

Entre Deux Chaises:
A Study of the Liminal Space of the Artist Teacher

Anne Pilon

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By: Anne Pilon

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Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. David Pariser

_____ Examiner
Dr. Kathleen Vaughan

_____ Examiner
Dr. Linda Szabad Smyth

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Lorrie Blair

Approved by _____
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____ 2016 _____
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ABSTRACT

Entre Deux Chaises:

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Anne Pilon

This thesis describes how I use action research methodology to study how engaging in artistic creation has changed how I see my role as an artist. I use a participatory art approach to consider how I experience the roles simultaneously. The dual roles of the artist and teacher are like being in a liminal state, where one is said to be in between two distinct roles or states of being. Through creative processes, making art and using reflection methods, I investigate how I experience liminality as a metaphor for being both an artist and a teacher of art. Rather than viewing this dual role as a compromise of each of them, I demonstrate that the roles compliment and strengthen each other. I explore how being in the liminal space between an artist role and teacher role is an ideal environment for creativity.

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To my husband, Richard.

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Entre Deux Chaises: A Study of the Liminal Space of the Artist Teacher

1. ART TEACHING AND ART PRACTICE: Introduction

Background

During my undergraduate years at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, I studied contemporary dance and theater. Three quarters of the way through the program I left my studies to start a family. While raising my children in the 1980s and 1990s I took courses at local art studios and cultural centers. I developed an interest in painting and drawing. My passion for visual arts grew as a result of learning from practicing artists who were also inspiring art teachers. Because of them I was inspired to continue to make art and eventually to teach it.

When I returned to university studies I finished my degree in fine arts and completed the Specialization in Art Education graduate certificate, so that I could have a professional career within the field of visual arts. I continued to develop my art skills in my painting, drawing and fiber arts courses while completing the certificate. Putting aside making time for art creation, I focused on pedagogy and assumed my full-time teaching responsibilities. Training to become a teacher and taking on a position as a high school art teacher meant that I did not make art as much as I would have liked.

After graduation, I took a job teaching art at a private high school for girls. At the beginning I was careful to dress formally and present myself as a competent and serious teacher. One day during class I needed to scoop paint from a jar and didn't have a spatula handy so I used my hand instead. A student observed this and made a telling remark: "Oh, so you are a *real art teacher!*" I paused and wondered what she had thought I was prior to this spontaneous and

seemingly innocuous use of my hands. Didn't I already seem like an art teacher to my students? It was as if the act of getting my hands dirty demonstrated that I was behaving more like an artist than a teacher. Would the student have a similar reaction to a math teacher performing a particularly involved calculation? I started to wonder about the artist-teacher identity and how I could rekindle the artist within me in order to be perceived by my students and myself as an artist and a teacher. After ten years of teaching I decided to go back to university studies in order to reconnect with being an artist.

My motivation for returning to school to do a Master's degree in art education was clear to me. It was to rediscover my passion for making art and to find ways to revive my art practice. I have been a visual arts teacher in a high school for the past fifteen years. The responsibilities of my work and family had become a priority, and creating art had taken a back seat. When people, especially my students' parents, asked me what kind of art I created I struggled to find an answer. The artist in me had been dormant for so long that I no longer felt like an artist. I am reasonably comfortable in my professional title of teacher, but I often felt conflicted with regards to the title artist. I decided that making art would become an important priority. Therefore I endeavored to find ways to integrate art making on a regular and sustainable basis in order to be able to legitimately and unquestioningly feel more deserving of the title "artist teacher".

Research Questions

Like many artist teachers I know who work in school systems, I struggled to find the time and motivation to create personal artwork. Because I had stopped producing art, I sometimes felt that calling myself an artist-teacher was a bit of a misrepresentation. I struggled to identify myself as an artist to parents and peers because I had not maintained my art practice. The conflict

I felt with regards to my identity as an artist caused feelings of insecurity in my identity as an artist-teacher. I have come to believe that in order to feel more confident in presenting myself as an artist-teacher, I must be able to call myself an artist. My research questions arose from my desire to find ways to renew my artist identity and to discover how doing so would impact my perception of myself as an artist-teacher. It prompted my research questions:

- How can I, as a full-time art teacher, re-invigorate my art practice?
- How will doing so change my perception in my role as an artist in the title of artist-teacher?

In this thesis, I discuss how focusing on my role as an artist enabled me to revive a much-neglected artistic practice. I address how making art has helped to reduce the tension in the title artist-teacher and illustrate how a return to making art has changed how I think about making art and teaching it.

Justification: Why is it important to address this issue?

For years the title artist-teacher has been used in the field of art and art education to describe individuals who are both artists and teachers. According to Daichendt (2010) it can be used to signify one is more than just a teacher of art, and can even rival the traditional title, art teacher or art instructor. However, the use of the term, artist-teacher can pose a problem as individuals in both the fields of art and education have challenged its meaning. There seems to be little consensus on the one true definition of the term. The word artist in the title artist-teacher seems to be partly at the root of the problem. There is little dispute that mathematics teachers can perform calculations and are good at problem solving, among other skills required to teach the subject. But there are often tensions about whether artist-teachers can be practicing artists as well

as teachers of art. The duality in the title indicates that one is committed to both practices, that of the artist and that of the teacher. How much commitment to each practice is required to fulfill both roles in order for a person to be perceived as both within the title? When does the dual identity begin to cause tension within a person and why does this happen?

Blair and Fitch (2015) found that the conflict of the artist role presents itself as soon as students begin teacher training. In a study of pre-service students in studio art classes they found that students in art education programs start to develop feelings of inadequacy as artists in their studio classes. This was partially due to their instructor's pre-conceived notion that students training to be art teachers are not serious artists because their commitments lie in art education. According to Blair and Fitch (2015), "The problem is then compounded by the contradictory message received in their home department, where the pedagogical role takes precedence over the artist role" (p.94).

In my case, tensions arose during my first years of working as a professional teacher when my teaching practice took precedence over my art practice. Before I started searching for employment as an art teacher I saw myself as an artist with an aptitude for teaching. When I interviewed for the art teacher position at my school I was asked about my teaching experience, but not about my art practice. Clearly the message was that pedagogical concerns of the administration were more important than artistic pursuits. In my school there are many opportunities for professional development in pedagogy, but time for artistic development is not built in to my workload. This is not to say that personal artistic development is discouraged by my school administration; nonetheless, making and exhibiting art has never been required as part of my job. The task of developing myself as an artist has been left up to me to pursue on my own

time. It is as if school administrators overlook the value that an active art practice can offer to the artist teacher's profession. School systems seem to provide little encouragement and support for artist teachers to continue their art practice.

In my conversations with other artist teachers, many have expressed the same frustrations about losing a sense of themselves as artists. They also say they lack the time, motivation and support to keep their art practice alive. A recent conversation with the music teacher at my school highlights the tension he feels when describing his profession. I asked him, "What do you call yourself as a professional?" After some hesitation he replied that he calls himself a music teacher when he is among friends who are professional musicians and a musician to students, parents and other teachers. It is as if he is apologetic about the fact that he is *merely* a music teacher to his musician peers. On the other hand, he seems to assert himself as an artist to those with whom he interacts professionally. To me the dual identities in the title artist-teacher indicates that one is committed to both practices, that of artist and of teacher. I believe that the conflict in the dual roles for artist-teachers is an important issue to address and that it is possible to understand the combined roles as complementary to each other. In discussing how I re-invigorated my art practice I hope to bring forth the value and benefit of addressing the issue of role conflict during teacher training so that artist-teachers can continue to develop their role as artist and to reduce the tension they will face as they pursue careers in teaching art.

Theoretical Framework

Being an artist-teacher often feels like I continually straddle two different states or roles. While researching this topic I discovered the notion of liminal described as being in the transition between two states. The word *limen* means threshold in Latin. According to Robertson &

McDaniel (2012), “The term is borrowed from the writings of the early twentieth-century Dutch ethnologist Arnold van Gennep, who described “liminal’ as the transitional phase a person moves through when he or she is experiencing a change in status” (Robertson & McDaniel, p. 333). The artist-teacher experiences continual transitions between the philosophies and practices of art and education. In this thesis I use the notion of liminal to investigate how I experience the space between the roles of artist and teacher. I explored the back and forth transitions from the teacher role to the artist role as I developed an understanding of how the two roles overlap and complement each other. I used the notion of being liminal to represent the physical and mental space where I perceived the integration of the two perspectives.

The French saying “entre deux chaises” literally translates in English to mean being between two stools, in other words, being in a difficult predicament. Being liminal has also been used to describe being neither one state nor another. Turner (1964) described the quality of liminal space as an ambiguous state. From this perspective, being liminal seemed unstable and problematic. Rather than view this state as a problem, I took a more positive approach. I decided to use the notion of being liminal as a space to explore and incubate ideas for art projects. I considered how liminal space represented a unique perspective and could be seen as a mental space for creativity. From this perspective being liminal was a place to study and redefine my artist’s role. In this thesis I discuss the notion of liminal space as a place for creative inspiration rather than an ambiguous place where my identity as an artist teacher was suspended.

Liminal Space As Theme

One of the most important challenges I faced when I decided to revive my art practice was deciding what kind of art I wanted to make. I hadn’t thought of myself as an artist for so long

that I lost the connection to ways of thinking like an artist. I drew inspiration from other artists who explored the concept of liminal space in their work. Among those I researched was German-American artist, Hans Breder. He is first and foremost a conceptual artist and photographer. Breder is known for his explorations of notions between real and virtual space. Through photography, sculpture and video Breder explores the “mingling of real and virtual space” (Breder & Busse, 2005, p. 207). Breder created and directed the Intermedia Program in the School of Art and Art History at the University of Iowa from 1968 to 2000. The goal of the program was to provide a site for art students to explore liminal spaces as a conceptual theme. Breder’s work is an example of how his role as an artist was an influence on his teaching practice. According to Busse (2005), “The core concept which his work in each medium seeks to explore and evoke, is the concept “liminality.” Busse explains liminality as, “the physiological, psychological and spiritual experience of threshold states, of in-between spaces, the pure consciousness of being neither here nor there. Busse goes on to say, “Breder’s work in each medium intends to serve as catalyst, evoking the experience of liminality” (p. 11).

A compelling aspect of Breder’s work is that he uses the engagement of the spectator as a participant in the artistic expression (p. 206). Breder (2005) views the practice as the connection between the audience and the artistic work. Participatory practice, according to Breder, “is collaborative, conceptually grounded, performative, ritualistic, site-specific. It exists in liminal space where the interplay of two or more media propagate new ideas, new forms, new ways of seeing and being” (Breder & Busse, 2005, p. 206).

Korean-American artist Soo Sunny Park also references the notion of in-between spaces in describing her art concepts (Spring, 2015). Her sculpture installation, *Unwoven Light*, 2013,

plays on the transient quality of changing light and its effect on the spectators as they experience the art (p.124). Ann Hamilton is another artist that actively engages spectators into the art experience. An example of this is her installation entitled *The Event of a Thread* (2012). In this multi-sensory installation visitors animated the space by their interactions with the elements of the piece. These elements included swings that hung from the gallery ceiling, that when used, moved a large cloth across the space. Other elements included sound and written texts to be read by spectators. Spring describes the installation as playing with a “particular point in space at an instant of time” (p. 54). The idea of exploring in-between spaces and directly engaging others in the art experience are two concepts that inspired my theme and work.

I drew on the notion of liminal as the theme for ideas and as a concept that guided the development of my projects. I also became mindful of my own experiences as they related to the notion of liminality. While searching to place my mother in a senior’s residence I was shown a room that had just recently become available. The former resident had just passed away and their personal items were still lying about on the furniture. I was struck by the uncanny feeling that the person was still present through the personal objects and physical traces they left. I connected that event with the idea that the person was in a liminal state, departed but still present through personal objects. I also started to reflect on my past artwork that also drew inspiration from the physical traces left behind by people or events.

I began to think about ways that I could deliberately collect physical traces left by people. I started to think about the staffroom where I work as a symbolic liminal space, a place where teachers enter and suspend their professional roles for a short time. In a way, it is a physical and mental transitional space that is akin to a liminal space. In this space teachers regularly cross

thresholds from one state to another, from teacher to another role, sometimes several times a day. In considering the physical aspect of the staffroom as a metaphor for transitional or liminal space I invited teachers to create artwork there, to leave their traces behind. I created participatory art installations to engage people while I was simultaneously teaching in my classroom. When I was not teaching I would go to the staffroom and collect the traces left by my co-workers. In this way I used participatory art practice and connected it to the theme of art performed in a liminal space.

2. IDENTITIES AND ROLES: Review of Literature

The Artist-Teacher Identity

The underlying issue explored in this thesis is connected to the notion of professional identity. One's perception of professional titles contributes to identity formation. Titles and identifications have both a psychological and professional impact on individuals "being in the world" (Thornton, 2013, p. 5). Social identity and role identity are two characterizations of identity formation. Social identity relates to belonging to a certain group while role identity refers to the role one takes on within a group (Stets & Burke, 2000). The artist teacher belongs to two distinct groups; those who are artists and educators, while the roles within these groups are integrated with one another (Daichendt, 2010; Thornton, 2013). For Thornton, people are multifaceted with a variety of roles and identities that make up their overall personal identity. How individuals see themselves within a group and how they perform their role in the group contributes to identity formation (Stets & Burke, 2000). The professional title 'artist teacher' represents the integration of artist and educator roles but the term is fraught with tension (Blair & Fitch, 2015; Daichendt, 2010; Thornton, 2013).

Many have written extensively about the implications of the title "artist teacher." Day (1986) and Thornton (2013) questioned the title "art teacher" and found it to be problematic. To them, the term art teacher or art educator falls short because it does not identify the individual as an artist first and foremost. Booth (2014) suggests the term "artist teacher" would better describe the profession. In his book "*Artist Teacher*" Daichendt (2010) writes that the title "artist teacher" is a powerful term that is widely used to refer to people who work in the field of art education, whether in museums, community centers or schools. In his view, the term describes people who

are both artists and teachers, but it has implications beyond the fact that it represents a dual identity. It represents a teaching philosophy and a way of using artistic thinking processes in the context of the classroom.

Based on my literature search, scholars have long debated the complexities in the title “artist teacher” as a blend of both identities. Day (1984), for example, writes that the model of artist teacher is an image that portrays a person who is first and foremost an artist. He claims that the image of the artist as a lone figure working in a studio is contradictory to that of the teacher, who is more like a coach or moderator of a large group of people. For Day, teaching is a social and dynamic practice. Classroom artist teachers, for example those in high schools, are confined by a set schedule and prescribed objectives within a fluid situation. Their first responsibility is to the students' education. This is contrary to the situation of individual studio artists who works on their own schedule, in their own space and with their own objectives.

The artist teacher title implies a dual identity and complex roles within each identity (Booth, 2014; Daichendt, 2010; Thornton, 2013). Roles in both identities have been studied separately and together as they examine the various characteristics in each role and identify differences and common aspects. (Daichendt, 2010; Thornton, 2013). Uptis (2005) writes, “By artist teacher, I refer to those teachers with substantial professional training in one or more art forms, who maintain a home studio or are otherwise active in art-making, but whose primary vocation is teaching” (p. 2). Thornton posits that the term artist teacher came originally from a tradition of professional artists who taught apprentices, but more recently the term refers to artists who teach in art schools or those in general education who also make art (p. 20). For Thornton the term carries with it the implication that the person makes art and teaches it and the two are

complementary “at every level of art education” (p. 20).

Thornton (2013) and Daichendt (2010) argue that the title artist teacher signifies two distinct identities that sometimes intersect and sometimes have contradictory values. They studied the identity conflict issues to better understand how the title artist teacher fits the contemporary art education scheme and found that the dual identity can cause tension and instability in a person’s self-perception and that it can lead to identity conflict for some people. Day (1986) believes that contemporary art educators focus not only on art production but also on art history, criticism and approaches to learning about art (p. 38). Day commented that the title artist teacher places more focus on the artist role at the expense of the teacher role. He believes that the title, artist teacher, fits most appropriately to those who teach art at college and universities and are expected by their employers to continue to maintain their artistic practice (p. 38). For Day, the title becomes problematic at the public school level. He wrote, “The image of individualist nonconformist is not compatible with the performance of many teaching responsibilities that require placing the welfare of students” (p. 40).

Thornton (2013) discussed the use of the terms artist teacher, teacher artist, and art teacher as being related, but with slightly different implications. He interprets the title of artist teacher as one who privileges art making over teaching (p. 27). He stated the term art teacher emphasizes the professional role of the teacher whose main function is to teach art. What is important for Thornton is the use of the word ‘art’ in the title. He emphasizes the importance of art making and appreciation. Furthermore, an art teacher must continue to develop professionally. He stated, “The term artist teacher could be understood as implying a mutual relationship that benefits not only the developing artistry of the student but also the developing artistry of the art

teacher” (p. 27). According to Daichendt (2010) “Artist teacher, when used properly, is actually a philosophy for teaching. It does not presuppose an artistic lifestyle but uses the individual talents and learned skills of techniques of the artist and circumvents them into the teaching profession” (p. 61).

Early Teacher Training and Role Conflict

Art education scholars challenge society’s misconceptions that artists become art teachers because they weren’t successful as artists (Blair & Fitch, 2015; Daichendt, 2010; Imms & Ruanglerbutr, 2012; Thornton, 2013). For Daichendt (2010) the problem lies in art teachers who have a negative self-perception. To him an artist is one who makes, experiences and engages in art (p. 65). Blair and Fitch (2015) reported that some art education students felt stigmatized by their fellow fine art students and sometimes their teachers in studio art classes while training to be art teachers. They studied the students’ self-perception in relation to their colleagues in fine arts and their studio art teachers. They found that many students experienced feelings of inadequacy about themselves as serious artists (Blair & Fitch, 2015). Blair and Fitch noted the negative view of art education students by studio art teachers in fine art classes.

Imms and Ruanglerbutr (2012) compared normal art programs with those where practicing artists were present. They found that student engagement, creativity and skills improved when a practicing artist was teaching. To find out why this was so they studied the perception, within the broader community, that art teachers who work in schools are “failed artists or uncommitted artists” (p. 58). They found that several myths perpetuate this notion, for example, “that artists cease to produce one they start to teach; that having an artistic career in tandem with teaching makes one a better teacher; that practicing artists eventually exit the

teaching profession, leaving that task to pedagogues” (p.58). They conducted a longitudinal study tracking art educators’ early-career experiences to determine the factors that contribute to such myths. They were interested in seeing how new art teachers retain or lose their artist identity. They concluded that an art teachers’ artistic identity changes early on in their careers and may even disappear altogether as a result of shifting from art maker role to the art teacher role.

Imms and Ruanglerbutr (2012) also studied whether art teachers who continue to make art considered themselves to be better art teachers. They found that when art teachers are committed to personal art practice their self-perception is more positive and therefore see themselves as better art teachers (p.70). They suggest ways that the dual identities can be harmonious. These include having opportunities to study the concept of artist teacher, finding ways to obtain support from schools for ongoing artistic pursuits and professional development.

Zwirn (2005) examined how art educators derive meaning from their artist and teacher roles. She interviewed four groups, each comprised of six individuals. The groups were composed of undergraduate and graduate art education students, and art teachers who were at different points in their teaching careers. Using role concept theory to interpret responses, she wanted to gain an understanding of each individual’s identity construction as artists and educators. Role theory is based on societal expectations in relation to people’s perception of their role. For example, a teacher might be viewed as someone who behaves in a serious, purposeful and organized manner while an artist might be seen as someone who is unconventional or peculiar. When these two roles are assessed separately they seem contrary to one another in the way they play out in society. In this way the art teacher roles are connected and sometimes conflict with each other. Zwirn found that since art teachers train as artists and as teachers there

are specific expectations about the two roles. On the one hand the art student is “educated to master techniques in order to foster personal expression” and art education students are “taught to present a broad range of media and numerous artistic orientations” (p. 2).

According to Zwirn (2005), role conflict occurs when the expectations of the roles are not compatible. How individuals reconcile the two roles may depend on their experience, training, place in their career and ability for what theorists call role conflict resolution. Career satisfaction can depend on an individual’s ability to reconcile the two roles. Negotiating between the two roles may not be easy because the expectations society places on people in specific professional settings shapes the development of their identity. As Day (1984) proposed, the image people have of an artist as an independent, creative person is not compatible with that of a teacher, one who addresses all aspects of visual art education (p. 39). For example, if I regularly presented my high school students with unconventional art project proposals or if I didn’t respect the schedule or objectives, I would run the risk of not being taken seriously by my students, their parents and other teachers, potentially putting my job in jeopardy. Unconventional behavior is incompatible with the expectations of a teacher. At the same time I want to integrate my role as an artist and model artistic behavior in my teaching.

For Zwirn (2005), integration of artistic behaviour can be a positive trait of art educators; nonetheless, pedagogy and teaching must remain their priority. Zwirn found that some mid-career teachers prioritize artistic pursuits over teaching duties while other prioritized their role as a teacher. Art education students aim to keep the connections with their studio and art education courses. Regardless of the individual’s priorities, resolving issues around role conflict depends on many factors including professional development, engagement with art practices, merging

pedagogy goals with artistic models and gaining support from others.

Integration of Roles

For Daichendt (2010) the combined term describes an individual who uses artistic approaches in pedagogical systems. He states, “Artist-teacher, when used properly, is actually a philosophy for teaching. It does not presuppose an artistic lifestyle but uses the individual talents and learned skills or techniques of the artist and circumvents them into the teaching profession” (p. 61).

For Thornton (2013), whether one adopts the title "artist teacher" or "teaching artist," the implied dual role can cause an identity crisis because the practices are different; furthermore, the approaches and values within of each of the roles are in conflict. He studied teacher identity, artist identity and artist teacher identity as three distinct concepts with overlapping features and common factors. Thornton (2013) suggested using the integral theory approach to allow for the integrity of the both identities to coexist. Thornton states, “Integral theory is considered amenable to an understanding of being as a mediator of a plethora of personal roles and identifications important to the individual but potentially destructive when in constant conflict” (p. 8). When the roles and identities are in constant conflict, one finds reconciliation in both roles by actively practicing both roles. According to Thornton (2013) the current labels used for what art teachers do are not always reflective of the overlapping features of the practices. Finding a way to examine and articulate how the roles work together is important for the development of art education. Thornton explains, “We need to gain some understanding of ourselves and the social conditions in which our professional identities are formed” (p. 131). Art making is not only an activity practiced by lone artists in their studios but can include others in collaborative and

social art practices.

Graham and Zwirn (2010) examined the teaching artist model and its influence on K-12 art educators. They interviewed art teachers who actively make art and found that being an artist contributed to their teaching practice. They outline “studio habits of mind” that are particular to artists' practices and tested how it might contribute to teaching artists pedagogy (p. 220). Their study revealed ways in which individuals adapted to and garnered meaning from the artist and teacher roles in their lives. Some of the ways included visiting contemporary art galleries, engaging students in “interpreting art and envisioning ideas” and fostering play and experimentation as part of the creative process (p. 222). In this way, artistic behaviors are integrated into the teaching practice. They examined the conditions of learning in an art classroom through the lens of complexity theory to understand the complex learning environment as it pertains to the adaptations involved and describe how art teachers initially train as artists and later pursue a career in art education. The authors describe how a lack of time and energy makes it difficult to maintain an art practice while teaching. Those in the study who managed to practice art while teaching fulltime found aspects of their work to be connected. Graham and Zwirn concluded that, “There is much to be gained from the struggle to keep the artist alive, particularly if it contributes to sustaining art teacher’s interest in school learning as an extension of their artistry” (p. 230). They found that art teachers who kept an active art practice saw themselves as engaged in a life-long process of personal development and that the teachers experienced a greater sense of self-respect. In my position as an artist teacher it is as important to model this approach towards self-improvement, as it is to teach art techniques. It is beneficial for students to view their teachers as artists who struggle and then find ways to learn from the art making process.

Identities can coexist when one is active in both the roles (Daichendt, 2010). I agree with Thornton (2013) who says, “It is in the spirit of integral theory that I am proposing that these identities can and do coexist and overlap, and awareness of this, and openness to the possibilities in practice, self identification and organizational opportunities over time, may help individual’s sense of renewal and becoming practitioners” (p. 133). Imms and Ruanglerbutr (2012) state, “Art teachers can have a greater impact on student learning outcomes if their professional identity amalgamates the roles of teacher and artist, a hybrid identity that conflates two quite distinct professions (p. 58) In this thesis I explain how I achieved a better sense of myself as an artist teacher through the activation of my role as an artist and the integration of the two identities.

3. CREATION FOR KNOWLEDGE: Methodology

Action Research

According to McNiff (2013), action research is a methodology that enables practitioners to examine and change their practices. As a methodology, action research is used to acquire knowledge about one's practice with the goal of improving it. Since one of the aims of this study is to re-invigorate my art practice, I chose to use action research to examine my art practice, reflect on its efficacy, and implement a plan of action to improve it. McNiff writes, "Action researchers see knowledge as something they do, a living process" (p. 24). Since my inquiry is about renewing myself as an artist through art practice, it was appropriate to use this methodology. Thornton (2013) offers the following characteristics of action research:

- Practitioners who engage in action research strive to improve their practice as a direct result of the research.
- It tends to be autonomous and is evaluated from the practitioner's/client perspective.
- Although tending to be autonomous, it may be undertaken by peers in collaboration in a specific workplace or environment.
- Improvement in the immediate context is a major driver of the research (p. 124).

Action research, also called practice-based or practice-led research, involves identifying an issue, collecting baseline data, implementing a plan, and reflecting upon its outcome. This process is a cyclical or spiral approach (McNiff, 2013; Thornton, 2013) McNiff (2013) defines the steps, known as action-reflection, as follows: observe – reflect – act – evaluate – modify – move in new directions (p.10). The issue I addressed was my negative self-perception as an artist and its implication in the title, artist-teacher. In addition, I developed an art practice and integrated it into my teaching practice thus re-defining the roles within the title.

My process involved planning and executing participatory art activities to engage my colleagues at work and then to use their products and comments as data for reflection. I then

observed their interaction with the materials and reflected on their written and verbal responses. Finally, using their feedback, I evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the concept in order to modify and plan a new iteration. Thus the process was ongoing and in constant development.

Knowledge about myself emerged through reflection after each art activity. This epistemological perspective is referred to as constructivism. According to Daichendt (2010), “Constructivists create their own reality (thus multiple realities exist) and understanding of the work through their experiences” (p. 103).

Research-Creation Method

In this thesis I use research-creation to investigate how artistic practice and academic research helped to inform me about the importance of my role as an artist within the title of art teacher. Chapman and Sawchuck (2012) explain research-creation as a method of inquiry that integrates creative processes and artistic work as forms of research and research presentation. Research-creation methods allow the integration of a variety of approaches including the investigation of artwork and creative processes that could not be addressed using other methods. The authors expand the definition of research-creation by examining the meaning of the individual words “research” and “creation,” to identify how each is used in a variety of types of research-creation projects. They divide research-creation into four distinct forms: research-for-creation, research-from-creation, creative presentations of research and creation-as-research.

In using research-for-creation, the researcher gathers information using familiar academic practices such as archival research, interviews, and literature reviews. Chapman and Sawchuck (2012) state, “Research-for-creation involves many familiar basic research skills, including how

to do a media or literature review and the identification of a cluster of concepts that provide intellectual guidance and inspiration for the project” (p. 8).

On the other hand, research-from-creation consists of research in art projects that not only could stand on their own as works of art, but also can (and will) be used as raw data for the research. According to Chapman and Sawchuck (2012), “The use of such research-from-creation information does not simply come at the end of the process to 'evaluate' the effectiveness of the work; instead, the work itself can be used to generate information on what is being created” (p. 8).

The third category discussed by Chapman and Sawchuck (2012) is creative presentations of research. As the name suggests, it describes presenting traditional data using unconventional and creative presentation forms. These could include video or audio productions.

Finally, creation-as-research is distinguished by its use of creativity to produce data and to analyze it. Chapman and Sawchuck (2012) state, “It is a form of exploration through creative processes that can include experimentation, analysis, critique, and a profound engagement with theory and questions of method” (p. 11).

Research-From-Creation

Of the four forms of research-creation, research-from-creation is the one most closely aligned with my own method. Chapman and Sawchuck (2012) emphasize this method as involving “an iterative process of going back and forth between creation and reflection or knowledge development” (p. 14). My process involved planning, executing and reflecting on an

action. The result of the reflection was used as a reference point to drive the new iteration. Using the spiral approach in action research and the iterative process of research-from-creation, I developed a series of four iterations of participatory art installation projects that provided data for reflection. My use of participatory art practice was meant as a means to study how I enact my role as an artist by conceiving and staging art events. It did not engage the participants directly in the research, nor did I study the actions or products of the people who engaged in the art making. The traces made by my participant's interactions with the material served as a vehicle to study my engagement as an artist. This process was risky because I could not predict how much participation would take place during the art activities. Therefore I did not know in advance what kinds of marks or traces I would have to transform into an artwork later on. However, the unpredictability was part of the creative process that helped me to understand how I, as an artist, used reflection and found meaning in my art form. Each reflection period was followed by a new approach, thus the iterative method in research-creation provided an excellent platform for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Leavy (2009) and Daichendt (2012) state that art-based research uses a variety of ways to collect, analyze and represent data. According to Leavy (2009) "Arts-based research practices are a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation and representation" (p. 2). For Daichendt (2012), collecting data can be accomplished through artistic processes, and artwork produced by the researcher plays the role of the key data collected in the inquiry. (p. 98)

According to Daichendt (2012), art and objects are the primary sources of data in visual arts-based research. Following this reasoning, I collected data in a variety of forms, including informal feedback from participants, photo documentation, and my own artwork. Works of art created by anonymous participants, art educators and myself constitutes the majority of the data collected.

Feedback from participants played a significant role in motivating me to continue to install art activities in our staff lounge. Written and verbal feedback from the people involved provided me with evidence that their experience was positive. I took digital photos at various stages of the process for each project. These provided helpful data to be studied. The photos were also used as a direct source of material for my art production. Thus the documentary photos served as data and as material for artistic inspiration.

In analyzing the data I looked for ways in which the activity engaged people or not. If people made art, then it worked. If not, then there was something wrong with my plan. In analyzing this way I was able to see the limitations of the approach. Through reflection and the creative process, I was able to gauge how well my plan worked and consider new directions when needed. The purpose of the study was to find ways to make art and the means was to engage people in the process.

Visual arts-based participatory methods use visual art as a way to access human experiences. According to Leavy (2009) “visual arts-based participatory methods are a specific set of practices for incorporating visual art into the research process” (p. 227). Leavy posits that visual arts-based participatory methods can access hidden dimensions of social experience in

ways that other methods cannot. For her, the art produced in this process “serves both *as* data, and may also *represent* data” (p. 227). The art produced for this thesis serves as data that was also a point of departure for subsequent participatory art projects. I used a hybrid approach that began with a participatory art project, followed by a second phase where I use the products created by my participants from the first phase as raw materials for making subsequent art projects. Thus, I had a dual role, as architect of the project given to my participants in the first stage and as participant myself in the second stage. Viewed as a whole, therefore, the method is highly interactive in nature and its development depends on participants’ responses. I combined reflective practices and evaluated the efficacy of the process. I used that knowledge and modified my approach to develop new iterations and to move in new directions. Information that emerged from action and reflection was valid as it gives results that could be evaluated. The question I asked myself was how did the action contribute to reduce the tension regarding my role as an artist? How did applying that knowledge contribute to change and transformation in my practice? Through this process I was able to gain an understanding of my perception of myself as an artist. I expand on how these processes produced knowledge in chapter five of this thesis.

In conclusion, the multiple methods used to collect and analyze the data included observation, reflection, action, evaluation, and modification of actions in practice. The reflections were insightful and contributed to my understanding of the artist teacher identity. This knowledge was a catalyst for me to move in new directions in my art and teaching practice.

4. METAMORPHOSES: Art Process

Participatory Art Practice: Defining My Art Process

In my initial attempts to find a way to create art, I decided to convert a walk-in closet in my art room at work into an art studio. The idea was to have a specific place and use spare periods during my workday to dedicate time to draw and paint. After making a few attempts to sequester myself in my makeshift studio I realized that this approach would not work and the idea was abandoned. There are three main reasons why this approach failed. First, given that the studio space was in my workplace, the temptation to attend to other pressing responsibilities, rather than make art, was too great. Secondly, it was a struggle to find subjects that I wanted to draw and paint. Finally, I did not have an audience or purpose for creating work other than for pleasure. It seemed impossible to revert back to the way I used to make art, by being alone in an art studio and I was not inspired to continue working this way. I had to find a new approach.

I had to reconsider what it means to be an artist today. Did I have to create art in a studio? Did I need an audience to appreciate the work I produced? I searched for a definition of artist and found SSHRC's definition of artistic discipline as, "Any one, or any combination, of the following categories: architecture, design (including interior design), creative writing, visual arts (painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, textiles), performing arts (dance, music, theatre), film, video, performance art, interdisciplinary arts, media and electronic arts, and new artistic practices. (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Definition of Terms, 2014). Within this broad and inclusive definition, I decided to use participatory art practice to create art. From this point of departure, I found that I could work without needing a studio space and participants could engage in art making with me and appreciate the work as its audience, simultaneously.

In the next section I describe how I was introduced to participatory art practice. I define participatory art practice and describe how some artists use it. I recount how I was a collaborator and participant in an art installation produced by Mexican artist Maria Ezcurra. I map out how I employed collaboration with others as a strategy for making art using my work environment as a point of departure.

Introduction to Relational Aesthetics and Participatory Art Practice

Participatory art practices are installation works that invite participants to engage in specific social interactions, in performances and, at times, in art making. The artist places the emphasis on the engagement of people with their environment rather than on creating finished works of art. According to Robertson and McDaniel (2013) this process, sometimes called relational art, is used to explore the human experience in social contexts. Participants who engage in this process are not necessarily trained artists and sometimes their participation produces unexpected results. Bishop (2006) describes the social dimension of participation as "...striving to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception. Their emphasis is on collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience" (p. 10). Gablik writes: "When everything is perceived as dynamically interconnected, art needs to collaborate with the environment and a new sense of relationship causes the old polarity between art and audience to disappear" (p. 150).

When I started my Master's degree in Art Education at Concordia University I discovered participatory art practice through reading and studying contemporary art practices in studio classes taught by Dr. Juan Carlos Castro. Artists who engage in participatory art invite their

participants to collaborate in the art making process initiated by them. This practice invites interaction between people and their environment, thereby making the relationship part of the artistic expression. My first participatory art project occurred in 2012 when I took Dr. Castro's course called "Participatory Art and Social Practice". During the course, we were asked to respond to the question, how does art teach? Classmates were asked to offer each other prompts or topics to respond to and to interpret in an art piece. I chose to respond to a classmate who put forth the idea in some cultures women create their own undergarments that incorporate many symbols. In my interpretation I engaged my colleagues at work by inviting them to respond to the prompt. I bought a dozen women's white handkerchiefs and supplied materials such as embroidery thread and fabric markers I placed them in the lunchroom where I work. Over a period of two weeks I obtained eight different responses. I transformed the handkerchiefs by attaching them together and created an art installation that was presented as a performance, to my classmates. The performance consisted of taking neatly folded handkerchiefs out of a box one at a time, slowly unfolding and refolding them, and then placing them in a slow and deliberate fashion back into a box. I wanted to portray each individual's story as precious and hidden in his or her artwork.

Many contemporary artists use participatory art approaches in a variety of ways. Although far from being an extensive list of artists, the following examples illustrate three different approaches that artists have used in participatory art work to engage the audience through their participation and as collaborators in performance work: the late Felix Gonzalves Torres (1957-96), Marina Abramovic and Maria Ezcurrea. In his participatory art installation called, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991) Gonzalez-Torres heaped 175 pounds of unwrapped candy into a corner of a gallery floor at The Art Institute of Chicago. He referred to them as "spills". The

weight of the pile of candy was equal to that of Gonzalez-Torres' partner prior to contracting an AIDS-related disease. He invited viewers to take candy from the pile, and as they did so, the pile became lighter, representative of the diminishing condition of his partner who later died. The Art Institute of Chicago, where the installation is housed, replenished the candy so as to provide a continuous engagement between the audience and the artwork (Robertson and McDaniel 2013). When encountering this work the audience/participants face a dilemma: should they take one candy, a handful of candies, or none at all, and what would the gallery security guard have to say about the putative theft? In this instance, the artist was not present when the participation occurred but the audience experienced and made meaning of the work in his or her own way.

To contrast Gonzalez-Torres' art installation, Abramovic's performance piece, *The Artist is Present* (2010), is an example of participatory art that engaged participants in a performance along with the artist. Staged at New York's Museum of Modern Art, Abramovic sat at a long table for several hours a day over a period of two and a half months. She invited visitors to sit in a chair across from her. They gazed into each other's eyes without speaking until the participant decided to get up and leave.

A third example that illustrates an approach to participatory art practice is where the participants were also collaborators in the art production. In February of 2014 I participated in an art installation entitled *Trends, Threads and Threats* (2014) created by Mexican artist Maria Ezcurra. She engaged the collaboration of twenty participants to produce the imagery that would later represent her concept. In this project Ezcurra explored people's relationship to culture and meaning through their interpretations of the wedding dress. The artist provided her participants with a choice of wedding dresses that she had from purchased second-hand stores. She asked us

to reflect on the significance of the wedding dress from our point of view and to re-imagine its transformation. To me the wedding dress represented how I focused on the details and trappings of a traditional wedding, including having the perfect white dress, and had neglected to attend to the difficulties faced in the relationship. Eventually the marriage was dissolved. I described to her how I wanted the dress to represent the slow and difficult disintegration of the marriage. I chose a simple, straight dress that had a slip underneath and a sheer dress overtop. I asked Ezcurra to cut the top layer of the dress into pieces, starting at the top with larger pieces and getting smaller working its way down to the bottom, to dissolve into tiny shreds of cloth. I asked her to reattach each piece with thread to represent the idea that, throughout, this marriage I was *hanging on by a thread*. Finally, I was unable to move around while wearing the transformed dress, representing the idea of being *stuck* in a difficult situation (see Figure 1).

Ezcurra transformed the dresses and then photographed each of us wearing them. She printed the photographs onto silk and exhibited them as a series of banners. Each interpretation offered a very different and personal meaning. In addition to the printed silk banners, several participants, including myself, performed by wearing our dresses and engaging with the audience in Art Souterrain at Place Bonaventure in February of 2014.



Figure 1. Photograph of Anne Pilon printed on silk banner for the installation *Threads Trends and Threats* by Maria Ezcurra, taken at the Notre Dame de Grace Cultural Center in March, 2014

Participatory Acts in Liminal Space

What is striking to me in these three examples is that the artist's concept forms only part of the artwork. A common element in all three works is that when the artist conceived and created the installations or staged the experiences, they had to relinquish some control over to the participant's interaction or interpretation of the elements provided in the work. The final expression of the work is completed by the actions of participants. Without the collaboration of others, the art doesn't exist in its fullest expression. These notions informed how I considered new approaches and inspired me to find ways to incorporate participatory and collaborative approaches into my art practice.

Using notions of participatory art, I developed four art projects in which I invited

colleagues to collaborate with me in making art. In my school staffroom I installed three art interventions inviting fellow teachers to experiment with art materials and to express their responses to the experience in words. These three interventions took place while I was teaching in another classroom, recalling the process used by Gonzalves-Torres. The fourth art project occurred at the Canadian Society for Education in Art annual conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the fall of 2014. During my presentation at the conference I asked for participation from other art educators by inviting them to write me a postcard. The details of all four projects are discussed later in this thesis. The act of making artwork in collaboration with others served both as a practical solution, solving the problem of lack of time and space to create, and to explore how I function as an artist in the collective experience. In setting up art interventions, I could make art while I was teaching in another part of the school, therefore acting in the liminal space.

A feature of participatory art practice is that sometimes the artist may not be present while the art is being created (Robertson and McDaniel, 2013, p. 33). By using this feature I could work on an art project even if I was working somewhere else; in that sense I was acting in the liminal. Through this investigation, new knowledge about my relationship to others in my role as an artist has emerged. This new knowledge changed how I connect with others both as an art teacher in my classroom and in my community. Gablik (1991) states, “Art that realizes its purpose through *relationship* - that collaborates consciously with the audience and is concerned with how we connect with others – can actually *create* a sense of community” (p. 157-158). By employing research-from-creation methodology, I explore how others understand my role as an artist through the use of participatory art practice.

The First Proposal

My conversations with other high school art teachers indicate to me that I am not alone in feeling frustrated with regards to lack of time and space for personal art practice. Like many art teachers I know, teaching practice is a priority while art practice gets left behind. This inquiry began with the intention to investigate how other full time art teachers negotiate the dual roles.

As a way to investigate other art teacher's experiences I proposed to interview high school art teachers with whom I have had meaningful discussions about role conflict. I hoped to gain insight into how they faced the dilemma and to create a dialogue about possible solutions. I wrote a series interview questions to collect data about the common issues that arise as a result of straddling the two roles and especially with regards to neglecting personal art practice.

Along with the written analysis of the data collection I also wanted to create artwork as a component of the proposed thesis and thought I might create art projects to interpret the responses to my questions. To do that I proposed to ask the interviewees, "What artwork would you make if you had time?" My intention was to interpret their response to this question by creating the artwork they would make and in doing this, I would act as an artist on their behalf. Moreover, I thought I would create a representation of their ideas in my own way.

In my first attempt at exploring this inquiry I interviewed a colleague, Jane (not her real name) who teaches art at my school. Besides being a fulltime art teacher, she is a mother and has a very busy family life. We have taught together for many years and have an excellent work relationship based on open communication and frequent collaboration. Jane was more than willing to help me pilot my interview questions.

I conducted the interview and at the end I asked her what artwork she would make if she had the time. Jane's art practice is in painting and participatory art approaches. Her body of artwork features people's relationship with food and memories evoked through the senses. She described how she would make edible artwork, in the form of cakes, and display them on gallery walls. Using a participatory art approach she described how she would invite the audience to consume the art, both physically and metaphorically. The audience participation would be a way to engage people with the art experience through the senses and for her to observe people's actions. In this collaboration between the artist and the audience the process of consumption and decay is a more important feature than the end result. We agreed to try out her idea in our own staff room and using her art images, I created "*The Cake Project*". It is important to note that the scope and depth of my colleague's concept would not fully be realized. Jane's intention, were she to create this project in her way, would be to install the edible art in a gallery and observe the decay of the works over several days. For the purposes of this pilot study I installed the project to reflect what I thought was its essence as my colleague described to me. This smaller scale project was intended to be a one-day participatory art project for the purposes of my own research process.

Cake Project

Every Friday a staff member at my school brings treats to share with everyone. I decided to combine this ritual with my colleague's concept of food, art and consumption to recreate her idea. I baked three large cakes and decorated them with edible prints of my colleague's own artwork. I put them in the staff room at our school and invited people to come and eat the cake during the lunch hour (Figure 2).



Figure 2: “*Let Us Eat Cake* ” (artwork on cakes used with permission)
May 2013 Photographic documentation, Anne Pilon

The purpose of this activity was to test out the viability of my proposal to create artwork using another art teacher’s idea. I purposely kept my explanation of the project to a minimum in order to avoid having an influence on the participant’s reactions and to allow the event to unfold in a spontaneous way. I was also curious to see if people would ask about the artwork on the cake. I invited staff members to write their reactions and impressions on napkins as they ate the cake. All of the participants wrote their impressions and few participants made reference to the images themselves other than asking how the edible prints were made.

The comments written on the napkins (Figure 3) reveal a variety of positive reactions. They include, “I love art and I love cake. They both make me happy” and “*Sensational!!! Toutes les routes mènent à l’art*” (Sensational!!! All Roads Lead To Art). These reactions demonstrate how happy people were to have shared this experience. Others responded with astute observations such as, “I learned a new thing today about art! p.s. beautiful cake” and “So hard to cut into something so beautiful! I wanted the cake but did not want to destroy the art. A

In the first part of her comment Jane refers to her participation in a special project created in collaboration with the artists from the group, En Masse. They are a group of artists, based in Montreal, who create large-scale black and white drawings and who use a collaborative approach (<http://enmasse.info>). They had come to our school to create a mural with the students and my colleague worked closely with them. She considers that event along with her participation in my project as two special events and as something different from the daily routine. Jane goes on to consider how she consumes her own images. To me her comment can be interpreted to mean that she has a desire to share what she considers as a valuable part of her art with others. I believe that by considering this she is seeking to be validated and recognized as an artist.

New Considerations

While working on the pilot project I felt slightly dissatisfied with the idea of creating artwork using someone else's ideas. In discussing this dilemma during my proposal presentation with my thesis committee I realized that the best way to address the issue was to ask myself the same question, "What art would I do if I had the time?" With the counsel from my thesis committee I changed the focus from the study of other art teacher's experiences to study my own art practice with the goal to find ways to integrate art practice back into my daily life. This new direction brought with it a new problem, that of finding my own subject.

During the course of the pilot project I photographed the event as it unfolded. One particular photo helped me think about a subject that has always been of particular interest to me (Figure 4). It represents the idea of documenting the traces people leave behind after an event. I realized at that moment that I, as an artist, was adding my own perspective. I also used the

comments on the napkins as data for reflection.

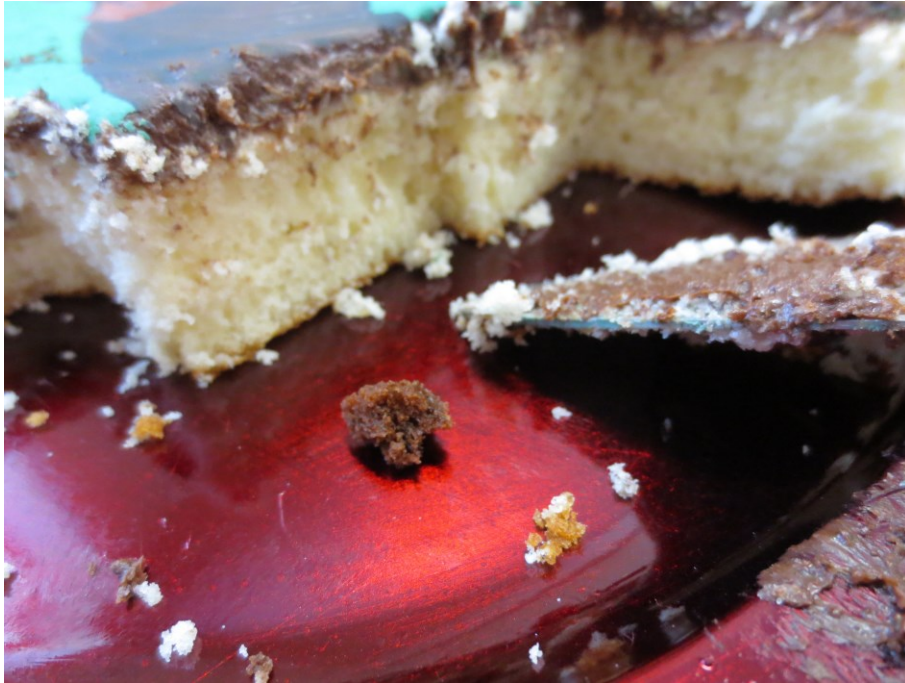


Figure 4: “Traces” May 2013 Digital Photograph: Anne Pilon

The successful responses of my colleagues to the “Cake Project” prompted me to continue to develop my own new ideas and to document its process. By introducing a series of activities and soliciting and participant responses I hoped to gain an understanding of this process as a viable way to make art while I was teaching. The thoughts and impressions people had written on the napkins demonstrated how people were transformed by their engagement with the artistic process. Encouraged by the positive responses I was inspired to invent more participatory art projects. In this way I enact the dual roles, that of artist and teacher, in tandem.

Knowing that some of my participants may not be familiar with art techniques I aimed to make the activity quick and simple to do. I also wanted the activity to parallel my own situation that offers little time for art making. I came up with the following guidelines:

- The task had to quickly and easily done by anybody.

- The instructions had to be clear and simple.
- I was to be absent during the activity.
- I had to transform the objects into a new artwork and return it in a new form to the staffroom.

Each activity was set up in the staffroom for a period of two weeks. I gathered data by periodically photographing its development. I continued to elicit written responses as a way of collecting data. When the process was over I used the artifacts as raw materials to make artwork and the written responses for reflection.

I used a digital camera to document the progression of the work. I went up to the staffroom approximately twice a day to document the evolution of the artwork that was produced by others. Photo documentation provided visual information that informed me of the ongoing nature of the process. These photos were used as raw materials in subsequent artwork. By repeating the process I was able to reliably collect the data needed to investigate how creating art in liminal space is a source of inspiration to me. Using artistic processes I found ways to present the art that had been made by participants into a new form. I used the new art creation as a point of departure for the subsequent art activities. By doing so I demonstrated how the process of collecting marks and traces left behind by anonymous collaborators became a source of material to use in art making. In this sense I created interplay of receiving and giving back to the collaborators.

Participatory Art Practice and Liminal Space

Considering that the people with whom I engaged with participatory art practice are non-artists I wanted to create a non-threatening environment for them where they were free to

participate in the way that they chose. Therefore I made it a point to be absent during the activity. My involvement was not mediated directly in my role as an art teacher, but as an artist and later as a participant. Furthermore, I was not interested in knowing who participated. Rather I was concerned with the process of the activity. By removing myself as an art teacher from the process I believe I created a safe environment for the participants to feel to engage in the activity. It is important to note that not all teachers who use the staffroom collaborated in the art making. Those who chose not to participate still engaged in the activity by having conversations about the art with those who collaborated in making the artwork.

I viewed the staffroom as a transitional environment where teachers may experience a change from the teacher role to another role, such as the role of friend. When they leave the place to go back to classrooms they change roles once again. By introducing art collaboration as a new ritual in this transitional place I changed the way participants experience the space. Through this perspective I viewed the staff room as a metaphor for liminal space, a place where transformation is experienced.

5. PROJECTS

Description of the Projects

In this chapter I present a report on each project. The four projects represent the body of work produced between May 2014 and October 2014 for this thesis. I describe the materials and process of each project in detail. I explain how each project used the participatory art approach based on collaboration in art making as a process between respondents and myself, in my role as an artist. I show how I transformed the artifacts created by people into new iterations that served as a continuation of the participatory process and that also became the raw material to create personal artwork. I analyze how this process relates to notions of the liminal state. Finally, operating from the perspective of action research methodology, I discuss how each project relates to research-from-creation involving iterative processes of going back and forth between creation, reflection and the development of knowledge that leads to new understandings about my art practice.

Each project report is written in the following format:

- Project Title and Description of the process
- Transformations and New Iterations
- Participatory Art Approach and Liminal
- Research-From-Creation, Knowledge and New Understandings

Project One: “Take What You Need”

For the first project I placed water-based ink, watercolor paper, brushes and water containers on a coffee table in our staffroom (Figure 5). I invited people to play with the painting materials. I was not expecting any specific forms or style to emerge, as having a finished product was not the goal. Rather, the goal was to see how I could gather physical traces left behind by

people and how I could use those traces in an artistic creation. I wrote the following simple instructions in the top left-hand corner of the paper:

1. Apply water to the paper using a brush
2. Apply ink into the wet paper
3. Let the colors flow and spread
4. Don't worry if the colors flow into other colors
5. If a word or phrase comes to mind, write it down on the painting



Figure 5. Installation in the staffroom including materials and instructions (Photographic documentation)

I left the materials on the coffee table for a period of two weeks. Everyday I checked the process and photographed the painting gestures left by the participants. A component of the instructions in this first art project asked the participants to respond to the activity with words and phrases. Their responses were intentionally kept anonymous to highlight the fact that the interaction between the artist and the participants occurred when I was teaching in another room. In this way I was enacting in the liminal space. At the end of the two weeks I took the paper and materials away and transformed the watercolor painting into several smaller projects.

Transformations and New Iterations

I used digital photography to create new compositions that focus on details of the painting. I enlarged the photos, then printed and framed them. I cut some of the watercolor painting into strips. I wove the pieces of the painting and incorporated some of the words (Figure 6 & 7). I used this open-ended process as a way of playing the role of participant and collaborator in the art making. I used this time to reflect using artwork as a way to elicit my own response and to come up with a new interpretation. As an artist I was re-defining my own art problem, “How could I transform people’s mark making into a new form that would communicate the notion that collaboration is an artful ritual?”



Figure 6: Pilon, A. 2014 “To Be Still, To Be Moved”
Photographic Detail of collaborative watercolor painting



Figure 7. Pilon, A. “Woven Words and Images”
Experiment with weaving painting and text.

The participants written responses revealed surprising reactions. I used these as inspiration for an interactive art project. Some of the phrases and words portrayed their sense of fear and disappointment while making their marks on the paper. Others expressed a sense of relaxation or a sense of energy and flow. I recognize these sensations as an integral to the artist’s experience while making art. Reading these reactions reminded me of the various feelings expressed by my students in the art class. As an art teacher, and in this case, as an artist, it is important to me to acknowledge these feelings as a normal and even desirable component of the creative process. I decided to interpret their sentiments into positive statements. The table below shows examples of how I turned their words and phrases into words of encouragement and inspiration.

| From their words: | | To Mine: |
|---|--|------------------------|
| Shocked | | A sense of surprise |
| Disappointed followed by pleased | | To be open |
| Contemplation leading to void | | To be still |
| It changes how I think | | To change a perception |
| A little stressed | | To practice self care |
| Hearing the sounds of the room: the clock, the hum of the fridge, distant laughter | | To be still, to listen |

Figure 8. Table of changed words and phrases



Figure 9. Transformation of the Collaborative Watercolor Painting into a Pull Tab Poster (Photographic documentation)

I used an idea I found on a *Pinterest* page to represent the painting and words into a new iteration and to continue the interactive process of making art. *Pinterest* is an interactive Internet site used by people to exchange and share ideas with each other through images. Operating like a collage or scrapbook page, *Pinterest* pages are constructed by choosing themes and adding images to fit the theme. Using an idea from a *Pinterest* page whose theme is social intervention I designed as pull-tab poster called “Take What You Need”. The poster is made in the style of an advertisement with pull-tabs with contact information written on the tabs. I transformed some of the watercolor painting into small paintings and using the words from the participants and my own words I transformed them into signs with pull-tabs. I pinned two of these signs on the corkboard in the staff room.



Figure 10: Pull Tab poster. (Photographic documentation)

The instructions for this interaction are on the poster itself. The tabs went quickly as teachers took what they needed. Some teachers reported that the words expressed exactly what they needed at that moment. Others reported that they were looking for a particular tab they had seen previously on subsequent days and were disappointed to find that it was no longer available. Some reported that they would wear their tab paintings as pins. Some of the paintings are still affixed in individual offices. In this process people connected with each other and this promoted a sense of community.



Figure 11. Pull-tab Poster Installation (Photographic documentation)

Participatory Approach and Liminal

The staffroom is a place where everyday rituals around eating and engaging in conversation are performed. In the liminal space one is transformed from one state into another. I see the staffroom as a metaphorical liminal space where teachers suspend their status as teachers when they come into the room, perform a ritual and return to their status as teachers when they go out into the hallways and classrooms. Robertson and McDaniel (2013) explain ritualistic performance art and its context this way: “The use of ephemeral materials and forms and the performance of ritualistic activities in contemporary art relate to the transitional state that appears to be characteristic of contemporary cultures.” (p. 332). By manipulating the space so that it is no longer just a place to eat and run but a place to be creative I changed the dynamic of the space and the way in which people interact in that space. While using the staffroom as a virtual process lab I created a framework for open-ended art exploration and a platform for my own engagement in art production. The paintings created by the participants became ephemeral materials later gathered by the participants as mementos.

A striking feature of this interaction is that the participants did not really seem to be aware that they had taken part in the creation of the pull-tab pieces. In my conversations with them they did not easily recognize their own marks or traces. This aspect is interesting to me as it is evident that the process is such an important part of the creation of a work.

Research-From-Creation, Knowledge and New Understandings

In this research-creation approach I integrate the creative process used in participatory art approach to investigate how I enact the role of the artist. By using the research-from-creation

perspective I was able to observe how the process generated data to help me understand people's perception of me. An example of this is at the beginning of the first experiment when the participants asked me what I expected them to create with the paint. I understood this to mean that they saw the activity as an assignment and me as a teacher. It took a few conversations to reassure them that I was not expecting a finished product but that I was simply offering them a chance to be play with art materials. They seemed happy to make their mark and participate in the process without necessarily expecting or seemingly needing a final product at the end of the experience. Thus I learned that by communicating notions about experimentation as an artist, my colleagues began to see me more as an artist than as an art teacher.

This project contributed to my understanding of how interactive artwork generated new information about my role as an artist in the process of participatory art projects. In my role as an artist I set up the conditions under which people were able to engage in the creative art process through play. Play and experimentation played a key role throughout the process with participants and in my own creation of subsequent artwork. As a result I determined that the iterative processes, as described by Chapman and Sawchuck (2015), using the form of participation, and being a participant in the art making myself was a viable way to gather information.

Through this process I learned about non-artists experiences when they are presented with an invitation to make art. This information was analyzed by interpreting the words they wrote while painting. I learned that in the act of painting people experienced a range of emotions, from hesitation to fear. Taking risks is part of the artistic process and it was a risk to ask people to express themselves with words. I didn't really expect negative comments. I learned to accept that

unexpected responses were useful in gleaning knowledge in the continuum of the process. I also expected much more playful mixing of colors than what was actually done. Perhaps they were hesitant to paint over someone else's marks or they simply had very little time to explore. For some, the experience of engaging in art made them sensitive to their surroundings in other ways besides visual. The person who expressed, "I hear the hum of the refrigerator and distant laughter", evidences this. The act of making art can change a person's experience of a place and in this way it is transformative. By doing this project I learned about the creative experience through the analysis of my process.



Figure 12 a: "Take What You Need": Two examples of pull-tab posters created as an interactive art activity

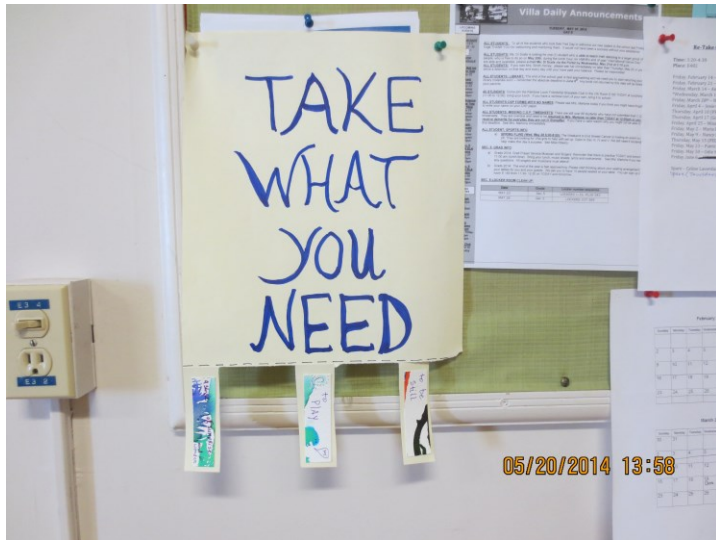


Figure 12 b: “Take What You Need”: Two examples of pull-tab posters created as an interactive art activity

Project Two. “We Play At Beauty”

I wanted to continue to explore the process of interactive artwork created by people’s participation and I wanted the process to relate to the context of their environment. Words and language are essential components in the education environment, therefore the use of text seemed like an appropriate and accessible tool to use with the teachers, especially those who are not artists or who might have felt inept with using the art materials. Thus, I decided to use words as material for the second art project. I bought a commercial magnetic poetry kit and set it up on a tray along with a disposable camera. I left the tray on the dining table along with written instructions for them to follow (Figure 13). The instructions were as follows:

1. Create a phrase and put it on the fridge
2. Use the last word of a phrase that is already there and build on it or create a new phrase
3. Take a photograph of the phrase with the disposable camera



Figure 13. Installation of instructions for found poetry, magnetic words and disposable camera (Photographic documentation)

Whereas in the first project the materials were left on a coffee table, this activity was placed on the dining table where most people gather to eat. Because many people use the refrigerator in the staffroom, even though they may not stop to eat at the dining table, I thought that more of them would take the opportunity to participate. In addition to using what I thought was more accessible material and putting the activity in a highly visible place, I considered the spontaneity of the activity an essential component of the playful aspect of the process.

In addition to having the participants document the development of the project I took photos as well. The following images are digital photographs that I took during the two-week period that the activity took place. They represent eight examples of the phrases that were made by participants.

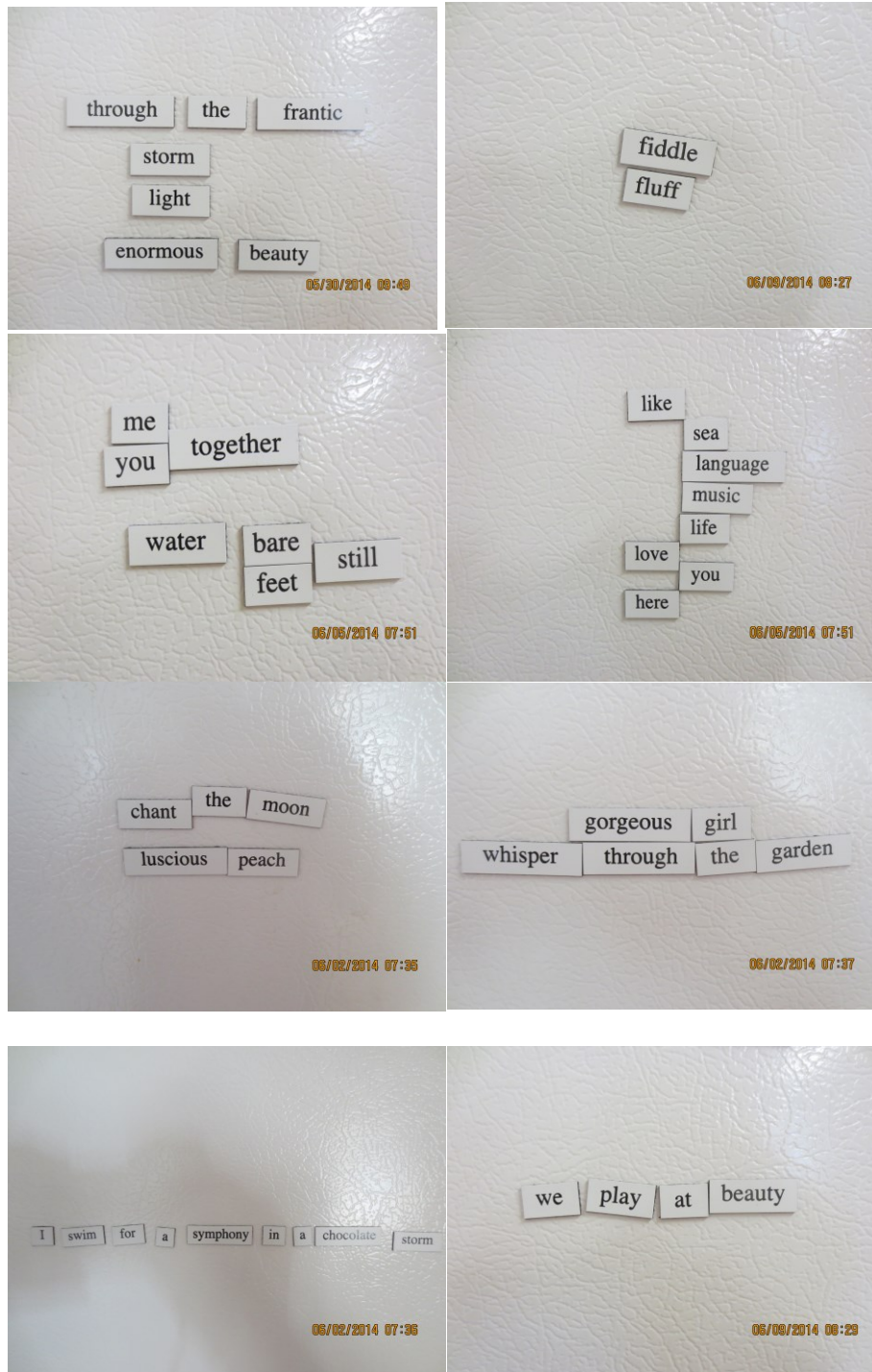


Figure 14. Found Poetry Examples of phrases created by participants with a Magnetic Poetry Kit (Photographic documentation)

I consider the phrases to be a kind of found poetry and I used my own photos of them as a source of data to reflect upon. In all, twelve iterations of found poems were created. I reflected on

the phrases and responded to them with my personal observations. To me the phrases represent very honest sentiments of the participant's lived experiences at that moment in time. "We play at beauty" and "Through the frantic storm, light, enormous beauty" are two examples of phrases that I find very moving. To me, the phrases represent, in a poetic way, how the people were feeling and the time. I interpreted the 'frantic storm' as a general reflection of the atmosphere at school during the last weeks of the scholastic year. And yet, there was still a sense of enormous beauty.

In addition to the text that made up the found poetry, the manner in which the words were put together in different shapes and patterns were visually appealing. The following is an example of a phrase that was started by one person and was added onto by others; it illustrates how collaborative actions can create beautiful narratives:

"Gorgeous summer
Sweet lazy time
Away
 Gorgeous summer
 Sweet lazy time away
 We play
 Garden swim TV chocolate
 Gorgeous summer
 Sweet lazy time away
 We play
 Garden swim TV chocolate
 Languid whisper
 Us,
 A symphony in peach"

Transformations and New Iterations

At the end of the two-week installation I brought the disposable camera in to be processed. Unfortunately the photos taken by the participants were mostly overexposed and some revealed faint, blurry images. It was disappointing to me at first but in enacting the role of the

artist I had to respond to this unexpected event in a creative way. I decided to transform the prints into an artist's book.

Artist's books are conceptual artworks that use the book form in a unique way to express an idea. They come in a wide range of forms. For example: an artist's book can be in the form of an altered book that is transformed into a sculptural object or as a one-of-a-kind book that use words and/or images created by an artist in a variety of mediums. According to Burkhart (2006) artists have been increasingly using the book as a form of artistic expression (p. 248). For her, "These textual, photographic, and material traces of anonymous lives are artifacts that provide a compelling and much larger picture of humanity than the sum of its' parts" (p. 257). This notion of collecting material traces and artifacts fit perfectly with my idea of creating art using people's traces as inspiration and material to express the lived experience.

As an artist I wanted to show a representation of human traces through the collection words and gestures in a work of art. I used the prints processed from the disposable camera for pages and I created an artist's book with them (Figure 15). I purposely left the images unaltered choosing instead to let the obscured images represent the idea ambiguity in liminal space. I also used self-adhesive letters to create the words: "Under Exposed" to use the idea of word play. To me, the words represent the context of how the place was used by the people who occupied that place.



Figure 15. Pilon, A. “Under Exposed”
Artist’s Book, Photographic prints and collage

Participatory Practice and Liminal

In this participatory art project an open-ended approach was used to explore the interactions of people in response to materials and to each other. Being open-ended also meant that I, also as a participant, would respond to whatever form the project would take. The development of the project was dependent on the people’s interactions and on my response to them. In asking the participants to use the words and the disposable camera to photograph I was dependent on them to participate in the process of art making.

The advantage of using a disposable camera was that the result of the photos would only be revealed when the camera was processed later in a photo lab. In this way, the results would be a complete surprise to me. Thus the documentation of the image was part of the process and did not necessarily result in a finished product but would contribute to the process and ultimately the artistic expression. Once again the process occurred during my absence from the room thus keeping the action in the liminal. In the time period when the action took place, I was enacting both within the role of teacher and artist, in the liminal space.

Research-From-Creation, Knowledge And New Understandings

The knowledge gained from this experience helped me to understand how participatory art practices require a basic understanding of the participants who are involved in the project and the context of use of the space they occupy. In attempting to understand how I would be able to engage these specific participants in this specific setting I adapted the materials to what I thought would best suit them in the setting. In continuing to test the use of participatory approaches to evaluate the artist's role I used the results from the first project to modify my approach for the second project. According to Chapman and Sawchuck (2014) "The use of research-from-creation information does not simply come at the end of the process to "evaluate" the effectiveness of the work; instead, the work itself can be used to generate information on what is being created" (p. 8).

The data collected during this project helped me to understand how open-ended participatory approaches work with the idea of social interaction as part of the creative expression of the art project. In participatory art, a relationship between the artist, participants, materials and setting is created and becomes an interconnected and dynamic collaboration. I also understood more about the dynamics of collaboration as one that depends on response to the unexpected. In the final outcome of this project I was challenged to turn the raw material into an art project by using the unexpected results of the over-exposed prints and the photos I took into create a new form.

Project three: Drawing a Response

When I returned to school in September 2014 many colleagues asked when I would set up the next activity. Continuing the ritual of using their own art as raw material I asked them to create a visual response to the poems they made them. I wanted to continue to use the process of taking previously made artifacts as inspiration to develop a new form of participation. I decided to write out the phrases from the second project on pieces of drawing paper. I placed brush tip markers and several copies of each phrase in a box and set these on the staffroom dining table. I wrote instructions that invited the participants to use the markers to illustrate the poems they had created from the previous project (figure 16).

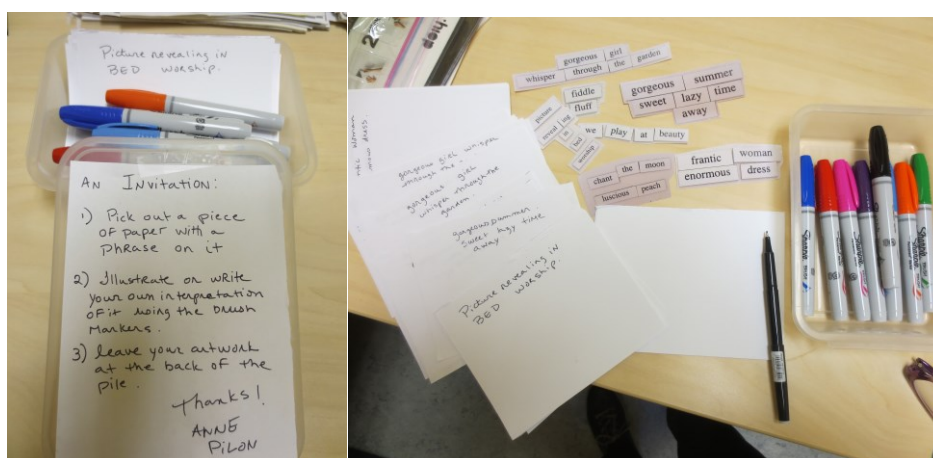


Figure 16: Project three, Photo-documentation of the set up for the project

Transformations and New Iterations

Anonymous respondents created a total of eight small drawings. Below are two examples of the illustrations. They represent, to me, simple and playful visual responses to their own words. I felt that the participants enjoyed using the materials and producing the drawings. My intention was to turn the drawings into magnets and put them back in the staffroom. In the end, I did not transform the drawings as they did not inspire me or resonate with the idea of participatory practice.

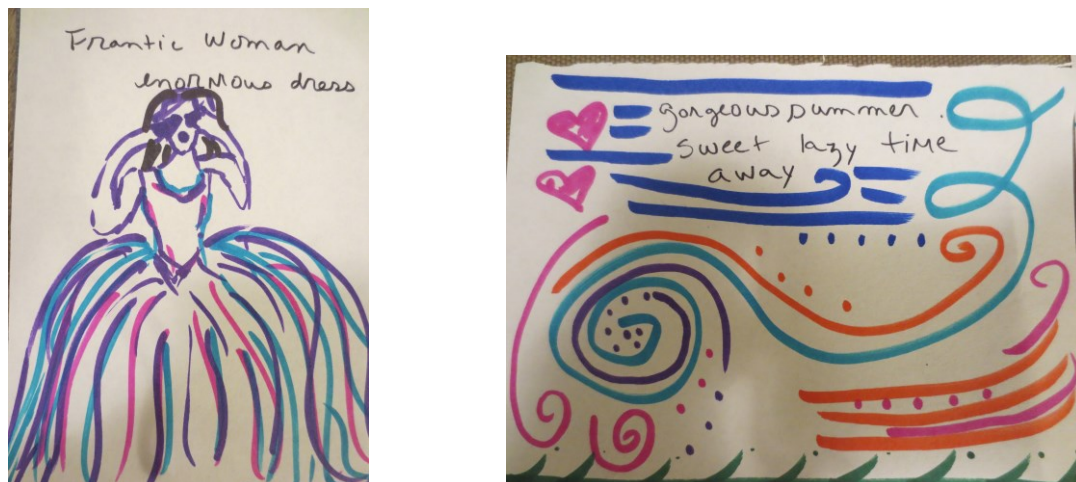


Figure 17: Examples of Illustrated Texts, Photo-Documentation

Participatory Art Practice and Liminal

Participatory art projects involve the audience in the creative process making the participants co-authors of the work itself. From this perspective the art is collection of people's expressions, responses and interactions. Given that participants, in this project, were asked to produce an illustration, that essential aspect of the participatory approach was missing from the experience. In fact, the activity was presented more like an assignment rather than an invitation to participate. In the final analysis, this project was not successful as a participatory project as it did not engage people in playful experimentation. Instead it asked them to produce an object in a very prescriptive way. By doing so, it inadvertently halted the creative process and the activity became an individual action. In the theory of liminal states, the ritual process is experienced within a group or community setting and leads to some sort of transformation.

Research-From-Creation, Knowledge and New Understandings

In spite of the fact that this project failed as a participatory art project, some important knowledge was gained. Using the reflective process I was able to compare the three experiences

to analyze my approach as an artist in each scenario. I determined that instead of practicing my role as an artist with participants as co-creators I reverted to the role of teacher. In that role I controlled the outcome or product that was produced by the others. In other words, I presented a direct request to others to perform in a specific way and had certain expectations of how the final product would look. By doing so, there was little room for exploration and experimentation that is essential in the creative process. Just as an artist may relinquish some control as part of the creative experience I now realize that I must give up control over the outcome of the process in my role as an artist in the participatory exchange.

As an art teacher I aspire to encourage exploration, experimentation and creativity in students. In the role as teacher and in trying to maintain control of the outcomes, I am not functioning as an artist in the classroom and the students simply perform to what the assignment asks of them. This discovery caused me to think about how I can bring the notion of the participatory engagement into the classroom to inspire more creativity in my students.

Project four “What Does Your Liminal Space Look Like?”

In October of 2014 I presented a talk about this thesis research process at the Canadian Society for Education in Art conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I decided to take the opportunity to experiment with participatory art with a broader, public audience. I solicited participation from attendees at my presentation by giving them self-addressed, stamped postcards. I provided markers and pens for them to use if they wished to do so. On each postcard I wrote the following question: “What does your liminal space look like?” I verbally explained the context of their participation with regards to how it fit into this thesis during the last moments of the presentation. I asked the conference attendees to send the response to me in the form of text and/or images and

to either leave it with me or mail it to me. Over a period of two months I received four postcards in the mail and two from conference attendees at the presentation itself. I also invited other artists that I know personally and invited colleagues from work to participate in this project. The following are examples of responses in the form of drawing and text. Since the text and sometimes the participants signature appears on the same side as my home address, I have included only the drawings in order to protect their anonymity (figure 18a & b).



Figure 18 a. Example of a postcard created by an art educator who attended my session at the CSEA conference in October 2014 and sent to me in response to the question: “What Does Your Liminal Space Look Like?”



Figure 18 b: An example of a postcard sent in response to the question: “What does your liminal space look like?”

Transformations and New Iterations

The texts from those who responded in writing were analyzed and provided a variety of personal interpretations and responses to the question, “What does your liminal space look like?” Some of the responses suggest that other art educators struggle with the same issues as I do regarding the artist-teacher duality. The first postcard expresses an experience similar to my own that is the feeling that I am sometimes working out a creative idea in my head, while at the same time I am attending to other types of work-related concerns (Figure 18a). The participant writes, “Others talking, me drawing”

The second example eloquently describes how I feel when I am struggling to find time to make creative artwork (Figure 18b). In response to my question is a message written by the participant. It states, “Time stitched into crevasse...seconds and minutes hidden in pockets and sleeves...borrowed from chores and things that are “needed”... “KAIROS” slip over the

threshold to creativity...” The Greek word kairos means, “ a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment.” (Merriam-Webster on line dictionary, June 2, 2015) In this statement the postcard artist calls on Kairos to help find the time and conditions to be creative. The artist sees the act of passing from one state through the threshold to creativity. I decided to express this idea in the form of two tunnel books (Figure 19 and 20).



Figure 19: Pilon, A. “*Within*” Tunnel Book, mixed media, May 2015



Figure 20: Pilon, A. "Kairos" Tunnel Book, mixed media, May 2015



Figure 21: An example of a postcard sent in response to the question: "What does your liminal space look like?"

Participatory Art and Liminality

In this participatory project I was aware of the fact that the participants are artist teachers and I decided to present a well-defined question while still leaving some freedom to interpret in a personal response. Given that most of the conference attendees were from other cities I thought the idea of writing a postcard would suit the context of the situation. I asked the respondents to refrain from revealing their identity, as I wanted to repeat the same element of anonymity as with the previous participatory art projects. In not revealing who they were I could be open to interpreting the images in my own way, thereby being a participant myself. Once again the project, as a collective expression, existed and depended on the participation of others.

To me the concept of liminal in the realm of participatory art practice is connected directly to the act performed in liminal space. Being liminal is transitional and allows me the freedom to experience movement within the space. In this case the liminal space was represented by distance and time. The anticipation of waiting for responses and of not knowing whom were the respondents or if there would even be responses was akin to being in a liminal space.

Research-From-Creation and New Understandings

In this iteration I was able to use the context of the situation as inspiration for the project. I kept some of the same structure I used for the previous projects, namely that the project would have simple instructions and that I would transform the responses into new artwork. The difference between this project and the previous ones was the time factor. This was a project where I would get responses over a longer period of time. By doing this project I learned how to manage my expectations regarding the time it takes to develop a project.

6. TRANSFORMATION

Co-Artists and the Classroom

Through this investigation new knowledge about my relationship to others in my role as an artist has emerged. This new knowledge changed how I connect with others both as an art teacher in my classroom and in my school community. Gablik (1991) states, “Art that realizes its purpose through relationship - that collaborates consciously with the audience and is concerned with how we connect with others – can actually create a sense of community” (p. 157-158). By employing research-from-creation methodology I explored how others understand my role as an artist through the use of participatory art practice.

By doing more art I have a better appreciation of how and why art is made and can convey that idea to students with a deeper sense of conviction. I have widened my approach to art education by putting more emphasis on art traditions and analysis of artwork. It was necessary for me to be involved in personal art making practice to feel authentic in my presentation of self as an artist teacher.

As an artist teacher I reflected on how my art practice has helped me gain an important connection to my students and see them as creative artists too. Daichendt (2010) states, “Once an individual moves toward thinking and being an artist, his or her teaching can embody this special way of thinking that makes arts education valuable” (p.147). Similarly, Vieth writes (1999) “Seeing the teacher as both artist and a mentor, students develop respect, trust, and increased confidence. For us, as working artists, adopting this style of teaching contributes to our own development and growth. It energizes the vital qualities of both facets of our identity: teacher and

artist” (p. 4). This way of thinking has caused me to consider how I engage the students I teach. A recent event, described below, provides an example of what I mean.

In an exploration for printmaking I assigned my grade seven students to gather various textures in and around the school building using the “frottage” technique. The students used the typical rough surfaces and collected many samples. One particular student used the technique on signage and plaques on which words were engraved or raised. In a playful way she began gather many rubbings of words and to string them together to make phrases. I characterize this student’s divergence as creative and artistic thinking because she explored an idea that was proposed in class in her own way. She was spontaneous and used intuitive gestures and as an artist I appreciate her playful experimentation. The frustrating part to me as her teacher was that she demonstrated poor classroom performance. She almost never finished her assignments nor did she put in as much effort as she does in her own explorations. This presented an odd conflict for me when it came to the evaluation of her performance. It was hard to put into words or codify artistic behavior in an evaluation grid and to assign a number value that represented her class performance. This student’s intuitive artistic behavior and unique approach was acknowledged with positive comments. In this way I encouraged an artistic sense of inquiry and recognized the spontaneous exploration as an important characteristic of the artistic process. In this way the artistic process was brought into the context of the classroom and has become part of the art education pedagogy along with building technical skill. By engaging in art making myself I believe that I found ways to model for students what it means to think like an artist. Rather than assuming the role of one who assigns art projects, I have become a co-artist, along with my students in a community of makers.

I am inspired by the seemingly small gestures that people use everyday, by the effect of human behavior that can be observed by the traces they leave behind, and the relationship to the places they occupy. In using my staffroom as a place where I set up activities I was able to observe the traces left behind after the people created in the space. For me an artist needs a connection with the materials and themes that they explore. My connection to the materials is with the people in the staffroom and their everyday experiences. In the examples above the possible outcomes were not always known in advance. In fact, sometimes the activities produced unexpected results. These results provide new knowledge; for example, they can reveal technical challenges that require adjustments or expose new connections that can lead to the formation of new iterations. Using my workplace as an environment to explore participatory art was a practical decision that allowed me to integrate art making into my busy life. I used creation research to examine how producing art and reflecting on its process has helped me to define what it means to me to be a contemporary artist.

This allowed me to not only make art but also share it with other people. By setting up these projects in my staffroom I was able to make art with others with whom I shared ideas. Thus this project helped them see me as an artist and in turn affirmed the artist in me.

Mentoring Student Teachers

Over the passed several years I have mentored six student teachers from the art education program at Concordia University. The internship program aims to have the students experience first hand the challenges of creating lessons and unit plans with teaching goals and objectives. The student teachers also learn classroom management and other complex features of the teaching profession. I am often surprised that the student teachers are focused on the end result of

student production rather than on their artistic process. It is as if the student teacher starts to abandon their artistic way of thinking to adopt a mode that focused on producing objects to evaluate.

Artistic behaviors modeled by artists include intuitiveness, spontaneity, experimentation and the ability to take risks. These characteristics serve a valuable purpose to bring those into the teaching of art. In 2013 I mentored a student who is an enthusiastic and energetic creative artist who is also trained as an art teacher. When Betty (not her real name) began teaching a unit on masks she asked the students first to draw their proposals in their sketchbooks. She wanted the students to produce an exact, detailed drawing of what they wanted their mask to look like in the three dimensional final format. I noticed that the students struggled to get the details right during this stage and that they were worried their drawing would not turn out perfectly. Furthermore, they experienced anxiety about how they would translate their drawings into the final three-dimensional form. Half way through the unit Betty invited a guest artist to present her work and give the students an art lesson on making masks with paper and tape. In the artist's presentation she gave the students simple guidelines to approaching art making. Those included notions about taking risks, not being afraid to fail or start over, working intuitively, and being open to new ideas. After listening to the artist and seeing her work, the students were very inspired and excited to make their own masks. For the remainder of the period all the students managed to experiment and create elaborate headpieces with newspaper and masking tape. Their enthusiasm and engagement in the project skyrocketed. The students seemed to have crossed a threshold from being passive and constrained by fear of producing something specific to being active and completely involved in the process of making. When the class was over I said to the Betty, "This is what an art class should be like." With my encouragement she changed her approach to reflect

more the way an artist works and in particular, drew on her own approach to art making and completely changed the dynamic in the classroom. As a result, the students were able to apply some of the principles proposed by the invited artist and by Betty to their own work. This event was key in my observation that an artist's presence is crucial in the art classroom. It is also important to relate to the students as artists themselves. As a mentoring teacher I will be vigilant in the future to relate to the student teachers as artists and as classroom managers. I will urge them to develop projects based on their artistic interests and approaches and encourage them to remain aware of their artist selves as they move through the fluid dynamic of the artist teacher identity.

Art Practice in the School

The four participatory projects created for this thesis gave me the inspiration to try the same process in the school. Some of the students at my school belong to a club called "Healthy Mind, Healthy Body" (HMHB). The club is organized by a teacher who has made it her mission to help students develop coping skills to combat the negative effects of stress due to misconceptions they have about themselves. Among some of the important topics related to women's health she addresses are issues relating to positive body image and healthy self-esteem. Throughout the year she held discussion groups and leads workshops.

In May 2015, she organized a closing ceremony that ended with the symbolic release of twenty-one live butterflies into the air. The release of these butterflies was meant to symbolize letting go of negative thoughts and stress. The theme of liminal, which has been the thread in this thesis project, resonated with the sense of ritual in liminal space. It connected the idea of

separating from the negative influences in their lives, the notion of crossing the threshold in the form of discussions and, with the help and support of the group members, the re-integration into the community in a new state.

The project I describe below was inspired by this particular event. I used the same structure as in the previous four projects; I provided simple instructions, provided materials that were easy to use and the drawing could be done in one period, finally, and transformed the products into a work new art to be returned to its co-creators. By doing so I integrated my art making practice into my teaching practice based on what I learned from my previous projects.

I explained to my students that they could all contribute to a large installation to commemorate the releasing of the butterflies event and that the installation would be a lasting reminder of what they had experienced on that day. I asked each of my students to draw a butterfly using pencil crayons on vellum paper. I then asked the students to help me glue each one of the butterfly drawings onto a thin metal wire. As a group we discussed how this installation could be arranged and where it would most appropriately be displayed. After trying several techniques we came up with a way to arrange the butterflies onto three foam-core boards by using the wire to pierce them through to board (Figure 23). Working with the students this way taught me to communicate with them in a new way.



Figure 22. “Let It Go” Detail of Collaborative Butterfly Installation created by Anne Pilon and student participants for Healthy Mind, Healthy Body, Photographic Documentation, June 2015

One of the most important things I learned was how I changed the way that I address the participants as artist/collaborators in the art process. This changed how I spoke to the students. Instead of giving directions to the students to do specific tasks I asked for their input. As an example instead of saying “you are going to do such and such” I would say “how about if we do this” or “I was thinking of doing it that way, what do you think?” Also, my tone of voice changed from being firm and directive to a softer, friendlier tone. This change affected my student’s performance in a very positive way. They became very engaged in contributing to the installation project.

As the students finished their last art projects of the year they continued to draw butterflies, cut them out and glue them onto stems. Each time a new group of students came in for

class they looked for their drawing among the group's drawings demonstrating a high level of engagement with the work. The project was displayed in a high-traffic area of the school. It was also used to open the HMHB event in October 2015 and the organizer invited the entire student body to participate in making the installation even bigger. The transformation of larvae into butterflies is a beautiful metaphor for the HMHB project and relates closely to my journey through liminal space in my projects.



Figure 23. Presentation of the art installation participation project at a school assembly in October 2015. Photographic documentation

Reflections and Summary

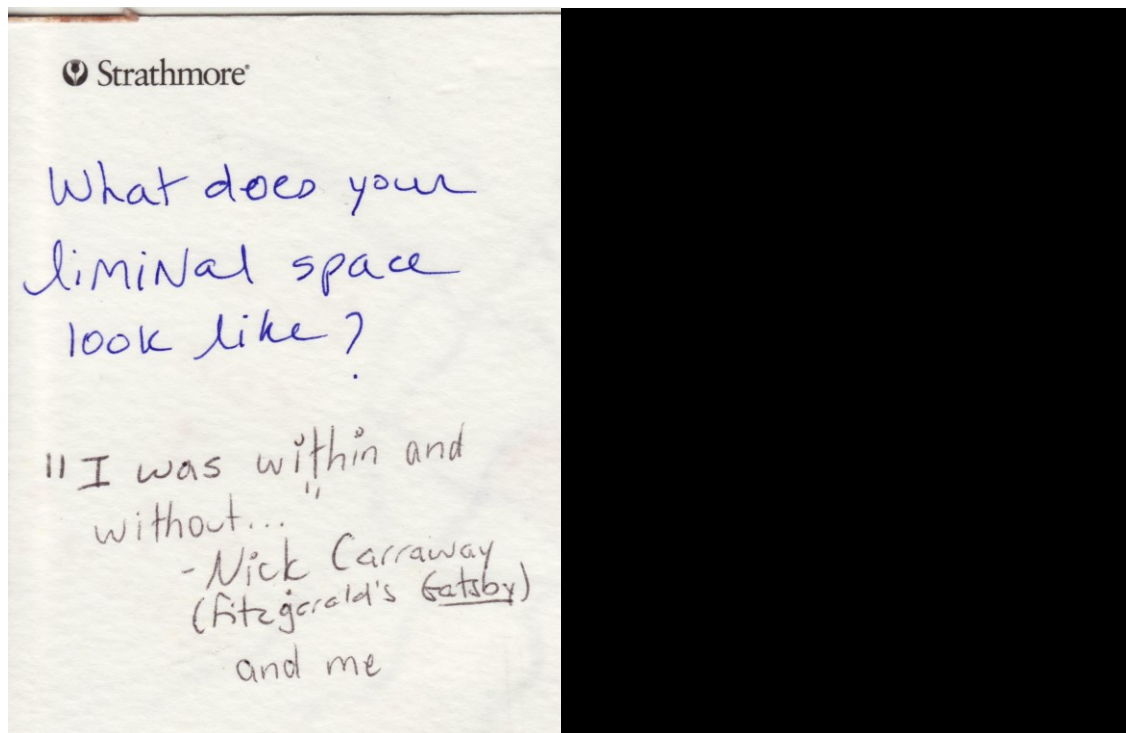


Figure 24: Postcard response from Project 4
“I was within and I was without” F. Scott Fitzgerald

The title artist teacher has connotations that cause tension, but it doesn't have to be that way. Before doing this thesis calling myself an artist teacher who hadn't made art for several years felt disingenuous. While I had reached my goal of having a career in visual arts, I still felt tension in regards to the title artist teacher. I could call myself an art teacher but not an artist teacher. The notion of liminal space was illustrated on a postcard sent by an anonymous participant (figure 22) quotes from F. Scott Fitzgerald's – *The Great Gatsby* (1925), “I was within and I was without”. The response aptly expressed the tension in the dual roles felt by another artist teacher. In the novel, the character Nick Carraway says, “I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life” (wikiquote.org).

While living simultaneously in the creative artist role and the teaching role I was able to reduce the tension and feel more fulfilled as an artist, and therefore better able to integrate the two roles.

In order to explore the meaning of the title artist teacher, I had to examine what the title signified. To me the title denotes two distinct professions, that of artist and teacher. When I think about the title 'artist teacher' I think about people whose primary profession is that of artist who sometimes teach artistic techniques or whose community outreach has educational implications. The goals for these professionals are different than those of a high school art teacher. To me, the art teacher is someone whose professional title signifies that they are primarily a teacher whose subject expertise is art. It means the teacher's primary goal is to develop in students an appreciation for the study of art including why and how it is made, traditions, how to engage with it, analyze and critique it. What does the title artist teacher imply? Thornton (2013) offers this definition, "An artist teacher is an individual who practices making art and teaching art and is dedicated to both activities as a practitioner" (p. 89). I believe that this definition clearly defines a person who is an artist as well as a teacher. In other words, one can be both artist and teacher without compromising either role.

In researching issues of the duality of the artist teacher position I came across the notion of liminal. The term liminal, whose origin is Latin meaning threshold, is used in contemporary language to describe "the condition of being on a threshold or at the beginning of a process" (dictionary.reference.com, June 2015). When one is between two states they are said to be liminal. It is a position of ambiguity or a sort of limbo and sometimes rituals are performed in that space in order to cross thresholds into new states. Turner (1964) states: "Van Gennep himself defined "rites de passage" as "rites that accompany every change of place, state, social position

and age” (p. 234). I drew on the notion of liminal as a way to describe the condition of the artist teacher duality. I used the idea of being in-between two states as inspiration for creative art projects and as a metaphor to show how I crossed the threshold from being an art teacher to becoming an artist teacher. In this thesis I examined how being liminal is a symbol to represent the lived experience of the artist teacher.

I also drew parallels to my school staffroom as being a transitional physical and mental space for my colleagues and me. Our staffroom is a place where we go to eat, rest and meet with other teachers. In a way we regularly cross thresholds in-between one state and another, sometimes several times a day. The concept of liminality involves rites of passage to help in transitional phases (Klemm, 2005). In ritualistic fashion I created participatory art installations to incorporate new rituals in the teacher’s daily experience. I considered those who engaged in the new ritual to have been transitioned into the role of collaborative artists. According to Robertson and McDaniel (2012), “The use of ephemeral materials and forms and the performance of ritualistic activities in contemporary art relate to the transitional state that appears to be characteristic of contemporary cultures” (p. 333). While teaching in my classroom I was also engaging in artistic practice with other collaborators.

Liminal space is linked to ritual. Rituals are performed in order to pass through the threshold into a new state (Turner 1964). The teacher’s staffroom is a liminal space in a way. It is a place where teachers temporarily suspend their roles and socialize with other adults. They perform their own lunch rituals before returning to their teaching responsibilities. I wanted to change this space to offer a place for them to engage in art making. In a way I wanted to create a ritual of art making for them and for myself. Because I would not be present during the art

making I didn't have an influence on the result of the encounter. Afterwards I could monitor the traces or evidence people leave behind when they had interacted with art materials. It became a performance in a way, a ritual enacted by others and mediated by me. The interaction of material and people forced a new interaction with the space and connected the people together. The act of transforming art materials into a visual expression, however small, highlights the importance of the experience because it is transformative. The act transported the person out of the ordinary actions into a new way of being in the staffroom. Because the staffroom is a transitional place where people spend only a little time refreshing and replenishing themselves I made sure that the ritual acts took little time to perform.

In his essay on Arnold Van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* Turner (1964) discussed Van Gennep's characterization of the three distinct stages of liminal: separation, margin and aggregation (p. 234). According to Turner the separation stage "comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or set of cultural conditions (a "state")" (p. 235). As I think back on how I had questioned my practice as an artist teacher I now realize that I sought to detach myself from a practice that was dedicated mostly to teaching into a practice that also included personal art making. In order to do that I systematically performed acts where I operated as an artist within my workplace.

In the second phase Turner (1964) explains the liminal period or margin as, "the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger") is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (p. 235). In this action research study and as the subject of this research project I practiced making art on a regular basis for a period of one year. I used

the spiral process of action research methodology to construct meaning in the artist teacher position. From the epistemological perspective and using research-creation methods I discussed how knowledge was gleaned from the various iterations of the artistic process and reflection. Using this process I passed from having the attributes and concerns of the teacher role to those of the artist role. Although being between the two was like being in an ambiguous state, the experience of it made me more at peace with the ambiguity. This realization helped me understand how the two roles were integrated.

According to Turner (1964) the third phase, aggregation signifies a return of the subject to a new, well-defined position. As I look back at the research question, “How can I re-invigorate my art practice?” I realize that not only have I found a way to integrate art making into my everyday experience I have also re-defined my art practice. Furthermore, I changed my perspective in my teaching practice. My colleagues and my students now see me as an artist and as a teacher. The butterfly project demonstrates this fact.

Daichendt (2010) states, “It is in the spirit of integral theory that I am proposing that these identities can and do coexist and overlap, and awareness of this, and openness to the possibilities in practice, self-identification and organizational opportunities over time, may help individuals’ sense of renewal and becoming practitioners” (p. 133). Continuing my artistic development has already proven beneficial to my teaching practice. In the language that I used in the classroom I was able to draw from my own experience as an artist to convey what it is to be creative. There has been a shift from being the art educator to being the artist teacher. As I started to involve my student’s in artistic creations and move through artistic processes with them, as I did in the butterfly installation project, I began to be seen and respected as an artist by peers and students.

By becoming one who integrates the two roles I am renewed in my art practice and in my teaching practice. I believe that making art while teaching is complementary and necessary to teaching art.

Before doing this project I had trouble identifying myself as an artist. When asked by others what I teach I responded that I teach techniques in painting, drawing, sculpture and mixed media, as well as art history and traditions. When asked what art do I make, my response was not that clear. Motivated by a personal desire to identify myself as an artist in the title artist teacher I looked for ways integrate art making into my daily life. I first had to identify the type of art practice that interested me. I used contemporary art practices involving participatory art approaches to incorporate artistry in many aspects of my daily life. My concept of what it means to be an artist has changed from thinking of the modernist tradition to the post-modern approach.

When I began teaching art I separated myself from the world of art makers. This situation is common in new teachers as they begin to take on the responsibilities and duties of teaching in school systems. There is a large body of literature that examines why and how this happens at the beginning of the teaching artist's career. As I am becoming aware, through my discussions with student teachers from art education programs, this issue is now being addressed in their courses. However, I have not found literature that discusses how mid-career artist teachers, like myself, cope with the issue.

The three stages of liminal - separation, margin and aggregation, which informed this project, was for me like the cyclical process of action research. I am now in the aggregation stage of liminal, or, in the action research phase of moving in new directions. For me, this journey has

been personal and enriching with my engagement in artistic processes and my connections with other artists. I see the cycle as an on-going personal process. This valuable enrichment reaffirms my conviction to continue to teach art even as it tempts me away from teaching to spend more time creating it.

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