative practice of visual arts teachers” (Adams, p. 183), which will then have a positive impact on art classroom instruction. In this case, both Adams and Thornton described a context in which being an artist, or actively participating in art-making and being involved in the process of working in the visual arts, actually makes an art educator a more effective teacher, and becomes beneficial to the art educator’s work in the art classroom.

In a more recent article by Cynthia Hatfield, Valerie Montana and Cara Deffenbaugh (2006), the authors explored issues related to identity in the context of art education which also considered the artist-teacher identity, questions that are closely linked to the questions that I am investigating in my own research. The researchers

began their article by writing that “[w]e were educators, we were artists and we were struggling to be both” (p. 42), and went on to explore the identities of art educators. The authors explored these identities and how they were perceived and experienced by the participants through journals and interviews. Hatfield, Montana and Deffenbaugh also gathered information about pre-service preparation and training. Participants in the study were either trained in fine arts, in art education or in regular education. The authors examined how the experiences of the different preparations correlated to the participants’ perceptions of their identities, and found varying reactions to their professional identities as artist-teachers, from confident to conflicted. The study identified that those participants who were the least conflicted with the identities of teacher and artist were those who had a background in art education. The study focused primarily on how the identities of artist and teacher led to the professional identity as art teachers, how the art teachers felt about it, and how it may have been impacting their success as art teachers. However, Hatfield, Montana and Deffenbaugh also touched upon several issues that are also important when examining identity, including the power and importance of integrating the two identities.

Pnina Bachar and Rivka Glaubman (2006) conducted a study in Israel which is also very closely related to my research. Bachar and Glaubman examined the differences between the teaching approaches of art educators, as well as the ways in which priorities and policies of schools support or reinforce these approaches. The participants in the study were evaluated for their level of “involvement in artistic practice” (p. 5) and divided into three categories. The first category included art teachers with no artistic practice or exhibition of artwork. The second category included art teachers involved in

artistic practice without exhibition. The third category included art teachers who were involved in artistic practice with exhibition. The researchers found clear differences in the approaches of the various art teachers based on the teachers' involvement in artistic practice, and identified the approaches as the "studio approach" (p. 4), or art teachers who were active in the creation and exhibition of their own work, and the "cognitive-academic approach" (p. 4), or those art teachers who were not. A distinction was then made that identified the two approaches by the ways in which they were meeting the needs of either "the internal aspirations of the student" (p. 12), as the "studio approach" (p. 4) was, or "the external needs of the school" (p. 12), as the "cognitive-academic approach" (p. 4) was. The results of this study, however, also identified a third type of teacher that could incorporate both approaches, referred to as "the integrative teacher, who attempted to integrate the traditional studio with the school framework" (p. 10). The researchers deemed this discovery of the third type of art teacher as a valuable piece of information when faced with the question of what might be the best type of teacher or teaching approach for policy-makers to endorse, because this type of teacher could incorporate the best of both previous approaches to more broadly meet the needs of art students.

All of the authors whom I have examined here have helped me to begin my inquiry into this research. I am exploring the reality of secondary art teachers' experiences both as artists and as teachers. In this sense, the wisdom of the many researchers, writers and scholars whom I have discussed have helped me to frame my research questions and gain a deeper insight into the identities of art educators as artists and art teachers. I am interested in how many have continued their artistic practice and if



so, to what degree. I am also concerned with how they feel that artistic practice informs or relates to who they are as teachers and how they teach. I am also interested in the implications that this may have for the field of art education, and the ways that the discoveries that I make within my research will fit into the greater context of the body of literature that I have discussed.

## Chapter Three

### Methodologies & Methods

#### *The Methodologies: Phenomenology and Arts-Based Educational Research*

Two primary methodologies informed my practice as I carried out my research into the identities of art educators. I chose phenomenology to guide my research because my goals in exploring the interrelationship of the artist and art teacher identities are largely about getting at the essence of the ways that these identities are or are not connected. It also guides my understanding of the ways that art educators find to be artists, teachers, or both, and how this affects their work in art education. While I mainly used a phenomenological approach to this research question, I also used Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER), which is appropriate for my research process because I am an artist, a teacher and a researcher. In the context of ABER, I wanted to understand and investigate my research questions through both writing and art-making. It is these methodologies that I will utilize to understand more deeply the ways that the interrelationships of identity inform my participants' art teaching.

As I worked, I kept in mind that the process of doing phenomenological research involves understanding the nature of phenomenological research, according to Max van Manen (1984). This nature is described as “the study of lived experience... the study of essences... the attentive practice of thoughtfulness... the search for what it means to be human... a poetizing activity” (pp. 1-2). As I approached my research in this way, I felt that the interview process was well-suited to studying the lived experiences of my participants. Harold Pearse (2004) used ABER to examine praxis, the “dynamic dialectical relationship between theory and practice” (Pearse, p. 184), which always

involves action and relates closely to the lived experiences that are of central importance to phenomenology. The art educators in my research are connecting my theories to action by telling me the stories of their lived experiences with these identities so that I can try to formulate insights and conclusions and discover ways to deeper understand the essence of the phenomenon that I am researching. The action of ABER, closely related to the lived experience of phenomenology, is highly relevant to my research investigating how identities and ways of being converge upon the art teacher, and through interviews and visual responses and writing in my field journal, I hoped to get closer to understanding the implications of my research questions.

Van Manen (1984) presented phenomenological researchers with two ways to educate themselves as they approach their research. He recommended that they understand how important it is to have “real life experiences” (p. 12) and gain an understanding of these experiences through “experiential understanding” (p. 12). Van Manen also recommended that we gain an “interpretive understanding” (p. 13) through a wide variety of sources including literature and the arts. As a researcher, I have real life experience as an art educator, and I have pondered the questions that I have raised within this research in the context of my own life. I hope to gain more experiential understanding, and thus get closer to an even deeper understanding of the phenomenon of this interrelationship of identities, through the voices of my participants. Phenomenology helped me to reintegrate the part with the whole as I attended to this research process, and perhaps, as Van Manen suggested, “sponsor a certain awareness” (p. ii) of the research question. This allowed me to move closer to understanding how the parts, the identities of the artist and the art teacher, exist or coexist in the life of an art educator. It is this value

of these real experiences that drew me to phenomenological research, because it is the humanness of the experience that opens up the research and gives it transferability.

Throughout the investigation of my research, my goal was to approach the research questions in a way that would lead me to a deeper understanding about the essence of the interrelationship of identities that I have discussed. In order to keep track of my thoughts and art-making throughout the research process, I kept a field journal. In this way, as a researcher I wanted to do as Rita Irwin (2004) wrote, and “move to embracing *theoria*, *praxis* and *poesis*, or put another way, research, teaching and art-making... to a more complex intertextuality and intratextuality of categories” (p. 28). Throughout my research I attempted to connect theory, or ideas about the importance of the identities of the artist/teacher, and practice, or what it is really like for teachers as they live and work within these identities.

I used the interview process as a method to gather these lived experiences in order to investigate the interrelationship of identities of artist and teacher in secondary art educators. I interviewed five secondary art teachers from an urban area in the southwestern United States, three of whom worked in the public school district of the city, one of whom recently retired from that same district, and one of whom worked in a private school in the area. Interviews were face to face and semi open-ended. In this way, I approached each interview with the same questions, but allowed the responses and conversation that developed in between questions to take place in as natural a way as possible. In this way, I intended to ask all of the participants the same set of questions, but allow them to answer in their own ways, in their own orders, sharing with me their

unique narratives, stories, experiences and perspectives. I recorded and transcribed the interviews, and later coded them for further analysis.

In this research, I am concerned with specific people and their individual experiences as art educators, and the ways that they are art teachers and artists. I am working with real people, I am concerned with them in the present moment of their lives and careers, and I am looking closely at my participants' personal experiences through interviews as they relate to my research. As Peter Willis (1999) stated, phenomenology is a philosophical approach used because of a desire to "reaffirm and describe [our] 'being in the world'" (p. 94). I believe that I had the best opportunity to do this in the context of an interview, in which I give the participants the opportunity to share their experiences in their own voices. The larger questions that I ask in my research, as well as the questions that I asked throughout each interview, are directly concerned with the desire to allow these art educators to tell me about their being in the world as it relates to art education. I also hoped to deepen my understanding and my knowledge about how art educators are artists, teachers or both through listening to these art educators tell their stories. Through the phenomenological process I want to "uncover and attend" (p. 97) to the experiences of these art educator participants, and perhaps get closer to uncovering and attending to something that has relevance to the field of art education.

### *The Interview Process*

After I developed my research questions and strategies, I selected the site that I would use for my investigation, and developed some guidelines for selecting my participants. As a secondary art teacher myself, I knew that I did not want to do "backyard" research, research that involves researchers "studying their own institution or

agency” (Glesne, 2006, p. 31). I chose a nearby school district and urban area located in the southwestern United States as a research site. I selected participants from this site in particular because it would be convenient, but also because I do not work in this site, but am employed in a much smaller, nearby community, and therefore had no direct professional influence over these participants in any way.

Before I actually began the process of selecting participants for the study and interviewing them, I had to gain permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of New Mexico. IRB approval is required for any projects that include human research participants, as mine does. As a part of this approval process, I had to develop a consent form that my participants could sign, assuring them that they would remain anonymous and that they were under no obligation to participate in the study, and could withdraw from it at any time if they chose to, thus allowing them ethical and legal informed consent. The IRB approved my research for one year in August of 2008, and renewed the approval for another year in September of 2009.

In the course of the participant selection process for my study, I used two main strategies. Initially, I wanted to use a typical case sampling, in order to examine “what is typical, normal” (Glesne 2006, p.35). I wanted to gather a small number of participants from this large, urban school district so that I might get closer to the essence of the experiences of a variety of art educators. In my attempts, I learned quickly that finding potential participants for this study was to be a difficult task. My first attempt to make contact with art teachers in the district was through email in an attempt to contact a fine arts coordinator, hoping for contact information regarding secondary art teachers. However, that email went without reply, which led me to decide to use the district’s

website to contact the secondary art teachers myself by sending each art teacher in my initial participant pool a letter of invitation at their respective school site. I sent invitations to all of the approximately forty-seven secondary art teachers in the district, limiting the letters to only those secondary art teachers whom I could identify as teaching at the district high schools.

In order to participate, art educators needed to have been teaching art at the high school level for a minimum of three years. I identified this requirement within the letter of invitation (see Appendix A). This ensured that each art teacher participant would have at least a basic level of experience to provide a foundation of teaching knowledge to draw from, as my interview questions were built upon the experience of being an art teacher. I purposefully did not specifically state any minimum requirements or expectations related to artistic practice or being an artist. I believe that people, art teachers included, have a wide range of ideas and preconceptions about what it means to be an artist or be involved in artistic practice. Because I am operating under the assumption that all art teachers are familiar with art-making, which is inherent in that they teach art, they will have had experience as artists in the way that I have defined it for this research in Chapter One.

After this initial large-scale wave of recruiting, I received only four responses, of which only two were art teachers. The other two responses were music teachers that I had contacted by mistake under the umbrella of fine arts teachers. One music teacher merely wondered if she could be of any assistance to me, which unfortunately in the context of this research she could not, but the other highly recommended that I contact an art teacher who had recently retired from the school district. This initially small response, as well as the potential lead that arose as I pursued participants, led me to reevaluate my

selection strategy. I decided that this was a perfect opportunity to transition to network sampling, a strategy that would allow me to learn about “potential cases from people who know people who meet research interests” (Glesne 2006, p.35) So, my initial attempt yielded three participants after I recruited the art teacher who was recommended to me through networking. I completed the first three interviews in the summer months after I sent my initial invitation letter (see Appendix A),

Since I set out to have a minimum of five interviews for this project, I continued to use this networking approach to find my last two participants. I contacted a professor with the University of New Mexico via email (see Appendix B) who regularly established placements for student teachers with art educators in the urban area schools where I had established my research site. As someone who had the knowledge of people who could meet my research criteria, this professor was able to help me to contact several potential art teachers (see Appendix C), from whom I was able to find another participant. The final participant in my study came from another professor who was serving as a member on my thesis committee, who was able to provide me with a networking contact that led to my final participant, for a total of five participants, and five interviews between June and November of 2009.

### *The Interview*

Through the interview questions, I attempted to understand my participants as art teachers and as artists, and to encourage them to reflect on the interrelationships of the two identities, as well as their perspectives and expectations surrounding this interrelationship. I grouped the interview questions into four sections, and I made a point



to take time to chat informally with each participant before I began asking the questions and recording the session.

I began the recorded interview by asking questions about the participants' teaching, which I assumed would be a good place to begin, as the one sure thing among my participants was that they all taught art at the high school level. I then asked some questions about the participants' involvement in artistic practice, with follow-up questions that could be skipped if the participant were to say that they no longer had any involvement in art-making. After asking questions about the participants' artist identities, I moved on to asking them direct questions about the interrelationship of the two identities within themselves, and then asking them in more general terms about their beliefs and values surrounding the same interrelationship in art teachers in general. In this way I was able to look specifically for their personal insights into the artist/teacher relationship, which is central to my investigation. The interview questions were as follows:

(TEACHER/PEDAGOGY)

- How long have you been teaching art, and what classes do you teach?
- Can you describe your approach to teaching art? What are your priorities in the art classroom?
- What kinds of lessons or projects do you prefer to teach? Please tell me about one of your favorites.
- How important is teaching art history to your curriculum? Art criticism?
- What do you value and want your students to learn or take away from your classes?

(ARTIST/PRACTICE)

- Are you actively involved in creating work as an artist?
- Can you describe your process when you create art? What medium/media do you use when you work?
- How would you describe your artwork? What meaning does being an artist have for you, and what are your priorities as an artist?
- How often do you create artwork? Do you exhibit/sell work?

(ARTIST-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP)

- Do you think whether or not you continue your artistic practice influences your teaching? How?
- Does your teaching influence your artistic practice? How does it or in what way is it separate?

(NOTIONS OF BEING AN ART TEACHER/ARTIST)

- Do you believe it is important for an art teacher to continue to create artwork? Is it necessary to actively be making work to be an artist? Why or why not?
- Do you think that creating artwork or being an artist has any relationship to the quality of an art teacher's art teaching?
- Do you think other art teachers would agree with you?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

After I finalized the interview questions, I answered them all in an independent session in my field journal in order to add my voice to the voices of my respondents. I hoped that this would clarify some of my own biases and preconceived ideas about my

research, and I also hoped that through the writing I might be able to learn something. As Laurel Richardson stated, “I write because I want to find something out” (2000, p. 517).

Richardson also wrote:

I consider writing as a *method of inquiry*, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of “telling” about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing” – a method of discovery and analysis. (p. 516)

Before the interview, I wrote in my field journal because I wanted to find out how I would answer the very questions that I was posing to my respondents. I wanted to be able to understand what it was like to answer my own questions in a somewhat spontaneous fashion, even though I created the questions and was familiar with them. This journaling gave me more insight into the experience of answering the questions I created and helped me to be a better interviewer. Through the course of the interviews, I was glad that I had done this reflection writing prior to the sessions with my respondents because I felt it allowed me to be more empathetic, and it also provided me with a way to reflect on my own experiences and voice in my research.

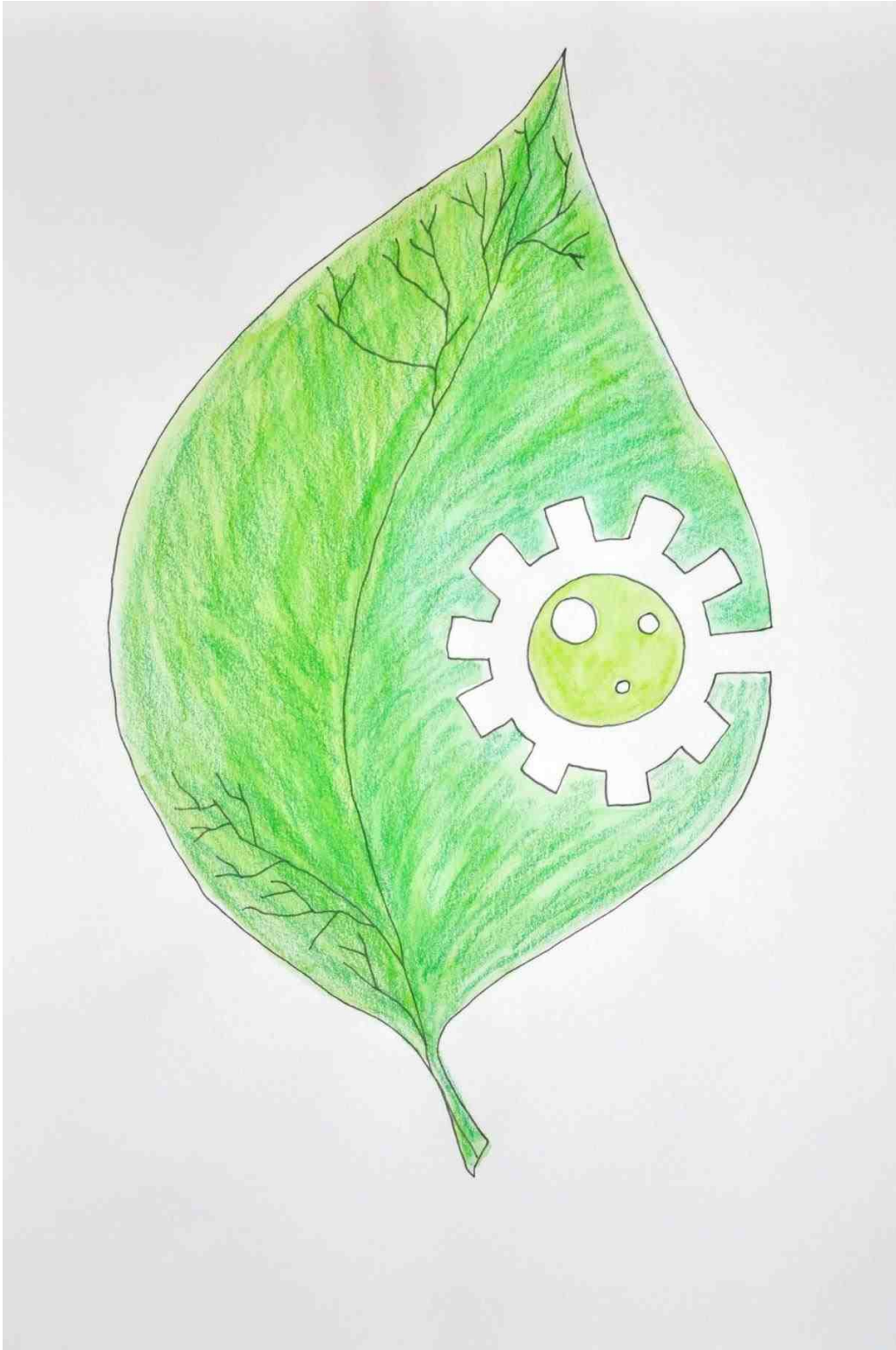
## Chapter Four

### Findings

#### *Fieldwork*

Before embarking on the interviews and data collection portion of my research, I worked in my field journal, preparing and reflecting on the research process thus far. Throughout the research process I attempted to use the field journal as a “tool to intervene in the world and in knowing” (Naths, 2004, p. 120). In doing this, I also kept Nath’s question in mind, “What is an experience unless it is reflected upon and connected to the world?” (p. 124). I recorded my notes, ideas, questions and visual responses, and artwork, in order to delve deeper into my research, and perhaps find more meaning in my work. The mixed media artistic reflection piece that appears in Figure 1 is a visual, nonlinguistic expression of the beginnings of my investigation into this research. It touches upon the complexity of the questions that I was investigating, and provides “nonlinguistic forms of the arts for alternative modes of representing research data” (Barone and Eisner, 2006, p. 101), as I set out to do using ABER.

After the interviews were completed, and I was able to reflect on the process of interviewing, writing, transcribing, reflecting, coding and reviewing within my field journal, I found that identifying how the interrelationships of artist and teacher identities inform art teachers is perhaps not a simple thing to pinpoint. As I carried out the interviews and continued my research process, I found that hearing the stories and perspectives of the art educators involved in my project was a deeply valuable experience. I also found that somewhat contrary to my expectations, each individual did not seem to have only one interpretation of the interrelationship of artist and teacher



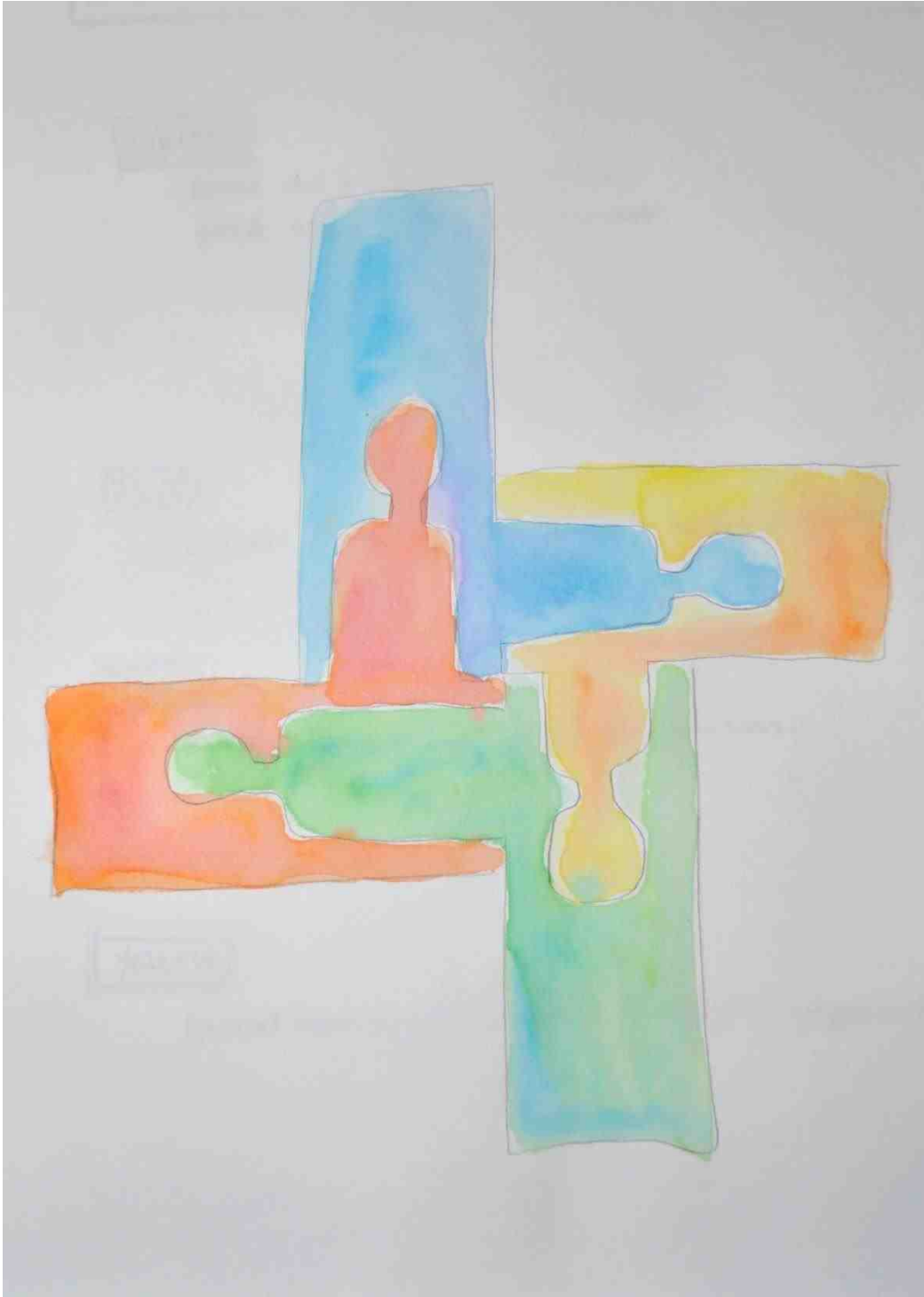
*Figure 1.* Early image from field journal, visual response to research questions.

identities. I created visual responses in my field journal to the research and the experience of gathering participant voices which appear in Figures 2 and 3. In the context of self-reflection of their own artist-teacher practices, as well as in their general opinions or ideas about the nature of art and teaching, all of my participants expressed complex and unique perspectives about the ways that artistic practice informed art teaching.

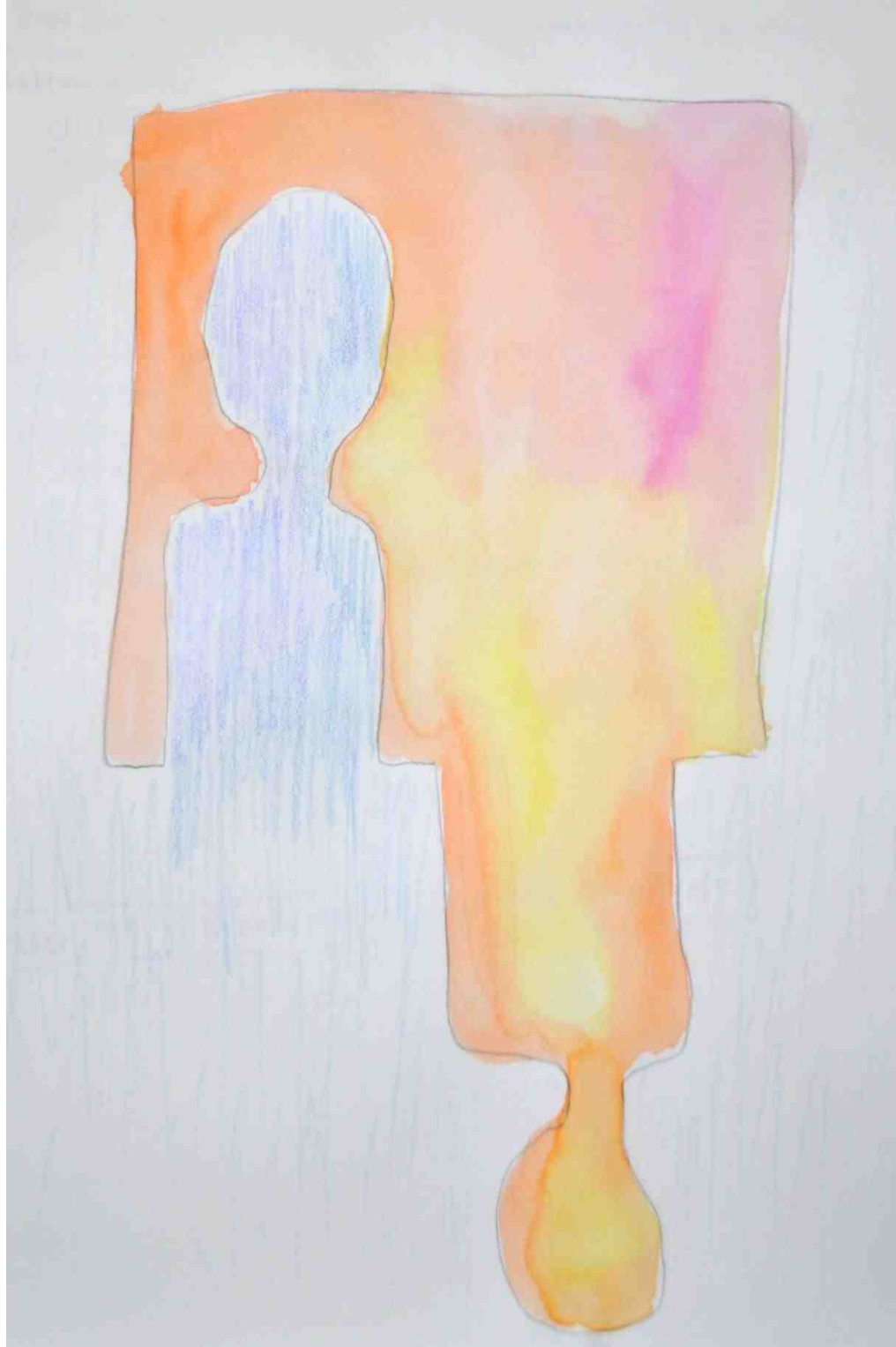
I also found that the process of interviewing elicits very different responses than the process of answering interview style questions in writing. The participants answered questions in a wide variety of ways, based on how they interpreted the questions. They answered thoroughly and naturally, and the dialogue that followed each scripted question allowed for each participant to capture the complexities of the question at hand in her or his own way. When I provided responses to my own interview questions, I stuck to the question and refrained from making any connections to other parts of my exploration. Perhaps I was able to answer exactly the question I was asking because I created the questions, I was familiar with them and had undoubtedly been contemplating the answers over time, and I had no one else to converse with about it. In any case, the interview process proved to be an abundant resource for discovery in my investigation, as well as a means to deepen my understanding of the essence of the interrelationship of identities I was investigating.

### *Participant Voices*

As each participant responded to the interview questions, I was able to glean some insight into their teaching philosophies and approaches, their involvement in



*Figure 2.* Image from field journal, visual response #1 to research questions after completion of the interviews.



*Figure 3.* Image from field journal, visual response #2 to research questions after completion of the interviews.



artistic practice and identities as artists, and their concepts of the relationship between their own art-making to their teaching, as well as their perspective on the interrelationship between artistic practice and teaching for art educators in general. I found the insights that my participants shared incredibly enlightening. In order to keep the identities of participants in this research private, the names I use within this document are not the real names of the art educators I interviewed, but pseudonyms. In addition, as I selected the quotations to share here, I tried first and foremost to honor my participants' voices by being true to their intended meanings and not presenting their responses out of context. At the same time, I wanted to focus on specific aspects of what they were saying, and draw attention to their responses when they were particularly relevant to the questions that I have asked in this research. I have made every effort to be true to their original intentions as I present them here.

### *Researcher as Participant*

I responded to the interview questions in my field journal prior to conducting any interviews, thus becoming a researcher/participant in my own study. I had been teaching art for four years at the time of the responses. However, I had only spent one year of that time as a secondary art teacher at the high school level, so I knew that my responses would probably differ from the art educators whom I would later interview. As I described my priorities as a teacher, I expressed my goals that “students feel safe and valued and are able to grow and develop their artistic ideas and selves, and gain confidence, skill and a sense of creative expression” (personal field journal, June 2009). The lesson I described as one of my favorites was one which involved students in an painting project that began with very specific, skill-building activities such as color

theory and color mixing, but culminated in the students finishing a small acrylic painting in which they were able to experience the creative process. Students were able to use their skills to develop a finished painting that demonstrated their own unique, creative problem-solving and demonstrated their personal development as artists.

As an artist, I recognized that while I was not highly active in my artistic practice, I was still involved in creating work. I produced this work mainly in the context of being a graduate student in art studio classes, and, less frequently, independently in my studio. I had participated in some exhibitions through my graduate program, but for the most part, I was not active in displaying or selling my work. When I reflected on the artistic process I went through as I created art, I wrote:

I tend to think and plan a lot when I am working. I often work from ideas and images in my mind and do writing about those ideas and images, trying to deepen or broaden the concept I have of what I am trying to create...Being an artist is to ask questions of myself and pose the answers to others, in the form of the artwork, which as artwork almost becomes a question again for the viewer as audience and interpreter. (personal field journal, June 2009)

Later in the reflection, I had several somewhat contradictory responses regarding the relationship between myself as artist and teacher, writing:

I think continuing my artistic practice does influence my teaching. I also think it's important to remember what it feels like to be the one creating and working with the materials and ideas in the studio. That being said, I still feel like I can be a good art teacher even when I'm not very active as an artist. I also think it's

important for my confidence and for credibility with students, especially at the secondary level. (personal field journal, June 2009)

When responding to a similar question about art teachers in general and their artistic practice, I added that “I do believe it is important, but I haven’t decided if I think it’s essential... I think it might make them a better teacher” (personal field journal, June 2009).

### *Interview 1*

The first interview I held was with Jennifer. Jennifer had taught secondary art for twenty-nine years. She spent nineteen of those years at the high school level, and when I asked her about her approaches to teaching art, she replied that

number 1, the kids wanted to learn skills so that they could draw better, and that drawing is really the foundation for all of it... But I believe that until they get that foundation of confidence in their drawing skills, they can’t really be creative, and if you just throw all these creative assignments at [students], and it still looks like a fourth grader drew it, they’re still going to hate their assignments, you know.

(personal communication, June 29, 2009)

She went on to elaborate that she really believed in building skills that would inspire confidence so that her students could go on to create more complicated works, and had many students that went on to study art at the college level with much success. She also placed a great deal of emphasis on making the lessons fun for the students and creating a sense of community in her classroom. As she said later, “I want my students to feel as if they’re artists, and I think they really want that, and that they can be successful. But my first expectation is that they become humanists” (personal communication, June 29,

2009). She also emphasized that art history and art criticism were fundamental components of her lessons, saying that “with each assignment that I would do, I would incorporate art history” (personal communication, June 29, 2009).

As we continued the interview and Jennifer began to tell me about herself as an artist, she shared with me that she had spent her early teaching career actively involved in artistic practice, which included exhibiting and selling her work in several local and regional galleries. As she continued her teaching career, for personal reasons, she became less active in the public side of being an artist, and no longer exhibited and sold her work, yet she continued to be actively involved in her identity as an artist, creating works of art and engaging in artistic practice. Her focus in artistic practice shifted, however, and her motivations for creating work became more related to her teaching. Jennifer placed a great deal of importance on creating samples of the projects she did with her classes, both as an artist and as an art teacher, saying at one point that “my samples became my art form” (personal communication, June 29, 2009). Jennifer had deep motivation for her samples, maintaining that

when I was doing my demos, I would usually take them to a conclusion so that they could see all the steps, no matter what medium we were working in. And I always had samples... So then, I knew, oh, if I do this, it'll screw up. If you do this, it's going to really work. How do I hold my hand, what am I doing with my brush, how does it work if I add more water or less water, or, you know, what if I spray it with Windex and rub it off? All those kinds of things that you might try, and then I could give the kids a variety of choices and work on a variety of ways of working. (personal communication, June 29, 2009)

Jennifer went on to explain that in her experiences with student teachers, they did not have such a profound dedication to creating samples, and often this hurt their lessons and made them less dynamic. In her opinion, this was a weakness of the teacher preparation program that the student teachers came from. Jennifer held to the idea that more emphasis should have been placed on the importance of artistic practice within art teacher training programs as it related directly to an art teacher's teaching.

When I asked her about her personal experiences with artistic practice, and whether or not being an artist had an influence on her teaching she replied:

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely... Well, number one, I think it keeps me, creative.

Kept me creative. It made me think of new things, it made me want to explore new ideas... So it was good for my creativity as an artist, and it was good for their creativity as students, and, you know, I think my skill mastery got better and better and better... I'd say that is one of the most crucial things, regardless of whether or not you're doing your artwork to sell. Or, you're just doing your artwork to inspire your students... And, and I think my students viewed me as an artist, and that I was sharing my artistic knowledge with them to help them improve... and they saw my progression, and because I'm such a fast worker, a lot of times they'd see a lot of different problem solving for the same idea.

(personal communication, June 29, 2009)

After that, I asked her about art teachers in general and whether or not it was important to continue to create artwork, and if she thought artistic practice had any relationship to an art teacher's teaching, and her reply was "yes, I do. And I think it's really, really

important. How can you teach technique if you're not doing it? How can you teach them to be creative if you're not doing it?" (personal communication, June 29, 2009).

### *Interview 2*

Alice agreed to speak with me for my second interview. Alice had been teaching secondary art at the high school level for seventeen years. She had begun her art teaching career with a focus on photography, but more recently she had been teaching drawing and painting classes. Alice expressed a clear vision when I asked her about her priorities as an art teacher, saying:

There's a few. The main one is for students to really feel successful... So, everybody starts at a different place, and so the main priority is to get everybody in the same group to feel confident and successful in whatever it is, and wherever they're at, that's the first priority. The second would be teaching art history, and really making them understand that someone like Picasso was a rebel, just like they are, and when he was, where he was at when he was a child, is probably what they need to think about, that they were there, that sort of thing. So, the third priority would be to get them, in 9 months, up to speed. In other words, to make them to feel so successful and confident, that they can really feel like they can draw. (personal communication, July 20, 2009)

Alice also articulated placing a great deal of importance on teaching both art history and art criticism in her classroom. She talked about some lessons that she preferred to teach, telling me about her interest in teaching students to work with still life, explaining it this way:

I like a lot of still life work. I think using things that are real, or still life, like, say for example, a vase of real sunflowers, really helps the students to connect to something that they see every day or they see driving by, or they can touch it, they can smell it, they can feel it, so the five senses is a really big deal to me. (personal communication, July 20, 2009)

She also explained that she expected her students to do a lot of work in their sketchbooks, saying that “the sketchbooks are eminent, they’re one of the main, one of the most important things that I really try and work with for these kids” (personal communication, July 20, 2009). From her classes, Alice hoped that her students would take with them “just self-reliance number 1, and number 2, the knowledge of art... that makes them more aware of what’s around them” (personal communication, July 20, 2009).

Alice was very active in her identity as an artist. She had been a professional photographer for 25 years. More recently, inspired by her teaching role in the media of painting and drawing, Alice had expanded her artistic practice to include painting. She described her artistic process this way:

The process is, the first thing that I do is that work in my sketchbook. And I write every single day... I write first, and then I start to think about what it is that I am dreaming about, or daydreaming about, or something that hits me, and I put it down on paper first, and I start to sketch it out, or I start to draw it out, or I photograph it, whatever it is. I’m always making work, but it always starts with the sketchbook. A lot of processing in the sketchbook. (personal communication, July 20, 2009)

Alice also emphasized her work ethic, which included daily practice. She had a broad understanding of activities that could enhance one's artistic being, and considered anything that involved some sort of creative process to be valuable, saying "I work every day, yeah. If I'm not working in the sketchbook, or working, then I'm cooking, or I'm doing something" (personal communication, July 20, 2009).

When I asked her whether continuing her own artistic practice was important for her teaching, Alice replied:

Yeah, sure. I mean, I think that I intimidate a lot of art teachers because I do do my work, and I don't mean that in an egotistical way, but I do have expectations of my students and my teaching ability that I raise the bar. It's gotta be high... So that's a really, a real challenge for me as an artist, to try and get them to see how am I doing my process, how they can do theirs... So, getting them excited is a big deal. And it does inform my teaching, my artwork does inform my teaching. If I do something in my studio that I think really works, then I'm on it. Then I say, "you guys, let's do this." And that just recently happened with an assignment that I had for some work that did in [city]. The assignment that I had, I gave to my advanced students, and they LOVED it. It was like one of their favorite projects, so we're going to do it again this year. (personal communication, July 20, 2009)

She also shared her ideas about the importance of continued artistic practice for art teachers in general:

Absolutely... And if it's not about the artwork, then go out and cook, or go out and take a class, or go out and, you know, but do some sort of process. It doesn't matter, even if it's something new, even if it's auto mechanics or something, or



diving, you know, I don't know what it would be, but... I really do believe that the only, the way that an art teacher becomes whole, because it is a difficult, it's difficult, we all know, you know. Teaching in itself is difficult, and an art teacher has to be that much more, they have to be that much more creative, they have to be fresh, they have to be new, they have to be on all the time. So how do they, how do they inform that to themselves is what you're asking. And my suggestion would be that they do something. (personal communication, July 20, 2009)

Alice did not necessarily think that other teachers would agree with her ideas about this. She maintained, however, that continued artistic practice, continuing to be an artist while being an art teacher, was essential to being a successful art teacher. She acknowledged that it was often difficult to find the balance between being an artist and a teacher, but emphasized that it was important, and that finding such a balance was well worth the effort spent making it a priority, and making it happen.

### *Interview 3*

My third interview was with Cathy, an art educator who had been teaching art for about ten years. Cathy had spent all of her years teaching at the secondary level with high school students. Similar to Alice, Cathy also began her career teaching photography, although she also taught beginning art classes, and was also transitioning from teaching photography into teaching drawing and painting. As a teacher, Cathy stated her priorities as being “for [students] to really understand that art is an academic subject, and to feel free to experiment within boundaries, to really understand the basic concepts and how they can use those” (personal communication, July 22, 2009). When I asked Cathy about her favorite lessons, or the types of lessons she liked teaching, she explained that she

enjoyed working with fresh, contemporary ideas and approaches. Later, when I asked her about what she hoped her students would take away from her classes, Cathy said that the most important thing for her was that her students were

having a positive experience with art, and learning not to fear it. Like being able to walk into a gallery and understand what's going on and why art is important in their lives. Especially in the world we live in, it's so visual. We need to have a background knowledge of what the visual means. (personal communication, July 22, 2009)

For the most part, Cathy seemed to share goals for her students that were similar to the teachers I had already spoken with, including myself. She placed a great deal of value on learning foundations that could give students the skills they would need in order to produce more meaningful projects. She also placed a strong emphasis on art criticism in her classroom, but did not have a specific focus on art history, acknowledging that it was important, but stating that she placed more of a priority on the process of art-making.

Cathy was actively involved in artistic practice, and described her artistic process by saying that she would usually “start with photographs, and then sort of work with them into mixed media type pieces” (personal communication, July 22, 2009). She talked about working with found objects and experimenting with various techniques and processes, which seemed to be closely related to her teaching emphasis on more contemporary styles of art. Cathy said that she tried to work in the studio four or five days a week, and that she was primarily entering her finished works in shows. Cathy summarized her views on the importance of whether or not her continued artistic practice influenced her teaching in this way:

I think practicing gives me... It keeps my perspective on what I'm making fresh, which helps me to bring fresh perspectives to the classroom, but it also helps me understand when kids are having trouble working, you know, I can tell them how I worked through something, or, I was doing this and this is how I got through that block. I also think it gives you a credibility as a teacher. If you know how to make art and you are currently making art, you can really kind of talk to students on a more of a mentor relationship with them... It's not so much talking down to them as an equal discussion, especially for the advanced kids. And I think they have a feeling like "oh, art comes from nowhere," like "oh, you just know how to do it, you're talented". But they need to understand that it's hard work, and being able to work on it as an artist gives you the credibility and it also helps them to understand that it takes a lot of work, it's not instantaneous process. (personal communication, July 22, 2009)

When I asked her if she ever thought that teaching influenced her work as an artist, she replied that she did think her students and their ideas and energy in turn helped her artistic process. In general, Cathy said this about art teachers and the importance of continuing with artistic practice:

I think they might not need to be doing it currently, but they need to have a pretty strong artmaking background. I think without that background, I think it's... I think kids can read right through you, and they know whether you know what you're doing or you don't know that you're doing. Or you're not passionate about what you're doing, they know, and I think it affects how they learn. (personal communication, July 22, 2009)

#### *Interview 4*

Stuart, my fourth interview participant, had been teaching secondary art for eleven years, and in that time his classes included both middle and high school students. Stuart taught introductory classes in drawing and painting, clay and sculpture, as well as introductory and advanced photography. When I asked him to describe his approach to teaching art, he replied that

a lot of it has to do with skill building, and I don't teach a lot of advanced courses, so it's that whole scaffolding of ideas... I know in a lot of art education today this is out of fashion, or it rings too heavily of the DBAE [Discipline-Based Art Education] approach, and it isn't as funky groovy, or whatever, but so much of it comes down to skill building. And I find that kids want the skills. (personal communication, October 12, 2009)

When discussing the kinds of lessons he preferred to teach, he claimed that lessons he enjoyed “teaching the most are ones where kids can learn some skills but also take it in their own direction” (personal communication, October 12, 2009). Regarding what he wanted students to learn or take away from his classes, he said that he wanted them “to have enough success that they feel included, that they feel like, like active artists” (personal communication, October 12, 2009).

Stuart, like the other art educators I interviewed before him, was actively involved in artistic practice. He was engaged in the creation of works of art, and with his finished works of art he participated in shows and exhibitions and sold work in galleries. He spoke about working daily, and in a wide variety of visual media, black and white photography, hand-built and thrown pottery, large abstract paintings and smaller mixed media works,

as well as literary works in poetry. At the point in the interview when I asked him about his perspective on the ways that his continued artistic practice influenced his teaching, Stuart said:

You know, I'm a better teacher when I'm working. And part of it is, I think it's like going to the gym or something. That mellows people out, I think art has the same quality for me, kind of psychically, and so, I think I'm just more present in the classroom with the kids. And I'm more energized and enthusiastic, and able to see relationships between their work and mine. As well I don't feel like all I do is teach, and grade photos, and order supplies, and... You know, the craziness of the classroom... The boat sails more steadily through the water, the boat of me, you know? (personal communication, October 12, 2009)

And when I asked about the reverse, the ways that teaching art influenced him as an artist, he acknowledged teaching subjects outside of his main medium of photography really inspired him to experiment with drawing, painting and clay. He explained that "this process has influenced me and opened me up in a whole new way" (personal communication, October 12, 2009).

In terms of the relationship between being an artist and an art teacher, Stuart expressed his views about the necessity of an art teacher continuing her or his creative practice:

I think yes because I think it's what, a rare art teacher who didn't originally go into the arts, and look at art education as an adjunct career, or a way to make money with something they love. And I think, for most people, it's artist first, art teacher second. Even though once you get involved in it, it feels the other way

around... And just, in the same way that going to grad school helped me get in the position of my students, I think actively creating art helps you get in your students' mindsets more. (personal communication, October 12, 2009)

He added that being an artist was important to the quality of an art teacher's teaching, saying:

I see a lot of art teachers who aren't creating work, and how frustrated and blocked they get... So I think, just to stay healthy and keep the pipes unclogged, it's a good idea. But I see too many teachers who aren't doing their own work, and then when they do start up that process again, they're just happier, they're just more pleasant in the classroom, more present. So, I think it's integral, at least for me. (personal communication, October 12, 2009)

And when posed with the question of whether other art teachers would agree with him, he said:

Um... Yes. No. I mean, I don't know. I mean, most of the teachers I work with I think would agree... I think would agree. And some of them are raising kids, and having elderly parents they have to deal with, but the happiest ones, and I'm working with several teachers who have taught for 21 years, 36 years, 22 years, and when they are happiest and when they're at their best, is when I'm seeing them poke away at a painting during a free period, work on glazing something at lunch... (personal communication, October 12, 2009)

### *Interview 5*

My last interview was with Barbara, who had been a high school art teacher for twenty-one years. Barbara taught both jewelry and ceramics classes. I asked Barbara about her

approach to teaching art and her priorities in the classroom, and she replied:

My priorities are to get technique down on the kids, so that they understand not only why they are creating, but that the finished product has to be as beautiful as the drawing they started with... but you have to know the process before you continue other processes within the field of either ceramics or jewelry making.

(personal communication, November 2, 2009)

She explained that she began each class with a project that would introduce them to all the equipment and tools that they would need initially, so that as they progressed they could work in a more independent way, designing their own projects, developing their skills and pursuing their interests artistically. She explained it further, saying

...even though it's called a jewelry class, they can do sculpture in my class, small sculpture, because I want them to grow, and to be interested in what they're making, so that I can get a better understanding of where they're coming from, so that I can get books in, or videos, or if I have stuff at home that I can bring into the classroom to teach them, to further enhance what they're working on.

(personal communication, November 2, 2009)

One of her other goals, since advanced students are mixed into the introductory classes, is to encourage the class to work together, which involves advanced students sometimes teaching their skills to new students. When I asked about favorite lessons she had taught, she emphasized this importance on students learning to work together, explaining that

“when you get kids to work together that normally wouldn’t interact, that to me is the most powerful thing in my classroom because you can see the community at work” (personal communication, November 2, 2009).

Barbara maintained that both art history and art criticism were important to her teaching goals in the classroom, and were incorporated in different ways. She talked about speaking with each student at length about their finished work, and about a paper every student wrote at the end of the semester examining a particular artist, technique, culture or art movement and relating it to the students’ own interests. When I inquired about what she hoped her students would learn and take away from her classes, Barbara replied:

That they can be artists, that they can be craftsmen. That there is a way to make a living at what they’re learning in my class, it’s not just an elective class, that it’s not an easy class, which is what they come in thinking. (personal communication, November 2, 2009)

Barbara’s responses regarding her teaching were in many ways similar to the other participants’ responses, placing an emphasis on building skills in order to work on more personally meaningful and conceptually advanced projects, as well as including both art history and art criticism in her classes.

As an artist, Barbara was a jeweler. After studying at the university level, she spent a year apprenticing under several jewelers in Mexico. She had since been very active in her identity as an artist, and was actively involved in artistic practice on a daily basis. Barbara also showed and sold her work in several local galleries, as well as several



annual art markets in the region. I asked her to describe her process in creating her work, and she explained:

What I do a lot of times is I go into the studio and I'll look around, see what I have, what kind of stones I have, metal, I'll look back at some of the pictures, and photos of things I've done before, because I always try to make something new so that it doesn't repeat itself, so I always, even if it might be similar it has to have a different look. (personal communication, November 2, 2009)

Barbara went on to explain the importance of being an artist and the meaning it had for her. She spoke about how often, based on the needs of a student in one of her classes, she would try to brush up on or learn a new technique, saying "that's the thing. I mean, no matter what you do, you continue to learn and improve on your skills, and change your ideas, constantly change your ideas" (personal communication, November 2, 2009).

I also asked Barbara, as I did all of my participants, about her own artistic practice and whether she thought that it might influence her teaching. She replied,

Oh, definitely. Definitely, it's like I told you before, if I wasn't immersed in it at home, I don't think I'd be so, as excited in the classroom... I think it definitely, because it's in your brain and it's in your blood, and it's just something that you can share with your students at the beginning of the semester, I show a power point of my own work, I talk about my own work, I bring examples of my own work into the classroom. (personal communication, November 2, 2009)

When I went on to ask if she thought that this was true for all art teachers, whether it was important for them to continue in their artistic practice, she said

I do, but I feel like, you can teach, and you know, you can teach art, and you can teach art history, and ceramics and anything like that, but I think when you are working on your own pieces you get more inspired to push your kids a little further, because you know what it takes to get there, and you know how hard it was, maybe for you. (personal communication, November 2, 2009)

She was uncertain about whether other art teachers would agree with her, but thought that they might.

## Chapter 5

### Insights and Analysis

#### *Insights*

This research originated in my experiences as an art teacher and my desire to understand what it is to be an art teacher more deeply. In doing this research, the process has led me to make some profound discoveries about the research, about my expectations for the field of art education, and about myself as an artist and an art teacher. I found that I still believe that my research questions are relevant and important, both to me personally, as well as to others in the field of art education. I believe that understanding how artistic practice could potentially inform the quality of an art teacher's practice in the classroom could have a profound effect on many art educators, and I know that it will have a profound effect on me as both a teacher and an artist.

At times I wondered how I could possibly begin to understand the phenomenon that is at the heart of my study, the relationship between the identities of artist and art teacher. It has always seemed to me that the notion of what it means to teach art varies widely, mainly because art, that which is being taught, is difficult, if not impossible, to define in concrete terms. In addition, what it means to be an artist differs a great deal from person to person. However, through my interviews with the participants, the literature and my field journal, and the context of attempting to understand all of them through the thoughtfulness and attention to lived experience of phenomenology and the connection between theory and practice of Art-Based Educational Research, I believe that I have been able to truly get closer to the essence of this interrelationship of identities.

## *Analysis*

In the beginning, I began my research questions by wondering about the ways that the identities of artist and art teacher inform one another within art educators. I discovered through the interview process that all of my participants, including myself, viewed continued artistic practice as either beneficial to or necessary for their own successful art teaching. In addition, when I inquired about ways that being a teacher influenced my participants as artists, all responded that being an art teacher also influenced their work as artists. It became clear that there was, indeed, an interrelationship of identities within my participants, and while it was complex, gaining insight into their experiences and stories helped me to understand this phenomenon.

All of the participants, including myself, mentioned that being an artist does have a positive influence on art teaching. The participants gave a variety of examples of this through their responses. Several participants indicated that continuing to work allowed them to identify with the process and experience of creating works of art, which could help them to understand and empathize with students, and perhaps to better be able to motivate students who were working or even struggling with materials or processes. I said that it was “important to remember what it feels like to be the one creating and working with ideas in the studio” (personal field journal, June 2009). For Jennifer, continued artistic practice “[k]ept me creative... made me want to explore new things” (personal communication, June 29, 2009). According to Cathy it helped her to “understand when kids are having trouble working” (personal communication, July 22, 2009). Another example my participants gave that demonstrated the importance of their own continued activity as artists was that it gave them credibility with students. Cathy

said this exactly, stating that it “gives you credibility as a teacher” (personal communication, July 22, 2009). Similarly, I said that “it’s important for my confidence and for credibility with students” (personal field journal, June 2009). In addition, all participants implied that being artists kept them in touch with their skills and creativity, and that being actively engaged in their own artistic process of art-making helped them to more effectively help students to find their own artistic processes.

My research questions into whether art teachers are artists, art teachers, or both, and whether or not they should be both, were answered explicitly in the interview process. In expressing their views of art educators in general, and their expectations of continued artistic practice for all art teachers, my participants held the same expectations for other art teachers as they did for themselves. They were unanimous in their agreement that artistic practice was important to art educators in general, with reasons similar to the ones they gave for themselves. Jennifer made her expectations for art educators very clear in her questions, “How can you teach technique if you’re not doing it? How can you teach them to be creative if you’re not doing it?” (personal communication, June 29, 2009). Alice also emphasized the importance of this, explaining that it was the only way that an art teacher could be whole. For Barbara, working as an artist allowed an art teacher to push her or his students further “because you know what it takes to get there” (personal communication, November 2, 2009). Stuart responded by claiming that being an artist was “integral” (personal communication, Oct. 12, 2009) to being a teacher.

Interestingly, throughout the course of all of my interviews, only twice did participants make remarks that indicated that to be an artist and to be a successful art teacher may not be directly related, mentioning the possibility that continuing to be an

artist was unrelated to the quality of an art teacher's teaching. I made one statement in my field journal responses to the interview questions after claiming that it was important for me to continue to make art, qualifying what I had just written by explaining that "I still feel like I can be a good art teacher even when I'm not active as an artist" (personal field journal, June 2009). However, I still went on to say that continued artistic practice could in many ways make art teachers better. Cathy was the only participant to share a moment of agreement with this sentiment, saying "I think they might not need to be doing it currently, but they need to have a pretty strong art-making background" (personal communication, July 22, 2009). Like me, she was open to the idea that art educators might not continue with their practice, and that this does not have to necessarily be their downfall. In these two cases, our remarks revealed that we were open to the possibility that one could be a good art teacher without continued artistic practice, but both remarks seemed to be more of a hypothetical way to be inclusive of even the most unlikely of possibilities. Overwhelmingly, the responses of all participants indicated that this was indeed a very unlikely possibility, and that being an artist was fundamental to being a good art teacher.

Another interesting aspect of conducting my interviews into identities as art teachers and artists was that by gaining insight into my participants' involvement in artistic practice, specifically the ways they were all involved and their studio processes, I was able to see the ways it related to their approaches to teaching. While it does not reflect a question that I asked outright, I found many correlations in the ways that each of my participants' artistic practice informed their teaching. I found it interesting when examining the interviews, listening and transcribing and reading and re-reading, the small

relationships that emerged between the ways that my participants discussed and explained their own artistic practice, and the ways that they portrayed their teaching philosophies or approaches to teaching. For example, Alice (personal communication, July 20, 2009) stressed the importance of working in her sketchbook as part of her artistic process, and also described sketchbook work as essential to her priorities as an art teacher. Similarly, Cathy (personal communication, July 22, 2009) described her artistic process in terms of contemporary, mixed media approaches, and her teaching paralleled that as she talked about the types of lessons she preferred to teach, also describing them as fresh and contemporary. I felt that this further supported the idea that artistic practice benefits art teaching, because in these examples artistic practice and personal processes specifically influence approaches to teaching.

I believe that based on the responses of these participants, it is important for all art teachers to continue to practice. All of my participants were practicing artists, and all agreed that artistic practice not only benefitted them as teachers, but that teaching influenced their work as artists as well. For Jennifer, her teaching began to inspire her artistic practice through the samples she created for her classes, which eventually became her art form (personal communication, June 29, 2009). Alice, previously a photographer, had been inspired to do more painting by the classes she taught in that medium (personal communication, July 20, 2009), and in the same way, Stuart, also a photographer, had become inspired to draw, paint and work in clay based on teaching these media in his classroom (personal communication, Oct. 12, 2009). Cathy mentioned that her students gave her energy that helped her artistic process (personal communication, July 22, 2009),

and Barbara concluded that “your students do influence you, no matter what”(personal communication, Nov. 2, 2009).

Through the lived experiences of these art educators who participated in interviews for this research, I was able to gather insight and information about the interrelationship of being an artist and being an art teacher. I discovered that there are many complex ways that these identities inform one another, but that the essence of this interrelationship, I found that being an artist and being an art teacher proved beneficial, and at times fundamental, to my participants.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

There are several possible limitations to this study. To begin with, researchers who gather information through interview as I did always risk the fact that their interviewees will answer questions in the way that they imagine they should, or that they believe the researcher wants them to. In this case, there was a risk that my participants did not answer honestly about their own experiences, but answered in a way that they hoped would be helpful or useful to my study. Another possible limitation to this study is that I did not find all of my participants using the same recruiting tactics. The first three participants in my research emerged from the first letter that I sent out to all high school art teachers within my research site, but I discovered the last two participants through networking.

In addition to the standard limitations, I also have to wonder about why the art teachers who responded did respond, and why those who did not, did not. There are several reasons that art teachers may not have responded to invitations to participate in my research. It is possible that many art teachers did not even receive my initial letter of



invitation (see Appendix A) due to timing or mail distribution within the school district. It is also possible that art teachers may have been wary of participating in my research for one of numerous reasons. One reason that I believe is particularly relevant and possibly revealing is the possibility that art educators may have had notions and preconceived ideas about my research topic. Perhaps notions of artistic practice intimidated some art teachers, since I did not define it for the purposes of my invitation. Even though I only required that art teachers have at least three years of teaching, perhaps just looking at my research topic, artistic practice and teaching, was enough to intimidate or dissuade potential participants. In reading the research topic, art teachers may have gotten the idea that they had to be involved in artistic practice, which they may have defined in a more exclusive way than I did. For example, perhaps their notion of artistic practice was successful exhibition and sale of their finished work. Or perhaps many art teachers only teach, and while they may have defined artistic practice in the same way that I did, they just did not feel that they could contribute anything to a conversation about it. In the end, I have the interviews from the participants who did respond, and they are rich and valuable and provide me an incredible insight into the questions that I was exploring.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

My research began in the spring of 2008 and spanned two years, and I am finally drawing this project to a close in the spring of 2010. During this time, I carried out the research for my graduate thesis, investigating the interrelationship of identities in art educators, and how artistic practice informs art teaching. Over these two years I formulated research questions and gathered literature to create a theoretical foundation from which to work. I recruited five participants and conducted interviews, and was incredibly fortunate to have been able to learn from the accounts of these incredible artist-teachers, who were generous enough and brave enough to share their experiences, insights and philosophies with me. I kept a field journal and drew, reflected and wrote about the discoveries I made throughout the journey. All of these parts became the whole of this finished work.

This research grew out of my own wonderings as an art teacher. When I reflect on the questions that I began with, I am reminded of the central question that inspired me to undertake this research in the first place. What is the relationship between being an artist and being a teacher? I found in reviewing the literature in Chapter Two that most scholarly writing fell into one of three main categories; there were those (Hausman, 1967; Schwartz, 1975; Parks, 1992) who viewed artistic practice, or being an artist, as completely unrelated to being a good art teacher, there were those (Michael, 1980, Hammer, 1984) who fell at the other end of the continuum, viewing art teachers who do not continue with artistic practice as becoming stagnant in their field and there were those (Szekely, 2006; Adams, 2003; Thornton, 2005; Hatfield, Montana and

Deffenbaugh, 2006) who fell in more moderate territory, and viewed artistic practice as directly beneficial to the quality of an art teacher's teaching, but who did not go quite so far as to say that without being an artist, an art teacher was somehow doomed.

In the context of phenomenology and Arts-Based Educational Research, as I discussed in Chapter Three, I carried out five interviews with art educators, and included myself as a participant after I responded to the interview questions in my field journal. I discovered in doing this research, in transcribing coding and paying close attention to my participants' voices, that all of my participants, myself included, responded with perspectives that fell into more than one of the categories I discussed previously, and at times crossed over into more than one of these perspectives at once. As I presented in my findings in Chapter Four, each participant had a unique story to tell about the interrelationship of identities that I have been investigating. I have come to know what should have been clear all along, that this interrelationship is a highly complex phenomenon.

In some ways, the discoveries I made in this research surprised me. I was not expecting such unanimity of response from my participants, and that all of the participants would indicate that artistic practice was so important to art teaching. Interestingly, each of the participants in my research, when asked if they thought their opinions about the importance of artistic practice in art teaching would be shared by other art teachers in the field of art education, expressed at least a small amount of uncertainty. It led me to wonder why there would be any uncertainty at all when these art educators were clearly so certain that artistic practice, and continuing to be an artist, was so vital to their own art teaching.

In the end, as always is the case with me as a researcher, making discoveries always leads to more questions. For the purposes of this research, I defined artistic practice and what it means to be an artist. I would be fascinated to explore the numerous ways that art teachers might define this for themselves, and perhaps delve even deeper into the interrelationship of identities that I have just begun to explore here. I am curious about why so many of the artist-teachers that I interviewed were so uncertain that their notions of the importance of artistic practice to teaching were held by other art educators. Would all art teachers agree with them? I also wonder why so few people responded to my initial attempts to find participants, and whether or not this indicates that the participants of my study might not represent the majority of art educators in this context.

I believe that the findings of this research, or at least the many more questions that they raise, could have a profound effect on the field of art education. What priorities do teacher training programs and jobs instill in our art teachers? What priorities should they instill? In the case of this research, I think the answer is simple. Based on the voices of my participants, it is best to encourage continued artistic practice in all art teachers. As my participants indicated, in the context of our schools, even with priorities placed on art criticism and art history, and other non-art-making areas of art teaching, continued artistic practice can be beneficial to art teachers and does not have a negative impact on art-related activities. While it may seem that artistic practice would lead to an emphasis only on art-making, the teachers I interviewed seemed sensitive to the broader needs of students, not expecting them all to be artists, but hoping that they would become familiar with art in a way that would make them less intimidated by and more supportive of the arts in the future. At the very least, continued artistic practice appears to be important to

art teachers on an individual level. As Stuart stated in his interview, “I’m a better teacher when I’m working” (personal communication, October 29, 2009). This was echoed by all the other participants, and in the context of art education, is a concrete example of the interrelationship of identities, a way that artistic practice informs teaching in the visual arts.

Appendix A: Example of Initial Invitation Letter to Art Teachers, Personal  
Communication, May 12, 2009

May 12, 2009

[Name of art educator]  
[High school name and address]

Dear [art educator],

I hope that this letter finds you well as you near the close of the school year. My name is Karen Edwards. I am an art teacher at \*\*\*\*\* High School and also a third year graduate student in the Art Education Program at the University of New Mexico. In the coming six months I will be conducting research for and writing my thesis. For my thesis I will be examining the relationship between artistic practice and teaching. As a part of this process, I will be conducting interviews with several art educators. I would like to invite you to be a part of my graduate thesis research project by participating in an interview with me. I am eager to hear your ideas, reflections and stories.

I am looking for art educators with three or more years of secondary level art teaching. If this describes you and you are interested in participating as an interviewee in my research project, I encourage you to call or email me at your earliest convenience as I plan to schedule interviews during this summer. I will be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

The interview will take approximately one hour, and you may decide where we will meet. As a token of my appreciation, I will provide refreshments for you during the interview, and you will receive a small gift certificate for \*\*\*\*\* art supply store. This research has been approved by the University of New Mexico, and my thesis advisor is Dr. Laurel Lampela, Professor, Art Education.

Cell: \*\*\*-\*\*\*-\*\*\*\*

Email: \*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*

Thank you so much for your dedication to art education and for reading this letter. I realize that this is a very busy time of year, and I appreciate that you have taken the time to consider this invitation. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,  
Karen Edwards  
Art Teacher, \*\*\*\*\* High School  
Graduate Student, University of New Mexico

Appendix B: Networking Strategy Email Contact to Coordinator,  
Personal Communication, October 4, 2009

Hello,

My name is Karen Edwards, and I am a graduate student in the Art Ed Program at UNM. I am writing to ask a favor of you, if you are willing. I am working on my thesis for graduation from the program, and as a part of the research, I am interviewing secondary (high school) art teachers in the area.

I have faced some challenges in recruiting interviewees. In meeting with \*\*\*\*\*, she suggested that I contact you since you have been coordinating with teachers here, and I was hoping that based on your work with the department you might be able to help me by suggesting some teachers whom you think might be willing to participate in an interview (not more than one hour) with me. I am interested in art teachers with 3 or more years of experience, and I only need two or three more teachers/interviews before I can move on towards the conclusion of my thesis.

I know that you are probably very busy, and completely understand if you do not have the time to devote to this. However, I would greatly appreciate any time, effort and consideration you might be able to give me. If you do have the time, please feel free to contact me via email or phone, and maybe we could discuss any ideas you might have. \*\*\*\*\* also gave me your phone number, so I may try to give you a call in the next few days.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider this, I greatly appreciate it,

Many thanks,

Karen Edwards

cell: \*\*\*\_\*\*\*\*

email: \*\*\*\*\*@\*\*\*\*\*

Appendix C: Example of Email Contact to Art Teachers,  
Personal Communication, October 25, 2009

Dear [Art Teacher],

My name is Karen Edwards, and I am an art teacher at \*\*\*\*\* High School and a graduate student in the Art Education Program at UNM. I am writing to you because you were recommended to me as an excellent art educator, and one who might be willing to share a bit of your experience and expertise with me.

I am currently working on a graduate thesis. I am working on my thesis for graduation from the program, and as a part of the research, I am interviewing high school art teachers in the area. The topic of my research is the various ways that being an art teacher and being an artist inform one another, and I hope to gather many perspectives on this. So, I am emailing you with the hopes that you might be able to either devote roughly an hour (or less) of your time as an interviewee, or possibly refer me to another high school art teacher who might be interested. I realize how precious time is during the school year, and I greatly appreciate that you are taking the time to consider this.

If you are interested, or know someone who might be (or both), I would be happy to schedule an interview at your convenience, at a place that you choose. I can buy you coffee somewhere, or even meet you at your home, school or studio, whatever works best for you. I can also offer you a (very) small compensation for your time, a ten dollar gift certificate to \*\*\*\* art supply store. UNM has approved my thesis research, and if you have any more questions, please feel free to contact me.

In any case, thank you very much for considering this email, I greatly appreciate it. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you so much,

Karen Edwards  
cell: \*\*\*\_\*\*\*\*



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