Integrating the Visual Arts with a Spiritually Based Curriculum: In, Out and Around the Edges

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Abstract

This qualitative inquiry involving six adult participants and two facilitators (one for the study portion and one for artmaking) is an examination using ethnographic methods to determine what are the challenges that educators face when using the visual arts with a spiritually based curriculum at a grass-roots community level. The project demonstrated the importance of art education in facilitating learning and meaning-making using the Ruhi Curriculum, a curriculum used by Bahá'í communities worldwide. This study concluded with three major challenges related to bringing visual arts education into a spiritually based curriculum. These challenges included: connecting the visual arts to the spiritual context being taught; integrating the activities of both the study group (study circle) and artmaking group to make connections between the text and the arts; and issues concerning the challenges of team or partnership teaching involving two instructors (facilitators) working together towards a common goal.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures vii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Review of the Literature 3
Qualitative inquiry 3
Art-education research 4
Context and community 5
Curriculum 6
Teaching partnerships 7
Spirituality and art 8
A constructivist approach 15
Lifelong learning 18
Transformative learning theory 19

Chapter 2: Methodology 22

Qualitative Research 22
Ethnography and reflective practice 22

Research Process 25
Finding facilitators 25
Pre-project interviews 27
The invitations 31
The information session 32

Project Design 35
The three principal architects 35
Data collection 36

Chapter 3: The Sessions 40

The Study-circle Sessions 40
Within the study circle 42
The style of facilitation 44
The participant-observer within the study circle 46

The Studio Sessions 46
The studio setting 47
Within the studio sessions 48
The style of facilitation 55

Dénouement 63

Chapter 4: Findings 69

Participants' Feedback 69

Participant-observer's Responses 81

Frames of Reference 83

The researcher's frame of reference 85
The facilitator's frame of reference 91
The artist-teacher's frame of reference 94

Chapter 5: Theoretical Analysis 99

The Curriculum and a "Series of Experiments" 99

Constructivist Approach 100

Teaching Method 103

The Critique in Studio Practice 107

Integration of the Study Circle and the Studio Practice 108

The Challenges in Communication and Collaboration 118

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion 123

REFERENCES 126

APPENDICES 132

Appendix I – The Bahá'í Faith 132

Appendix II – The Ruhi Curriculum 134

Appendix III – Pre-project Facilitator Interview Questions 135

Appendix IV – Pre-project Artist-Teacher Interview Questions 136

Appendix V – Post-project Facilitator Interview Questions 137

Appendix VI – Post-project Artist-teacher Interview Questions 138

Appendix VII – Facilitator and Artist-teacher Consent Form 139

Appendix VIII – Participant Consent Form 141

Appendix IX – Pre-project Participant Questionnaire 143

Appendix X – Participant Letter of Invitation 144

Appendix XI – Post-project Participant Questionnaire 146

Appendix XII – Three Paintings by the Artist-teacher 147

List of Figures

Figure 1. Studio exterior. 39
Figure 2. Three participants around the studio table. 50
Figure 3. Artist-teacher holding *Ruhi–Book One* 51
Figure 4. Two participants painting. 51
Figure 5. Participants working intensely. 52
Figure 6. First drawings. 53
Figure 7. Ice-breaking exercises. 53
Figure 8. Mary's *first-ever* drawing of a face 58
Figure 9. Early paintings by participants. 59
Figure 10. Participants' paintings drying. 60
Figure 11. Participants' paintings drying on a table. 61
Figure 12. Paintings drying on a table. 61
Figure 13. Playfulness and repetition theme. 62
Figure 14. Repetition theme painted directly in participant-observer's journal. 62
Figure 15. Paintings on the studio floor. 63
Figure 16. Participant's painting. 63
Figure 17. Painting folded and pasted into researcher's journal. 65
Figure 18. Painting folded and pasted in researcher's journal. 66
Figure 19. Painting pasted and framed in researcher's journal. 66
Figure 20. Painting folded and pasted in researcher's journal. 67
Figure 21. Painting pasted and folded into the researcher's journal. 67
Figure 22. *Say O Brethren! Let deeds, not words, be your adorning* (Bahá'u'lláh). 71
Figure 23. *Do not be content with the showing of friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path* ('Abdu'l-Baha). 71
Figure 24. Various brushes, inks and paint. 72
Figure 25. Acrylic paints, inks, brushes and conté crayon. 72
Figure 26. On theme of memory and remembrance, titled, *Memories of R.W.* 75
Figure 27. One of Julia's first paintings. 76
Figure 28. Journal notes. 90
Figure 29. Journal notes and experiments. 90

Chapter 1: Introduction

The central question of this inquiry is: What challenges do educators face when integrating visual artmaking with a spiritually based curriculum?

This inquiry has its origins in questions I have asked myself over several decades about the nature and purpose of artmaking, more specifically visual artmaking, as it relates to everyday life. Though these questions can lead to myriad answers, they need to be reassessed as personal, political, and social contexts and circumstances evolve.

Several years ago these questions arose again in one such new context while I was participating in courses of the Ruhi Institute, a curriculum of courses for the study of the Bahá'í writings and teachings, and a pedagogical approach designed for the development of individual capacity to become engaged in community building and service. The Ruhi Curriculum, which currently includes a series of eight books, was originally developed and field-tested in Columbia, South America. The Curriculum has now been used by thousands of local Bahá'í communities throughout the world (Appendix I & II).

The Ruhi Curriculum stresses individual and group study, practice, reflection, and action. The study group is usually referred to as a study circle. A study circle is composed of a facilitator and 3 to 12 adults who study together with the purpose of building understanding and their capacity to engage in community life. This kind of engagement can be directed to diverse activities such as neighborhood children's classes, youth and junior youth groups, interfaith devotional meetings, and home visits.

The Ruhi Institute has been in existence for approximately 20 years and it continues to be developed. Though the arts are becoming an ever increasing and integral part of the learning process, there are, to date, no specific arts approaches, programs or

curricula that are particularly identified with the Ruhi Curriculum. Within this context, it became clear that there is need for the inclusion of the arts, calling for the input of artists, educators and scholars.

Given the cultural, socio-economic and individual specificity of the arts, as well as the international nature of the Bahá'í community and the values it promotes, an examination of how the arts are utilized throughout thousands of communities around the world can offer valuable insights into the importance of the arts in learning, and how they can enrich the lives of both the individual and the community.

For the purposes of this inquiry the first book in the Ruhi Curriculum titled *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* (1999) was the source material used by the facilitators and the participants in the study circle that was formed in the fall of 2008.

It is in this context that, after having studied the use of the Ruhi Curriculum by the Bahá'í community and my studies in art education, I chose to examine how a facilitator and an artist-teacher have utilized the first book of the Ruhi Curriculum, in an urban North American setting, for a study circle composed of six adult-participants, including myself, with varying degrees of visual art experience.

Through both the practical and pedagogical aspects of this inquiry, challenges arose for the facilitator, artist-teacher and researcher as all embarked on using the Ruhi Curriculum in conjunction with the visual arts in the particular urban context in which we found ourselves. Although some of the data concerning the experiences of the participants and their artmaking are examined, this is not an inquiry into the experience of the participants. The central question of this inquiry is essentially: What challenges do educators face when integrating visual artmaking with a spiritually based curriculum?

More specifically, my inquiry focused on the expectations and the challenges that arose out of one facilitator's and one artist-teacher's experience. There also emerged greater clarity about my own expectations, as one of the three principal architects of this project and as a Ruhi Curriculum facilitator, as to what the most effective artmaking practices and circumstances may be and how visual-artmaking may enhance the process of learning and practice for adult learners—adult learners who may themselves become facilitators of future study circles.

Review of the Literature

There are several concepts and theories examined in light of the literature in art education, in psychology, in ethnography and in several other human sciences that have guided this qualitative inquiry. More specifically they include the nature of qualitative research, the importance of the context, the perspectives within which this inquiry occurred, the role of curriculum and teaching partnerships, the features of constructivist and transformative learning, the value of reflective practice and spirituality in artmaking and teaching.

Qualitative inquiry

Although art education is not concerned with all of the same aspects of human activity examined in the social sciences, the following broad definition by social scientists Denzin and Lincoln (1994) offers an "initial, generic" definition of qualitative research that describes how I anticipated doing this research:

> Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life

> story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3)

This project was a study of a visual-arts approach to learning from the experiences of facilitating and integrating the visual arts in this teaching process. I was able to observe from within the group itself as a participant rather than as an outsider so some features, which are found in action research, have been borrowed though I was not a facilitator and the facilitators were not my fellow researchers.

Art-education research

From the 1960s well into the first decade of the second millennium, professor of art and art education Elliot Eisner (1988, 1997, 2002, 2005) has published many books and articles about art education. Over these many decades Eisner has articulated with increasing clarity the importance of art in education, and consequently art-education research. Eisner (1997) discusses the various justifications used to "make a place for art in education" and asserts that, "The visual arts deal with an aspect of human consciousness that no other field touches on: the aesthetic contemplation of visual form" and that the visual arts "provide our perception of form that vivifies life and that often makes an appraisal of it" (p. 9). Such "an appraisal" requires a process of reflection based upon implied though not necessary articulated values. What "vivifies life" is not only our "perception of form" but also what it means to us; that the object or expression created for our and the consideration of others can serve to imbue our lives with meaning and meaning making.

Eisner also states that, "we can learn of the justification of art in education by examining the function of art in human experience" (1997, p. 9). To find out why we need art in education we must first and foremost *make art* in order to be able to examine its function in any given context. Participating in a Ruhi study-circle is one such human experience in which artmaking is encouraged and has therefore been utilized in this inquiry.

Eisner asks a big question: "What does art do?" (1997, p. 9) and suggests that we must direct our efforts to works of art to attempt to answer this question and that it must be the basis for further field-based research. Eisner (2002) also suggests that art-education research needs an *agenda* (p. 209) and that this agenda should involve research programs of related studies. This is a process of inquiry and research into the integration of the visual arts with the study the material contained in *Ruhi–Book One*.

Throughout history and pre-history, art has functioned as an integral part of human experience in all its aspects. Visual art has, therefore, been particularly evident in the expression of belief and the representation of the ineffable yet common experience of being human.

Context and community

Art educator R. W. Neperud (1995) discusses the role of art education from perspective known as *deep ecology*, a term used to distinguish a "biocentric view of ecosystems" to one that recognizes "the need to bring humans into harmony with the natural environment" (p. 229).

In a statement on conservation and sustainable development by the Bahá'í International Community (BIC, 1995), a non-governmental organization with advisory

status to the United Nations, has included this eloquently description of the relationship of people to their environment which expresses a very similar perspective to that of Neperud in that

> We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions (BIC, 1995).

Neperud (1995) states that art education has an important role to play in both the inner and outer life of individuals. The natural environment of human beings is community. Education and community building are two of the principal objectives of the Ruhi Curriculum. The use of the arts is encouraged in the building of the capacity and confidence of individuals to be active participants in service to community. In this inquiry, the short-term objectives, for all the participants, were a process of learning and discovery. The research itself focused on the challenges for the educators in this particular context.

Curriculum

Elliot Eisner (2002) in his book *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, discusses the various theories, features and some of the varied aspects of curriculum that were developed by pedagogues throughout the last century. These include curriculum described as *explicit*, *implicit*, and *hidden*. Eisner himself then adds: "But there is also another curriculum, one that is paradoxical: the *null curriculum*."(p. 159). It constitutes *what is neither taught nor included either explicitly or implicitly*, and suggests that what is not taught or intended or "hidden" may then be regarded as unimportant, irrelevant or even non-existent and is therefore *null*, whether it be the educators or the educated, who

are unaware of whatever knowledge their own lifeworld may actually encompass (*Ibid*).

The arts are often either part of the *null curriculum*, often poorly funded and poorly taught in public schools in North America, or simply treated as an add-on rather than as being essential or integral. Although different from the arts, spirituality and values are also neglected, ignored, or poorly taught within public school curricula.

This inquiry has involved aspects of both the visual arts and of spirituality in curriculum. I chose the Ruhi Curriculum because it offered a framework through which the participants could be offered the opportunity to explore and reflect upon the relationship between spirituality, their everyday lives, and their use of the arts—more specifically the visual arts as part of their experience.

Teaching partnerships

There are many kinds of teaching partnerships or team teaching, however, for the purposes of this inquiry the focus is specifically on the kind of artist-teacher and facilitator partnership that was created for this inquiry. Having examined the literature I have found that there are innumerable models and descriptions of teaching-partnership experiences however I am inclined to agree that, "Little understanding of the relational nature of artist-teacher learning exists" (Kind *et al*, 2007, p. 839). Nevertheless, these four art educators: Kind, de Cosson, Irwin, and Grauer (Kind *et al*, 2007), of whom two are also practicing visual artists, have reported their research and observations over a period of three years about "artist-teacher interactions, the nature of artist-teacher learning, and the kinds of professional development opportunities available for both the artist and the teacher" (p.841). Their research is based upon a very successful national program in Canada involving artists-in-residence in elementary schools. The program is

called *Learning through the Arts*™ (*LTTA*™) sponsored by the Royal Conservatory of Music (Toronto) and includes the teaching of the visual arts in schools by artists-in-residence (Upitis & Smithrim, 2003).

Although some of this research (Kind *et al*, 2007) involved three elementary schools in British Columbia and is therefore in a context unlike this inquiry, their rich description of "some of the multi-layered, multi-dimensional complexities, tensions, and contradictions that are part of artist and teacher experiences" (p. 841) are invaluable in articulating some insights and analyses of the challenges involved in teaching partnerships specifically involving visual artists and teachers. Their findings (Kind et al, 2007) and observations are pertinent in light of some of the findings that have emerged concerning the challenges of integrating the visual arts into a spiritually based curriculum involving two facilitators, which will be discussed later in light of the findings.

Spirituality and art

Spirituality in education is both a complex and a complicated issue for innumerable reasons that will not be discussed *ad infinitum*. For the purposes of brevity, the forces of postmodernism, feminism, environmentalism and millennialism have influenced attitudinal changes in these last decades in an effort to understand the relevance and importance of spirituality (King, 2005, p. 9-10).

Although the study of the spiritual in art and art education during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first appears to have been overlooked by many experts in the field, concern for the spiritual has persisted and resurfaced in diverse ways. Wassily Kandinsky's little jewel titled *Concerning the spiritual in art* (1914/1977) has often been dismissed or overlooked by art scholars as a mere expression of his own dabbling in

theosophy when in fact, since my undergraduate studies in studio art, I and many of my contemporaries have regarded this small book as an inspiring vision by a pioneer artist in the development of non-representational art. Concern for the spiritual in diverse media has persisted among countless artists and scholars to the latter part of this same century, as demonstrated in a voluminous exhibition catalogue titled *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890*-1985 (Tuchman, 1986) that includes a collection of essays by art historians about art works by very many prominent twentieth-century artists of Europe and North America.

A more recent, early twenty-first century work that discusses the emergence of spirituality in art education can be found in a two-volume publication: *The International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* edited by art educator Liora Bresler (2007). In this tome, an entire chapter is dedicated to the question of spirituality edited and introduced by well-known Canadian art educator and researcher Rita Irwin. In this chapter art educator Peter London (2007) has addressed the need of "spiritually grounded art education" (p. 1482-1486). As a consultant and member of several editorial and art-education boards in the United States, London examined various educational contexts and hundreds of American art-education settings in search for spiritually grounded curriculum. Although he acknowledges his research is not complete, it is exhaustive. London has so far concluded that there is an "almost complete absence of research literature, and practice in spiritually grounded art education in North America, kindergarten to higher education" (p. 1482). According to London the most conspicuous reason for the absence of spiritually grounded art education "is the enshrined policy of the separation of church and state" (p. 1483).

Researching spiritually grounded art education in Canada in primary and secondary schools would have to take a different approach than in the United States and London's research does not encompass or represent the Canadian context. My own far less extensive, inquiries indicate that there is little if any of this kind of research except on a provincial level in Canada. Furthermore, many Canadians often appear to be under the mistaken impression that "church and state" are separate for Canadian educational institutions, when in fact church and state throughout Canada have collaborated since well before the Canadian Confederation of 1867. Although some may argue that spirituality is different from religious instruction or indoctrination, it has nevertheless been associated with the subject of religion. In the last several decades the trend is toward more secular schools devoid of any religious instruction, though the issue continues to be unresolved in some regions of Canada. This collaboration of church and state has involved both federally administered residential schools for Native children, and provincially administered ministries of education for many sectarian school boards serving the public where the majority populations were, until recently, usually members of Christian denominations. Although the particularly "religious" or sectarian character of education is less prevalent, a glimmer of spirituality or in this context the teaching of values has remained. Those glimmers are not always discernable in that they are not characterized as such. Instead, they are usually taught through courses on civics and ethics, multi-faith or interfaith education, and more recently found in the teaching of social and environmental responsibility, and community service.

American Lucy Lippard (1997), well known art historian, author and activist, states quite frankly that spirituality or "the spiritual component" in art is "rarely

acknowledged by scholars as a factor in contemporary life" and that it is particularly "difficult to define the way the word 'spiritual' is used today" since it is viewed as "an amalgam of institutional or syncretic religions, individual soul-searching, and an array of less socially accepted parareligious activities" (p. 14).

Inasmuch as Lippard has clearly described how challenging it is to even attempt to define spirituality within contemporary life in North America, for the purposes of this inquiry into a Bahá'í-based curriculum, the following succinct description of spirituality by Bahá'í scholar, educator, mathematician, and philosopher William Hatcher, should suffice to clarify what is meant by "spirituality" in this context.

> In the Bahá'í conception, spirituality is the process of the full, adequate, proper, and harmonious development of the spiritual capacities of each human being and of the collectivity of human beings. Their spiritual capacities are capacities of a nonphysical, indivisible and eternally lasting entity called the soul. ...The body and its physical capacities serve as instruments for this process of spiritual growth during the period of earthly life when the body and soul are linked together (Hatcher, 1982, p. 32).

Based on this description, the development of "spiritual capacities" is a transformative process through which human beings acquire qualities such as compassion, empathy, love, kindness, generosity, courtesy, wisdom, honesty, integrity, steadfastness, and trustworthiness to name a few. Spiritual capacities are exercised, observed, and experienced through our actions or agency. The "nonphysical" nature of spiritual capacity can be perceived and understood through actions in the diverse contexts and often-unpredictable situations in our everyday lives or through our "lifeworld" (Efland, 2002, citing Habermas, p. 121-123). As we build capacity to act, that seemingly elusive essence which is spirituality finds expression and can be perceived through the

fruits of our labor in such activities as those found in this inquiry: teaching and artmaking.

The development of spiritual capacities is not the exclusive or singular purpose of artmaking; however, art and the artmaking process offer experiences, and elicit thoughts and feelings that can encourage the development, understanding, and practice of these capacities. There are innumerable examples of the expressions of spirituality throughout human history and even pre-history, which are found in the vestiges of ancient civilizations and their artifacts. A few examples are: Ancient Egyptians who, prompted by their belief in an afterlife, constructed the pyramids and a multiplicity of beautiful objects for the passage to the afterlife; Europeans and North Americans, who believed that worship should be at the centre of their communities, constructed magnificent cathedrals, temples and churches; and ancient unknown artists, who created the monumental and magnificent sculptures of the Buddha. There are also many contemporary artists whose works are imbued with expressions of spirituality both within organized religions and in secular contexts (www.pbs.org/art21/series/seasonone/spirituality.html#, retrieved 4 September, 2008).

Many ancient works attest to the "spiritual capacities" (Hatcher, 1982, p. 32), which the artists, the designers, the craftspersons, and the communities in which they worked had acquired and made such magnificent works possible; works that despite their deterioration are admired to this day. This is not to ignore or deny the use of slave labor and the unspeakable abuses of power and resources that often accompanied projects of this magnitude. Rather, acknowledging these abuses may also be reason to consider that

the arts and crafts without such violations could far exceed those of the past. Educator and author Peter Abbs (2003) eloquently suggests that

> If spirituality concerns the amplification and deepening of consciousness then both the creation and appreciation of art are essential to its task – for the arts provide the distinctive metaphors and technical means for reflecting the invisible life of human experience. Unlike any other symbolic system the arts have the power to disclose the lineaments of being. To engage with the arts is to engage dynamically with the meanings and possibilities of human existence (p. 40).

In her article about "spiritual reflective practice" for pre-service art educators, Laurel Campbell (2005) discusses spirituality in light of the observations of several contemporary art education theorists and her own research, indicating that spirituality is an "increasingly significant aspect of contemporary art education theory" (p. 51-69). Although Campbell does not make reference to Donald Schön (1983), who coined and defined the term "reflective practice" as it relates to the work of professionals, teachers and researchers, she cites Klein (2003) and suggests that, "*Reflective practice* can be defined as the systematic use of reflection to reach greater self-understanding by relating experiences, goals, motivation, and intentions to action" (p. 52). She further states that for pre-service teachers reflective practice "can be described as *spiritual* when it focuses on not only the self for deeper understanding, but on the self as it relates to the *other*, to the greater good of society, both locally and globally, and as a force for social reconstruction" (p. 52, italics added).

Art educator Sidney Walker (2001) discusses spirituality as a vital element of the creative process; that it encourages mindfulness, the ability to develop meaning in the artmaking process, and facilitates or inspires individuals to find ways of expressing existential concepts or "big ideas" (p. 80 and p. 1-17). Walker also explains that one of

the greatest challenges at the outset is to encourage the motivation and perseverance of the participants, sustain their interest and help them find their own *personal connection* to these "big ideas" (p.19). That personal connection must be maintained through the utilization of regular practices and resources such as those so clearly demonstrated and sustained through education and the use of the arts. The excerpts from the Bahá'í writings contained in the Ruhi books involve many such "big ideas".

From a Bahá'í perspective there is little if any distinction made between the arts and crafts since "...the underlying unity and equality between the two kinds of art lies precisely in the common function of rendering a spiritual service" (Tuman, 1993, p. 68). A similar viewpoint is described in *Book Seven* (2001) of the Ruhi Curriculum in which facilitators are encouraged to have their participants

> ...develop their capacity for artistic expression, be it through music, poetry, painting, drama or any of the various types of crafts. ...should not think of this as entertainment or as an extracurricular activity...but as an essential element enhancing the spiritual development of the participants (p. 111).

There are also similar viewpoints emerging in art education in which scholars offer a sound and informed understanding of the purposes, the needs, and the direction of artmaking in contemporary education.

> In the past, student artistic production has often been characterized as therapeutic self-expression. In contemporary contexts, creative production may need to be thought of less as therapeutic self-expression and more as the development of cultural and personal identity. *People can come to understand the characteristics and the influence of identity through the visual arts and it is through the arts that identity is often constructed.* It is difficult to explain some of the most important aspects of life, such as love, honor, spirituality, without referring in some way to artistic forms. Contemporary students often come to know about social and cultural conditions through their viewing and making of art (Freedman, 2007, p. 209, italics added).

In the context of the Ruhi Curriculum *identity is constructed* upon a pivotal principle: the oneness of humankind, which must be expressed and effectively communicated. In this context *cultural diversity* is essential, and individuals are encouraged to also develop individual capabilities in a nurturing, diverse, and harmonious environment.

In the Ruhi Curriculum there are no instructions or facilitator manuals beyond what is already in the workbooks. Participants are themselves regarded as future facilitators who learn to facilitate through various kinds of experience as participants themselves, as contributors through the arts, and through their interactions with facilitators who may become exemplars, teachers, mentors, colleagues, and coworkers.

A constructivist approach

Constructivist theory in education has its origins in the work of several twentieth-century philosophers and psychologists particularly Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vigotsky (1896-1934). In addition to Piaget's theory of stages in child development Vigotsky stressed the importance of context, culture and language in education. American philosopher and pedagogue, John Dewey (1859-1952) further contributed to the development of a constructivist approach in American education, which eventually became better known and gained in popularity in the 1960s, on the heels of the predominating behaviorist views of child development and education (Dewey, 1934/1980).

Eisner (2002) has taken many of the concepts and practices found in constructivist theory, and further elucidated on teaching styles in art education citing these earlier pedagogues. He introduces Dewey's concept of "flexible purposing" and how it "pertains

to the improvisational side of intelligence as it is employed in the arts" (p. 77). Eisner discusses how art is made through making connections. These connections involve choices and that, "What such choices depend upon is judgment in the absence of rules" (p.77). Artmaking is a process where the making of "such choices" may reveal unique individual expression in the times and circumstances in which we are living, and nevertheless affirm the universality of being human since, in the words of Bahá'u'lláh

> Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements (1969, p. 212).

British academics Belfiore and Bennett (2008) have examined and described the social impact of the arts from an historical perspective based upon the views of prominent philosophers, historians, and writers—ranging from Plato to the contemporary playwright and screenwriter David Mamet—about the purposes of the arts. Belfiore and Bennett concluded through their vast analysis that, "the ways in which the arts can affect human beings have changed over time and in accordance with the political, cultural and intellectual climate of the time" (p. 194). Belfiore and Bennett concluded that historically the arts have been utilized by whoever had the resources and for whatever suited their particular purposes. The current climate at this time indicates that artmaking can serve as a powerful educational tool offering individuals and communities opportunities to learn about and contribute to the wellbeing and prosperity of humankind.

While the everyday involves making many unconscious choices, often devoid and hardly in need of reflection, there are nevertheless unanticipated and unfamiliar contexts when we must use our own "judgment in the absence of rules" (Eisner, 2002, p. 77). How

can sound judgment, making informed choices, and using reflection be utilized without education? Education is not instruction about rules and neither is artmaking. Education means learning and understanding principles upon which we can make connections, thereby empowering us to develop our own capacities to think independently and effectively. Rules-based responses both in artmaking and in education can often simply be expedient ways of making poor choices. Art educator Arthur Efland discusses many of the same issues as Eisner and asserts that the arts are "cognitively significant" because "they provide encounters that provide the capacity to construct interpretations." (2002, p. 161). Artmaking can serve to create and enhance connections, and help to understand principles and teachings such as those articulated in the Ruhi Curriculum.

This process is essentially a constructivist approach to teaching and learning in that the Curriculum is based on the premise that learners "actively create, interpret, and reorganize knowledge" (Windschilt, 1991, par. 9) through their own inquiry; their discussions to deepen their understanding of the subject matter; through opportunities to express and to share their insights with the other participants; and to use the arts to discover new, deeper, and more nuanced meaning and expression.

Efland (2002) asserts that

> ... the arts are places where the constructions of metaphor can and should become the principal object of study, where it is necessary to understand that the visual image or verbal expressions are not literal facts, but are embodiments of meanings that can be taken in some other light (p. 151).

The use of metaphor is a powerful tool well suited to a constructivist approach in art education and meaning making. Efland (2002) goes so far as to state that "an art education that fails to recognize the metaphoric character of meanings in the arts is without serious educational purpose" (*ibid*).

Walker (2001) also uses a constructivist approach in her lessons in *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking* with well-designed projects for visual-arts teachers. Walker describes the characteristics of her constructivist approach as: teaching that has "strong connections to the real world"; collaborative learning; active involvement; knowledge gained through study of the discipline; use of prior experience; and gaining an increasing understanding and access to some experts in the field (2001, p. xiv).

Lifelong learning

Over the last 50 years in North America, continuing education has increasingly been an important part of programs that the educational institutions offer adults. The concept and pedagogical approach to adult learning is often viewed as a process of self-directed learning.

> In its broadest meaning, "self-directed learning" describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (Knowles, 1975, p.18)

Knowles coined the phrase "self-directed learning" 35 years ago and since then this concept has become part of what is more commonly known as lifelong learning. Although the Ruhi Curriculum is designed to encourage each participant to take responsibility for her or his own learning, there are other kinds of learning that include collaborative and mentorship learning; as effective ways of learning how to learn, to work, and to teach both as an individual and with others. As capacity in individuals increase, self-directed learning can be developed such that individuals seeks ways of using their capacities by both taking more individual initiative while also learning to work effectively in groups depending on context and circumstances. Therefore in the

Ruhi Curriculum there is less stress on individualism in the pursuit of learning since it is balanced with a view to learning how to develop abilities to build positive and collaborative relationships with other individuals and groups with a common vision to contribute to the growth and betterment of the larger community. For example, within the Curriculum the principles of consultative decision-making are explored, discussed and exercised.

Transformative learning theory

Jack Mezirow, one of the leading expounders of transformative learning theory, examined "a broad spectrum of research related to transformative theory" (1991, p.192) based upon the research of experts in the fields of sociology, psycholinguistics and psychology, as well as the study of examples of transformative experiences both in and out of schools such as in Alcoholics Anonymous, in women's support groups, and in associations based on religious affiliation and social activism. He describes transformative learning as "a particular function of reflection: reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that results from such reassessments" (1990, p. 18).

The transformative potential of some adult education programs has become evident through stories and studies of experience on the part of both participants and teachers involved in adult literacy programs and other programs directed towards people with disabilities, and those who are disadvantaged. Whether adults are in such situations or not, as human beings we do nevertheless need to feel connected to our surroundings, develop our sense of purpose, and understand why our often modest, seemingly insignificant actions can have a beneficial effect upon the world.

This is an inquiry to gain some pedagogical understanding of how the integration of the arts with the Ruhi Curriculum can encourage both individual and social transformation. Ideally, facilitators in any such program must be individuals who have had the lived experience of transformative learning, and who are prepared to facilitate in an attitude of learning in what can become an important and possibly transformative experience for all the participants. Mezirow notes that, "This learning may occur in the domains of either instrumental learning [task-oriented problem solving] or communicative learning [understanding meaning]" (1990, p. 18, parenthesis added). This inquiry has involved both domains through the study of *Ruhi–Book One* and the use of the visual arts, which will be further examined in light of this experience.

One of my own first conscious experiences of transformative learning occurred when I was about eight. I remember a dramatic and unexpected "teaching moment" when my mother, a classically trained painter, who had studied at l'École des Beaux-Arts in Montreal in the 1940s, casually explained to me what an artist can see when looking at a landscape. As we looked across a lake, where on the other shore there was nothing more to me than a vast expanse of dark green forest, she told me that there were many greens in that scene and that they all changed as the light and clouds moved across the sky. As I began to observe more carefully, I witnessed what appeared to be an astonishing phenomenon, suddenly there were greens such as I had never seen before and which had utterly escaped me until she had *described* them to me. My own perception changed and my understanding of how and what I could see had simply depended upon my mother's well-chosen words in that particular context.

> The visual arts make *visible* aspects of the world—for example, their expressive qualities—in ways that other forms of vision do not. The ability

> to see the world in this way is no small accomplishment. It engenders meanings and qualities of experience that are intrinsically satisfying and significant (Eisner, 200, pp. 42-43, italics added).

By understanding how, through various pedagogical methods and resources, the visual arts can engender "meanings and qualities of experience" (*Ibid*) and facilitators can become skillful and artful creators of an environment such that participants may have transformative learning experiences that will become part of their inner landscape and be made visible through their own creative expression.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Qualitative Research

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p.3). In so far as this inquiry has been such that "things" were studied "in their natural settings", which were made "sense of", and have been interpreted "in terms of the meanings people bring [brought] to them" (Ibid, parentheses added) this inquiry was conducted using a qualitative methodology. The research involved several of the means Denzin and Lincoln (1994) listed as "personal experience, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts" (*Ibid*). Through such means this inquiry has helped to "describe routine and problematic moments and meanings" through a "...range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand" (*Ibid*). In this case, some significant insights have emerged as to how the visual arts can be an integral part of the Ruhi Curriculum, and what challenges facilitators faced in the kinds of circumstances that will be described and discussed in the following chapters.

Ethnography and reflective practice

In his comprehensive and aptly titled book *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing,* Harry Wolcott (2008) avoids defining ethnography and states that he "has long urged qualitative researchers to make a distinction… between *doing ethnography and borrowing (some) ethnographic techniques*" (p.44). Despite his best efforts, while attempting to tell his readers what ethnography is *not*, he describes ethnography as being "the study of customary social behaviors of an identifiable group of people (p. 241).

Given Wolcott's advice and his description of ethnography, this inquiry is not ethnography since this somewhat "identifiable group of people" did not have "customary social behaviors" as viewed from an ethnographic or anthropological perspective. Nevertheless, this inquiry has borrowed ethnographic techniques, principally methods involving the use of fieldwork and interviews (Wolcott, 2008, p. 47). Fieldwork in this inquiry included observation and participation by the researcher (Wolcott, p. 46-54); journal notes and a digital diary (as in "field notes", p. 269); questionnaires and interviews (p. 56-62); and the use of photography.

Eisner's ideas about research are similar to those of social scientist and educator Donald Schön (1983). In an article on art, education, and research Eisner (2005, p. 196) cites Schön who is best known for the notion of *reflective practice*. In Schön's well-known and oft cited book, titled *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) there are many helpful examples to illustrate how reflective practice relates to the work of professionals, teachers and researchers. Although Eisner does not specifically quote the passage itself, Schön's description of reflective practice is invaluable for any professional and particularly for facilitators.

> When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case. His [her] enquiry is not limited to deliberation about means, which depends on a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from action … His experimenting is a kind of action; implementation is built into his enquiry (p. 68).

Based upon field experience or "the practice context" (*ibid*) a very similar empirical approach resulted in the development of the Ruhi Curriculum itself. In the implementation of this Curriculum, reflective practice is encouraged in the participants

through the Ruhi workbook, the diverse questions related to the material, discussions, and personal practices, which in this instance included artmaking and personal reflection. For the purpose and within the limits of this inquiry, the participants only studied the first in the series of eight *Ruhi* books, in which personal practices are immediately introduced. However, the long-term objective is to encourage the participants to become facilitators. Participants must therefore learn to use reflective practice beyond that of personal reflection to become effective facilitators themselves. For the facilitators in this inquiry reflective practice involved the use of the Curriculum in their respective contexts and how it was related to the artmaking process for the participants.

In my own experience artmaking and teaching, the use of reflective practice (Schön, 1983) describes the essential and natural pattern of work and reflection very well. Through reflective practice the artist can understand the nature and characteristics of the media both as a means and ends in the artmaking process. So too in teaching reflective practice is essential in the process planning curriculum as well as in a somewhat improvisational quality in the use of our training and experience to serve in particular "teaching moment".

Schön (1983) introduced reflective practice as a method that professionals may develop and effectively utilize in their respective professions. More broadly 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1912/1969), the son and successor of Bahá'u'lláh and the designated interpreter of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, described "meditation" in a very similar way in a talk given in Paris in 1911 when he stated that

> It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed. ...Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state

> man abstracts himself: ...in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves (pp. 174-75).

Research Process

Preliminary preparations for this project demanded some reflective practice on the part of the researcher as to how to be able answer the central research question: What challenges do educators face when integrating visual artmaking with a spiritually based curriculum?

Finding facilitators

As I began to realize that the scope of this project was far larger than I had originally imagined, I thought it best to have an artist-teacher facilitate the studio sessions rather than myself and that ideally artmaking should occur in a studio setting. While conducting an earlier interview (Pritchard, 2007) for my graduate course work and considering how to develop this inquiry, I interviewed visual artist Lorraine Pritchard and got to know more about her way of working (Maloney, 2007a).

After that earlier project I asked Pritchard if she would consider participating in a studio-teaching project involving use of the Ruhi Curriculum with which she had recently become acquainted. She not only accepted to facilitate the studio portion, but also offered her spacious and accommodating studio, in which she has regularly conducted art workshops herself for diverse paper-based artmaking. She described the studio as suitable for a group of up to nine people. We agreed on a tentative timeframe, possibly a two-hour studio held regularly over several months, but did not discuss the project in more detail since I anticipated that it would not begin for some time. Having found an accomplished

visual artist with teaching experience and the possibility of a studio space for up to nine participants were both important stepping-stones in further defining the project.

The other major activity that would include these same participants needed a study-circle facilitator and a natural setting for semi-formal study and discussion. I considered being the facilitator myself since I had had some experience facilitating study circles using the Ruhi Curriculum, although they did not involve the visual arts. However, I also thought that if I facilitated the study circle I would direct too much of my attention and energies toward facilitation and preparations for the study circle, rather than being a participant-observer. I also thought that taking on both roles, as facilitator and as observer, could be deleterious to my research and I concluded that a more balanced or symmetrical vantage point from which I could observe both activities and both facilitators for my inquiry would be a better way of designing the project. A common vantage point and a common role as the participant-observer in both activities may have also avoided the confounding of issues such as those of power and authority that are ever-present in a teacher-student relationship no matter how informal the context may be.

I had considered a few individuals as possible facilitators, and had overlooked one that emerged as a natural choice. It was only when my daughter and I discussed the project and the resources I needed, that she indicated that my husband and her father, Julian Lebensold was qualified, experienced, and capable of facilitating study circles. He has also had many years of college and university-level teaching experience. I was surprised at my own shortsightedness when I heard her suggestion. Subsequently I asked him, and he willingly accepted to facilitate. His acceptance therefore made our living room the natural setting to host the study circle.

Finding two different facilitators with two different locations, largely determined the settings, the timetable, and the overall organization of the project. The facilitator, the artist-teacher and I agreed that sessions should be approximately two hours and would be offered on weekday evenings based upon the availability of the facilitators. Given the estimated time needed to cover the material in *Ruhi–Book One,* participants were then invited to attend an information meeting where we informed them about the need to commit themselves to a regular weekly session of two hours per week, alternating between a studio artmaking session one week and a study circle the next. We also told them that we anticipated that the sessions would be from the end of September 2008 to February or March 2009 with a break in December.

Pre-project interviews

At the suggestion of my thesis committee, I interviewed the artist-teacher and the facilitator before the project began to determine what the expectations of both the facilitators and myself may be, and to determine, in greater detail, what the project may entail. Both facilitators also agreed to another end-of-project interview when the project was completed. The pre-project interview with artist-teacher occurred on May 6, 2008, and with the facilitator on July 25, 2008 (Appendix III & IV).

During the pre-project interview with the facilitator I asked him if he wanted to meet with the artist-teacher and his first response was, "I don't think it's needed" (Lebensold, 2008). When we talked about scheduling, however, he concluded that he should discuss it with the artist teacher and thought it was important to have the artist-teacher participate in at least the first if not several of the study-circle sessions. He contacted the artist-teacher who thought that the scheduling could be done by phone and

agreed to come to the information meeting where they would both present their plans and answer any questions from those present.

The Curriculum's importance became apparent even before we began the study circle when I had asked the facilitator and the artist-teacher independently if they thought the three of us should have a meeting before the information meeting with the participants. They both independently thought that such a meeting was unnecessary. Looking back as the researcher, I realize that I could have, and probably should have presented them with the need to have a meeting together rather than offering them a choice. I did not insist on having a meeting together because I was already an ever-present observer and I thought that any further intervention on my part would alter whatever naturalness with which the project had already begun. Second, I did not wish to discourage the facilitators from carrying out what they had already committed themselves to fulfill. Asking more of them or have them change things could have been regarded as criticism, dampened their enthusiasm, and robbed them of their own sense of ownership of their respective roles and responsibilities.

The unexpected aspects of the role in which I found myself, as a result of introducing two important and capable individuals, were challenging for me. I had to continually remind myself of the dispassionate nature of research as essential in preserving its integrity and I had to work with the available resources. The concept of trying to allow the naturalness of the project to develop was one consideration that made me hold back rather than insist or intervene at a few points during the course of the project. In retrospect the whole question is complicated and almost moot since, if the two facilitators had naturally decided to do a project of this kind, none of these first steps

would have been organized in this particular way.

In addition to the Curriculum, the first interviews with the artist-teacher (Pritchard, 2008) and with the facilitator (Lebensold, 2008) served as a basis to begin since we had established a general and common understanding of the project itself (Appendix III & IV). The first interviews with each facilitator revealed that neither the facilitator nor the artist-teacher expected a literal or direct correlation between the artmaking and the study of the Ruhi workbook. The facilitator described his approach as "a work in progress" while the artist-teacher remarked that

> The value of doing something like this is that the art of drawing or making art is another kind of thinking, and can be valuable in that sometimes you are not aware of what you are taking in and what you are receiving. Certainly art is another way of expressing that words cannot, or another form of communication… It is a different area of perception (Pritchard, 2008).

The artist-teacher said she saw the project much in the same way she sees her work as being a process of reflection about ideas and principles using the visual arts as a language for the metaphorical expression of experience.

I also realized through this first interview with the artist-teacher, that she sought further understanding of my expectations and was open to various suggestions (Pritchard, 2008). I lent her Sidney Walker's book (2001) since it contains many good ideas as to how to approach artmaking with adolescent and adult learners. We both agreed to take an open-ended approach. She asked if I thought music could be included and we both agreed that it would be fine. Although having music seemed like a good idea at the time, its use in this experience will also be discussed later.

At the outset, both facilitators acknowledged that they did not know what to expect of this inquiry involving the visual arts as part of the learning and reflection of the

study-circle participants. Based upon the first interviews, the expectations that the researcher (later to become the participant-observer), the facilitator, and the artist-teacher held in common can be broadly described as:

- first, to use the material in *Book I* of the Ruhi Curriculum to study and guide the participants through to project completion;
- second, to encourage reflection and the daily individual practices found in *Ruhi – Book One*;
- and third, to facilitate and foster visual-art practice through the studio sessions and the use of a visual journal.

The interviews helped both facilitators clarify their roles and consider their plans. Once the project got underway this foundational step helped the three of us (facilitator, artist-teacher, and participant-observer) to focus more directly on our respective roles. My notes indicate that after these first interviews, the three of us also seemed to have a stronger feeling of collaboration and there developed a greater rapport between the two facilitators as they started to communicate by phone and email about the details of the first meetings thus further defining their respective roles (Observations.pdf, 2008-2009).

The study-circle facilitator's principal concerns expressed in the first interview were about the time and pacing in covering the material in *Ruhi–Book One*, as well as sustaining the regularity and continuity of the project over several months. He also mentioned the importance of the journal and anticipated mentioning artmaking during the study circle (Lebensold, 2008).

The artist-teacher's principal concern, as she described it, was

> ...for the participants to begin, the beginning is the hardest part. It's the transition from inaction to action that's the hardest. After it's much easier.

> The practice of something reveals a pattern. ...reveals a lot ... something about your way of thinking, to engage in the practice, to draw as parallel to their study, get into the practice of drawing (Pritchard, 2008).

My own principal concern as the researcher and participant-observer was being able to observe while participating, to take notes, to collect data needed for the purposes of my research, and to see the project to completion.

The purpose of the second interviews was to inquire about their experience as facilitators and their response to the process, the events, and the issues that had occurred while they were involved in the project. Emerging themes and challenges for the facilitator, the artist-teacher, and for myself as the researcher will be discussed later.

The invitations

I first found a few possible project participants in the spring and summer of 2008 through word of mouth, when friends or acquaintances would ask me about my plans for my art-education research project. My plans were not yet clear until I began to develop my project proposal and subsequently interviewed the facilitators. Months before the information meeting, the study-circle facilitator and myself, as the researcher, agreed during our pre-project interview that he should be the one to invite the participants. We agreed to this because historically, a facilitator usually organizes the study circles and invites possible participants. I provided the facilitator with a rough draft of the invitation I had originally intended to send myself, which he revised and distributed himself (Appendix X). Collaborative work such as this and the first interviews helped to further define our respective roles and tasks.

During the interview we agreed that, in his capacity as facilitator, he would send the invitations by email to several individuals who might wish to participate either

because they were already involved in the visual arts or had expressed interest in the project (Lebensold, 2008). There were a few responses but when we both realized that we might not have enough participants we agreed that he send the same letter as a general invitation on the local Bahá'í community's electronic mailing list. The list itself includes at least a few hundred local subscribers. After confirming the date, place, and time with the artist-teacher, the facilitator invited all the respondents to the invitation to an information meeting (Appendix X).

Before the information meeting, the researcher and facilitator determined a few possible dates by telephone, and then decided to begin at the end of September 2008. The facilitator contacted the artist-teacher as to when she would be available and asked her to speak at the information meeting about how she saw the art-making portion of the project. We all agreed that Wednesday evenings from 7:30 to 9:30 was the best time for all three of us. The facilitator and the researcher consulted as to how the first meeting should be organized. The facilitator then phoned the artist-teacher to discuss what he and the researcher had determined, and asked the artist-teacher if she had anything to add or change. Based on these preparations the three of us agreed on an agenda and that the facilitator would chair the meeting.

The information session

The facilitator, the artist-teacher, and the researcher (yet to become the participant-observer) determined the time, place and agenda for the information meeting. The invitation was posted on a local email list with the date, time and place (Summer 2008). Seven interested individuals attended the information meeting. Four of them bowed out mostly because of the time commitment and the distance they would have to

travel. The following week, two more joined as we began the workbook. A week later another also joined. We were six participants including the participant-observer. Note that the participants, other than myself, have all been given fictitious names.

The researcher produced the necessary consent forms for both the facilitators and for the participants; developed the questionnaire that helped to determine their previous artmaking experience and some of their expectations (Appendix IX).

The facilitator chaired the meeting. He first welcomed everybody, introduced himself and asked everyone to introduce her or himself. He spoke about the study circle portion and the Curriculum, specifically *Ruhi–Book One*. He then invited the artist-teacher to speak about her involvement and how the participants would be asked to use the visual arts as a related or parallel activity.

The artist-teacher spoke of the improvisational nature of the art-making process and described art as "a series of experiments" and this project as experimental, and as a process of considering the writings we would study in studio "with a different part of the brain" as a "deepening process". Stating that this experience was entirely new for her, as it would be for everyone, she explained that we would begin "with something to do in the first studio, see how the participants work, and then evolve toward a general direction… Work things out on paper" (Journal, 2008). The artist-teacher mentioned the use of a visual journal and offered participants a well-bound drawing book like the one I had purchased, which she could sell them at cost since they are in stock in her specialty paper store (Au Papier Japonais, Website, retrieved February 28, 2010). A few participants bought a drawing book and others already had one in a size or format they preferred.

The facilitator then invited me as the researcher and the participant-observer to speak about my participation for the purposes of a graduate research project in art education. After saying a few words about my interest in this project and stating my research question, I requested the signed consents of all participants (Appendix VIII) as required by Concordia University in Montreal (http://oor.concordia.ca, retrieved January 14, 2010). Some signed the consent forms at the meeting and others said they as yet were undecided. After we each presented the various aspects of our roles and our plans, and explained the time and commitment involved, we answered a few questions. Some of the questions participants asked suggested that they had some anxieties as to how "good" they could be as visual artmakers but many were very curious about artmaking in this context.

As the researcher I felt that once this seemingly small step was completed that I had crossed an important threshold through which I felt I had become the participant-observer.

In order to participate in this project the participants, including both facilitators, each read and signed consent forms. In the form, the facilitators agreed to recorded interviews before and after the project. The participants and the facilitators also agreed to answer a short questionnaire at the beginning of the project. The participants also agreed to answer another questionnaire at the end of the project, and having photographs taken of their studio artmaking (Appendices VI, VII, VIII, IX, X & XI).

The first questionnaire (Appendix IX), which I asked the participants to fill out, indicated that we were six adults between the ages of 25 and 55. I was also able to determine that two of the younger participants attended arts-oriented high schools; one of

them had completed university studies in marketing and was actively involved in the promotion of theatre arts, and the other had completed university studies in dance and movement and was a stay-at-home mother involved in her community. Another was a teacher and an interpreter for the deaf with little visual-art experience. The only male in the group completed his university studies in art and design and was working in this field. The older participant was a social worker and university teacher. She had the least experience with the visual arts. Although she later had to drop out for health reasons, she kept in touch mostly through email since I continued to send her anything I sent to the other participants, and she chose to join us for our last celebratory session. And I, the participant-observer, completed my university studies in studio art over 25 years ago, have taught and worked in various media, and am currently conducting graduate research in art education.

Project Design

The three principal architects

The three principal architects involved in this project were: Julian Lebensold as the study-circle facilitator; Lorraine Pritchard as the artist-teacher; and myself, Suzanne Maloney, as the researcher, the observer and participant, or the participant-observer. I will continue to refer to the three individuals according to their respective roles: facilitator, artist-teacher, and usually as the participant-observer. As mentioned earlier, the facilitator is a college teacher and my spouse. The artist-teacher is an accomplished visual artist and a businessperson who also has several years of experience teaching paper-based artmaking workshops.

The group met weekly from September 2008 to March 2009 for the study circles and studio sessions, with a three-week winter break in December 2008, and having to cancel once because of a snowstorm. We had a total of 20 sessions. There were a few sessions when we either had two consecutive studios or two study circles because the facilitator or the artist-teacher had to switch their sessions. In one instance, which will be discussed in further detail, the facilitator and the venue were changed. We carried on through a nasty Montreal winter despite a few evenings when we had next to impossible driving and parking conditions. We even had to push one participant's car out of a snow bank and off into the night on the slick and slippery streets.

Data collection

Interviews

As noted earlier, the project began with the pre-project interviews of both facilitators in the spring of 2008. I prepared a series of questions for the facilitator (Appendix III) and the artist-teacher (Appendix IV) concerning what they anticipated to be doing in their respective capacities, how they would communicate, how they saw my role, and any other comments or questions they wished to add.

The recorded interviews were conducted before and after the project, individually with each facilitator. Before the project began the artist-teacher was interviewed on May 6, 2008, and the study-circle facilitator on July 25, 2008 (Appendix III & IV). When the project was completed I interviewed the facilitator on April 2, 2009, and the artist-teacher on April 14, 2009 (Appendix V & VI). Since their respective activities and circumstances were different, the facilitators were asked different questions. Questions were asked bearing in mind that the facilitator had a curriculum and a workbook to follow. For the artist-teacher, since she had no equivalent curriculum designed to introduce the arts

through any particular teaching method, lessons, or media, we agreed that the studio artmaking would be based on what the participants were currently studying in the study circle in whatever way she thought suitable, which could also include supplementary materials and resources.

The questions that were posed to the facilitator were directed toward the details of the study circle and what he anticipated doing to relate the two different meetings and activities to each other. The questions to the artist-teacher were broader since neither of us had previously experienced facilitating artmaking in this context.

The journal

A year before this inquiry began, I had interviewed the artist-teacher about her practice and discovered that she used journals regularly, both for written and visual-art purposes (Maloney, 2007b). The journals are essential tools in her daily practices of prayer, meditation, reflection, and artmaking. Her descriptions of how she utilized her journaling, and how she related her daily art practices and daily spiritual practices appeared to be a well-suited approach for the participants in this project to consider using a journal. Having used visual journals intermittently myself, I thought it would be useful to have each participant use a visual journal for regular personal reflection and artmaking. Furthermore, journaling is used in many different adult-education programs such as those described by educator Joseph Lukinsky (1990, p. 213-234) who wrote about journaling in the context of critical reflection and transformative learning theory.

Ruhi study-circle participants are encouraged to become mindful of spiritual concepts as they relate to their everyday lives through a process of prayer and meditation. Although these daily practices do not necessarily take much time and are usually a private practice, in my experience they become evermore meaningful when done

consistently and reflectively. Daily practice is introduced in *Ruhi–Book One* at the very beginning: first, through daily reflection upon our own actions; then, daily study and memorization of a few of the excerpts from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh; through the daily practice of prayer and meditation; and finally, through further study and reflection on the nature and purpose of life, death, and the afterlife. Given this context the journal appeared to be a valuable tool worth introducing.

As the researcher and the participant-observer, I purchased a large well-bound journal-like book to serve as my own journal (Figures 14, 17-21, 26, 28, 29) specifically to serve for this project. I also began a digital diary for thoughts and observations following any of the sessions (Observations.pdf).

Photographs

There were photographs taken of the studio interior, the participants, the materials, some of the artworks, and notes from my own journal over the course of the project (List of Figures 1-29). During one studio session the artist-teacher informed me that she found my photographing a bit disturbing. I did continue to photograph the setting, activities, and art works, but avoided taking more of the artist-teacher.

After the sessions ended, I also took photos of the art studio without the snow banks to better convey the exterior studio setting and context (Figure 1). Note the large grey panel covering what was once a large storefront window to the left on which artist-teacher painted black and white calligraphic markings that are characteristic of many of her paintings (see Appendix XII), which in this case seemed to blend nicely into the setting.

Figure 1. Studio exterior.

Chapter 3: The Sessions

The sessions were planned individually by the facilitator and the artist-teacher, and held in their respective settings: The study circle in the facilitator's living room, and the artmaking sessions in an artist's studio.

The Study-circle Sessions

The study-circle met every two weeks for two hours in the facilitator's home located near a subway station and where parking is usually not a problem. This home is the main-floor apartment of a duplex built *circa* 1920 and designed somewhat like a train car in that a central hallway leads to the various rooms that have dark oak frames and doors with beveled glass windows. The living room is medium sized with a fireplace and tall leaded-glass windows under which there is a long dark oak bench designed to let the heat out of the cast-iron radiator beneath. The living room is warm and inviting. The hardwood floor is covered by a deep burgundy and purple Turkmenistan carpet. The large couch, several chairs, tables and footstools made the space comfortable for study and discussions. One wall is lined with a variety of books of fiction, history, art, philosophy, and religion. On the other walls there is an eclectic collection of paintings, photographs and hangings. There were various objects, ceramics and *bibelots* that my husband, the facilitator, and I, the participant-observer, have accumulated, created, collected, or inherited – everything from seashells and stones to sculptures.

One participant noted the setting in his response to the post-project questionnaire stating that, "The home where the study sessions were held was comfortable and inspiring. Being surrounded by examples of 'high' and 'low' art and a wall of books is a constant reminder of the creative spirit in all people" (Adam). The casual atmosphere and

the attitude of the participants was such that we would all go into the kitchen, gather up our tea and goodies to bring into the living room and begin an uninterrupted two-hour period of study and discussion.

The study-circle facilitator introduced the participants to the study process; set the overall objectives, and the scheduling of the sessions in consultation with the artist-teacher through email or telephone. Within the study circle setting he established a pace and facilitated the study circle through the use of *Ruhi–Book One* of which we all had our own copy. At the first study circle we had four participants who were prepared to make this commitment. The artist-teacher also attended the first study-circle session and, since she was away and unable to begin the first studio session the very next week, the facilitator asked all the participants what they wanted to do and we all agreed to have another study session instead. Therefore, the facilitator immediately sensitized the participants to the fact that as the facilitator he was not necessarily the singular decision-maker for the study circle, rather that all the participants were, through a process of consultation and the seeking of consensus. One more participant joined us the next week and another at the first studio session held on October 1, 2008. We then had six participants.

As the artist-teacher was leaving our first study-circle session, while she and I were saying our goodbyes she expressed the wish to attend the study circle regularly and I responded that that "would be great" if she could. Both the artist-teacher and the facilitator expressed similar desires to attend one another's sessions, however time and weather did not permit them to fulfill that wish.

Within the study circle

The atmosphere was relaxed yet formal in that the facilitator led the discussion, usually with a question directed to each participant to share her or his insights with the group. Study-circle participants read, discussed and wrote in each of our own copies of the 8½" X 11" workbook that is titled *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* (1999), which will be referred to as either "the workbook" or *Ruhi–Book One* (Figure 3).

The workbook is designed around some selected excerpts from Bahá'í writings on certain themes about personal conduct and reflection, the purpose of life, community service, prayer, and life after death. In the various sections of the workbook there are questions about these writings and concepts to encourage learning, and understanding of the implications of these concepts in our everyday lives, in the community, and in the world. The study circle followed this pattern of study.

One overarching theme in the study circle sprang from the question that the facilitator asked each one of the participants at the beginning of our sessions. After a period of prayer or reciting excerpts from the Bahá'í writings he would ask each to recount an *act of service* we had accomplished in the past week. In the post-project interview I specifically asked the facilitator to explain why he asked each of us to recount an act of service we had performed in the past week at the beginning of each study circle. He responded saying

> The purpose of our existence is to serve each other and fulfilling that purpose is our source of happiness. ...Service to humanity is fundamental and part of our universal core. I highlight it at beginning of each session so we don't forget that. Because it's something we do and we should become conscious of it.
>
> Many of us are brought up with notion that we are not very good people. ...we don't like to look at what we do as valuable. ...some of us are taught not to praise each other. ...[Thinking that] praise will go to their heads...

> however I think that's completely unfounded (Lebensold, 2009 parentheses added).

I first found this exercise at the beginning of each study circle a bit embarrassing since the purpose and intent was not entirely clear to me. As I listened to his response, I realized that I had been taught this "notion" both implicitly and explicitly that "we are not very good people" in the sense that the facilitator described it, and that such unconscious and deep-seated beliefs influence our attitudes and behavior throughout our lives. I therefore wondered if the other participants understood the facilitator's intention more clearly than I did. He finished his response as to why he had regularly asked this question by adding that

> By sharing the experience of this act of service it becomes an affirmation, which requires thought and awareness of the act. It is about *doing* an act of service in *any* given context and not a way to 'show off'. Why? To *make connections* between the concepts and our everyday lives (italics added).

His rationale for asking this same question sprang from the very first excerpts of *Ruhi–Book One* in which we are directed to consider how we can contribute to the "betterment of the world" and how our practices and behavior are the means through which we may accomplish what may appear to many, if not most people, as such a daunting objective. The first excerpt states that, "The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct"; the second states, that we not "walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds"; the third, that we should bring ourselves "…to account each day" as a regular and personal examination of conscience (Note that there is no clergy or rituals involving confession of sins in the Bahá'í faith, and that an examination of conscience is a

private practice); and the fourth excerpt asserts: "Let deeds, not words, be your adorning" (1999, p. 9).

Campbell (2005) describes reflective practice for pre-service art teachers as "the systematic use of reflection to reach greater self-understanding by relating experiences, goals, motivation, and intentions to action" (p. 52) and further states that reflective practice "can be described as *spiritual* when it focuses on not only the self for deeper understanding, but on the self as it relates to the *other*, to the greater good of society, both locally and globally, and as a force for social reconstruction" (p. 52). This concept is very similar to Hatcher's (1982, p. 32) concept of spirituality that was used earlier to describe spirituality from a Bahá'í perspective: in that the qualities that reveal spirituality can be perceived through our *actions*. Although both of these scholars are from different fields of expertise and experience, they see spirituality in much the same way (Hatcher, 1982; Campbell, 2005).

The use of systematic routines and practices during the study circle offered opportunities for reflection on both an individual and a group level through which a common vision or understanding seemed to be developing. Within the study circle many such opportunities for reflection are inherent in the pedagogical principles and design of the Curriculum. The workbook includes questions, many which do not have unequivocal answers, and discussions through either pairing up the participants, discussion in the group, and individual reflective practice.

The style of facilitation

During the study circle the participants were invited to share some of their responses or observations. The facilitator would then direct us to the portion of the Ruhi

book where we had left off. He systematically asked each of us if we had anything to say about the passage or the questions we were currently reading, which was read aloud by one of the participants and sometimes read a second time by another. The questions in the workbook and the brief discussions enriched and deepened individual understanding, as did listening to the insights and diverse points of view of the other participants. Although many questions sometimes appeared simple to some of the participants, they were not so for everyone. Since many of the questions did not necessarily have an unequivocal answer, responses varied and through discussion new insights were often brought to light.

The facilitator neither dismissed nor disagreed with any of the opinions expressed by the participants. Occasionally, he would also ask questions to help clarify the issues. Rather than providing any answers, he encouraged reflection and comments from all the participants. He helped us stay focused and directed our attention to the material at hand. One participant described the study circle as a little "strict" (Julia, questionnaire). We worked through the material at an unhurried but steady pace, sometimes waiting a few moments while other participants completed the questions portion. These waiting times became moments for further personal reflection rather than conversation, which would have disrupted the contemplative atmosphere. By waiting a few minutes for everyone to complete an exercise, an atmosphere of solidarity was created in that we were experiencing the whole process as a group. The facilitator paced the time such that we completed whatever section of the book we were working on and rarely stayed much longer than the two-hour period.

At the beginning of the study circle the facilitator often asked the participants what they had previously done in their last studio sessions but after

the first few sessions, the other participants did not usually bring their journals and did not say much about what had occurred at the last studio session.

Soon after we began, after the first studio session, one participant had to drop out for health reasons but kept in touch. Later, in January 2009, one participant had to come consistently late since she registered for another course that ended at our starting time, but we simply carried on and she joined us as soon as she could. Attendance was quite regular; every participant did miss one or two sessions for reasons of work or illness.

The participant-observer within the study circle

Like all the other participants, I also had the *Ruhi–Book One* workbook that I used and completed. Nevertheless, I first expected to be somewhat removed from the group of participants, more an observer and recorder of the activities but once the study circle began the facilitator invited me into the discussions in the same way as the other participants. He quite literally and naturally facilitated or eased my entry into the group. When participants first directed any questions to me, I redirected them to the facilitator. They quickly identified the facilitator as such and the tendency of directing organizational questions to me stopped after the first two study circles. Often the facilitator would direct a decision-making process of consultation to the study circle itself to find a consensus for issues about scheduling, or special activities such as the end of session celebration.

The Studio Sessions

Prairie-born and after living many years in Toronto, the artist-teacher and her spouse established themselves in Montreal over a decade ago. About seven years ago the

artist-teacher and her spouse, who is a graphic designer, converted a two-storey brick building into a large studio and an upstairs apartment. They also offer paper-based art workshops that both of them and other local and guest artists conduct.

The studio setting

The studio setting was excellent although the location was a bit out of the way for most of the participants. We met every two weeks for two hours in the artist-teacher's studio in an older semi-industrial two-storey building. The studio is located at street level a few blocks from a subway station in a working-class neighborhood along a busy street in north-central Montreal where there are small businesses and some light industry. Outside at street level there are no windows only large grey plywood panels covering what had once been storefront windows. The entrance is a grey metal door with no doorbell, only a mail slot and beside it is a sign about their workshops. The artist-teacher transformed the large grey panels into a large painting that blends almost unnoticeably with its surroundings. The strokes and the pattern on that panel suggests it contains a message in an unknown alphabet; this is one of the distinctive qualities often found in many of the artist-teacher's own paintings (Figure 1 & Appendix XII).

Inside the studio we walked into a large U-shaped workspace, no street-level windows, no outside distractions, a well-lit space, high ceilings (essential for some of the artist's own larger works), and heated with a small, high-efficiency wood fired stove in the center of the space making it warm and inviting. The space was also lined on some walls with shelves, chests, supplies, books, tools, and a few hanging and freestanding sculptures. The way the artist-teacher chose to place many of these found objects or tools were such that they could be regarded either as tools, reliefs, or as sculptures. The

workspace setting used by the artist encouraged the participants to get down to work as soon as we arrived.

Within the studio sessions

We walked on a warm, smooth floor of clear-varnished plywood in our stocking feet across an open area to a large worktable. In the corner nearby, on another table there were several boxes of water-based acrylic paints, inks, *conté*, papers, various pens, brushes, sticks, pans and containers and sheets of *washi* (a very resilient, multi-use traditional Japanese paper made of wood pulp) laid out for our use (Figures 24-25). We were invited to sit around the other large (approximately 4' X 10') table with vestiges of old paint and ink marks, covered by a thick clear plastic sheet round which the artist-teacher had set up folding chairs (Figures 2, 3, 4, 5). Nearby, we used a large deep sink splattered with paint stains in the tiny powder room under the stairs that lead up to the apartment.

The artist-teacher's considered choices made the studio all the more suitable for this project. The central studio space was open and inviting. A few teapots, a kettle, a small thermos of coffee, and Japanese teacups were placed on an old wooden chest to the side of our work area. We did not stop together for a break but were invited to help ourselves anytime when we wished to pause. Some of us would bring desserts from time to time.

When we first began the studio sessions, another area of the studio's ceiling and lighting was being rebuilt. By January 2009 that portion of the studio became another workspace where we sometimes spread out our paintings to view and let them dry.

Within the studio itself, there were a few physical features that bear some consideration. One of them was the working surfaces and how the participants were placed (Figures 2-5). In this instance, having participants sit further apart may have prevented the amount of chatter that first occurred in the studio sessions. It is interesting to note that one of the more talkative participants in her comment at the subsequent study circle had said that being at the studio worktable "...felt like eating together. You know, like food is bonding" (Rose, observer's journal). Working on a common surface, side by side and all around the same table, may have encouraged more social interaction and distractions instead of greater focus on our individual work.

It would have helped if the furniture and placement of the participants were set further apart when they were individually artmaking. Given the media that was used in this instance, defining individual work areas by having each participant using a board of approximately 24' X 30' (60 X 80 cm) could have been helpful. Of course, the setting and work format could be more flexible if it was set in a space dedicated for that particular purpose, rather than the temporary use of a private studio

The height of the studio worktable in relation to the folding chairs was quite high though it may have only been a problem for myself since none of the other participants, including myself, remarked on it. I found myself having to stand in order to properly see my work and felt confined working at the table. This may be because as a working artist, I have found that I usually need to stand to see my artwork well, and I have become accustomed to working on a surface at a 45 to 80 degree angle. Furthermore, the less experienced participants may not have realized that there is a natural visual distortion in

working on artwork on a horizontal surface when it would likely later be displayed and viewed vertically.

Although neither the artist-teacher nor I thought music would be a problem, it was. Music is such a powerful medium that it colored the work, the mood, and we discovered that we do not all have the same taste in music, and definitely did not all like it at the same volume. Music need not necessarily be entirely eliminated since it can be used in other ways than in this instance, and may be a very helpful medium. For example, the artist-teacher may, for a specific exercise, have a musical selection before beginning the artmaking if it is used to set a mood of meditation or reflection in silence, or some scores or melodies can be part of a series of warm-up exercises when introducing new media and techniques. Clearly, music should be used judiciously.

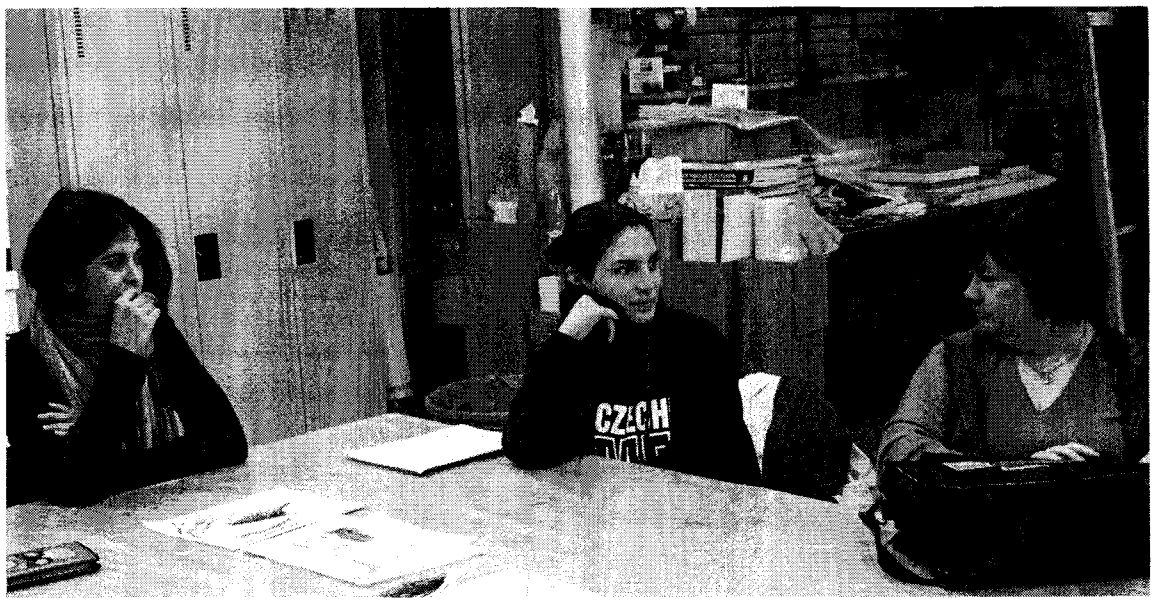

Figure 2. Three participants around the studio table.

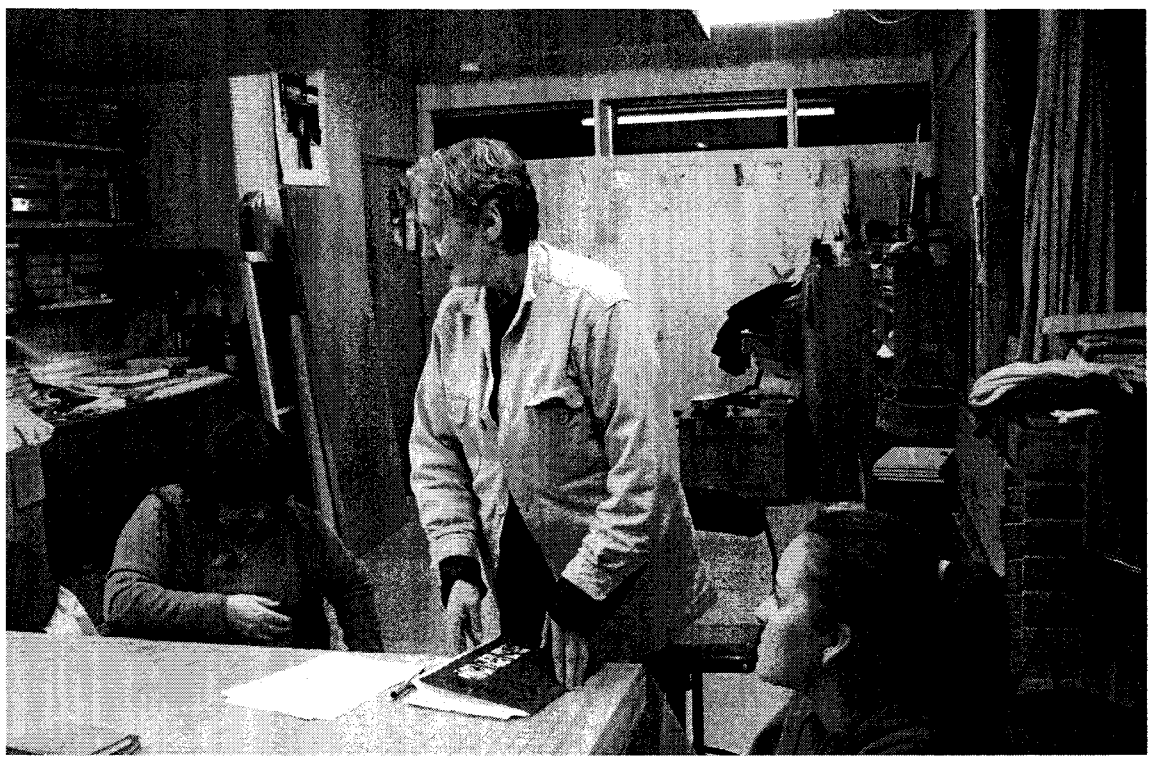

Figure 3. Artist-teacher holding *Ruhi–Book One*.

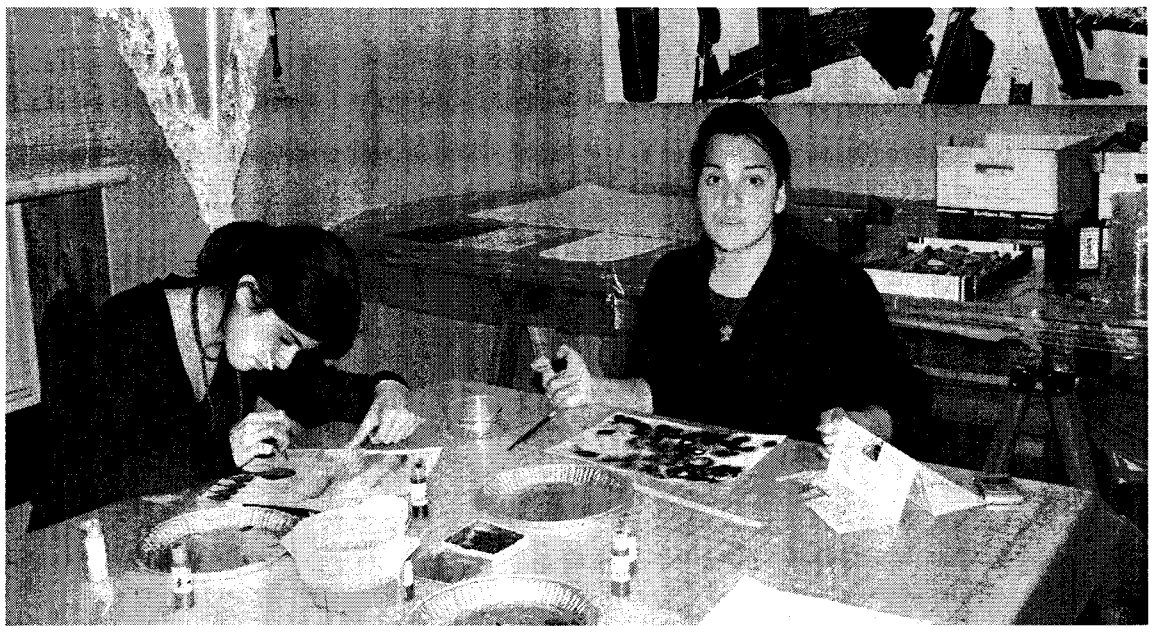

Figure 4. Two participants painting.

Figure 5. Participants working intensely.

At the first studio the artist-teacher asked the participants to each choose one of four short excerpts studied the previous week in the study circle, to reflect upon the excerpt chosen and to "think about the nature of it" and draw a line with black *conté* sticks on paper "which kind of expresses its [the excerpt] nature". We were then asked to draw again and then circulate it to the participant to our right who could add to the piece to then pass it on until we had all made our mark or marks on each of the pieces. Another exercise was what could be described as a visual conversation between two of the participants: one would draw and the other would respond and give the drawing to the partner who did the same. Another exercise involved three of us and we were told to avoid drawing on the others' lines. We then displayed these drawings. Since we had not worked together in this way before and because of having to share the single piece of paper, there was some tension and shyness. The artist-teacher made positive comments

about some of the qualities of the drawings that were laid out on the studio floor at the end of the session (Figures 6 & 7).

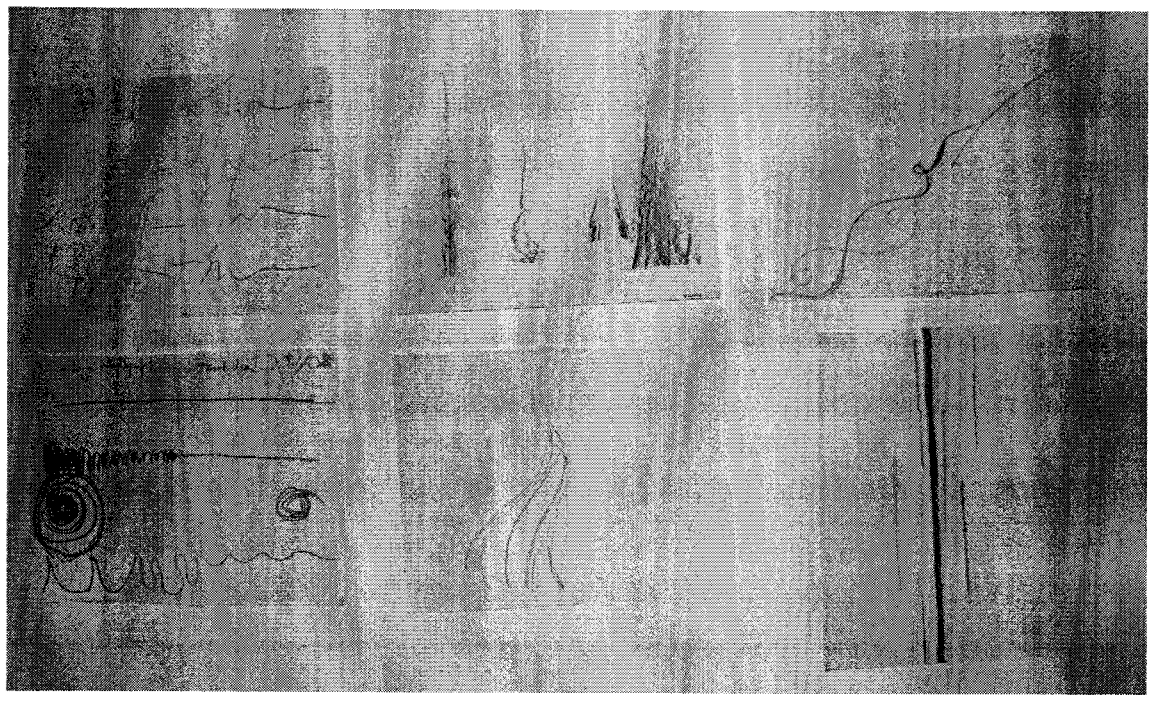

Figure 6. First drawings.

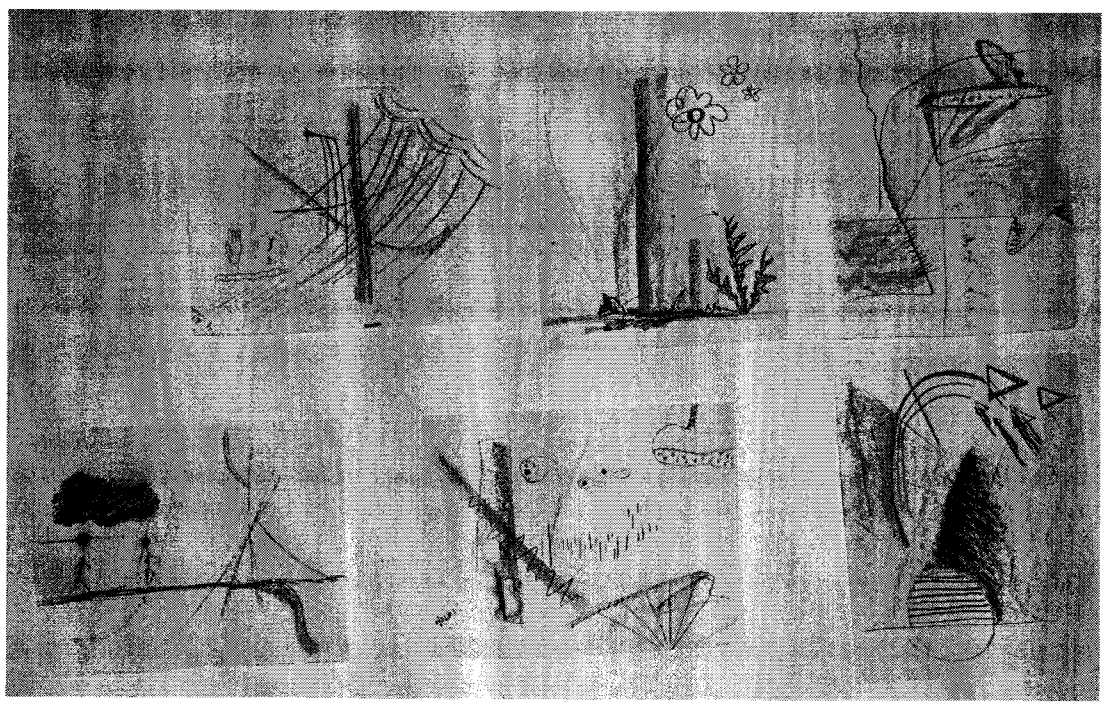

Figure 7. Ice-breaking exercises.

We usually used either the floor or tables to display our pieces and briefly comment on one another's work. Instead of a formal critique, the artist-teacher set the tone through positive comments; she indicated some of the qualities, the playfulness and the imagination expressed in the works, and how the materials were utilized. Participants sometimes expressed their liking for some pieces or certain qualities. I consciously held back from talking too much and followed the artist-teacher's lead, looking for the best qualities in the works and sharing a few of my perceptions. The artist-teacher stated that she did not wish to analyze the works "too much".

By the third studio session the artist-teacher introduced a theme, using both written and visual works of a few artists which she has found particularly helpful in developing her own work. The studio sessions were based upon these themes or "big ideas" (Walker, 2001). We were not taught any techniques or methods, rather we were invited to begin exploring by drawing, and later through painting based on our own responses to the themes.

In one session we examined concepts of beauty, a subject she told us was of particular interest to her in her own work. She read some excerpts from the Bahá'í writings as well as other writings on this theme of beauty by diverse artists working in different media: one was the reknowed Japanese potter and philosopher Sõetsu Yanagi (1889-1961) (Yanagi, S., Japanese Folk Art Museum, retrieved 23 November 2009), and the other was Agnes Martin (1912-2004) an American painter, sometimes described as a minimalist, who was influenced by Zen thought in her life and work (Haskell, 1992).

Another session began with the idea of the use of repetition, patterns and practice when the participants experimented with the materials made available to them such as

different brushes and sticks with paint on paper (Figures 24-25). Other themes or concepts were about reflection, diversity, knowledge and intuition, memory and rememberance.

The style of facilitation

During the pre-project interview a few months before we began the artist-teacher said

> I'm not sure how we'll do this; very evolutionary…we'll see. Once we get into the process, once we see what is revealed we'll see this as we go along, things will shift, there will be some interactive work but simple and will free up people. It's going to be a very interesting process (Pritchard, 2009).

Although the artist-teacher expressed her vision of teaching differently, it is not far different than the insights Eisner (2002) expressed in more scholarly terms

> Sense is made; it is not provided or discovered. What students are able to do with a situation is affected by what they bring to it, their frame of reference. And this brings us to the function of the curriculum and, more specifically, the function of the arts within the curriculum (p. 85).

The artist-teacher was prompt, prepared, and as she anticipated the first two studio sessions were exploratory. Subsequently the sessions involved a theme to consider and explore. Sometimes we began with a few prayers and the artist-teacher usually shared some of her thoughts about a theme or a concept. She used her own journals and notebooks, in which she kept many of her most cherished Bahá'í writings and those of poets and other artists from Japan and North America. In the earlier sessions she would also make reference to the workbook and subsequently encourage exploration through the art materials, individual reflection, and expression.

At the end of the sessions, the artist-teacher usually expressed her pleasure, interest and surprise at the diversity of our work, a feature she also mentioned again

during our second interview (Pritchard, 2009). The artist-teacher would take this time to indicate certain qualities and ways the materials were used in the works displayed on a table or the floor (Figures 8-23, 26, 27).

As a working artist, the artist-teacher had some of her art works in her studio, usually large canvases of non-representational pieces that were either hanging or leaning against a wall. The studio was a workshop rather than a gallery, therefore pieces were not there for display but rather in the space as part of the artist's own ongoing process of work, or preparing works for exhibition and shipping. Over the last several decades the body of her work has included paintings, sculptures, installations and multi-media works that have been exhibited and collected in Canada and abroad, particularly in Japan.

Richard Perry, professor emeritus of the Faculty of Fine Arts of York University in Toronto, in response to Pritchard's (the artist-teacher) exhibition of works at the Craig Scott Gallery in Toronto in 2007, described the influences, preoccupations and the non-representational nature of her work

> ... the complex surfaces of her art work... say that it transformed the *shakuhachi* subtlety one intuited woven within the monumentally beautiful, inspired tableaux, collages, and earth-toned markings of her Japanese period (works as radiant and mysterious as a tea bowl by Koetsu) into the jazzy, metropolitan joie de vivre landscapes and mappings on display in this current exhibition.
> ... it appears to this viewer that the signage (arrows, numbers, cross-hatchings, intersecting avenues) restlessly animating the imagery within her work of the past few years has now relaxed its quirky questing for a more open-hearted, resolved acceptance of the urban world... Lorraine Pritchard has perhaps left the haunting plains of Manitoba at last, and embraced Montreal as her home.
> ... a master of balance, and no matter how febrile her compositions may seem at times, the myriad forms always hold together in miraculous equilibrium; so too do the colors bright and breezy and occasionally bold ultimately cohere in a unity of emotional effect. One sees in these paintings and drawings the unmitigated passion for touch, almost an automatism, yet the result never seems intellectually contrived or forced;

> rather there exists a certain underlying, calm creative spirit, something akin to the Taoist's universal void from which all forms emerge. (Craig Scott Gallery, retrieved 08-12-09),

The artist-teacher's works found in Appendix XII (with permission) are not the specific ones that were in the artist-teacher's studio at the time, however, they do convey some of the non-representational qualities found in the artist-teacher's works as they are described above. These examples of her own artmaking affirmed that she did not seek to encourage realism, or representational and illustrative drawings or paintings by the participants. Whatever anxiety was first expressed by a few of the participants who thought they might be unqualified for participating in any kind of artmaking was quickly dispelled.

In one case, the older participant who had the least art experience had mentioned at the first study circle that she had been diagnosed as a child as having dysgraphia (a term used broadly to describe any difficulty in using an implement to write or draw). Remarkably, in the second studio she exclaimed to her great surprise that for the first time in her life she could "actually paint a face" (Mary, digital diary & Figure 8). It was regrettable that she could not continue participating since it would have been interesting to observe her work develop.

Figure 8. Mary's *first-ever* drawing of a face.

Although there was an open-endedness or experimental approach there appears to have been some unstated yet clear expectations according to this particular description by one of the participants about the studio sessions

> … the only constraints being mutual respect for the humans in the room and for the materials. Also, there was the unspoken expectation of group cooperation that kept the art sessions running smoothly. Examples include: washing up after yourself, not speaking over others, listening attentively, being actively involved in the conversation or the art exercise at hand. Being enthusiastic and encouraging of the work others produced (Julia, questionnaire).

There was never a question of sessions involving demonstrations of techniques. The artist-teacher encouraged exploration and individual expression. After a few of the first studios, she would sometimes work with us with the same materials, contemplative and focused. In our post-project interview the artist-teacher noted that this kind of facilitation was quite a change for her since her usual studio workshops involved teaching methods that are more instructional for the creation of various paper-based objects and collages (Pritchard, 2009). Although the artist-teacher has demonstrated through her own

art-making process that she has clear philosophical and spiritual concerns, she also mentioned that this was her first experience in directly considering the use of the visual arts to deepen the understanding, reflection, and responses to the study of Bahá'í thought, in the sense that Walker (2001) aptly describes as "big ideas".

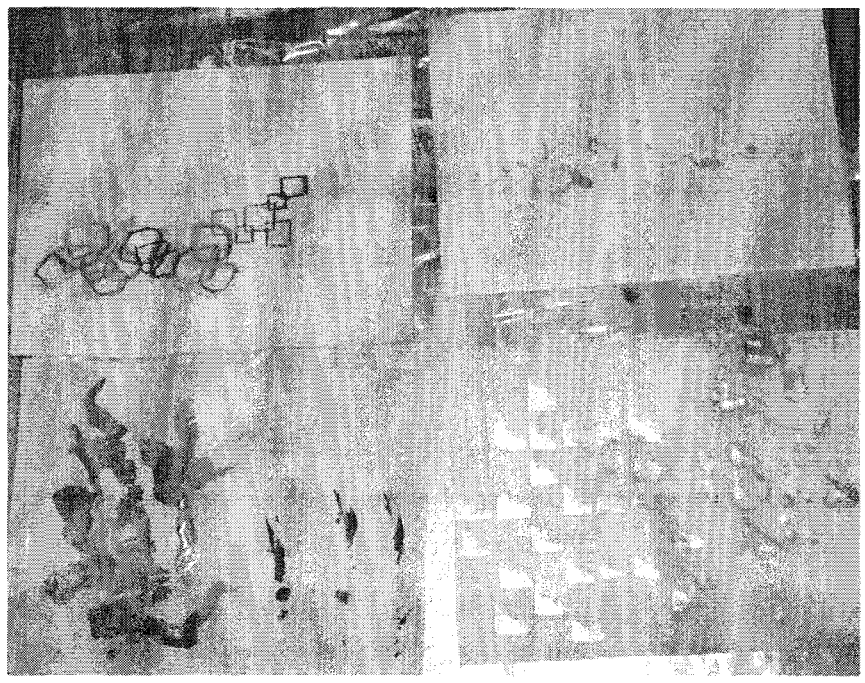

Figure 9. Early paintings by participants.

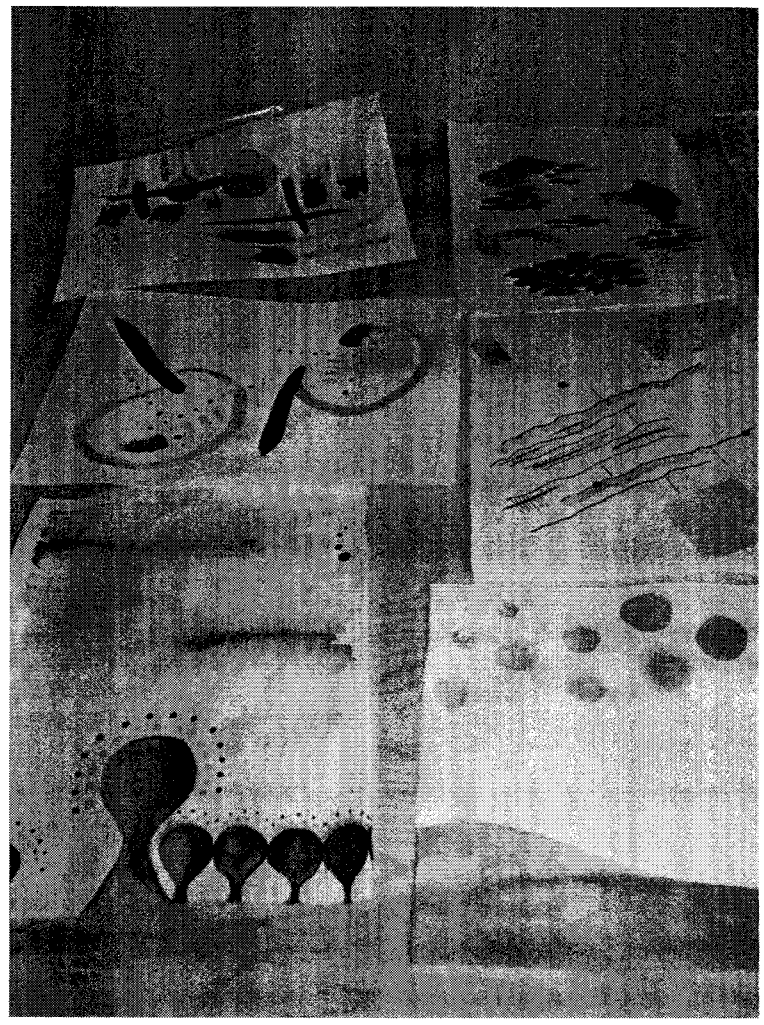

Figure 10. Participants' paintings drying.

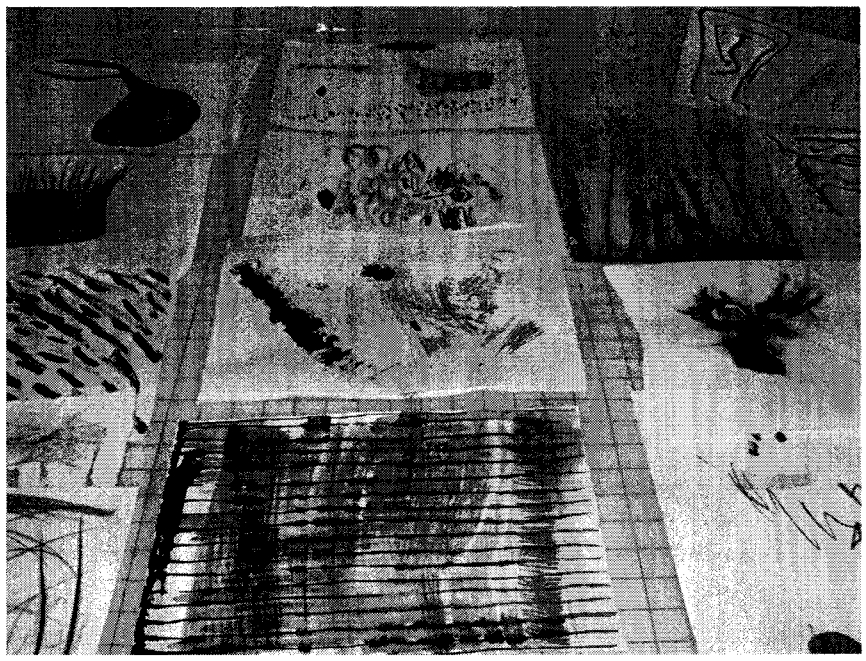

Figure 11. Participants' paintings drying on a table.

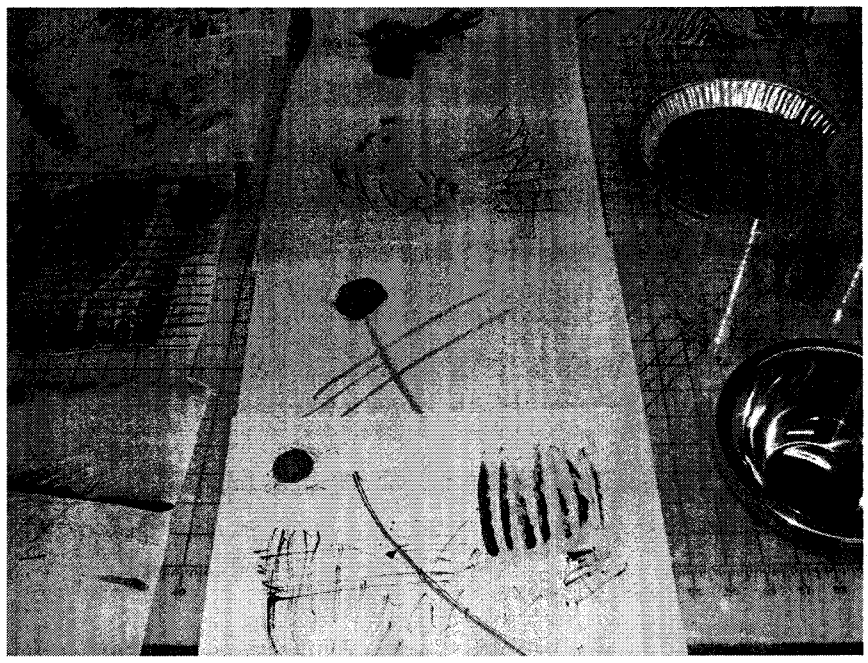

Figure 12. Paintings drying on a table.

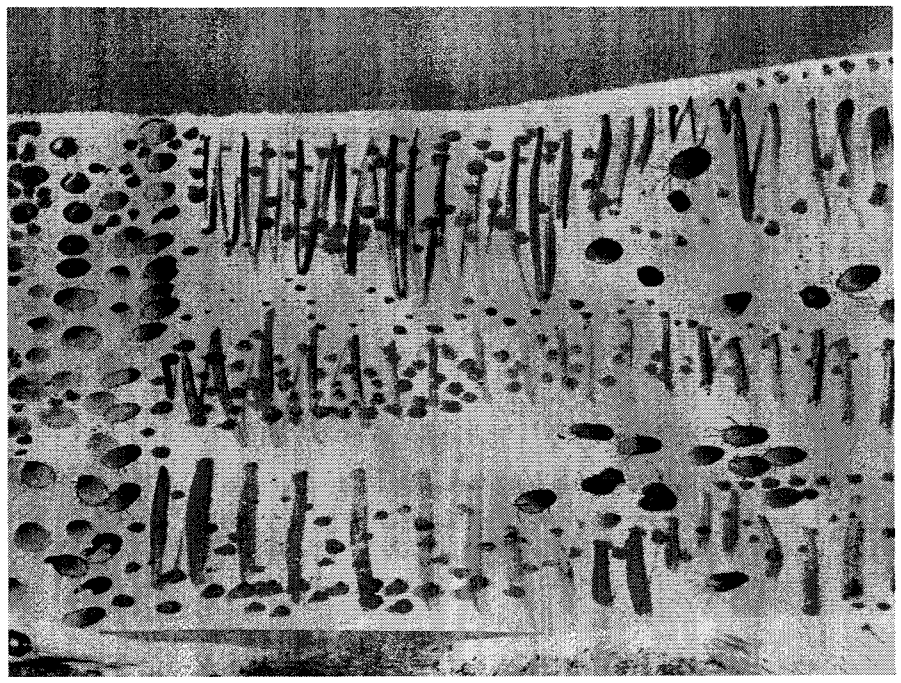

Figure 13. Playfulness and repetition theme.

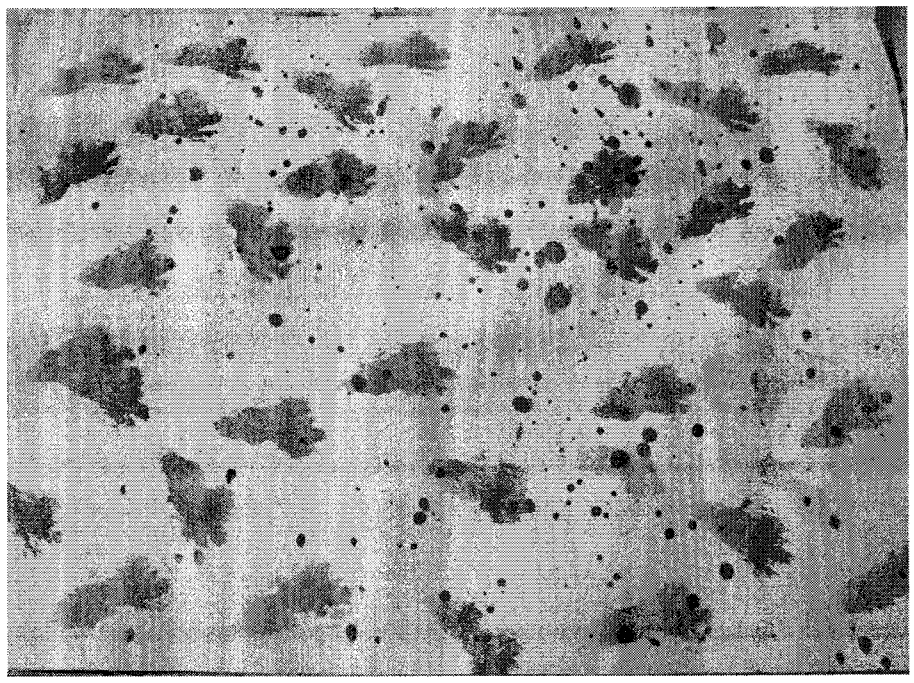

Figure 14. Repetition theme painted directly in participant-observer's journal.

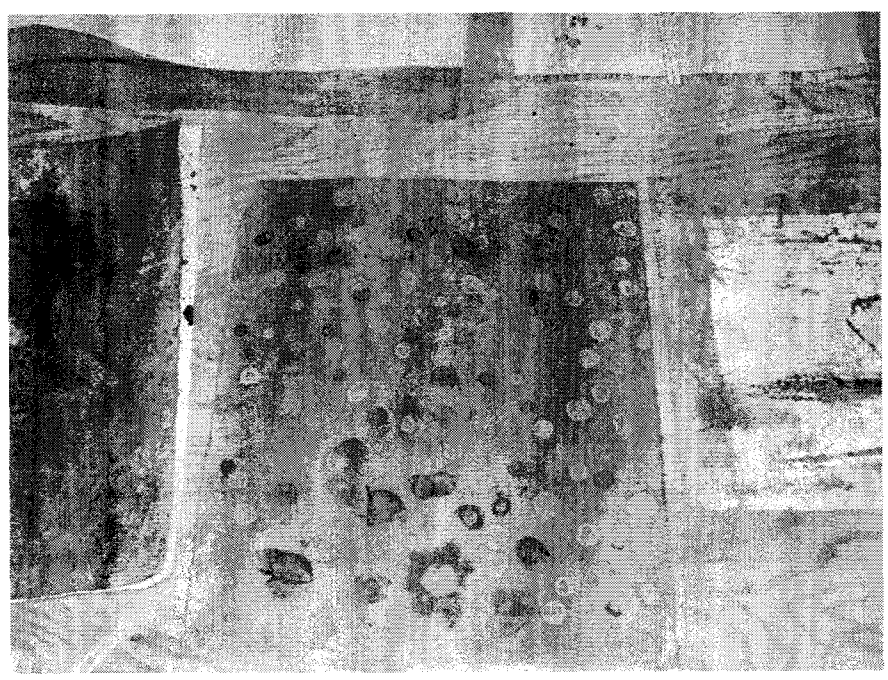

Figure 15. Paintings on the studio floor.

Figure 16. Participant's painting.

Dénouement

The study of the Bahá'í teachings about "big ideas" (Walker, 2001) that are found in *Ruhi–Book One* appeared to influence the overall atmosphere of helpfulness among the

participants. As a group, we functioned very effectively or as the facilitator noted in the later interview, the level of unity was unlike any earlier group he had previously facilitated (Lebensold, 2009). There are several examples where the actions of the participants indicated that a kind of solidarity existed such as: participants, of their own initiative, brought refreshments to the sessions; picked up after themselves at both sessions; who visited the participant who was ill; took ownership of the project as when one participant offered to host and facilitate a study circle while the others supported her initiative; and gave others lifts to the sessions. These are all examples of the qualities participants were encouraged to develop in the course of their studies. In other words, they found ways to be of service to one another in the diversity of circumstances in which they found themselves.

Before we completed the workbook in late February 2009, we consulted briefly at the last studio session about our plans for our last wrap-up session. We agreed to have an end of project celebration with a potluck supper at the home of the facilitator with a few friends and family. I noted in my journal that after supper we gathered together for a few prayers and dessert in the living room. The facilitator asked each of us a few questions about our experience and plans, and a few of us shared some of our artwork. I brought my journal in which I had folded and pasted various paintings on paper, which I had done during the studio sessions (Figures 17-21).

We also met another time, again at the facilitator's home, in mid-March 2009 at which time the artist-teacher gave a talk about what artmaking means to her as an artist and shared some of her experiences and ideas based upon some Bahá'í writings and

stories about art, work, service, and prayer. After she spoke, we were invited to the dining-room table where we painted together again, for one last time.

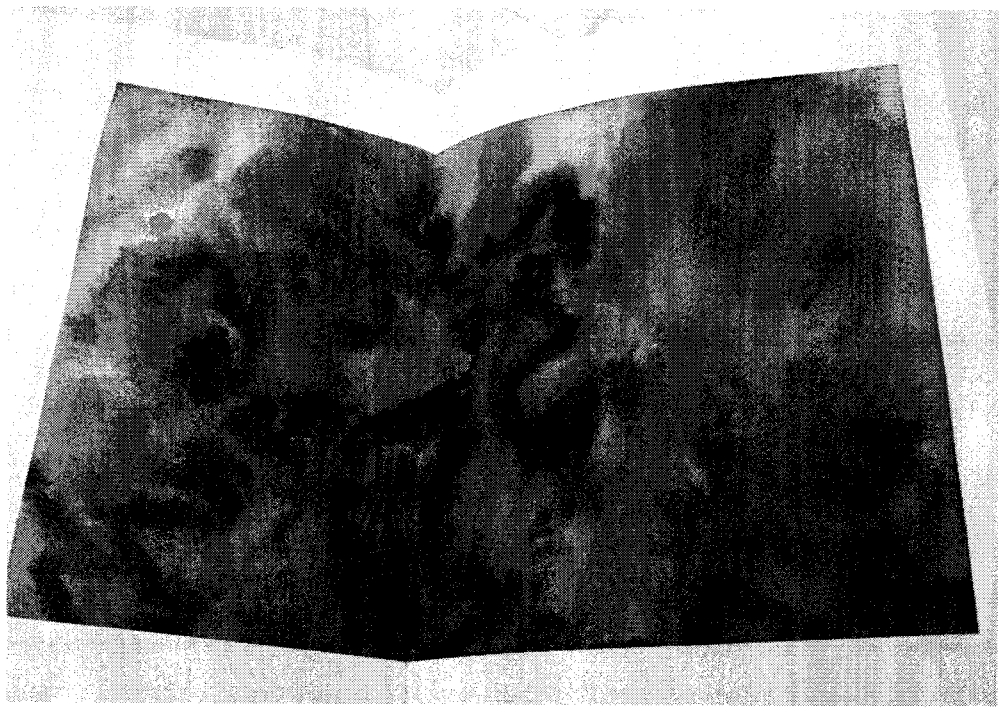

Figure 17. Painting folded and pasted into researcher's journal.

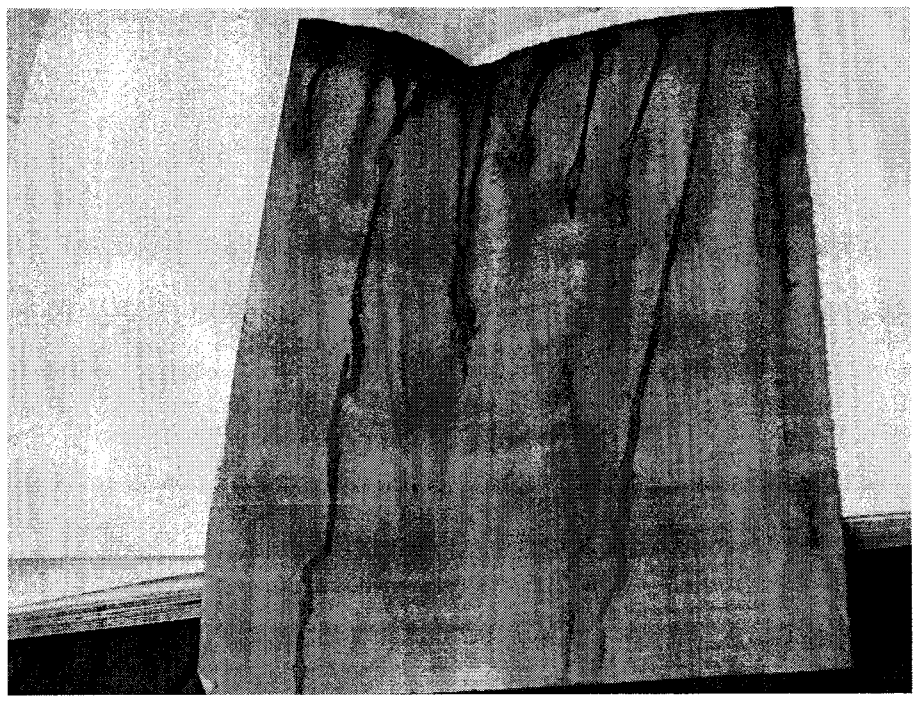

Figure 18. Painting folded and pasted in researcher's journal.

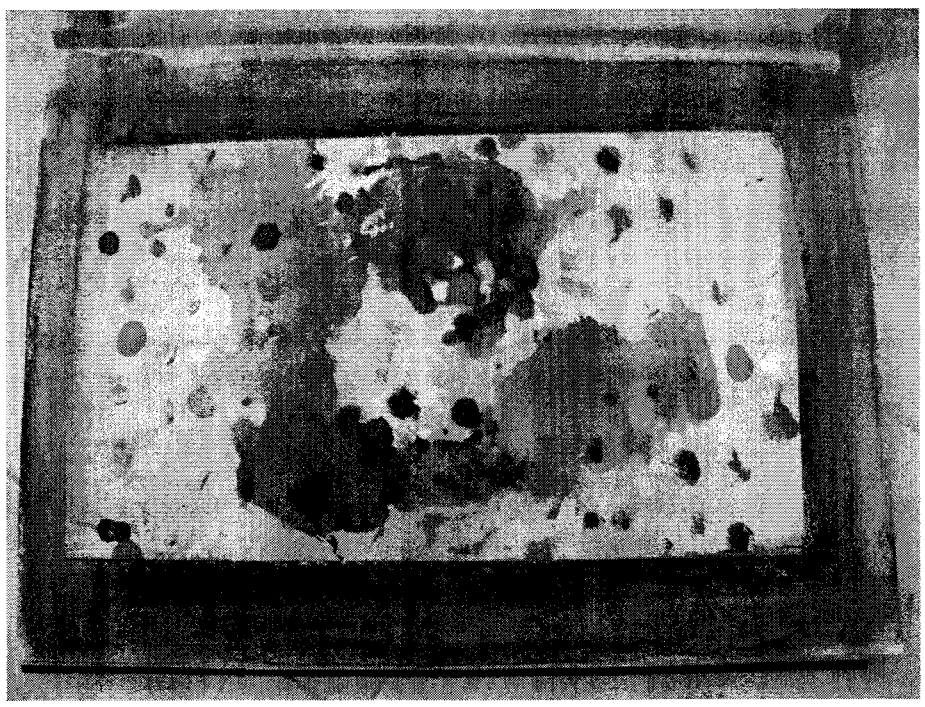

Figure 19. Painting pasted and framed in researcher's journal.

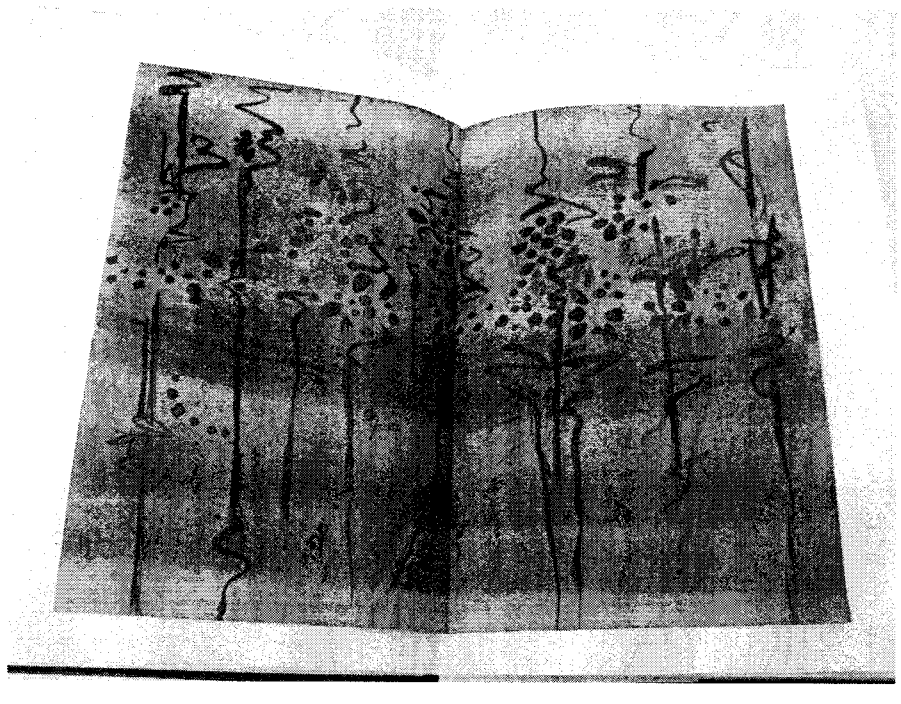

Figure 20. Painting folded and pasted in researcher's journal.

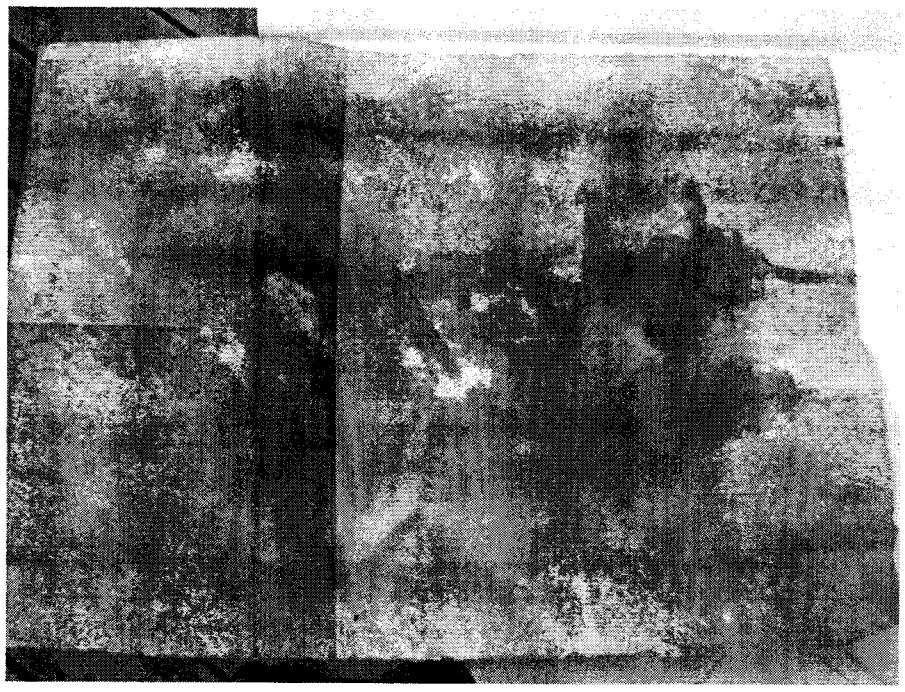

Figure 21. Painting pasted and folded into the researcher's journal.

The later end-of-session evening also included Mary who had been absent and who also brought a friend, and all the participants, except Tanya who was out of town. This particular session occurred because the artist-teacher offered to give a short talk about artmaking and suggested that we then have one last painting session together. She brought the materials and I set up the dining room table where the participants and the facilitator (for the first and only time) all painted together.

The artist-teacher spoke about her artmaking and recounted a story about 'Abdu'l-Bahá, son of Bahá'u'lláh, citing part of the notes of his a talk which he gave in London in 1912 in which he stated that

> ... arts, sciences and all crafts are worship. The man who makes a piece of notepaper to the best of his ability, conscientiously, concentrating all his forces on perfecting it, is giving praise to God. Briefly, all effort and exertion put forth by man from the fullness of his heart is worship, if it is prompted by the highest motives and the will to do service to humanity ... Service is prayer ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, pp. 176-177).

She related this to her own experience in Japan, where in traditional contexts there is little distinction between artists and craftspersons. She praised the humble attitudes of craftspersons, such as the fine papermakers, and noted that she was informed that it was inappropriate to thank someone for his or her work. I later consulted a long-time resident of Japan, originally from the United States, to ask her of her own understanding of this kind of convention. She explained that the more individualistic distinctions or the praises of an individual in a group or public setting, which are often expected and sought in North America, are an anathema in Japan.

Chapter 4: Findings

Participants' Feedback

As stated earlier, the purpose of the use of the arts was not to create artists but rather to enhance learning, practice, and reflection. Although this inquiry was not designed to assess the learning and practice of the participants, there were nevertheless indications through the comments of the participants and their questionnaire responses that the use of the arts made the study-circle process more interesting (Upitis & Smithrim, 2003).

When we first entered the studio we all marveled at the workspace, the interesting materials, the tools, and the artist-teacher's works. We began with the artist-teacher giving us a brief introduction to *washi* (a particularly fine yet resilient Japanese paper) and the use of various materials. We were then invited to use *conté* on *washi*. We were asked to use the material and reflect upon one excerpt studied in the study circle the previous week and to draw. The drawings were very elementary and tentative at first (Figures 6 & 7). We also had music in the background and its rhythmic quality appeared to have a greater influence on our work as the evening progressed. I borrowed these first drawings to photograph and we showed them to the facilitator at the following study circle.

Participant responses about the first studio were varied when the facilitator asked us about it the following week. One participant noted that the process was a "kind of a flip, to say don't analyze this" (Mary, participant-observer's journal). The studio session appeared to be an entirely new experience for her. I had also noted that this same participant described her experience as "cool and difficult, like learning a new language"

(Mary) and another first described the exercises as "intimidating" (Julia). Clearly, the participants experienced some anxiety in the first few studio sessions as they encountered exercises they had never before experienced.

Since the artist-teacher was out of town after the first studio, and I was concerned about what the next studio would involve, I decided at the end of the study circle prior to that studio to ask the participants to each bring in a personally significant object to share with one another at the beginning of the next studio and to reflect on one of the writings we had studied together. Since I did not know what her plans were, I wrote the artist-teacher an email telling her what we had covered in the study circle and what I had asked the participants to bring to the next studio. At that studio session the artist-teacher asked us to reflect about the writings we had studied and asked each of us about our own personally significant object. The objects were jewelry for two of the participants, a prayer-book cover, a tiny handwritten book by the participant's father, and a mask given to the participant by some friends. Before getting to the artmaking portion, the artist-teacher also presented her own personally significant object, which was a blank sheet of paper like the ones upon which we were about to begin our artmaking. The artist-teacher's unmarked sheet of paper, her personally significant object, segued nicely into the next portion. About a year before this inquiry, in an earlier interview (Maloney, 2007b), the artist-teacher had explained that the pristine surface of a canvas, which in this instance is a blank sheet of paper, has always represented the vast prairie landscape of her childhood. While she held up her sheet of paper the artist-teacher declared that it represents "a world of possibilties" (participant-observer's recollection).

During that studio session a few of the participants clearly related their significant objects to an excerpt from the Bahá'í writings that they also incorporated into their drawings (Figures 22 & 23). As the participant-observer, I thought that these participants appeared to be attempting to make connections between their particular reflections and their artmaking (Eisner, 2002, p. 77).

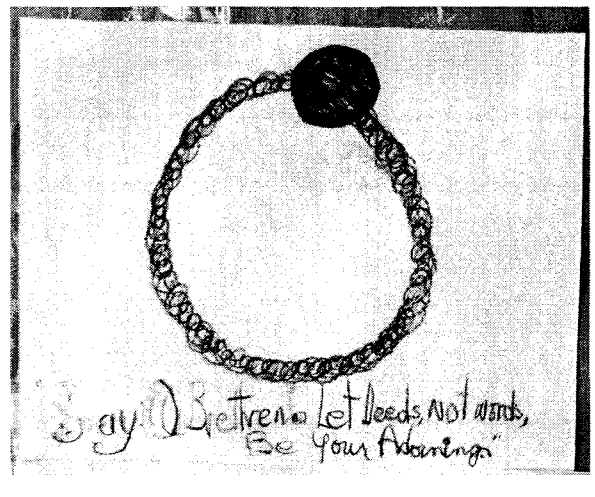

Figure 22. *Say O Brethren! Let deeds, not words, be your adorning* (Bahá'u'lláh).

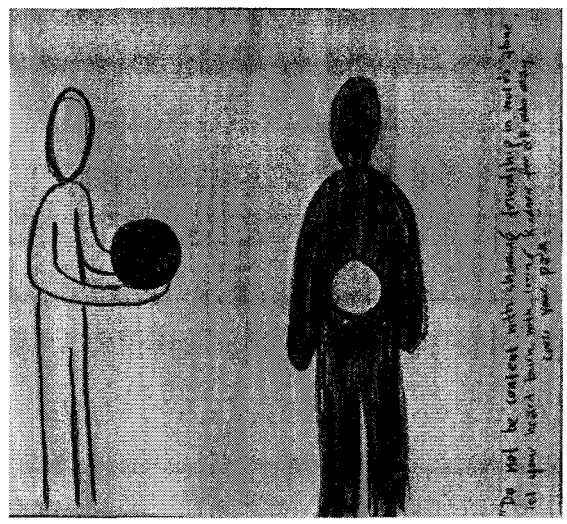

Figure 23. *Do not be content with the showing of friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path* ('Abdu'l-Baha).

By the third studio session the artist-teacher introduced the theme of collaboration between a poet and a visual artist and the concept of words inspiring visual art. We were

not taught any particular techniques or methods, rather we were invited to explore the drawing and painting materials. These materials were fine quality waterbased acrylic paint in a wide range of colors, with a great selection of different types and sizes of brushes, traditional western and oriental brushes, sticks, and implements, and various containers to mix paint and water (Figures 24 & 25).

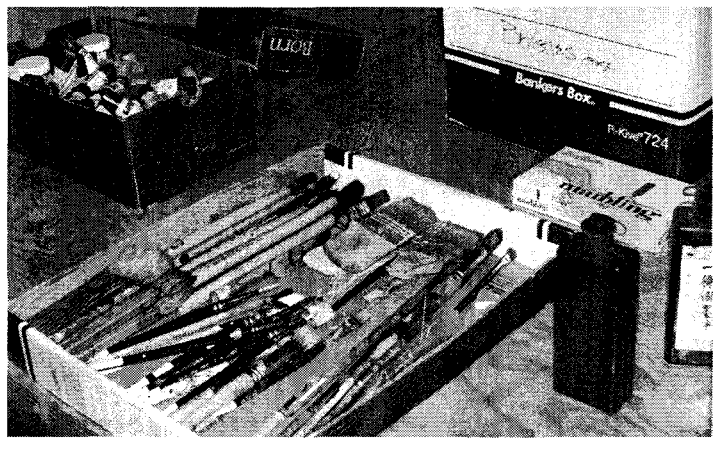

Figure 24. Various brushes, inks and paint.

Figure 25. Acrylic paints, inks, brushes and conté crayon.

As mentioned earlier, the artist-teacher and I had agreed during the first interview that introducing some music while the participants were artmaking might be a good idea

(Pritchard, 2008). What neither one of us considered, although it seems all too obvious now, was that we may not all have the same taste in music, or not find that the music suits or does not correspond with our own feelings about the concepts or the themes being examined, in addition to the simple fact that we may all prefer hearing it at different volumes.

At one of the early studio sessions the artist-teacher had some contemporary instrumental or jazz playing. One participant had to ask that the artist-teacher lower the volume. I was also disturbed by the music but did not say anything because of my inclination to let others respond to the environment rather than influencing events myself. The artist-teacher stopped having music after that session.

During the studio sessions, I noted that we had "informal conversations" that "were rich and more intimate. Some asked questions, others offered insights and information. ... a feeling of solidarity and interest in one another created an interesting and stimulating environment" (Observations, 2008). It was not apparent for a few more studios that what I had described as "informal conversations" among the participants were the source of some frustration for the artist-teacher. At one session just as we began working around the table and becoming a bit chatty, the artist-teacher rather suddenly interrupted our conversation, and specifically asked the group not to engage in idle chatter. She further explained that some conversation was welcome but that we should focus our verbal exchanges on the work at hand. We all took her request seriously and after a lull in our interactions we continued working in a rather heavy silence, all the more so, being made aware that we were there to focus on our artmaking.

The artist-teacher's intervention was surprising to me, and appeared to also be startling for the other participants. Only later did I understand what might have been the motives of the artist-teacher in having the music so loud earlier and also choosing to work with us in silence at the head of the worktable. Later, as I considered the sequence of these events, I understood that the artist-teacher might have been trying to tell us what her expectations were for studio practice through these *actions* rather than actually verbalizing them. When these expectations were not obvious for all, if not most of us, she then found herself having to make an abrupt verbal intervention to stop, explain her reasons, and redirect our attention to the work at hand.

In another early session the artist-teacher showed the participants how she has used journals over the years as an integral part of her artmaking. She then pointed to her bookshelves containing dozens of journals in various formats of bound books in which she also kept some loose notes. At the following studio I also brought a few books about journals and journaling (Kahlo, 2000; New, 2005) to offer more examples of its value and diverse purposes. The book about Kahlo's diaries is full of her rich and spontaneous drawings and writing, which caught the interest of the participants and the artist-teacher (Kahlo, 2000). One participant borrowed the book and commented on the way the bleed-through from the other side of the pages in the original diaries were reproduced in the book, giving it a feeling of authenticity (Adam, participant-observer's recollection).

In the study circle, while studying the last of the three sections of the workbook, we read and discussed questions pertaining to the purpose of life and life after death. In the studio during this same period we spent an evening considering the concept of memory and rememberance. Although the themes were not linked or associated directly

to each other by either the facilitator or the artist-teacher, the participants may have considered these kinds of associations, at least I did, but we did not have occasion to discuss the theme or the works in the studio that evening. When I told one participant that his piece seemed quite evocative, he mentioned that it was about a childhood memory (Adam). At that studio session I had also responded with memories of a specific time, place, and a feeling of being with an old friend now long gone (Figure 26).

Figure 26. On theme of memory and remembrance, titled, *Memories of R.W.*

Unfortunately, on that evening and several others, some of the participants had to leave early so we did not have the opportunity to discuss our work together. The artmaking and looking at the works increasingly became an individual rather than a group activity.

The participants' questionnaire responses about the study circle and the studio sessions described their experience as "rewarding" and "refreshing" in contrast to their everyday world (Tanya, Adam, Julia). One participant stated that, "I enrolled in the Ruhi course so that I could have a scheduled time each week to forget the stresses of everyday life and be surrounded by people focusing on spiritual matters" (Tanya). Another stated that she "felt a true yearning and excitement to see everyone every week. It was the highlight of my week" (Julia).

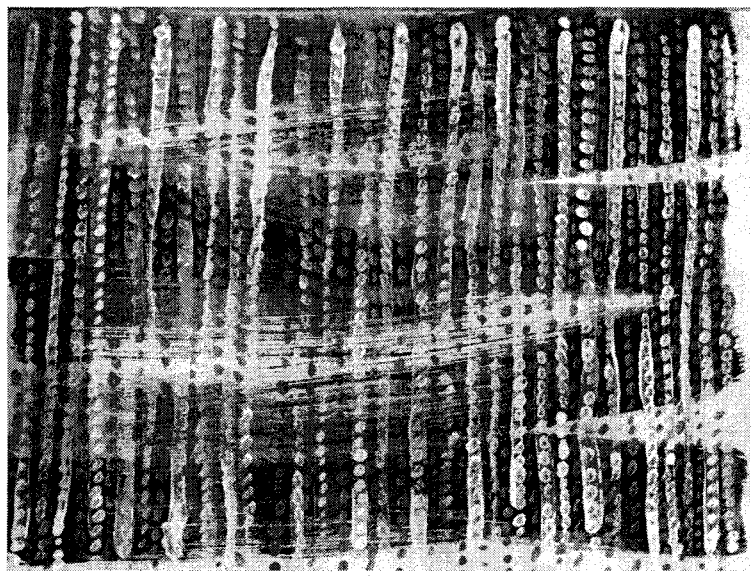

Figure 27. One of Julia's first paintings.

Often, Julia, who is an extraordinary baker, brought goodies to share with all of us. On one occasion, she offered to make and sell us each some of her own homemade skin cream, which was more economical to make in large quantities. We each ordered the quantity we wanted and she made some for all of us. The cream was of such good quality that some of us were disappointed we had not ordered more. Her creativity came out in a number of ways to the delight of all the participants. This kind of thoughtfulness and generosity among the participants may have been an important element that contributed

to the level of unity the facilitator mentioned as the outstanding feature of this particular group of participants (Lebensold, 2009).

Mary, who had to leave for health reasons, unexpectedly chose to answer the questionnaire like the others since she had continued to receive my emails to the group about scheduling and organizing the last sessions. In her responses she noted that the bonds of friendship continued while she was in hospital and during her recovery. I was one of the participants who continued to keep in touch with her, though in my case I cannot credit the study circle as the reason for the continued contact since I have known this individual for over two decades. There were, however, other participants who did not know her at all and continued to be in touch. In this particular participant's response to the questionnaire she indicated that, "I was touched by the love and support offered to me when I was 'walking my own valley of worry'" (Mary). Although I recognize that the study circle was not the only reason for this behavior by the other participants, since it is customary for many if not all of us to care for the ill, I have come to recognize that the daily practice of reflecting about striving to live as a good human being, may have sensitized participants about their own circumstances and those of others. This process may have helped to make further and ever-increasing connections between our thoughts and our actions, which is part of the process of the development of mindfulness and spirituality (Hatcher, 1982).

In their responses, the participants indicated that the writings studied and the way the group was facilitated brought them closer to one another (Adam, Julia, Tanya). Mary was more guarded in her written response, when she stated that, "It was an interesting contrast of personalities so I felt the experience was rich", which could be interpreted as

either positive or negative. I understood better when she shared some of her feelings during our celebratory get-together saying she found the style of facilitation quite "challenging". Julia expressed it in a different way

> Ruhi study was significantly more 'strict' feeling in the sense that i [*sic*] felt I had to take my cue from someone when and how I should speak. It wasn't a free for all, let's say (Julia, questionnaire).

Although there was no question asking specifically about the gender of the facilitators, for Adam, the only male participant, the gender of the facilitators appeared to be significant since he noted that he "...would liken it to having a mother and a father". On the other hand, Julia saw the facilitators as "two 'authority figures'" when she noted

> I thought the two 'authority figures' balanced each other out. It was nice to have a change of pace every other week. It never got boring. I feel I have incredibly deep and loving friendships with all people in my ruhi [*sic*] group and art group (Julia, questionnaire).

It is interesting to note that Julia describes *two* groups, whereas I saw it as a single group whose members participated in two different activities. Her choice of words may be interpreted to suggest that she regarded the two activities as so unrelated to each other that she saw them as two groups; or it could be interpreted as a way for her to include both facilitators in her statement.

As a young mother, Julia also described how she "...started putting the quotes [from the workbook]...to song. Singing these tunes to ... my son has really helped remind me of their message and apply them to my life" (Julia, questionnaire). Note that Julia's earlier university studies were principally in dance and she is describing how her artmaking, in this case her singing, mirrored *meaning* through *practice*. In this instance, that *meaning* is about making connections between spirituality (studied in the study circle), the use of the arts (singing), and her everyday life (caring for her child).

Although Julia was describing the art of song, she also noted that the "...art component made me want to attend all the more" and concluded that, "Ruhi and art go great together like cheese and crackers" (Julia, questionnaire). Her response about the "art component" here indicates the artmaking sustained her interest in the ongoing study activity.

Adam, who had studied art and design, shared further insights as to how a relationship between creativity and spirituality was nurtured

> Introducing my creative side to my spiritual side and realizing that they'd known each other for a long time. ...I have learned that I can make art with no goal and with no audience. Because I work in creative fields, I feel like I've found spiritual justification for it [artmaking] from a process point of view. I feel like a [*sic*] bonded with the other participants... because we shared more of ourselves by sharing our art with each other... *It extended the spiritual dialogues from the Ruhi course into my everyday life* (Adam, questionnaire, parentheses and italics added).

One of the younger respondents noted that she felt "...a more profound understanding of the study materials and a sense of confidence in my creative capacities" and concluded that

> I would strongly recommend incorporating the arts (be it visual, dramatic, musical or otherwise) into future study circles. Firstly, I think it can serve to bring a group even closer together, which is invaluable in a curriculum that is meant to be teaching lessons about community life and serving our fellow man. Secondly, it can help individual participants explore and expand their own creative capacities. And finally, it can teach the daily practice and discipline required of us in our professional, emotional and spiritual pursuits (Tanya, questionnaire).

Although she also frankly admitted that

> I found it difficult to overcome my own insecurities about my artistic skills, whether at home on my own working in my journal, or at the studio with the group. I was very concerned with what my art looked like and how I fared [*sic*] when compared to everyone else. I came in with a preconceived notion of what good art is and it took me a while to let go, create and then embrace my creation. It was a challenge to internalize the

> fact that art is subjective and that there are many paths to Beauty (Tanya, questionnaire).

Shortly after the project ended, Tanya pursued further visual-arts studies and subsequently began working in computer-assisted graphics and design. When I later asked her if I was correct in my understanding that her experience in the use of the arts had influenced these choices she wrote back that, "I can say without hesitation that my experience in the study circle reaffirmed my desire to pursue graphic design and explore further how the arts can me [*sic* be] used in community building efforts" (Tanya, email, April 22, 2010).

Another response is an example of the mindfulness in one participant who eloquently stated that

> The third section on Life after Death REALLY [*sic*] made a huge impact on how I see my relationship with my father and made me realize the necessity of healing that relationship and becoming spiritually healthy in my interactions with him (Julia, questionnaire).

The settings and regularity of the sessions were well appreciated by all the participants. One participant, who had described the study circle as a little "strict", also described the studio atmosphere in that

> … the only constraints being mutual respect for the humans in the room and for the materials. Also, there was the unspoken expectation of group cooperation that kept the art sessions running smoothly. Examples include: washing up after yourself, not speaking over others, listening attentively, being actively involved in the conversation or the art exercise at hand. Being enthusiastic and encouraging of the work others produced (Julia, questionnaire).

The participants seemed to appreciate having two different facilitators and one of them noted that

> …I'm sure that one person could have done both but the alternating weeks allowed each to bring more energy and insight to the meetings. ...

> What was most meaningfrul [*sic*] about this experience for me was that I was involved in something new and original. ... It reminded me that I am happiest when involved in the creative process. This became most apparent a few weeks after finishing the studio sessions when I felt a longing to be back in that space...(Tanya, questionnaire).

When Mary had unexpectedly answered the questionnaire, she made no mention that we were all there to "help" the researcher to do this project, however on two different occasions she had made that statement to all the participants. It would be remiss to ignore this although none of the other participants responded to her comments thereby indicating neither agreement nor disagreement with this individual's perspective. Since there were no responses to her statement, and the participants were all engaged in their own experience over a seven-month period, it would seem that they were genuinely interested in and committed to what this experience could offer them.

Participant-observer's Responses

After the sessions, I usually wrote some of my observations on my laptop, which became my digital diary (Observations.pdf, 2008-2009). My reflections also involved drawing and writing in my journal at home, looking at the photos I had taken of the studio, and some of the artworks produced by the participants. There were also email messages that I have kept as part of my records. They were usually from the facilitators or myself to the participants and occasionally from a participant to keep us informed that she or he would not be attending an upcoming session. These email communications are stored on my hard disk.

My digital notes indicate that after the first interviews, the two facilitators and I seemed to have stronger feelings of collaboration and there developed a greater rapport

between the two facilitators as they started to communicate by phone and email about the details of the first meetings and further define their respective roles (Observations, 2008).

Several months after the end of the sessions I realized that I had not thought to answer my own questionnaire as a participant. My only excuse is that having a multi-faceted role quite literally created this blind spot. It was only when I read the participants' questionnaires more carefully that I realized that there was one missing. I had entirely forgotten my participant-observer role immediately after the sessions finished and shifted into my role as researcher. Everything had become a sea of data while both the participant and the observer roles faded into the distance. This indicated to me, as researcher, that I often saw myself as an outsider and that I had to now consciously ask myself the question: What about me? I was a participant too. What do I think of my own experience during these sessions? I concluded that it was better late than never and answered the questionnaire.

As such incidents occurred I also became more aware of my own reflexivity. Here I mean reflexivity as a process of introspection as to the interpretation and the subjectivity of my understanding of the events and the data for the purposes of this qualitative inquiry (Finlay, 2002, p. 209). Unlike the other respondents, I found the whole study circle and studio experience to be "Scary ... I did not know what to expect and felt ... responsible for having the project happen." Since I had also read the responses of the other participants, I found it "...thrilling to see how much the other participants enjoyed the experience" and I also "...loved the settings ... I especially enjoyed having access to such a well organized and spacious studio dedicated to artmaking" (Suzanne,

questionnaire). The others really appreciated it too, though one of them mentioned that the location of the studio made it a bit far for her to get there.

As for having two facilitators, I found that "...the relationship between the two activities was unclear, and not directly related" and added that, "maybe that's good otherwise their use of the material would be literal, contrived and word-based, rather than un-uttered experience" (Suzanne, questionnaire). I had not realized at the time I wrote my response but what I meant by "un-uttered experience" is similar to *reflective practice* or that of becoming "a researcher in the practice context" (Schön, 1983, p. 68). What was particularly challenging was being "... both an observer and a participant and sometimes forgetting one for the other or not knowing how to see from one perspective and not the other, or not clearly seeing distinctions between them" (Suzanne, questionnaire).

For myself, as the researcher and the participant-observer, the journal became a powerful metaphor for daily practice and an invaluable tool in reconstructing and recalling my experiences and the sequence of events.

Frames of Reference

Eisner (2002) suggests that, "...frames of reference make a huge difference in *what* we see" (p. 85, italics added). However much these frames of reference are important, Eisner also adds that "...there is a caveat. Although frames of reference provide an aperture through which we can secure a focus, every frame excludes as well as includes. ... *a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing*" (p.85-86, italics added). One of the most challenging aspects of this inquiry was to examine, to understand, and to interpret the experiences of the three architects in the creation of this project in the context of their own frames of reference as facilitator and as artist-teacher, and my own

frames of reference as a researcher, and as a participant-observer. Through this process, I have come to a better understanding of the challenges involved and how they may be met. I therefore examined their experience within their particular "frame of reference" (Eisner, 2002, p. 85-6) and thus, in light of their respective roles and functions.

Frames of reference helped me as the researcher focus on particular representations of experience, which viewed in relationship to each other also created new meaning and insights. This inquiry was an opportunity to see learning from inside, out and around the edges. Eisner goes so far as to say that in educational programs "...the curriculum is a mind-altering device" (2002, p. 13) and, in this context, it also helped to shape and to define the experience itself.

The Ruhi Curriculum was what we all had in common and helped to guide us with a few underlying constructivist principles such as underscoring participants' responsibility for their own learning and practice; offering a facilitator approach to learning, suitable settings and resources to encourage participation and ownership by the participants themselves; and using questions, discussion and artmaking to encourage reflection.

The Curriculum also directed us toward a common destination that could simply be defined as the completion of *Ruhi–Book One.* Given our different roles, expectations and circumstances, it was fortunate that the Ruhi Curriculum had this unifying and cohesive influence on all of us. It served as a roadmap and offered an open framework through which we each brought the project forward given our particular understanding, circumstances and available resources.

The researcher's frame of reference

The frame of reference for myself as researcher involved the overall project within an art-education context and included: the Ruhi Curriculum, the planning, some of the coordination and communications, the theoretical underpinnings, and attempting to effectively examine the research itself in light of the literature, all of which encompassed my observer-participant experiences, my records and documentation.

I have come to understand my own frame of reference as quite different from my somewhat vague ideas and thoughts when I first considered this project. In the beginning I saw myself at the centre rather than as being *in, and out, and around the edges* since I was not even familiar with what the edges were or where they lay. As the project evolved, the work of scholars and experts became more pertinent and meaningful. First I began with access to a workable and field-tested Curriculum with which I was familiar, and I had the academic resources with which I could begin an inquiry on the use of the visual arts using this Curriculum in a community-based context. Frankly, I first imagined myself orchestrating and organizing "everything".

As I prepared to submit my research proposal, my daughter and I casually discussed the project. As an actor trained to work in teams with other individuals who all have very specific responsibilities, my daughter helped me clarify, define, and better understand the steps and roles involved in actually structuring this project and making it a realistic undertaking. I realized that the project did not need me to "do everything". The corollary to this dramatic change in perspective also meant my having to drop any illusions I had harbored of "controlling" this project. Her few questions and suggestions resulted in a shift in my own thinking; I was no longer at the centre and a new perspective was emerging out of this brief but eye-opening conversation.

I realized that I had to have two other individuals who, over several months, could facilitate one of the two major activities in this project. I needed to observe and to participate rather than "orchestrate" the project once the sessions would begin. I felt some anxiety as it became clear that by involving others, I would consequently be observing, participating, documenting, and trusting the two facilitators to be capable and dependable to facilitate the group as they saw fit.

The next turn in the road arose through the thoughtful questions of the members of my thesis committee. With their questions and suggestions there emerged features of the project, which I had not yet considered. Although we did not discuss this when we met, among these fears was my own fear of failure. I first thought this fear was about failure in bringing the project to completion, while I later realized that I also feared failing to create a positive experience for the participants.

I attribute this particular somewhat unconscious preoccupation to being a woman, the eldest and only daughter of a family of three children who was expected to always help out and when necessary, take charge. Being the mother of two now-grown-up children and having cared for some of my elders, I had found myself thinking in this same *caretaker* way about the facilitators and the participants. I had to learn how to distinguish between these different *frames of mind*: caretaker and researcher. I unconsciously first saw myself as caretaker rather than researcher. Throughout the course of this inquiry this gender-based theme emerged whenever any care or coordination issue would arise and the struggle continued between the two patterns of thought and behavior these roles engender (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006).

My frame of reference was first based on entirely different values involving the need to *care* for the project and its participants, much like caring for my own children. Interceding or guiding children is a form of essential care; in fact under certain circumstances, if a parent does not intercede such inaction can be interpreted as neglect; whereas a researcher interceding can be regarded as a breach in research protocol, influencing the data and thus the outcome. Although a researcher can and even should *care*, what is cared *for* and *how* care is exercised has a different purpose and objective. Care for the integrity of the research and ethical regard for the participants are the exercise of care, however this research has helped me to understand that it is care unlike that of a mother or primary caregiver, and one which needed my consideration throughout the project rather than my intercession.

Without the benefit of the scholarly resources and experienced researchers, I would have had no hope of carrying out this inquiry. Although the pre-project interviews with each facilitator first helped me better understand my own "frame of reference" since the sessions themselves had not begun, I only had an inkling of what this inquiry would entail. Once the project ended and I began to write, new and deeper issues and questions demanded further scholarly resources and reflection. I was just beginning to see my own frame of reference emerging.

The participant *frame of reference* became more distinct, largely defined and determined by the facilitators and their respective resources except insofar as the extent to which these adult participants, who have their own life experience and resources, chose to explore and develop their own reflection and artmaking process beyond the confines of the group activities. In my own case, having two roles in the sessions allowed

me to be more playful with my own artmaking. This added vantage point gave me the impression of being hyperaware, enhancing my own feeling of freedom in the work. The experience of both roles also helped me become more aware of my own reflexivity (Finlay, 2002) rather than reflexivity being a term limited to book descriptions and definitions.

One such example in which both reflexivity and a constructivist approach came to the fore occurred through an unexpected and anxiety-ridden experience related to the study circle. At one of the study circles the facilitator informed the group that both he, and our regular meeting place, would not be available. He explained that he had to host an unforeseen meeting in his home, in our regular meeting place and at our regular time.

I first heard of this change before the other participants when the facilitator also informed me that he planned to bring it to the participants for consultation. I had immediately thought about finding a solution to this unexpected situation by myself when instead, the facilitator explained that he would put the subject to the participants to find a solution through everyone's participation in a consultative process. At that point my less obvious, suppressed role as the *caretaker* suddenly came to the fore rather than the *researcher*, and I found myself having to exercise extreme restraint in not interfering with the facilitator's plan.

To my relief and astonishment, the consultation with the group resulted in a solution I could not have imagined. One of the youngest participants spontaneously offered to host and facilitate the following study circle in her home (Tanya). A fortnight later we met in this interim facilitator's home where she modeled the facilitator's

approach to the study circle, simply continued where we had left off, and we had an excellent session without even a blip.

No one except the facilitator knew how concerned I was before that group consultation, nor did the participants realize how delighted and relieved I was to see the emergence of confidence, trust, collaboration, and ownership of the project by the participants themselves. The interim facilitator was confident and empowered, and the other participants were able to accept and work with her service to the group and to the project. Since she both hosted and facilitated, other participants brought and helped with refreshments. This was one clear instance where the attitudes and dispositions of the facilitator and the participants became evident through their own agency, and demonstrated how the very qualities studied and discussed in the Curriculum were put into practice.

I was quite disappointed that the journal was not as fully used and enjoyed by the other participants as I had imagined it would be. I also realized that my own journal, as a record of some of the activities and comments, did not serve the same purpose as it did for the others. I brought my journal to each study circle and each studio, and used it to write, paint, or use as a practice surface to see how colors would look when applied to a white surface with a particular implement. I also pasted doodles done on agendas and notes at other meetings, and papers from places I had been, into my journal. It became a record of my activities and reflections both in and outside the *frame of reference* that helped to better define, describe and in the process, to more deeply understand the nature of this inquiry (Figures 28, 29).

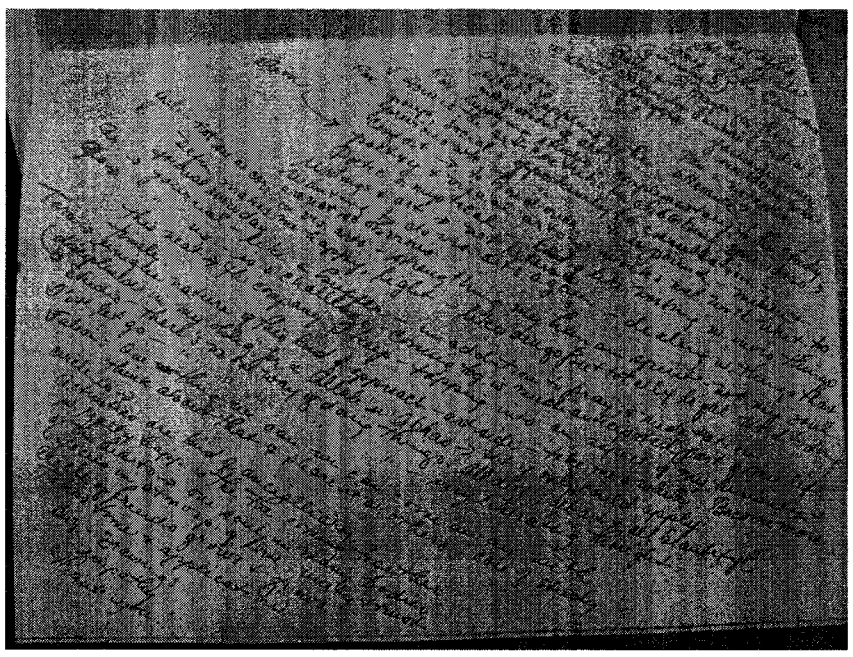

Figure 28. Journal notes.

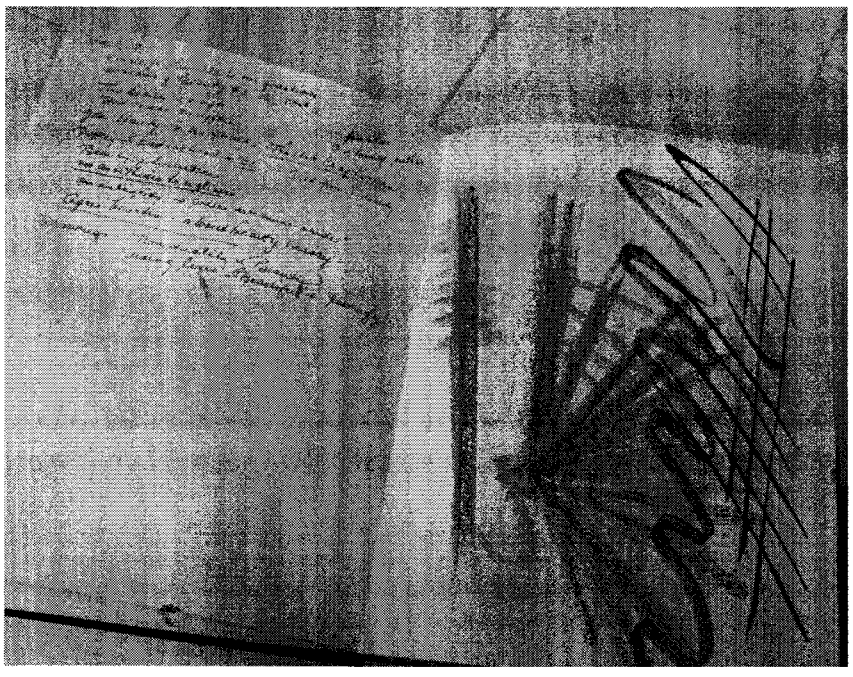

Figure 29. Journal notes and experiments.

Another reason for consistently bringing my journal to both activities was to prompt the other participants to consider its diverse uses. I was consciously hoping to demonstrate or influence the participants as to how their own journals could be used in much the same way that the artist-teacher tried to create a "proper" studio atmosphere. Although aware that this could be regarded as manipulative, I also regarded it simply as a participant who wanted to use my journal in the studio. Since I was not intervening I concluded that in this instance it was not manipulative. The artist-teacher would sometimes comment about the creative ways I used my journal. She may have been using it as a prompt to encourage others to use their journals although I have no data to indicate that this was her intention.

The facilitator's frame of reference

The facilitator's frame of reference was composed of the Curriculum, the study circle and the participants, and the feedback from the participants about the previous studio session whether it was verbally, through their journals, or their art works. When I interviewed the facilitator after the project ended, there were many aspects of his experience that emerged in the interview, which I would not have discovered or understood otherwise.

I met the facilitator for the post-project interview at our home in April 2009. He confirmed some of the feelings and experiences much like those expressed by the participants yet; he also expressed frustration about having the two activities so distinct from each other, in time, in locale, and in having two different facilitators working so independently from one another.

> I didn't get a sense of continuity. ...I did attempt at times to have people bring in their workbooks [journals]...but it would have been much better

> if we [the facilitator and the artist-teacher] had both been present at both sessions. ...I didn't feel there was coherence. ...our activities were disjoint. We were aware what each other was doing but...did not become involved with each other's activities" (Lebensold, 2009, parentheses added).

I had not noticed any indications of the facilitator's feelings of disjointedness and frustration as the participant-observer over those many months during the project. On one or two occasions outside the study circle the facilitator had told me that he wished the artist-teacher would be present at the study sessions, and would have liked to be at some of the studio sessions. The artist-teacher had also expressed to me her wish to be at the study-circle sessions as mentioned earlier. There were physical limitations and time constraints for both of them and neither took the initiative to invite each other or to express their wish to be present at each other's sessions. It was only toward the end of the project that the artist-teacher offered to speak about art and artmaking at the facilitator's home as part of the end-of-project celebration. Clearly there lacked communication between the facilitators.

During this same interview the facilitator indicated that he

> ... had the feeling that the study portion informed the artmaking more than the art portion informed the study portion. I got the feeling that study of the texts helped the group in their artmaking. I'm not sure how much the artmaking helped them in the study of the text (Lebensold, 2009).

The experience was not the same for the participants however, when, for example in one participant's response she stated that the "art component" sustained the study component, her interest in the study activity, and encouraged her to make connections with her daily life (Julia, questionnaire). All of the participants found the art sustained the study circle. On the other hand, it appears that from the facilitator's perspective or within his frame of reference, he could not see the influence of the artmaking on the study

portion.

When the facilitator described how he was unable to see the reciprocal influences that the activities had on each other, he added that he "may be the only one who felt this."

> It was challenging…trying to integrate the artmaking…with the study of the text. …given the two different locations…I found, I just don't know if it [integration] happened or not (Lebensold, 2009, parentheses added).

He offered a number of suggestions as to how to improve this kind of approach

> …all [activities] to take place in one place…artist-teacher or not even, but definitely in one locale. ... That might contribute to a more integrated sensation…having it in one place with a portion of the evening on text and the other on artmaking (parentheses added).

When I noted that there might not be enough time to do both in one evening he responded saying

> Artmaking doesn't need to take that long especially if it was integrated. …If it was all done in one locale. …One evening devoted to both, not two hours but three is fine. …How to do it? Have both go on at the same time…and pause, and then come back and integrate it much more. Good start but needs to be a much tighter integration.

He further suggested different possibilities to integrate the study and the artmaking in the same place and added

> I don't know how much an artist is needed. …participants not learning art from the artist-teacher but simply having access to materials, and artist may not necessarily be essential. …didn't see the artmaking had an effect on the study of the texts. …the biggest change is the relationships of the participants.
>
> ... need somebody no matter what subject it is, a good teacher instills confidence in students. Skilled artist may terrorize rather than being encouraging which is what a facilitator is supposed to do. Materials… technical knowledge that can be easily acquired.

When I asked him if there was anything particularly remarkable about this project.

> ...the sense of unity...amongst the participants. I definitely got the feeling that the artistic component really helped. That working together in an artistic...[way? word unclear or unfinished] really strengthened that. They seemed to feel a stronger sense of unity and commitment to each other, more than I've seen in other study circles (Lebensold, 2009, parentheses added).

Since we were using a Curriculum that is word-based, would it not be more likely that the study circle would *inform* the art-making sessions more than the art-making sessions inform the study circle? Although I understand the facilitator's frustrations, I think he was the one who experienced the disjointedness and isolation most acutely. None of the participants expressed any such feelings and neither did the artist-teacher.

To also note that in the facilitator's case, he did see the photos I took of the studio setting and some of the art and artmaking over the course of the project. Nevertheless, had the facilitator attended at least some of the studio sessions it might have helped alleviate his sense of isolation.

Several months after the project was completed, I discovered that, as a result of further reflection about the integration of the arts, the facilitator had actually changed his own "frame of reference" when he facilitated a subsequent study circle made up of four participants. When I asked the facilitator about it, he said that he had decided to integrate the arts in a more direct and systematic way. Although the facilitator is not an artist, he has had professional training and experience in music, visual arts, graphic design, and photography, so his own earlier experience with artmaking may have given him the confidence to try a new approach.

In this later study circle, the facilitator expected the participants to do their artmaking at home based upon what they had been studying the week before. He noted that there was some resistance to the idea at the beginning but they all accepted to at least

try. Every week one of the participants had to present an artistic work to the group. He described his approach as more "directive" in that he stated his expectations. Yet, it was also a more self-directed approach (Knowles, 1975) in that participants were free to choose their own media and materials. The works that resulted were drawings; two small oil paintings; a few collages; origami; a mobile and lampshade; and one participant composed and performed songs for voice and guitar using some of the writings studied. One of them created various computer-generated and multi-media works that were strongly reminiscent of Walker's concept about "big ideas" (2001). The facilitator's changes also appear to correspond with Mezirow's (1990) description of transformative learning in that the facilitator reassessed his way of facilitating based on his earlier experience and acted on "insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective" that resulted in a reassessment that influenced a change in approach in the subsequent study circle (p. 18).

The artist-teacher's frame of reference

The artist-teacher's frame of reference was the studio context, her vision and decades of experience as an artist, and the visual-arts and the philosophical resources she brought to the participants for their consideration. Although the artist-teacher had studied *Ruhi–Book One* before this project, and referred to it in the first few studio sessions, her frame of reference did not necessarily or at least did not consistently include *Ruhi–Book One*. During our post-project interview the artist-teacher began by stating

> First of all, I thought I should say that ...in the beginning I had this idea that we would do so much to correlate with the writings you were studying, and we started out that way, doing things that kind of zeroed in on that.

> Then it became, it felt kind of contrived and we abandoned that, and it seemed there was a real naturalness. The things they were studying, then they were talking about it and feeling about it and it was influencing them and I think it was a much more natural way to go. I was really happy with that. I think it went well. I thought people really were open to doing things (Pritchard, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, given the open-endedness of the studio sessions, the participants explored their ideas and their materials. In one of the earliest studios the artist-teacher introduced an example of how a poet and a visual artist (Tascona, 2001) collaborated to produce a book of poetry and drawings, to demonstrate how word and image can come together. We were then encouraged to reflect about the writings we had studied the previous week in the study circle and then begin to draw. After this studio in which the artist-teacher showed us this example of artists' collaborating to demonstrate how the verbal and the visual could be brought together, subsequent themes were not directly related to those in the study circle, and the workbook was rarely mentioned.

After the first few studios, we digressed from the Curriculum. Instead, the artist-teacher enriched and connected some of the new themes mentioned earlier through the addition of a few examples of the thoughts of poets, writers and visual artists. After the artist-teacher's introduction of a theme and some pertinent writings, the studio practice was left in the minds and the hands of each participant to reflect upon and respond to through their artmaking.

One such theme was about repetition and patterns (Figures 13 & 14); not a theme directly related to the study-circle writings. In my case I related it to the daily practices of prayer, meditation, the repetition of a particular verse, as well as the repetition of other verses, the structure, and the cadence particularly when reciting some of the longer prayers and tablets. In making these connections, I brought my own meaning to my

artmaking. Occasionally there were glimpses of similar patterns of thought among my fellow participants, particularly those who had had previous artmaking experience (Adam, Julia and Tanya). Occasionally participants would say a few words indicating that they had made a link with the study circle material, although opportunities to discuss them were not an integral part of the studio routine.

In the second interview and in studio, the artist-teacher noted that the works of the participants were remarkably diverse (Pritchard, 2009). Her very broad, theme-based approach rather than a directed or literal one, may have contributed to that diversity in the artmaking. During that same interview the artist-teacher also tried to convey to me the seriousness with which artmaking should be regarded. I had inadvertently used the word "dabble" when referring to what people sometimes do with art materials and their attitudes toward art and artmaking, which provoked a strong response when the artist-teacher stated

> I have to go back to your word "dabble" because that is what I object to. ... Although it's important for people to do it as a hobby, I have a problem with that. So that's my own thing. ...Very few people know anything about the visual arts. More people listen to music ... more accessible. ...Very few people look at art of any kind. Even if somehow they don't want to draw or make art, they can have more of an appreciation. ... maybe not the making of art but at least *learning to see the thought process* (Pritchard, 2009, italics added).

As the researcher, I appreciated the artist-teacher's frank response and as a participant, I regretted my choice of words. The frustrations and difficulties the artist-teacher expressed is one of the greatest challenges as to the nature and purpose of artmaking for many artists and art educators.

Eisner (2002) clearly describes how the aims of art education change depending on social, cultural and moral values prevalent at any given time and context. This is

further confirmed when examining the impact of the arts on the fields of philosophy, social studies, and art history (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008). Therefore, in this particular context, I thought dabbling was not an objectionable choice of word since the inquiry occurred in an experimental context. The artist-teacher had herself stated at the information meeting that she anticipated that artmaking in this context would involve "a series of experiments" (Journal notes). *Dabbling* is defined as a "superficial or intermittent interest, investigation, or experiment" (http://www.merriam-webster.com, retrieved June 14, 2010). This broad definition does describe what often occurred in the studio sessions, which largely depended upon the mood and the attitude of the individual participants and their responses to the themes and the particular circumstances in any given session.

The purpose of artmaking by the participants within the studio context was to learn how to reflect upon concepts and to express their understanding through visual art and though to a lesser extent, through language. As adult learners who may not necessarily have had any previous artmaking experience, experimentation or dabbling could therefore be part of the artmaking process.

The artist-teacher's frame of reference encompassed that of a professional artist whose aspirations and concerns may not have served the pedagogical objectives of artmaking in this educational context and will be discussed further in light of the literature.

Chapter 5: Theoretical Analysis

The Curriculum and a "Series of Experiments"

Among the challenges the artist-teacher and the facilitator faced in attempting to integrate the visual arts into this Curriculum were the lack of clear pedagogical objectives for the artmaking portion of the project. The artist-teacher was faced with the particular challenge of working without an art curriculum as complementary to the Ruhi Curriculum since there are no such programs currently in existence.

While being aware of individuals who have used the Ruhi Curriculum in North America, Europe, and in South America I have found over the last several years that there are only suggestions, projects, and the sharing of experiences about the integration of the arts (*Bahá'í World, 2004 –2005*, 2006). So far there are no cohesive programs or curriculum that can be effectively used for artmaking as an integral companion for the study-circle model. Until such time as a visual-arts curriculum is developed, the existing Ruhi Curriculum would have to be followed closely to make clear and strong connections between the study and the artmaking by the participants.

Since I had not found any such resources, I offered Walker's *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking* (2001) to the artist-teacher as an excellent and rich resource to help plan and develop her studio sessions. At first she did not wish to take it since she feared she might damage the book. I insisted and she accepted to take it. Since she returned it to me the day the studio sessions began, I doubt if she consulted it in any depth.

At the information meeting the artist-teacher had described what she anticipated doing in the studio sessions as "series of experiments" (Journal notes). As the artist-teacher herself stated in her post-project interview, after the first few sessions she chose

to drop the use of the Curriculum and introduced some concepts she had explored in her own work. As a result there was little evidence that strong connections were made between the contents of the study portion and the artmaking portion of the project (Eisner, 2002). After the first ice-breaking exercises (Figure 7), no collaborative learning activities occurred in studio between the participants. The participants were principally invited to explore the art materials with no particular instructions and only a few references to the work of other artists and some abstract concepts. Other than becoming familiar with the media, little knowledge was gained in the study of the visual arts, either technically or historically in relationship to examples of how some visual artists have dealt with "big questions" in their own artmaking (Walker, 2001).

What the participants' questionnaire responses did indicate was that each, for their own individual reasons, found the studio experience interesting and enjoyable. Their comments indicated that they discovered that all participants of study circles, no matter what previous experience or ideas they may have had about art and artmaking, can participate in artmaking whether they see themselves as artists or not.

Some participants stated that they learned that the principal or dominant objective of all studio practice does not have to be the acquisition of technical skills or attempting to create artworks that are predominantly representational or illustrative. However, what appears to be missing in their responses was being able to making clear and strong connections between the study circle and the studio artmaking.

Constructivist Approach

Participants in artmaking need "boundaries" since, " ... artmaking boundaries have meaning-making implications that act as structures to help the artist pursue

meaning" (Walker, 2001, p. 74). These boundaries are part of a constructivist framework that must be envisioned by the artist-teacher and facilitator within a curriculum. Within that broader framework, other structures need to be an intrinsic part of the study circle and the studio sessions. Therefore a "series of experiments" (Pritchard, 2009) without the benefit of curriculum appear to have become random and somewhat isolated artmaking activities.

Eisner (2002) describes these boundaries as "constraints and affordances" (p. 72) and identifies four such boundaries as "forces" which can help to construct a "classroom milieu" and thus create "a cognitive culture" (p. 74).

The Visible Thinking Research Group of the Harvard Graduate School of Education (Ritchhard *et al*, 2006) describes the function and purpose of "thinking routines" that are similar to these "boundaries" (Walker, 2001) or "constraints and affordances" (Eisner, 2002). These "thinking routines" effectively frame classroom activities, and can also serve in a studio setting in that

> Routines ... play an important role in shaping and directing the intellectual space ... These "thinking routines" are simple patterns or structures, used over and over again, that support and scaffold specific thinking, moves, or actions ... provide the structures through which students collectively as well as individually initiate, explore, discuss, document, and manage their thinking ... Just as effective teaching demands that teachers establish routines to guide the basic physical and social interactions ... *so too thinking routines need to be established to help guide students' learning and intellectual interactions* ... (Ritchhard *et al*, 2006, p. 1).

Through a studio routine using constructivist means, the integration of the arts can become "cognitively significant" and create "... encounters that provide the capacity to construct interpretations" (Efland, 2002, p. 161).

> These interactive forces create a cognitive culture that has as much to do with the developing disposition as with developing aesthetic and analytic

> abilities. ... What the [classroom] milieu teaches is seldom on the list of aims for the arts, yet what the milieu teaches can be of prime importance in helping students learn what it feels like to function as a budding artist, to be really engaged in one's work, not for extrinsic reasons but for intrinsic ones (Eisner, 2002, p. 74-75, parentheses added).

Another part of a constructivist approach is making connections with the real world, which is one important aspect of the integration of the arts in the Ruhi Curriculum that is beyond the limitations of this inquiry (Walker, 2001; Neperud, 1995). Nevertheless, it should be noted that, in a truly "naturalistic" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) context, failing to connect art education and artmaking to the community can convey the impression that "...student artistic production" is no more than a form of "...therapeutic self-expression" (Freedman, 2007). Such an attitude seems to have had its time, and contemporary artists and art educators have become evermore aware that, given the current world-embracing crises humanity as a whole is experiencing, social responsibility is an essential consideration in their practice and in their teaching.

In one of the later books in the Ruhi series, participants are reminded not to regard "... this [integration of the arts] as entertainment or as an extracurricular activity...but as an *essential element* enhancing the spiritual development of the participants" (*Ruhi–Book Seven*, 2001, p. 111, parentheses and italics added). The very design and purpose of the integration of the arts within the Ruhi Curriculum is in harmony with the view that visual artmaking is not limited singularly to studio practice because

> It is difficult to explain some of the most important aspects of life, such as love, honor, spirituality, without referring in some way to artistic forms. Contemporary students often come to know about social and cultural conditions through their viewing and making of art (Freedman, 2007, p. 209).

To be able to explore and understand the challenges involved in the integration of the visual arts using the Ruhi Curriculum, and since the arts must be an "essential element" (*Ruhi–Book Seven*, 2001, p. 111), then an art curriculum is also essential both *in spite* of the specificity or diversity of cultures and contexts, and also *because* of these same considerations.

> Put simply, art education should help students learn how to create and experience the aesthetic features of images and understand their relationship to the culture in which they are a part (Eisner, 2002, p. 43, italics added).

Within such an art-education curriculum *the specificity and the diversity must be balanced* such that local resources are utilized to make individual experiences meaningful, and the commonalities must be utilized to encourage social cohesion and the emergence of a common vision based on such global principles and teachings that influenced how the Ruhi Curriculum has been both designed and implemented in small groups and communities worldwide.

Teaching Method

During the post-project interview the artist-teacher described this studio-workshop experience as being unlike her previous teaching workshops where participants sought out information and instructions, which she termed as "didactic" (Pritchard, 2009). And she also mentioned that as an independent working artist she had experience in professional workshops. Workshops of this nature are usually for artists who are accustomed to studio practice, who need little direction or structure, and who already understand some of the less obvious yet important features of working with other artists in a studio setting.

Neither of these two teaching methods (instructional and studio practice) could answer the needs of study-circle participants who had variable artmaking experience. In a three-year research study on teaching partnerships in *Learning Through the Arts*™ (*LTTA*™), a program involving school teachers and artists-in-residence in British Columbia (Kind et al, 2007) in which some artists-in-residence taught art by using the "art as skill" (p. 848) method, and others by using the "art as self-expression" (p. 846) method. Both methods proved inadequate to effectively teach artmaking to students and to also expect to have schoolteachers learn how to teach artmaking by observing the artists-in-residence teach (p. 851). The researchers concluded that both were essential aspects of teaching artmaking and one could not be taught to the exclusion of the other.

The complexities involved in being both an artist and a teacher, and having to make connections between these two very different roles are also addressed in this study. Among some of the findings resulting from two years of observation in the classroom, they concluded that the pedagogical lessons learned by artists sprang from "a shifting of identities as teachers" (Kind *et al*, 2007, p. 842). The issue of identity is a recurring theme for artists who teach.

> The relationship that exists between practice and teaching can be said to be fundamentally one of identity construction, but this is influenced by ... the tutor's previous experiences ... It is possible to experience multiple aspects of identity relations but also to align more closely with one particular form of identity... *Constructions of identity are important as they help to shape the kind of learning about practice that students have access to through their tutors*. (Shreeve, 2009, p. 157-158, italics added).

Citing educators bell hooks (1994) and Britzman (2003), Kind *et al* (2007) also elaborate in that, "...a familiar way of viewing teaching" is to regard the very "act of teaching" as the way for both the teacher and the learner to learn, to grow, and to change;

that the very "act of teaching itself creates openings" (p. 843) for experience. However, citing Grumet (1991), they also note that for such "experiences to be meaningful they must be grasped reflectively" (*Ibid*). The researcher's further observations indicated that although there were opportunities for teachers to reflect upon their own practice, none were offered to the artists-in-residence. "Several artists felt this lack of support and suggested to us [the researchers] that they would have appreciated the opportunity to have further reflective time with other artists in the program" (*Ibid*, parentheses added). The researchers concluded that "...although we documented changes in artists' teaching practices, most artists lacked the opportunity and the sufficient conceptual pedagogical knowledge to critically reflect on and adequately process their learning" (*Ibid*).

Given the role and what was probably the isolation of the artist-teacher in the course of this inquiry, it was unfortunate not to have established opportunities to reflect upon and share teaching experiences at least with the study-circle facilitator since other artist-teachers are not widely available. This feature should not be overlooked given the long-term experiences and insights reported by Kind *et al* (2007) where they observed many assumptions and expectations in the way the *LTTA*™ program was designed. Despite some of the weaknesses in the *LTTA*™, it has also shown great promise (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005).

During some of the studio sessions the artist-teacher did introduce a few visual artists and writers to the participants, although it seemed that the concepts and writings chosen were very abstract and with few visual-art examples or discussion of how these artists had explored such concepts through their artmaking. With this group composed of individuals, with variable degrees of experience and proficiency, to have the participants

understand how to develop their own meaning-making process would require a greater diversity of examples of the work of various artists to examine, analyze, and come to some understanding of how a concept was explored and expressed (Eisner, 2002, p. 54 & 187). Encouraging some discussion as to how these artists resolved the challenge of expressing their understanding through artmaking may have enhanced and deepened their own meaning-making process as participants (Walker, 2001).

It has been my experience in conversation with many visual artists that they are loath to speak about art and artmaking; words are regarded as secondary and inadequate, or a distraction. A few of them have also told me that, "the work should speak for itself". For visual artists who are teachers using words seems to also create a tension when students look to them for some verbal interaction; their conscious choice to use silence in a studio setting appears to be a way of conveying the message: Do! Don't talk!

Although I agree that silence is essential especially for reflection, I also agree that, "We [teachers] have no direct access to experience [the student's inner landscape and artmaking]. We must use proxies for experience, and one such proxy is language" (Eisner, 2002, p. 91, parentheses added).

Concerning the use of language, Walker (2001) uses an example to describe how a lesson as to the artist's intent in the work had been entirely misunderstood (p.12-15). On the other hand, Eisner (2002) offers a broader view. Rather than using examples, Eisner cites Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1960) about the concept of the "zone of proximal development" as being that "space" within which the educator can offer the support needed for learning and yet challenge the learner since both are needed to foster growth (p. 73). This is where one of the greatest challenges for facilitators rests: finding

that "space", which is also discussed by Kind *et al* (2007). Determining when and to what extent language can help or hinder learning, and to what extent art can be taught with the judicious use of language is a challenge for all visual-arts educators.

The Critique in Studio Practice

At the end of the first studio session, during the critique the artist-teacher seemed concerned about viewing the works as they were drying on the floor and after a few comments, she asked that we not analyze the work "too much". She may have been attempting to encourage us to develop empathic and intuitive responses, or maybe she thought there would be a lot of "critique" since it is what an artist in a studio situation may expect. Her intention remains unclear to me, since the critique within studio practice is an essential part of artmaking (Eisner, 2002) and is an important tool in the meaning-making process (Walker, 2001).

As the studio sessions continued, the critiques we had just begun to have in the first studio sessions dwindled rather than developed or deepened. On several occasions, as soon as participants had finished painting they would clean up, and seemed to think the session as over and sometimes left as soon as they had cleaned up. This resulted in little time for the critique as a group. Since most of the participants were unfamiliar with the critique, this portion may have well appeared as insignificant to them.

The critique could have been an opportunity for the artist-teacher to introduce and encourage the use of metaphorical concepts or "elaborations" as tools to deepen understanding and facilitate participants in their making connections (Efland, 2002, p. 171). The importance of the critique in studio practice is not intended to mean that the verbal can express or overshadow the visual. However, for the participants who are also

learning how to be future facilitators, to learn how to use words effectively is an essential capability in need of just such learning opportunities.

Learning to be visually literate is, in my own experience, a skill that does not come naturally and must be prompted and cultivated much like learning to read and write (Eisner, 2002). The critique is only one example of these "forces", which Eisner describes as part of the complexity of the participants' interactions; as one element that is part of "... the *modus vivendi* of the classroom [studio]" (p. 71, parentheses added). It is essential to use language to encourage a growing awareness of what is the artmaking process: action, reflection, and through this process, the development and refinement of our own cognitive abilities. In the pre-project interview the artist-teacher alluded to this same cognitive experience when she stated that, "... making art is another kind of thinking, and can be valuable in that sometimes you are not aware of what you are taking in and what you are receiving" (Pritchard, 2008).

In this instance, neither the term "critique" nor the activity itself was used or discussed, and several of the participants did not seem to understand the purpose of the critique, or its importance in studio practice. Unfortunately the studio critique is often misunderstood and confounded with what art critics write or report about art exhibitions in the popular press, though they bear little if any resemblance to the studio critique done among fellow artists in a setting of trust, encouragement, and with an attitude of learning (Eisner, 2002, pp. 193-195).

Integration of the Study Circle and the Studio Practice

At the beginning of the studio sessions I thought it natural for all of us to feel a bit stiff and anxious since we were all going through a new experience while the artist-

teacher later stated that she thought that the approach in the first studios felt "a bit contrived" (Pritchard, 2009). Those feelings of stiffness and anxiety that I felt could have easily been described as feeling "a bit contrived". The artist-teacher went on to say that when she changed her approach in the subsequent studio it felt more "natural" (*Ibid*). Although this change felt that way for the artist-teacher, *both* approaches were *new* to the participants and therefore *both* could have felt "contrived" whether it involved the Ruhi material as it did in the first few sessions, or the different approach the artist-teacher later introduced. Note that this is not intended to suggest that other references to either Bahá'í, artistic, or scholarly sources should be excluded from the studio sessions rather, that the writings in the Ruhi workbook, which are integral and central to the Curriculum, were not referred to directly after the first few studios.

The artist-teacher subsequently used her own research, mostly from her journals and a few art and poetry books. Her research was based on Bahá'í writings and some Zen concepts. She used the works of artists whose ideas she had found relevant and meaningful (Mark Tobey in Dahl, 1984; Agnes Martin in Haskell, 1992; Tascona, 2001; Yanagi, 1989). Through their work these artists indicate an interest in landscape, particularly prairie landscape, Western and Japanese art of the late 20th century, non-representational art and minimalism, and Bahá'í and Zen concepts and teachings. Although these subjects are vast, they did not make a cohesive plan, framework or curriculum designed to complement or explore the themes found in the Ruhi workbook.

The journal could have served better yet both the literature (Lukinsky, 1990) and the experience itself indicate that if journaling is to be utilized it must be a guided process with exercises incorporated into the studio routine.

Although the artist-teacher did state at our first meeting with the participants that the artmaking involved "a series of experiments" (Journal, 2008), it had not occurred to me as the researcher that this would mean that the artist-teacher would consider digressing from the Curriculum altogether. Nevertheless, this inquiry has helped identify several pedagogical features that need to be introduced from the outset and through which the visual arts may be more effectively integrated into the Ruhi Curriculum.

Evidence of attempts by the participants to relate or integrate the contents of the two activities cannot be clearly discerned except in the first few literal uses of words and phrases in the drawings by a few participants in the earlier studios (Figures 22 & 23). Afterwards, there was little if anything in the artmaking that could clearly be related to the study circle material. As mentioned earlier, there was also so little discussion when the works were completed that the preoccupations of the participants remained unuttered and thus, largely unknown.

Facilitators must understand and maintain a strong connection between the two activities. In the context of a local community or neighborhood, participants in such a project can develop realistic, sound, and sustainable projects through opportunities suited to local needs and conditions. Being able to secure a suitable space, where participants can study and discuss the Ruhi study material and learn to make their own connections to and through artmaking, would be ideal. In that type of context the group may be able to develop group projects and extend their artistic pursuits beyond the confines of their meeting space into the community. In a neighborhood context it would be particularly encouraging to see signs of change through the burgeoning discourse and development of ties between art education and issues of the environment (Neperud, 1985) and social

responsibility. Attitudes have changed quite dramatically over the past few decades among educators and artists who have increasingly come to recognize that art education can be "a vehicle for social reconstruction" (Duncum, 2007, p. 292).

Unlike a study-circle, which is similar to a small informal seminar, studio artmaking is more akin to working in a laboratory in which the artmaking may require long periods of experimentation, reflection and research involving the manipulation of both the media and reflection about concepts. Since larger blocks of time are difficult to ensure, a different strategy may be needed if any serious attempt is to be made to have the arts become an integral part of the Ruhi Curriculum.

After the project, the facilitator recommended that the artmaking and study should be combined, more tightly integrated, and that both could be done if we had had a three-hour rather than a two-hour session (Lebensold, 2009). Since the purpose of artmaking in this context is not necessarily to produce art objects, then greater integration of this kind may be a better approach. However, the artmaking portion will require less time only if the participants each *take time* individually, between the sessions, to reflect on and plan what they will be working on in between and during the studio portion.

The challenge for the artist-teacher, who has developed both her spiritual and art practice, was to encourage the participants to develop and make connections between their study of the Bahá'í writings in *Ruhi–Book One* and their art practice. The artist-teacher directed the participants to the concepts and themes that she had already explored in her own art practice, however, the participants were left on their own to make their connections with the Ruhi workbook.

Study circles using the Ruhi Curriculum are usually an ongoing process in which participants are encouraged to continue on with their studies and develop their practices as they continue from one book to the next in the series. In this case, however, we did not have further plans for the participants. This made the end-of-project portion somewhat awkward and unrelated to any further steps in the development of the use of the arts using the Ruhi Curriculum. Had the facilitators and the researcher consulted more closely and regularly, there may have been a clearer sense of closure or continuity.

However much I attempted to make this project a "naturalistic" inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) the participants were not in a "natural" neighborhood setting therefore, one of the greatest challenges for all the participants including the facilitators was the time needed both for group work in studio, and follow-up with individual practice as in the regular use of the journal. The value of time is not only for the more obvious temporal needs, but to be able to build an atmosphere of trust and frank communications about the integration of the arts between the facilitator and the artist-teacher, seeing themselves as part of a "community of practice" (Eisner, 2002), as well as partners or as a team with a common vision and understanding, would probably have resulted in greater integration of the arts.

Kind *et al* (2007) found that time was a particularly important issue. It was only when teachers and artists-in-residence had been working together for a few years that some of them were able to develop very good working relationships and a mutual attitude of learning about both the value and the artistry of teaching artmaking, and of teaching itself. Since this project was far shorter and less frequent, time for communication and

collaboration between the facilitators is an important consideration when attempting to effectively integrate the arts into the Ruhi Curriculum.

As mentioned and explained earlier, at one of the first study circles I had asked my fellow participants to bring and share a personally significant object at the following studio. I chose to do this because of my own learning experiences in art education using personally significant objects. I had found that it was a powerful and effective means of connecting participants to a new artmaking context. The exercise encouraged me and the other participants to make connections between meaning making and studio practice. I therefore chose to introduce this exercise into the second studio to encourage the participants to reflect upon and share what these objects meant to them. Bringing these objects could facilitate their speaking to the group since it was about objects that have personal meaning. Once we had each spoken, the artist-teacher then spoke briefly about her own personally significant object, which was a blank sheet of *washi*, the paper we were using to do our artmaking.

This studio experience revealed many layers of meaning about how our (the researcher and participant-observer, and the artist-teacher) beliefs, which are often unconscious, influence how we teach artmaking (Kind *et al*, 2007, p. 845). For example, when the artist-teacher redirected the participants to the untouched sheet of *washi* and although it did segue nicely into the subsequent artmaking activity, it may have also suggested that artmaking begins with a "blank slate".

If this concept is understood by the participants as being that art begins with nothing, and is interpreted as a metaphorical construct of having nothing in mind or having a "blank mind" as we begin our artmaking, then it may not have encouraged

participants to bring their own reflections on the material being studied in the study circle into the studio. Although the artist-teacher may not have intended to teach this concept it could have been interpreted to suggest that we begin artmaking from nothing rather than with reflections upon something.

The artist-teacher's message could also be confusing and even contradictory in that we were also told to reflect upon what we had studied the previous week, though no specific excerpts which had been studied were then read or discussed in studio. To have left the individual participants to themselves to construct meaning and experience seems to be antithetical to a constructivist approach to teaching.

The challenges involved in the process of integrating the visual arts into the study-circle process also emerged when it later became clear that the intent of the artist-teacher's lesson plans were not clearly communicated to the participants. For example, in the first ice breaking exercises, when the drawing exercises involved sharing a page to draw upon with other participants, there were underlying themes and intentions, in addition to that of breaking the ice. Only when I, as the researcher, later interviewed the artist-teacher did I understand the artist-teacher's intentions, weeks after we had finished the project. As the researcher and observer, I had access to information, which the other participants knew nothing about since they did not have the same frame of reference (Eisner, 2002). Nor were the participants asked what the exercises meant to them, or indicate that they understood the artist-teacher's intent. During the post-project interview with the artist-teacher, she mentioned to me that these exercises were to help the participants experience "what detachment feels like" (Pritchard, 2009). The exercise may have been effective in that I understood her intent when she explained it to me in the

interview and I realized that I, as participant, had felt how we were attached to our first drawings and understood what the opposite feels like when we had to pass our drawing on to others to have others draw on them as well. However, as cited earlier, there was "... *no direct access to experience*" so, to understand, we needed to use language as a proxy for *experience* (Eisner, 2002, p. 91, italics added). In this instance, if the subject had been discussed during the critique the participants may have been able to make the connection or a "relationship" (Eisner, p. 75-77) between the *feelings they experienced* and what it *meant* to them.

> Critical reflection on experience is key to transformational learning. *Having an experience is not enough to effect a transformation.* As Criticos (1993) observed, what is valuable is not the experience itself but 'the intellectual growth that follows the process of reflecting on experience. Effective learning does not follow from a positive experience but from effective reflection' (Merriam, 2004, p. 63, italics added).

When I interviewed the artist-teacher I understood that, as she had said it herself, she wanted the participants to *feel* through this exercise. The artist-teacher may have also intended to have them think about how they felt (their experience), however without the opportunity to do so through the critique, the significance of the experience may have simply been lost. To some degree experiencing *detachment* from self may have occurred in that two of the participants' questionnaire responses indicated that they became less concerned about the appearance of their work and more interested in the process (Adam and Tanya). However, discussion could have also served to ease the tension or the "contrived" feeling the artist-teacher mentioned in the post-project interview (Pritchard, 2009).

Walker (2001) discusses some of the kinds of reflective and research practices visual artists have used, and offers some helpful and diverse examples of how artists

build their own "knowledge base" to then create their artwork (p. 38-47 & p. 115-154). Having such examples can help participants to develop their own strategies in building their own knowledge base with, in this instance, the concepts introduced in the Ruhi Curriculum.

Through reflective practice as to how sessions are conducted, the artist-teacher can help participants learn how to plan their own participation in the following session and understand their ongoing engagement. One effective method may be asking each to individually present their artmaking to the group as the facilitator did in his subsequent study circle. The facilitator may ask each participant to prepare a five-minute individual presentation on a rotational basis. For example, at the beginning of each session one or a few participants would present their work at least a few times over a ten-week period.

In my own experience my level of engagement, both in my reflection in artmaking and how to present it to a group, increased exponentially when faced with the opportunity and the challenges involved in having to communicate to others my particular intellectual and aesthetic concerns (Eisner, 2002; Vygotsky, 1960). I have also found that this specific activity is best ordered so as to give all the participants time "to really look" (Pritchard, 2009) at the work presented, and give them the opportunity to respond. I have also found that the participants' comments are best expressed *before* the person who created the work speaks about her or his process. Through this process artmakers may see features or discover meanings that they may not have originally intended or perceived themselves, thus further helping them refine their own perceptions and their artmaking through sharing with their peers. I have found that this kind of studio

practice is an effective and interesting way of facilitating visual literacy, particularly for beginners.

In studio, the time taken for artmaking itself may vary from week to week depending on how the work is progressing and what questions may arise. Much of the organization of the studio time would be determined by what the participants themselves bring into the studio based on their own earlier experience and their practice. In more advanced studio portions, which would likely be for participants studying the later Ruhi books, studio time may be less devoted to individual artmaking all together. Since more experienced participants may have developed a regular studio practice at home, more time would be devoted to viewing the works and concepts, and offering responses and feedback to one another about the individual work accomplished between the sessions, or even to consult about projects involving groups, community events, etc. The concepts may be in the form of written work, poetry, citations by others or a collection of images or objects. Work would then be shared in studio with journals and workbooks in hand, thus deepening the experience of understanding and expression through artmaking.

Although it should be clear that there is an expectation to have all the participants bring and use their journals, based on this experience, the facilitator's concerns first expressed in the pre-project interview (Lebensold, 2008), in addition to research about journaling (Lukinsky, 1990; New, 2005) on the myriad ways journals can be utilized, it should also be made clear to the participants that their journals are for personal reference and will not to be freely examined by other participants. Establishing this may help participants be more at ease in regularly referring to and bringing their journals to the sessions.

The Challenges in Communication and Collaboration

As I examined the data after the project was completed I concluded that this project had not resulted in the integration of the visual arts into the Ruhi Curriculum since the artist-teacher had digressed from the Curriculum, and the facilitator had indicated that there had not been any regular communication or coordination about content of the sessions between him and the artist-teacher, which was further confirmed by my own observations, the interviews, and the questionnaire responses of the participants.

The theoretical and practical aspects of this project, and the individual assumptions of the facilitators and of the researcher have inevitably influenced outcomes and findings. The challenges the researcher has faced in attempting to understand and interpret these findings were often related to an overarching theme as to how "things" can be effectively studied "in their natural settings" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.3).

Sociologist Michael Quinn Patton (2002) cites Guba (1978), a recognized authority in qualitative research, and states that Guba defined

> ..."naturalistic inquiry" as a "discovery-oriented" approach that minimizes investigator manipulation of the study setting and places no prior constraints on what the outcomes of the research will be (Patton, p. 39).

By reflecting about events as they occurred and refraining from interference or manipulation, the researcher has nevertheless gleaned some valuable insights about what challenges facilitators, artist-teachers, and art educators may face, and which ones may be inevitable, anticipated and prepared for, or entirely avoided.

The two activities took place in two different Montreal neighborhoods and most of the participants did not live or work in close proximity to either. For almost everyone involved, the distances and the weather were significant factors and may have also

discouraged the facilitators from attending one another's sessions. Having local facilities where distance and weather are not such great barriers would be both desirable and practical. Although everyone participated regularly, from a *deep ecology* (Neperud, 1995) perspective having a single and local setting would have required far fewer resources in time and transportation. Furthermore an underlying and guiding principle in deep ecology is to recognize that in ecosystems it is essential "...to bring humans into harmony with the natural environment" (p. 229) and that natural environment for humans is their own local neighborhood.

Once the facilitators had agreed to participate in this project and then introduced their part of the project to the participants, I left it to the two of them to consult with each other, communicate, coordinate, and sustain their activities. As the researcher I took on the role of participant-observer and tried to avoid taking any further initiatives. I had mistakenly assumed that they would "naturally" form a team and discuss how and what they were studying and doing in their respective settings.

I did not anticipate that there would be so little communication between the two facilitators. I was really of two minds as I first saw this rift developing between the facilitators. Not having established any planning and assessment meetings with the facilitators from the outset, I did not attempt to subsequently add them to the project since it was beyond what was originally envisioned and may have been beyond what, as volunteers with limited time and resources, the facilitators were prepared to do. Clearly, should two facilitators be involved in a single study circle, ways to collaborate closely and resources must be prepared beforehand to prevent this kind of rift to occur.

Mechanisms to encourage closer and regular communication between the facilitators should have been established before the sessions, since once they began, I was no longer in a position to institute any changes. This was essentially within my frame of reference as researcher, thus as part of the preparations I should have established the means to encourage and sustain the development of a *team-building relationship* between the two facilitators throughout the project. Nevertheless, both facilitators appeared to be at ease with the situation as it evolved and each at least appeared to be getting the information they needed about the other activity through the participants and their familiarity with the Ruhi Curriculum. Although the artist-teacher did not participate in the study circle, she did have a copy of the workbook and was familiar with the contents (Figure. 3), although it became clear that she was usually unaware of what had been most recently studied.

Clearly, the artist-teacher had no curriculum for the artmaking portion, which would have helped to frame, align, and relate the activities to each other. Since the artist-teacher had little if any feedback from the participants about the previous week's study circle, and since I have found no further data in our second interview about the issue, I can only speculate or interpret the circumstances as being similar for the artist-teacher as they were for the facilitator, who felt isolated. Her sense of isolation may not have been as pronounced since the facilitator also had the impression that, "... the study portion informed the artmaking more than the art portion informed the study portion" (Lebensold, 2009). Nevertheless as the observer and as a participant I did not find any data to indicate that the artist-teacher felt that way, yet neither is there data to indicate

that either activity informed the other directly except in the minds of the participants themselves.

There is no clear evidence that the participants made strong connections between the two activities. Reflective practice (Schön, 1985) was only evident later when the facilitator decided to integrate the arts in a subsequent study circle. I asked the facilitator what he had done and he explained that his expectations were clearly stated to the participants from the outset. He described to them the overall pattern of the activities that would occur in the study circle. This more integrated approach proved to be challenging for the participants yet each of them created artworks in diverse media and arts where they made strong connections between their study and artmaking. They all used the arts in the media of their choice to reflect upon the material studied, and to create a work that they would subsequently share with the other participants. At first glance this experience seemed to demonstrate that the arts could be effectively integrated into this Curriculum by a single facilitator.

Yet, upon closer examination of the literature and further reflection, I realized that the facilitator had had some previous training and experience in the arts and that it would be unrealistic at this time to expect all study-circle facilitators to already have previous artmaking and art teaching experience, particularly within a grass-roots community context.

Although the most pertinent studies I have found are school-based and conducted on a larger scale over more time with far more participants, they bear many similarities to this experience and the findings could contribute to the planning of facilitator training and prevent teachers and artist-teachers from making some of the same oversights that

they observed (Kind et al, 2007; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005; Lind, 2007). The findings indicate and confirm many of the same observations and challenges in this inquiry as to the implementation of effective curriculum planning, the need of more time to develop resources and preparations for art activities, as well as the need to recognize that time itself is an important element in the establishment of good working relationships between the artist-teacher and teacher (or facilitator). Another important finding to note is that, unlike their teacher counterparts, artist-teachers were often overlooked or not seen as *educators* and were therefore not offered the kind of pedagogical support they needed. Unlike their teacher counterparts who were offered further professional enrichment opportunities, the artist-teachers did not have the opportunity to network with fellow artist-teachers, nor did they have access to further art-education training and resources.

Given these findings (*Ibid*) and those of this inquiry, team-teaching research should be examined, and methods considered to introduce and integrate the arts in a thoughtful and methodical fashion, which can subsequently be assessed and altered based upon further experience, a deepening understanding of the processes involved, and ever-increasing resources at the grass roots.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

As a result of this inquiry there have emerged three particularly important challenges for the facilitators in this project: First, the challenges both pedagogically and physically of including the arts as part of the Curriculum; integrating activities where participants can make stronger connections between the text and the arts; and lack of communication and collaboration in planning curriculum when it involves two facilitators.

To resolve the difficulties of integration and communications, having both activities in the same location and facilitated by the same individual would be ideal since, to put it simply, the left hand would know what the right hand is doing. However, having one facilitator for both the study circle and the artmaking would necessitate some facilitator art-education training and resources, which may not be available at the grass roots. The alternative, if there are two facilitators, is team building or partnership training to communicate and learn how to work together using the Curriculum and developing a curriculum for the integration of the visual arts through both scholarly and empirical means.

This inquiry is neither an objective nor a conclusive study of the challenges involved in the use of the visual arts with a spiritually based curriculum such as Ruhi; however, recording and reflecting upon the experience from the different perspectives of the facilitator, the artist-teacher, the participants, as well as my own as participant-observer, has resulted in some valuable insights as to the importance of art-education training to facilitate learning and meaning making using the Ruhi Curriculum. This

inquiry, the research, and these subsequent developments may serve future research and planning for this type of community-based activity, particularly in an urban setting.

Clearly further research on and through experience is needed to better understand how and what approaches can be most effective, and to determine what curriculum can contribute to the effective integration of the visual arts. Art-education training can help prevent facilitators from having to "reinvent the wheel" and from repeating approaches that have not been effective in the integration of the arts. Neglecting to use scholarly resources to further develop, enrich, and ground the use of the arts would be to deprive facilitators and participants of the wisdom and experience of experts about the complexities of the multidisciplinary field that is art education.

There are several aspects for further research about questions related to the integration of the visual arts into the Ruhi Curriculum such as: what systematic and effective steps can be taken by facilitators to encourage use of the arts in study circles; how can tools and practices such as the use of visual journals be used more effectively; what pedagogical tools can be utilized or developed to encourage team-building projects and communication skills; and how can visual-arts education help facilitators and participants connect with and contribute to the betterment of their community.

The interdisciplinary nature of art education is one of its most interesting features; however it is sometimes regarded as the poor cousin of studio artmaking or as a hybrid form of educational or social studies rather than a distinct field of study that has valuable contributions to make in education, in art, and in communities. In my own experience, I have found that art education is unique in helping individuals, groups, and communities make meaningful connections between the various and often disconnected aspects of our

lives; often between our own inner and outer landscapes; between those seemingly insignificant aspects of our everyday lives and those "big ideas" (Walker, 2005). This inquiry has confirmed that art-education research and expertise can serve as a powerful tool, which in this community-based context, can contribute to effective means of integrating the visual arts into the Ruhi Curriculum

Although the Ruhi Curriculum is only one example of this type of curriculum, it is a remarkable and very successful model (Appendix II) in that it incorporates many of the most important principles, values, and objectives needed to make learning both meaningful and realistic for individuals and communities. Rather than being passive consumers of the mass-marketed arts, which are so prevalent and pervasive at this time, participants and facilitators may engage in artmaking to further develop and deepen their understanding and their capabilities in becoming effective agents of positive change.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I – The Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith began in 1844 in Persia (now Iran). Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) is the prophet-founder who was imprisoned and exiled most of his life in the Ottoman Empire (first in present-day Iraq, later in Turkey and eventually in what is now the northern region of Israel). The pivotal principle around which the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve is the oneness of humankind. Some of the fundamental teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are: the elimination of all forms of racism; the establishment of gender equality; the recognition that religion and science are complementary and essential functions in human affairs; that universal education must be established such that human beings can use their own abilities to seek out truth; and that humankind is in a period of global transition which requires the reorganization of its affairs based upon such universal principles. One of these principles is the recognition of the essential truth and commonality of the spiritual teachings of all the great prophets such as Abraham, the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, Buddha, Jesus, Krishna, Mohammed, Moses and Zoroaster. These great prophets are referred to as manifestations of God and are regarded as divine in origin (www.bahai.org/faq/facts/bahai_faith retrieved September10, 2008).

The central purpose of the Bahá'í Faith is the establishment of the unity of humankind. Education is regarded as essential therefore

> An educational approach directed towards personal growth and societal transformation, and based on the belief that human beings are essentially spiritual, however, must go well beyond a mere statement of purpose. When words and actions are not directed by a moral force, scientific knowledge and technological know-how conduce as readily to misery as they do to prosperity and happiness. But moral values are not mere constructs of social processes. Rather, they are expressions of the inner forces that operate in the spiritual reality of every human being, and

education must concern itself with these forces if it is to tap the roots of motivation and produce meaningful and lasting change (Bahá'í International Community Task Force on Education, 1989, par. 8. Retrieved May 20, 2010 from http://bahairesearch.com/).

Appendix II – The Ruhi Curriculum

The Bahá'í international community has grown to include over 100,000 local communities throughout the world. Out of the fieldwork and development by the Bahá'í Community of Columbia the Ruhi Curriculum has emerged and, in the last two decades, the Ruhi Curriculum has also become an important educational instrument utilized, supported, and encouraged by Bahá'í communities and agencies worldwide. The Ruhi Curriculum is now composed of a series of eight books for adults (15 years and up) and several others are designed for children and adolescents. For further information consult: http://www.ruhi.org/institute/index.php (Retrieved January 9, 2010).

Since the 1990s, in communities worldwide, regional institute boards are coordinating and developing resources that involve adult study-circles, facilitator training, junior-youth and youth learning, mentoring programs, and the development of neighborhood children's classes. Study circles are formed through grassroots initiatives in which experienced facilitators organize and use the Ruhi Curriculum to promote learning, action, and reflection through community service. The study-circle facilitators are encouraged to use the arts with the participants to enhance the learning process, encourage participation, and contribute to community development.

For the purposes of this inquiry the first book in the Ruhi Curriculum titled *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* (1999) was the source material used by the facilitator and the participants in the study circle, and consulted by the artist-teacher.

Appendix III – Pre-project Facilitator Interview Questions

You have been asked to facilitate a Ruhi study circle with participants who will also be using the visual arts as part of their learning and reflections on the Bahá'í writings.

1. Given your earlier experiences both as a participant and a facilitator of study circles, how do you see your role in these circumstances?

2. When you prepare to facilitate a study circle, what are your concerns?

3. How do you see the relationship between the study portion and the studio portion in this process?

4. As you have already been informed, the participants will all be using a visual journal to express and record their insights and experiences as part of their daily practice.

5. How do you expect to encourage them to explore and develop the use of this tool?

6. How do you see your relationship to the artist-teacher? Will you be consulting each other regularly?

7. How do your see the role of the researcher during the study portion of the study circle? Is the researcher a co-facilitator, an observer or a participant? Do you anticipate that the researcher will be in the circle among the participants or be outside looking in?

8. As you know, this is a different approach in which the participants are introduced to the use of the visual arts as an integral part of a process of reflection in response to their study circle experience working in an artist's studio. Given this unique context, are there other considerations you envision for the study-circle portion?

9. How will you relate the daily practices, the use of the journal and drawing to the material and objectives in *Ruhi–Book One*?

10. How will you begin the bi-weekly meeting?

11. How will you end the bi-weekly meeting?

12. Will you discuss what is expected of the participants between their bi-weekly meetings?

13. Will you contact the artist-teacher after the bi-weekly meetings? What do you anticipate discussing with her?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add about this project? (July 25, 2008)

Appendix IV – Pre-project Artist-Teacher Interview Questions

Based on our earlier interview, in the spring of 2007, when you spoke about your creative process and some of your preoccupations in artmaking, I would now like to ask you some further questions about our upcoming project involving yourself as the artist-teacher of participants of a Ruhi study circle who will also be using the visual arts as part of their learning and reflection process.

During that first interview I was struck by your daily practice in both the use of prayer and meditation, and artmaking. This same concept of daily practice of prayer and meditation is the overarching theme of the first section of the *Ruhi – Book I* so I would like to discuss how using the visual arts with this first part of the book can become a valuable learning experience.

1. Given your own experience as someone who has found inspiration in the Bahá'í writings and teachings and who is a visual artist, how have you articulated or translated or expressed this experience in your use of the visual arts?

2. How might your own personal experiences with art and your current knowledge of the Bahá'í writings influence the content/objectives of your plan to introduce artmaking to the participants? What do you value as important elements to include?

3. Do you use journals? Can you elaborate on how you journal? How do you use them? Do you draw or write or both on a daily basis? Do you structure or organize your journals chronologically or do you have particular ones for particular projects or for certain media?

4. Do you consider using the visual arts in this context as metaphorical? If yes, how might the participants grasp this process?

5. How might the visual journal be used with the participants?

6. Do you have any ideas of projects that you would like to introduce?

7. How might your input as an artist relate to the study-circle portion of this project?

8. What do you see as your role as coordinator with the facilitator? Have you ever participated in a similar collaboration? If yes, elaborate. As an artist, what would be your contribution to this project?

9. Tell me about some ideas you have regarding the organization of your art sessions. What do you consider to be some important elements to include?

10. Is there anything you would like to add? (May 6, 2008)

Appendix V – Post-project Facilitator Interview Questions

Reflecting back on this Ruhi study circle that involved artmaking, how would you describe your experience?

1. Did you find the setting suitable?

2. How did you feel about having both a facilitator and an artist-teacher as facilitators for each activity? How did you particularly see yourself as the facilitator of the study portion of the project?

3. What was particularly interesting or meaningful for you in this experience?

4. Why, at the beginning of each meeting, did you ask the participants about their recent acts of service?

5. How did you see the relationship between the artmaking and the study portions?

6. What was particularly challenging?

7. What have you learned from this experience?

8. Has participating in this study-studio circle changed your perspective or your life in any way? If so, how?

9. How has this study circle been different for you?

10. Was the addition of explicit art activity a positive or negative experience? Why?

11. What suggestions do you have for future use of the visual arts in study circles?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

(April 2, 2009)

Appendix VI – Post-project Artist-teacher Interview Questions

Reflecting back on the study circle involving artmaking in your studio on alternative weeks, how would you describe your experience?

How did you like having a facilitator for the study portion and an artist-teacher for the artmaking?

How did you see yourself as the artist-teacher of the studio portion of the project?

What was particularly interesting or meaningful for you in this experience?

Why did you introduce written ideas, thoughts and poetry at the beginning of some of the studios?

How did you see the relationship between the artmaking and the study portions?

What was particularly challenging for you?

What did you learn through this experience? Has participating in this study-studio circle introduced new or unanticipated insights for you?

How has this art-making group been a different kind of teaching experience for you?

How did working with a facilitator affect your experience?

Did having a kind of parallel curriculum of study influence your way of working and teaching this group? Why?

What suggestions do you have for further use of the visual arts in study circles?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

(April 14, 2009)

Appendix VII – Facilitator and Artist-teacher Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A PROJECT COMBINING VISUAL ARTS AND THE STUDY OF *RUHI–BOOK I*

This is to state that I, _____, agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Suzanne Maloney of the Department of Art Education of Concordia University, tel.: (514) 223-5056, Email: maloney@videotron.ca

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to answer the following question: What are the challenges involved in the integration of visual artmaking in a Ruhi study circle?

B. PROCEDURE:

This will be an opportunity for a small group of people with some artmaking experience to explore the use of the visual arts as a means of reflection and action, as part of the Ruhi Curriculum, specifically *Ruhi–Book One: Reflections on Life of the Spirit.*

Participation as an educator for this study circle either as a facilitator or as an artist-teacher; regularly plan and facilitate the learning process for the participants; weekly study circle and studio sessions will occur alternatively between September 2008 and February 2009 (this will include a break in December).

Permission to photograph and video record the study circle and the studio sessions; however should you wish to not be photographed or video recorded your wishes will be respected.

Permission to reproduce and publish some of your art work and journal entries is requested, however should you wish to not have them reproduced or published your wishes will be respected.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS:

No risks and no compensation.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences whatsoever.
- I understand that my participation in this study is (choose one)
  - NON-CONFIDENTIAL (my identity will be revealed in study results)
  - CONFIDENTIAL (my identity will not be revealed in study results)
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca.

Page 1 of 1

Appendix VIII – Participant Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A PROJECT COMBINING VISUAL ARTS AND THE STUDY OF *RUHI–BOOK ONE*

This is to state that I, _____, agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Suzanne Maloney of the Department of Art Education of Concordia University, tel.: (514) 223-5056, Email: maloney@videotron.ca

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to answer the following question: What are the challenges involved in the integration of visual artmaking in a Ruhi study circle?

B. PROCEDURE:

This will be an opportunity for a small group of people with some artmaking experience to explore the use of the visual arts as a means of reflection and action, as part of the Ruhi Curriculum, specifically Ruhi – Book I: Reflections on Life of the Spirit.

Participation in this study circle will include:

1. An information meeting;
2. Regular participation in the study circle with study-circle facilitator, Julian Lebensold at 4192 Girouard (near métro Villa-Maria), Montreal, H4A 3C9;
3. Use of a visual journal and in-studio artmaking with artist-teacher, Lorraine Pritchard at 6322 St-Laurent Blvd. (near Beaubien Métro), H2S 3C4;
4. Weekly study circle and studio sessions will occur between September 2008 and February 2009 (this will include a break in December);
5. And this process will include sharing of experience and artworks with the members of the study circle and the researcher.
6. Materials will include the optional purchase of a journal book (cost $18) and Ruhi–Book One – Book I ($3.00 to $6.00), and any additional personal art supplies needed.
7. Permission to use the information you are requested to provide in the participant questionnaire first at the information meeting, and another upon completion of Book I, however, should you not wish to do so your wishes will be respected.

8. Permission to photograph and video record the study circle and the studio sessions; however should you wish to not be photographed or video recorded your wishes will be respected.

9. Permission to reproduce and publish some of your art work and journal entries is requested, however should you wish to not have them reproduced or published your wishes will be respected.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS:

No risks and no compensation.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences whatsoever.
- I understand that I have the choice as to whether or not I wish to reveal my true identity and so I choose of the following:
    - NON-CONFIDENTIAL (my identity will be revealed in study results)
    - CONFIDENTIAL (my identity will not be revealed in study results)
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY **CONSENT** AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x7481 or by email at areid@alcor.concordia.ca. Page 2 of 2

Appendix IX – Pre-project Participant Questionnaire

Name _____ (optional)

Age _____ (optional)

Gender _____(optional)

First language _____

Ethnicity (ethnic background, first-generation Canadian, languages spoken)

_____

_____

_____

Previous artmaking experience:

Drawing _____
Painting _____
Installations _____
Sculpture _____
Ceramics _____
Describe

_____

_____

_____

_____

Did you already study Book I or other Ruhi books?
(If you have, please list time, place and briefly describe your experience)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Why did you join this art study circle?

_____

_____

_____

What do you anticipate learning from this experience?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix X – Participant Letter of Invitation

> *Through the mere revelation of the word 'Fashioner' ...such power is released as can generate ...all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce. ...No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected.*
> — Bahá'u'lláh

July 29, 2008

Dear _____,

This letter is an invitation to you and a limited number of other individuals to participate in a very special *Ruhi–Book One* study circle. What will make it special is the particular attention being made to include the use of the arts as part of the process. In addition to myself, the facilitator, the collaborators in the study circle will also benefit from regular interactions with Lorraine Pritchard, an accomplished artist and art teacher. This will be an opportunity for a small group of people with some artmaking experience to explore the use of the visual arts as a means of reflection and action, as part of the Ruhi Curriculum, specifically *Ruhi – Book I: Reflections on Life of the Spirit.*

The study circle will meet every week, alternating between my home, 4192 Girouard, NDG, and Lorraine's studio, 6322 St-Laurent Blvd. (near Beaubien Métro). During the studio sessions, collaborators will work on visual art projects; during sessions at my home, they will work through Book 1.

There will be an information meeting on Wednesday, September 10 at 7:30 p.m. at my home, 4192 Girouard, Montreal (metro Villa-Maria).

Because of the special nature of this study circle, it will be the object of an art-education research project. Suzanne Maloney, my spouse, is a graduate student in the Department of Art Education at Concordia University, and various aspects of this study circle will be examined as part of her graduate research. As such she will be observing the study circle, as well as participating in it. She will provide a brief overview of her research at the first information meeting.

Should you decide to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form that is a necessary requirement set by the Concordia University Office of Research. The consent form will be reviewed at the information meeting and must be signed before the first study-circle meeting.

Normally study circles only require the purchase of the workbook; however, because of the more intensive use of the visual arts, collaborators can expect to incur the following costs (please note that both the facilitator and the artist educator are offering their services at no cost):

- *Ruhi – Book I* (estimated cost $6)
- A well-bound artist's workbook (approx. $18). The purchase of the journal is optional if you already have one (at least 8" X 10" with unlined drawing-quality paper).
- Any additional costs for art materials to be determined and paid for by individual participants.

Please call to confirm your presence by August 22 since spaces available are limited. If you know of someone who has some artmaking experience whom you feel would be an asset to the study circle, please let me know their contact information, and if there is room I will contact them to see if they are interested.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

Julian Lebensold
4192 Girouard
Montreal, H4A 3C9
Tel: (514) 223-5056
Email: julian@lebensold.ca

Appendix XI – Post-project Participant Questionnaire

March 2009

Name:

Reflecting back on this Ruhi study circle that involved the visual arts, how would you describe your experience?

Describe how you found the settings in which each activity occurred (home and studio):

How did you feel about having both a facilitator and an artist-teacher?

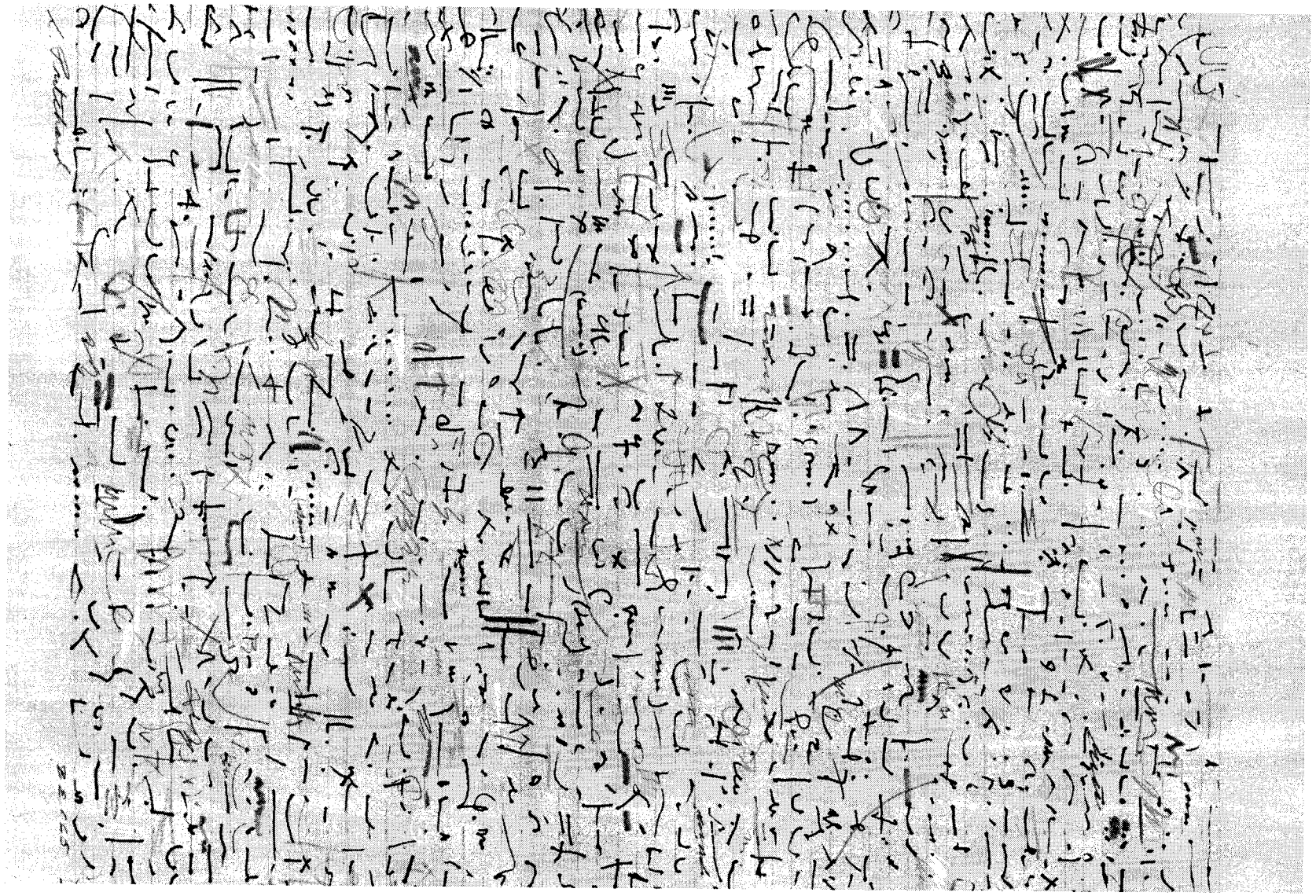
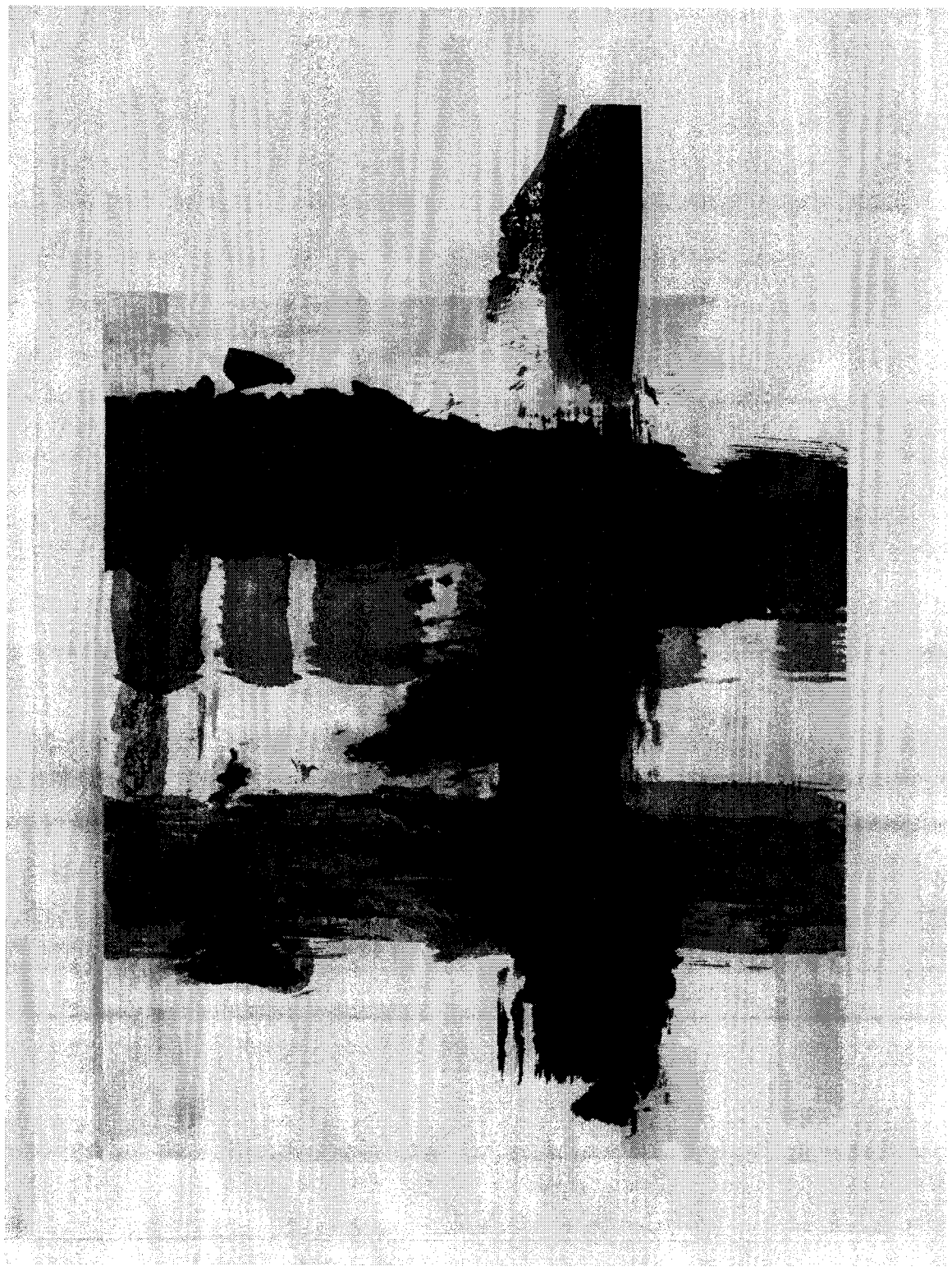
What was particularly interesting or meaningful for you in this experience?

What was particularly challenging?

What have you learned from this experience?
Has participating in this study and studio circle changed your perspective or your life in any way? If so, how?

If you had already participated in study circles before this one, how was this one different for you?

Was the addition of explicit art activity a positive or negative experience? Why?

What suggestions do you have for future use of the visual arts in study circles?

Appendix XII – Three Paintings by the Artist-teacher