

Meeting at the Intersection of Practice and Theory:  
How do I enact relational pedagogy when working with children affected by childhood cancers?

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## Abstract

### Meeting at the Intersection of Practice and Theory:

How do I enact relational pedagogy when working with children affected by childhood cancers?

This thesis presents my narrative examination of the question: how do I enact relational pedagogy when working with children affected by childhood cancers? The exploration of this research question presented me with an opportunity to understand my observations and add new knowledge to my practice while working with children at the Kids with Cancer Society of Northern Alberta (KWCS).

I used action research through the theoretical lens of relational pedagogy. I initiated a three-cycle action research plan around topics that were determined by both the children and myself. During the cycles, the children worked with each other and me as co-creators, co-planners and co-educators guiding the direction of each art session. Each cycle comprised of two art making sessions that included reflections for the planning of subsequent sessions. Furthermore, the children and I engaged in reflective journaling to document our experiences of the art sessions. The journal entries helped me understand the perspective of the children, and further provided them agency in expressing their perspectives as they related to engaging with art practices.

In my embodiment of relational pedagogy the following themes emerged: shared practices, learning about my practice and myself, reconsidering roles, and the balancing act between practice and theory.

*Keywords:* pedagogy of relation, relational, children, art education, action research, narrative, cancer

## Dedication

*Carry me,*

*Carry me over the hard times.*

*'Cause I'll do the same for you.*

*- Bill Alton*

This work is for one of my first teachers, my guide, and instigator, my dad. He always knew that we are stronger together.

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## **Prologue: Background to the Study**

In my role as an art educator in the non-profit community I have observed how art can connect people, ideas, and experiences. In the past few years I offered one-time art sessions at Kids With Cancer Society of Northern Alberta (KWCS), located in Edmonton, where I witnessed how visual arts gave children affected by childhood cancers a means to communicate their experiences, interact with others, and have fun during a time in their lives that is not always described as fun. While the goal of previous sessions was to produce works that could be auctioned as a fundraiser for other KWCS programs, I have seen how visual arts programming can provide a much-needed creative outlet for the participants. In pursuing a Master's degree, I was presented with an opportunity to understand my past observations and to add new knowledge to my practice.

Reflecting on past art sessions at KWCS, I perceived there to be community growth as I saw parents sharing their experiences outside the studio space with one another. Meanwhile, their children confidently engaged with themes like courage and bravery in their art making processes. Participants were accepting of each other and helpful towards one another as we worked through different projects. Through their behaviour and interactions I saw that they were not outsiders here, nor were they defined by their diagnoses during these sessions. In the art room they were just kids being kids. While they were not expected or asked to share their stories, they seemed comfortable sharing their stories and experiences of cancer through their artwork. These observations led me to begin searching through literature about play and child-centred learning in art education. In this search I came across a theory that drew me in: the pedagogy of relation. I began looking further into this theory as I felt it connected to my past experiences and

could lend itself well to my beliefs and practice.

## **Chapter 1: Review of the Theoretical Lens: Pedagogy of Relation**

### **1. 1 What is relational pedagogy and where does it from?**

Relational pedagogy is an educational theory that prioritizes the human relations in education. The teacher to student, student to teacher, and student to student relationships are valued and supported in a pedagogy of relation. The importance of the educational experience is not the set of outcomes; it is the relations we have in the educational environments and what we learn or gain from those relationships. Bingham and Sidorkin assert that the concept of relational pedagogy is not new and can be linked to many earlier educational philosophies (2004, p. 1).

Additionally, Bingham and Sidorkin (2004) present the connection between relational pedagogy and critical pedagogy as explored by Paulo Freire. Freire's writings speak of relations and the value of people coming together to learn. He writes,

In sum, the relationship between educators and learners is complex, fundamental, and difficult; it is a relationship about which we should think constantly. How nice it would be, nevertheless, if we tried to create the habit of evaluating it or of ourselves in it while we were educators and learners also. We would learn and we would teach together a tool indispensable to the act of studying (Freire, 2005, p. 107).

From his writings on critical pedagogy we see the value of relations and learning that can come from reflecting upon relationships. Furthermore, Goldstein (1999) has linked pedagogy of relation to Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Noddings' ethic of care. The zone of proximal development refers to the development that has the potential for future intellectual growth (Vygotsky, 1935/2011). Vygotsky explains:

On the other hand, if we offer leading questions or show how the problem is to be solved and the child then solves it in collaboration with other children-in short, if the child barely misses an independent solution of the problem - the solution is not regarded as indicative of his mental development. This truth was familiar and reinforced by common sense. Over a decade even the profoundest thinkers never questioned the assumption; they never entertained the notion that what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85).

Reflecting on Vygotsky's words, I understand how the potential for development is connected to relationships. It is by working with others who are more experienced or capable that one can increase their ZPD, or the "level of possible development" (Vygotsky, 1935/2011, p. 204). Noddings' (2004, 2012, 2015) notion of care comes into play when we read Vygotsky, as he uses the words "help," "assistance" and "cooperation" in his explanation of ZPDs (1935/2011; 1978, p. 204). The language used by Vygotsky evokes relations. There is no helping, assisting or cooperating with others without the other. In the context of education, the words he uses in his explanation of the zone of proximal development connect to the principles of relational pedagogy.

Additionally, many scholars connect the roots of relational pedagogy as stemming from Buber's examination of relations through his theories of I-Thou and I-It (Aspelin, 2011; Fraser, Price, Aitken, 2007; Sidorkin, 2002). Buber's (1970) writings illuminate the inherent relational nature of being. He traces language to highlight the primacy of relations. Stating:

In the beginning is the relation.

Consider the language of “primitive” peoples, meaning those who have remained poor in objects and whose life develops in small sphere of acts that have a strong presence. The nuclei of this language, their sentence-words- primal pre-grammatical forms that eventually split into the multiplicity of different kinds of words-generally designate the wholeness of a relation (Buber, p. 69).

Furthermore, Buber discusses reciprocity of relations, writing:

Our students teach us, our works form us. The “wicked” become a revelation when they are touched by the sacred basic word. How are we educated by children, by animals!

Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity (1970, p. 67).

The notion of reciprocity is carried through Noddings' writings on caring relations in education.

The teacher acts in ways to care for the student, in turn the student demonstrates that s/he has accepted the care of the teacher. The simple act of acknowledgement is the reciprocity of the caring relation (Noddings, 2012).

I view the long term interest in examining and understanding relations as evidence of the power of relations in human existence and the inherent need of humans to be in relation with others. Scholars of relational pedagogy emphasize the value of people being together and learning together as equals. The experience of coming together brings forth learning opportunities. Sidorkin (2002) defines a pedagogy of relation as follows:

[...]relation is the aspect of reality brought about by plurality. Admittedly, a sentimentality comes from unity and sameness of being. However, another and, in my view, more important aspect of reality is determined by the differentiation of being, by otherness of being. This second aspect of reality can be described as relation (p. 94).

He further asserts that nothing can exist if it is not in relation (Sidorkin, 2002). In his view it is only through my relation with another that I may begin to know that I exist. Here, it really is all relative!

Pedagogical relations may initially seem unnatural for teachers because the teacher must change the way in which she thinks of her students, her role and the product of teaching. She must see creating relationships and developing connected human communities as the goal of her practice (Sidorkin, 2002). Relational pedagogy presents another challenge for teachers; it is that relations have value within their contexts and are ever changing (Papatheodorou, 2009).

Relational pedagogy not only acknowledges this fact of context it views context as proof of experience and learning. Sidorkin states “If a relation between you and me today is the same as it was yesterday, this means that nothing happened between us yesterday, which, in turn, means that we had no relation.” (2002, p.110) In my engagement with the scholarship of relational pedagogy I can connect some of my past experiences as an art educator with the principles that are brought forward. I understand now in the light of relational pedagogy how and why I would have acted differently from one student to another. With all the educational theories with which educators can enact the words of Biesta resonate with me. In Biesta’s (2004) opinion relational pedagogy fills the gaps that are left by other educational theories. He states:

When we take our cue from theories that are available in the field of education, we can see that we have theories about the actions of the educator and theories about the actions of the one who is being educated (a child, a student, a learner)[...]But in order to understand the precise nature of the educational relationship, we should take the idea that

education consists of the interaction between the teacher and the learner absolutely seriously (p. 12).

Relational pedagogy offers a truly human education. Learning is not something done to someone by someone, it happens between people. With a pedagogy of relation we can connect to one other, hearing what others do not say with words but with bodies, and listen to what our relations can tell us (Dixon & Senior, 2011, p. 477).

The Manifesto of Relational Pedagogy: Meeting to Learn, Learning to Meet (Bingham et al, 2004) (The Manifesto hereafter) in *No Education Without Relation* (2004) urges teachers to consider relations. It brings forward the value for relational pedagogy in light of contemporary educational issues. The Manifesto lists the following nine principles for relational pedagogy: 1) “A relation is more real than the things it brings together. Human beings and non-human things acquire reality only in relation to other beings and things;” 2) “The self is a knot in the web of multiple intersecting relations; pull relations out of the web, and find no self. We do not have relations; relations have us;” 3) “Authority and knowledge are not something one has, but relations, which require others to enact;” 4) “Human relations exist in and through shared practices;” 5) “Relations are complex; they may not be described in single utterances. To describe a relation is to produce a multi voiced text;” 6) “Relations are primary; actions are secondary. Human words and actions have no authentic meaning; they acquire meaning only in a context of specific relations;” 7) “Teaching is building educational relations. Aims of teaching and outcomes of learning can both be defined as specific forms of relations to oneself, people around the students, and the larger world;” 8) “Educational relation is different from any other; its nature is transitional. Educational relation exists to include the student in a wider web of

relations beyond the limits of the educational relation;” and 9) “Relations are not necessarily good; human relationality is not an ethical value. Domination is as relational as love” (Bingham et al, 2004, p. 5-7).

After careful reflection on these nine principles I started thinking about the ideals of relational education being outlined in *The Manifesto*. I deliberated over the ways in which the principles along with other scholarship on the subject of relational pedagogy could inform my practice as educator and researcher in a community art education environment.

Furthermore, relational pedagogy in practice can be summarized into four main elements which resonate with my practice as researcher and educator. The first is the duty of the educator to care for the learner when they enter into relation. Second, in relational pedagogy the educator takes great interest in meeting the needs of the learner in a comprehensive manner. Thus, taking into consideration a multitude of possibilities related to different aspects of the learner’s educational experience. Third, a relational approach fosters many facets of meaning-making that correlate with the child’s own lived experiences. Finally, the educator prioritizes the building of positive relationships within the educational experience (Brownlee, 2004; Pieratt, 2011; Papatheodorou, 2009).

Bringing together the principles listed in *The Manifesto* (2004) and the four main elements or considerations for the practitioner of relational pedagogy guided me in my research. In later chapters I will present the ways in which these factors impacted my study and informed my understandings of my experience.

## 1. 2 Why a pedagogy of relation?

In the many educational theories I have encountered, pedagogy of relation, or relational pedagogy, presents an ideology that resonates with me, both personally and professionally. As previously mentioned I came upon the theory in my search for scholarship around play in art education and child-centred learning. I was engaged in the writings of Macintyre Latta (2013) and looked further into the theories she referenced. It was in this search that I found the book *No Education Without Relations*. As I read The Manifesto the words jumped off the page and resonated deep in my core.

A fog of forgetfulness is looming over education. Forgotten in the fog is that education is about human beings. And as schools are places where human beings get together, we have also forgotten that education is primarily about human beings who are in relation with one another (Bingham et al, 2004, p. 5).

This statement made me consider how relations impacted my learning and growth. I thought of the ways in which learners today can have more human contact in their educational experiences. While there are many different arguments for pursuing a relational pedagogy I am driven to address this fundamental need for relations in education.

In recent years I have become troubled seeing the isolation of students and teachers in our current educational system. The arguments presented by scholars of relational pedagogy offer me a better understanding of how we got here and how we can get out of the current epidemic of isolation. In Sidorkin's (2002) passionate argument about the need to de-school schools because of the mediocrity they promote. The non-existence is fostered by the myriad of useless things that are produced simply for production sake (Sidorkin, 2002). The "stuff" that is produced has

little to no connection to our lives outside the context of the classroom. Students work for hours on art projects, mathematical exercises, and science experiments that have no connection to the reality of their lives outside of the educational setting. This is what Sidorkin calls the wastebasket economy of education (2002). He asserts “Traditional childhood is learning how to exist; schooling is learning how not to exist. Childhood was about how to overcome half-existence; studenthood is about how to accept half-existence and how to play by its rules” (Sidorkin, 2002, p. 47). His arguments, coupled with my experiences in schools and other educational spaces, lead me to believe that we desperately need to create more spaces where children can be children with a goal to create social and moral human beings. Noddings (2012) writes:

A climate in which caring relations can flourish should be a goal for all teachers and educational policymakers. In such a climate, we can best meet individual needs, impart knowledge, and encourage the development of moral people (p. 777).

She further asserts, “A climate of care and trust is one in which most people will want to do the right thing, will want to be good” (p. 777).

Sidorkin shares her desire for an educational system that prioritizes the ideal of a stable and good life, not simply a system driven by educational goals (2002, p. 134).

Furthermore, the focus on standardization effectively denies the needs and presence of unique individuals in the system: the teachers and the students. Bingham blames rhetoric such as “No Child Left Behind” as considering each student as disconnected (Bingham, 2004, p. 23). The issue of standardization and assessment driven systems is further explored by Macintyre Latta (2013) and Aspelin (2011). Macintyre Latta engages with this notion as she explores the

pressures that teachers face in today's schools. Claiming that the state of education is causing great pressure on teachers and creates an environment of detachment and loss of autonomy. She states:

Thus, educators describe a detached teaching identity that becomes an operative mode of address. It is a mode that they do not necessarily feel at ease with, but it becomes a survival mode that entraps them. They further relay how incapacitated they increasingly feel as "fixes" (e.g., national, state-wide, and local standardized educational practices and policies), intended to enhance student achievement alongside teacher and school quality, are mandated and applied (Macintyre Latta, 2013, p. 12).

Moreover, Aspelin asserts, "If we are right in saying that the inter human sphere is the foundation of education, the total neglect of its existence is fatal. An important mission for relational pedagogy is to question the individualistic conception of education" (2011, p. 10). As a practitioner, I have felt the pressure of following a standardized program and experienced how it neglects my relational needs and desire to be creative. Standardization is not the only thing stunting relations in education. Competition draws individuals apart and creates a hostile environment of isolation (Margonis, 2011). In my experiences as a student I have experienced isolation in a standardized and competitive education. Isolation stemming from rapidly growing class sizes and the push to use digital content and tools as part of my education. In this environment I have experienced the ways in which students are pulled apart from one another and apart from their teachers. It is apparent to me that the value of the relations between teachers and students is not considered as class sizes grow and as lectures, notes and readings become available online. These changes further create an atmosphere of isolation as it would seem that

more students are missing out on the experience of having direct personal contact with their instructors and instructors with their students.

Additionally, assessment has become a means to highlight the success of a school in the eyes of the greater institution (i.e., government). Last year a group educators and administrators in Atlanta were accused and convicted of falsifying test results in order to make the school appear better and thus receive more funding (Blinder, 2015). I see these actions as the result of a capital, results-based educational market; a market that promotes a philosophy of good results (i.e., test scores) equals good school which equals money. Educators are pressured to produce results for the schools and school boards. This is where I believe art education can lead the charge in bringing relations back into education. Haynes (2013) illustrates the value of arts in providing a space to encourage and foster relations, thus supporting claims that relational pedagogy has the power to relieve alienation and isolation experienced in today's education system. She writes:

In the context of community arts the aesthetic dimension, with its potential to rupture given realities, provides a kind of space for liberation that can alter our sense of being in the world. Through collective arts based activities, sensual faculties come to the fore and sensuous forms of knowledge offer a shared counterpoint to alienation and engender solidarity and playfulness (p. 302).

In this article Haynes highlights the freedom that exists in community arts programs to move away from standardized guidelines related to time and content-based curriculum.

The fundamental element of being human and the need for relation is being left behind in education. A pedagogy of relation will bring us back to this fundamental element, but it is not

without its challenges. In explaining why I chose to enact a pedagogy of relation I believe Margonis puts it best. He writes:

My hope is that relational philosophies of education can contribute to the creation of a person-oriented ethos in education by offering more nuanced and appreciative portraits of students and teachers and by offering teachers and students conceptual tools for facilitating exciting educational events and powerful collectivities (2011, p. 434).

More specifically, I used a pedagogy of relation as a theoretical lens because my aim was to use pedagogy in this setting in order to empower the children and to give them the opportunity to have a voice; two things that may have been compromised during their experience dealing with childhood cancer. In opening the art room up to multiple voices and possibilities I put great value on the child's ability to "teach" others from their own lived experience. It was through relations that I came to understand my own practice. The arguments presented by these scholars have guided me in trying to create an environment that supports the individual's need to be in relation with others.

### **1. 3 Relational Pedagogy in Practice: The research that informs my pedagogy of relation**

A review of related literature has provided me with insight into the methodologies and studies that have been conducted relating to the topics of my research. Recent studies have asserted the value of relational pedagogy in art education (Haynes, 2013; Cody, 2013; Aitken, Fraser and Price (2007); Fraser, Price, Aitken, et al, 2007). Fraser, Price, Aitken, et al (2007) highlight the role of relational pedagogy in the arts through their two year study. They assert that while relational pedagogy benefits learners (teachers and students) through valuable social relationships, in the arts the approach encompasses the development of relationship with self and

art-making processes. Additionally, the study uncovered the ways in which the arts can help students to grow socially and take on different roles. Furthermore, Cody's study presents that drama education is not simply about learner the technical facets of drama, but extends into relational pedagogy. Thus resulting in social and personal development. Moreover, Haynes (2013) allowed the theoretical lens of relational pedagogy to guide her research of a community art program. She created a narrative of her research, thus creating a multi-voiced dialogic and reflexive voice. Studies performed by Newbury and Hoskins (2010), and Bellefeuille and Ricks (2010) illustrated how relational inquiry is a methodology that fosters inquiry to promote learning, generate narratives, and new knowledge for the participants, researchers and practitioners. Both studies presented relational inquiry as a ethical means to conducting research with children and youth. Pieratt's (2011) case study brought to light the ways in which students motivation and engagement in school increased as a result of relational and project-based pedagogies.

Furthermore, Buck, Mast, Macintyre Latta and Kaftan (2009) presented the vulnerability and flexibility required of the practitioner while engaging in relational pedagogy. Hobson and Morrision-Saunders (2013) discussed the role of the subject in bringing student and teacher into relation, which connects to Fraser et al's (2007) assertion that subject and process are part of the relation. Wagner and Shahjahan (2015) and Dixon and Senior (2011) explored embodied pedagogy, with the latter asserting that an embodied pedagogy is a relational pedagogy. The connection to embodied pedagogy brought to light the holistic nature and far reaching arms into other educational theories of relational pedagogy. In examining these articles I am able to insert my research into the existing scholarship.

My research methodology allowed themes to emerge through the data and the dissemination of the findings follows a narrative model, similar to that of Haynes (2010), Buck et al. (2009), Bingham and Sidorkin (2001), Bingham et al (2004), Macintyre Latta (2013) and Murriss (2013). These scholars have presented their experiences as educators and researchers exploring a pedagogy of relation in practice. Similarly, Freire (1970/2012, 1998/2005) and Noddings (2015) created narratives for critical pedagogy and curriculums of care, respectively, based on their own lived experiences. It is evident in their writings that relations, equality and empowering learners are positive outcomes of a pedagogy of relation. I see this theoretical lens as critical to creating responsible and meaningful research. I will build upon their examples by using relational pedagogy to inform my methodology.

Furthermore, Haynes (2013) and Jones and Deutsch (2011) investigated the positive outcomes of incorporating co-educative practices between students and teachers. Haynes used auto-ethnography informed by grounded theory and literature review. She compares and critically observes her early practices as a teacher with other community education settings. She presented her use of “imagination, ‘untutored’ and eclectic reading, and dialogue with fellow practitioners” (Haynes, p.298). The community school featured in her study reflected the ways in which groups can be brought together in different ways. Jones and Deutsch focused on youth programming and clearly outlines a set of relational strategies that were used in out-of-school programming. This presents new sources for out-of-school program pedagogy and research that I can access in order to build my research. This study differs from Haynes as it presents a case study, rather than auto-ethnography. The two studies present different perspectives in the study, experience and enactment of relational pedagogy.

A pedagogy of relation can be explored by educators of all disciplines, however, Aitken, Fraser and Price (2007); Cody (2013); Fraser et al (2007); Haynes (2013); and Macintyre Latta (2013) provided my research with examples for the opportunities within the discipline of art education for promoting relational pedagogy. Fraser et al explored relational pedagogy in the arts. They argued that relational pedagogy is not only about social relations in their study of the Art of the Matter project. Relational pedagogy can be viewed as a pedagogy that fosters learning through relationships with oneself and with the art processes explored (2007, p.42). They used ethnography, case study, self study, and action research. Their study illuminated the value of the arts as a discipline that fosters a broader view and approach to relational pedagogy. Additionally, Aitken, Fraser and Price also presented the Art of the Matter project and examined relational pedagogy in drama education. This article focused on issues of relational pedagogy, specifically the disruption of power and knowledge positions. They concluded that the strategy of ‘teacher-in-role’ had “political significance and pedagogical force” (2007, p. 2). The two articles present different perspectives of relational pedagogy within the same project. They present research that took place within schools, as did Macintyre Latta (2013). She examined classrooms and focused on the issues teacher encounter.

Finally, I reviewed literature that examined the role of arts programming for participants’ health and well-being. The studies of Hampshire and Matthijsse (2010); Lester, Strachan and Derry (2014); Reed, Kennedy and Wamboldt (2014); and Singer et al (2010) examined the positive outcomes on well-being of art programs for participants. Lester, Strachan and Derry examined the ways in which museums are using space, programming and interactivity to encourage children’s participation and inclusion in traditional museum settings. They placed

their findings within a greater dialogue of children's presence, concepts of play and well-being. Using action research they found that incorporating more playful approaches supported children's well-being. Additionally, an ethnographic study conducted by Hampshire and Matthijsse (2010) examined arts projects and found increased emotional and social well-being for youth who participated in a community music education program.

Reed, Kennedy and Wamboldt (2014) presented the findings from a study of a community arts mentorship program. They highlighted the benefits of personal growth for the children and professional growth for the artists. The program brought together children with artists who worked one on one, thus connecting to notions of relational pedagogy within a community education context. Finally, Singer et al (2010) looked at the impact of art education for the well-being of cancer outpatients. This case study was conducted to see how visual arts, here in the form of comic/illustrated books, could help parents share their stories and experiences of cancer with their children. Participants expressed the an increase in feelings of self-confidence and reduced anxiety, but they found no decrease in depression. I used these reflections of the theory in practice and art programs for people affected by illness to inform my practice and provide an art education context to these philosophies. The studies presented here have inspired me to look further into the role of art education programs at the KWCS and to consider relational pedagogy as an approach that has a place within art education.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

Cooper and White (2012) assert, “Qualitative research considers reality not as a fixed, objective, and constant construct but as a more fluid, ephemeral, and ever-changing thing” (p. 6). Qualitative research methodology allows researchers to engage in practices in order to best describe and analyze data within a variable and unfixed area of inquiry. While I identified questions and curiosities for my research, I was open to multiple possibilities that had not yet come forward in my previous experiences as an art educator. To foster multiple possibilities and perspectives I engaged in action research.

### **2. 1 Action Research**

McNiff (2002) writes, “Action research is a term which refers to a practical way of looking at your own work to check that it is as you would like it to be” (p. 6). Action research can be viewed as practitioner based research and is dependent on the practitioner’s reflexive practices in order to improve her practice (McNiff, 2002, 2007; Glanz, 2014). Here, my question of “how do I enact relational pedagogy when working with children affected by childhood cancers?” addresses this requisite of action research as a reflexive practice. Action research is iterative and is performed in cycles, with each cycle informing the next (McNiff, 2002, p. 12).

Lewin outlines the cycles as follows:

The next step again is composed of a circle of planning, executing, and reconnaissance or fact-finding for the purpose of evaluating the results of the second step, for preparing the rational basis for planning the third step, and for perhaps modifying again the overall plan (Lewin, 1945/1967, p. 206).

This cyclical process in action research is commonly referred to as the spiral. McNiff explains, “The processes can be shown as a spiral of cycles, where one issue forms the basis of another and, as one question is addressed, the answer to it generates new questions” (p. 12). Figure 2.1 illustrates the actions within the spiral of cycles and the iteration of the actions.

Engaging in action research allows researchers to analyze two processes: systematic actions and the researcher’s own learning (McNiff, 2002, 2007). The action of the process allows for critical reflection on what has been done, or what is currently being done. In this case, my participants and I looked at the current programming of KWCS and identified strategies for other programs, such as arts programs, that can benefit their members.

I was drawn to action research because this approach reflects my pedagogical beliefs of creating opportunities for multiple interpretations, curiosities, and inquiries. I agree with McNiff (2002) who states:

Action research is open ended. It does not begin with a fixed hypothesis. It begins with an idea that you develop. The research process is the developmental process of following through the idea, seeing how it goes, and continually checking whether it is in line with what you wish to happen (p. 6).

With the words of McNiff in mind, I set out on a journey engaged in inquiry without hypotheses. Furthermore, as suggested by Cooper and White (2012), I presented the multiple perspectives and possibilities that reside in my research question.



Figure 2. 1 Spiral of Cycles in Action Research

## **2. 2 Enacting action research**

The first step of this research was to obtain ethics approval from the Office of Research (see appendix I for approval certificate). During the summer of 2015, I began a literature review prior to initiating the three cycles of action research. I worked with the KWCS to schedule class dates and times and once ethics approval was granted Val Figliuzzi, director of KWCS, began recruitment.

The first phase of the action research is identifying and limiting the topic of research. Mertler (2012) outlines three main areas for identifying topics: “Trying a new teaching method,” “Identifying a problem,” and “Examining an area of interest” (p. 55). In my research I examined an area of interest: exploring and enacting relational pedagogy in art education. The initial action was my past participation leading short art sessions. It was in this capacity that I began to question how the arts could be used to benefit the KWCS members. This initial action led me to discuss possibilities with the director and other staff of the non-profit society as they began to see the potential for arts programming. This initial action addresses McNiff's (2013) statement:

The action part of action research involves you thinking carefully about the circumstance you are in[...]It also involves you thinking carefully about whether your perceptions of the situation are accurate, or whether perhaps you need to revise them in light of what you have discovered about the current situation[...]This is where the research part comes in (p. 25).

The next phase, as outlined by Mertler (2012), is to gather preliminary information. Prior to beginning the three cycles of action I engaged in a dialogue with the staff of KWCS and initiated discussions with members who may have been interested in participating in the research. During this phase I engaged in dialogue with potential participants and educators of

similar community programming to gather information and to help guide my project. The third phase is to perform a literature review to establish the work that has been done relating to the topics I have identified as relevant to my study (Mertler, 2012). A literature review allowed me to place my study in a dialogue with other scholarship, while also identifying areas that have not yet been explored. The next step was to develop a research plan. This is when the topic is refined into a research question, and a design for collecting and analyzing data is decided upon (Mertler, 2012). After these preliminary steps I initiated a three cycle action research plan with the participants.

### **2.3 The Participants**

Prior to beginning the research I met with Val Figliuzzi to communicate her role as third party in the collecting of consent and assent from participants. She selected children, based on her judgment of preparedness for, willingness to, and potential for personal benefit from participating in the project. She discussed the project with the families and gathered a group of ten participants from six to twelve years of age.

Val Figliuzzi discussed the project and explained the research protocols with the parents or guardians of participants and the participants (minors). She distributed consent and assent forms (Appendices II and III respectively) and discussed the research with interested participants. Upon arrival to the first class Val Figliuzzi collected signed consent and assent forms and began the initiation of the first cycle of research.

The participants registered in a free art program that spanned six 90 minute sessions. Prior to beginning the art sessions participants were asked to create their own pseudonym, which,

were used as coded identifiers in data analysis. Table 2.1 lists the participants, their ages and number of classes attended.

Table 2.1 Participant Chart

<b>Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of Classes Attended</b>
Amanda	10	4
Brenda	12	5
Butterfly	11	4
Galantis	10	5
Paintbrush	13	5
Peter	6	4
Pumken	6	1
Rainbow	11	3
Superman	7	4
Wise Owl	8	1

The KWCS defines children affected by childhood cancers as children who have had treatment for childhood cancers and brain tumours and includes children who are in remission or are considered by the KWCS as “survivors”. Typically the title of survivor for cancer is given after 5 years of being cancer free. However, the KWCS views childhood survivors as children who have successfully completed treatment, and have been clear of any signs of cancer for at least one year. Children affected by childhood cancers also include siblings of children who have battled various forms of childhood cancers or brain tumours.

#### **2. 4 The venue for the research**

The art sessions took place at the KWCS centre in Edmonton, Alberta. The centre is located in a heritage home in close proximity to the Stollery Childrens’ Hospital, the Cross

Cancer Institute, and the University of Alberta Hospital. The “house” as it is referred to by workers and members of KWCS, accommodates the various needs of the non-profit society: small offices for staff; communal areas for meeting, living room, dining room, kitchen areas; break out rooms for counselling services; a small art room; and a large play area for kids. The house acts as a safe place for families to meet with doctors and psychologist at diagnosis, throughout treatment and after treatment. If parents or siblings need a break from the hospital they are welcome to spend time at the KWCS house.

## **2. 5 Additional Participant Related Ethical Considerations**

I discovered during the research that there were special considerations to be made regarding ethics. Throughout the course of the six sessions there were several occasions when parents or siblings of participants were present in the class. At times they even engaged in art making and participated in discussions. One participant brought a friend along to a session. In my effort and desire to create a space that was welcoming to everyone I did not want to turn anyone away, or exclude them from participating. This led me to make special considerations to allow individuals who had not registered for the art classes to participate in the sessions. In order to protect their identities and privacy, their information and contributions were excluded from the data and analysis.

## **2. 6. The Cycles of Research**

Action research follows a systematic cycle of planning, implementation, reflection, adaptation and repetition (McNiff, 2002, 2007). For this study I engaged in a three-cycle system during which my participants or co-researchers were involved in the majority of each cycle. I held two art sessions for each cycle, thereby allowing six art sessions with three different themes,

objectives and art making processes that were explored. Each reflection guided the planning for the next cycle. The reflection consisted of personal journal reflections and group discussions at the end of each art session.

Each art session dealt with different art making media and processes. During the art sessions, I asked participants to engage in reflective journaling to process the session they had just completed. At the end of sessions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 participants engaged in art centred group reflections. The purpose of these reflections was to examine the sessions and to discuss the possibilities for the upcoming art sessions. Thus creating collaborative and inclusive planning for the art sessions. During our sixth and final reflection we contemplated the three cycles as a whole. This allowed us to engage in the retrospective act of creating a dialogic narrative about our shared experience.

## Chapter 3: Data

### 3.1 Raw Data

Data consisted of my observational notes, and session video notes. The research produced 11.5 hours of video, 18 pages of typed post session reflection notes (practitioner reflection), and 110 pages of typed video notes of raw data. I conducted unstructured observations rather than structured observations. Due to my dual role of the practitioner-researcher I was occupied during the art sessions working with the children. The dual role may have led to coercion or bias had I conducted structured observations. Mertler (2012) asserts that students may act differently or respond in certain ways when they know that I am taking notes pertaining to the actions of the class. Thus creating a limitation in structured observational note taking (Mertler, 2012). To minimize this I wrote field notes after the classed ended. Additionally, I reviewed video recordings of the art sessions make additional observational notes. Recent studies have shown that video as data in many different fields, including educational research. Video proves to be a valuable source for data in the detail it provides by capturing action as it occurs, thus allowing for contextual reflexive practices by both practitioners and researchers (Fitzgerald, Hackling, & Dawson, 2013; Wang & Lien, 2013; Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2012; Luff & Heath, 2012). Furthermore, Knoblauch and Schnettler (2012) illuminate the value of video as it provides a sequential representation of actions, thus actions are given context by the sequence (p. 337). As a teacher I may have missed a moment in that sequence but the video presented me with the fuller context of sequences during review. Upon completion of the three cycles I used all data collected from the action research to create a theoretical framework for my findings.

During the course of the research all data remained in my safe keeping. Digital data, including electronic field notes, photographs, and video recordings remained in a locked folder in my care on my personal passcode locked computer. Electronic data files were stored on the hard-drive, not in any software that enables or can be victim to online sharing (ie. dropbox, iCloud). All data and artwork, excluding video recordings of the art sessions, have the potential to be used in future presentations or publications pertaining to this research project. Video recordings were used solely as a tool for reflexive practice and for data analysis, recordings will not be shown in presentations related to this research. To protect the identities of participants they chose their own pseudonym for the research. Their names will not appear in any images of artwork that are published as a result of this research.

### **3. 2 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Action research requires different modes of analysis and interpretation from other methodologies. Dagmar Strand (2009) writes, “Action research reports are unlike other reports in three ways: the focus on instruction through the lens of professional knowledge; the use of self-reflection in analysis; and the report itself as a narrative of the teaching practice in context” (p. 350). Due to the special considerations with action research, combined with my perspective and experience as the practitioner-researcher, I followed a method of analysis as outlined by Mills (2014). He demonstrates the difference between analysis and interpretation. He states “Data analysis is an attempt by the teacher researcher to summarize collected data in dependable and accurate manner” (Mills, 2014, p. 132). Whereas, data interpretation is “an attempt by the researcher to find meaning in the data, to answer the “So what?” question of the implications of the study’s findings” (2014, p. 132). Following Mills’ approach to data analysis and

interpretation I engaged in an iterative process of data analysis immediately following each cycle of action. Mills (2014) outlines three steps in the iterative process “reading/memoing,” “describing” and “classifying” (p. 133). He suggests that the first phase of reading and memoing allowed me to get introduced to the data. Here, I began to see how my initial interpretation may have changed over time and how my intuitions held up or dissolved as I continued my research and analysis (Mills, 2014). During the first step I began to make note of new themes that emerged and recorded themes that connected to my initial literature review around relational pedagogy. The second phase is to describe the data. Mills explains:

describing, involves developing thorough and comprehensive descriptions of the participants, the setting, and the phenomenon studied in order to convey the rich complexity of the research[...]The aim of this step is to provide a narrative picture of the setting and events that take place in it so you will have an understanding of the context in which the study is taking place (2014, p. 133).

Finally, in the third step of classifying I broke down the data and group data according to themes and categories. This step was crucial for analysis and interpretation. Mills states, “The categories provide the basis for structuring the analysis and interpretation - without data that are classified and grouped, a researcher has no reasonable way to analyze qualitative data” (p. 134). As I classified the data I searched for patterns and recurrences in the themes as part of my coding and organizing data method. These led to my interpretations and guided me to seek further literature, thus promoting rigorous action research (Costello, 2011). Figure 3.1 illustrates my iterative process of data analysis as outlined by Mills (2014). The chart begins with the raw data and moves down through each phase of analysis.

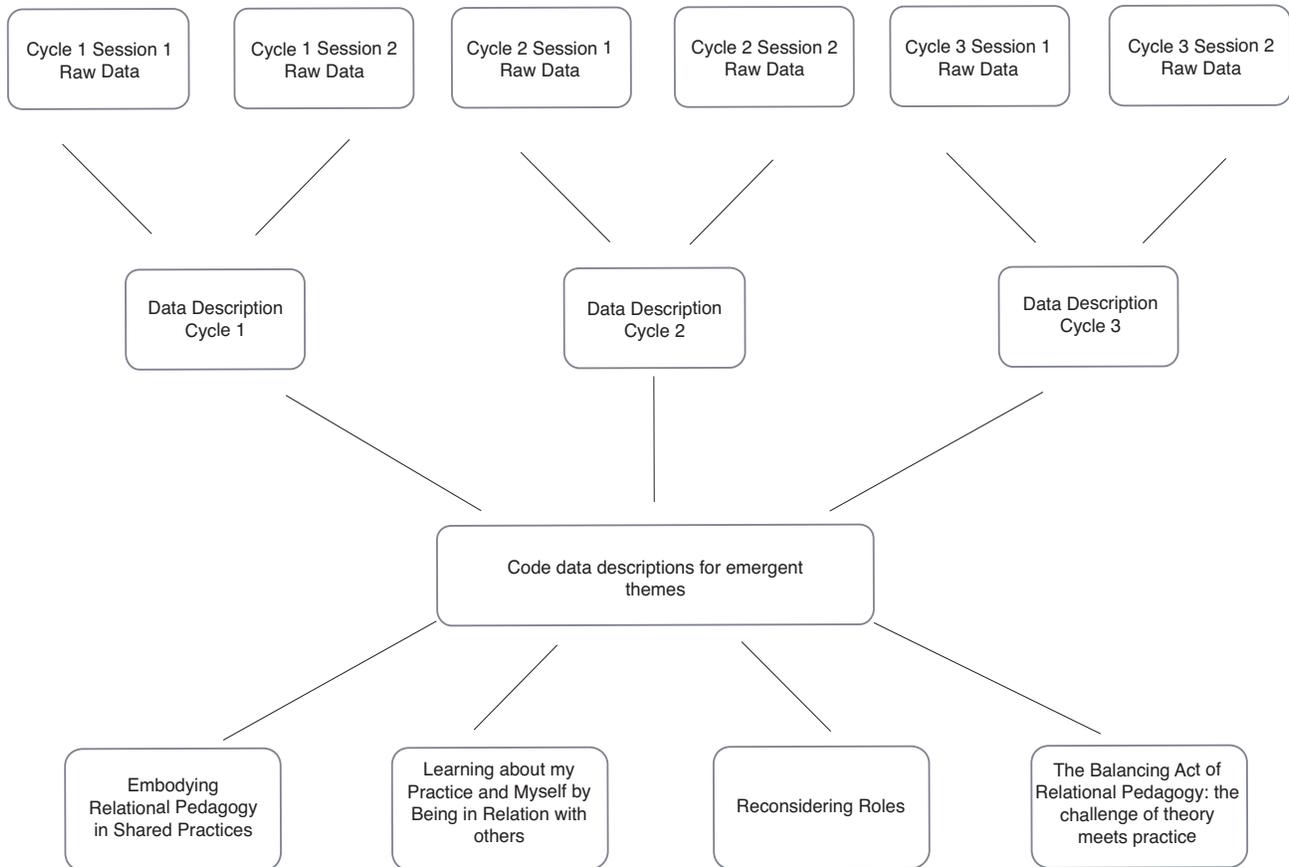


Figure 3. 1 Data analysis chart

In my interpretation of the data I created a dialogue with theory to explore the “So what?” of my action research and created a connection to relational pedagogy and other issues in art education that emerged from the data. Mills (2014) claims that connecting to theory is valuable for action researchers as it provides broader context to their research, allows the researcher to extend their work further than a descriptive account of events, and it provides “rationale or sense of meaning” to the research (p. 155). In the interpretation of the data I created a new narrative. Thus the reader is not required to sift through piles of raw data, or lengthy descriptions of the raw data. Walker (2007) states, “Narratives, it seems, are quite simply fundamental to the process

of action research, such that it is hard to imagine how we might do or write about action research in a non-storied way” (p. 295).

To validate the data from my research I used triangulation when possible. For example, cross referencing responses during group reflections with my observational notes, and video footage.

#### **Chapter 4: An overview of the program in action**

As I drove across the High Level Bridge heading to the Kids With Cancer Society House I felt the stress of the many unknowns I faced going into this research project. The venue was familiar to me, and working with children was not new for me. But there were so many factors that I could not anticipate. In the summer I had the opportunity to meet some of the kids and parents at a KWCS camp retreat. Despite this I was still unsure about who would show up for the program. I had been warned that I should be prepared for no shows or people to drop out at the last minute. My research relied on people being there so naturally I stressed about the idea of no kids to work with, especially with little to no warning. I was also insecure about how the kids would respond to a different approach, a pedagogy of relation. Would they want to engage in relational education or would it be a flop?

With my nerves bubbling inside I set up a range of media for collage; magazines, playing cards, string, bread bag clips, to name a few. The words of Nakamura (2009) guided my planning and I introduced the six session art program with identity collages. He writes, “As we have seen, the experience of art is a process of gaining insight into the personal vision of the other; through such a process the individual deepens his or her relationship with the other” (p. 436). I wanted us to explore and share who we are through art and I felt that collage would present a fairly accessible process for the group. Something we could ease into with some comfort and freedom to play. At one o’clock, the start time for the classes, I felt confident in the plan. I just needed some kids to show up. A couple minutes after one the first participant showed up. He was literally bouncing with excitement as he introduced himself, Superman. His parents shared with

me how happy they all were to be able to participate in the research and how thrilled he was to be going to art class. I was just hoping he wouldn't be the only one.

Sure enough fifteen minutes later another participant showed up, Butterfly. She was not quite as visibly excited as Superman, but she had a silent smile that told me she was happy to be there. Soon after another participant, Paintbrush. "Ok, this was going to work", I thought to myself. The four of us got started with the lesson. I briefly talked about the research project and tied it to the lesson plan. Another participant arrived, making us a group of five for our first class. As we approached three o'clock and the collages were not yet finished the group expressed interest in continuing with collage for the next session. After the class I reflected on our first session: how I felt it went; what I experienced as the teacher trying to engage with relational pedagogy; and what I felt could be done differently for the next session. I was happy with four participants in attendance but was hoping that more of the ten kids who had signed up would come to our next session.

For our next meeting I followed through on the desire to continue with collage as expressed by the group. Additionally I acquired some materials for a collaborative collage to extend the idea of self identity to group/collective identity. I sent out reminder emails to parents and received several confirmations and regrets from one participant, as they would be away on vacation. This communication with the parents eased some of my stress about attendance as I had a much better idea of how many kids were planning to attend. I set up the materials for this class, put coffee on for the parents, set out snacks for the children, and waited. Around one o'clock the first arrival, then soon after that another. The arrivals were staggered and this meant that the class start was delayed and for me, a bit awkward. I kept starting and stopping the

introduction as kids arrived and got settled. It was a fairly full class, eight participants and one guest. We crowded around the table, that last week seemed so big, and began working on our collages. As we worked I felt my stress melt away in my engagement with the kids. Around 2:30pm we cleaned up and prepared for our group reflection. Prior to engaging in our group reflection, I had everyone pair up and share their artwork. I did a partnering share, rather than sharing with the whole group in order to ease nerves about sharing ones artwork with the whole group. I listened in as they shared with their partners and entered into conversations when it felt appropriate.

Brenda offered to write the three reflection questions on the white board, as she was writing them Pumken offered to help come up with better wording for the questions. My original phrasing was far too formal. The questions became: What did you like today? What could we change? And, what should we do next class? I handed everyone a sketchbook and explained that we would be doing a group reflection. I informed them that they could use their sketchbooks to record their ideas and to use however they wanted during the art classes. Seated at the table with the group, I read the questions out loud, and we began with silent individual reflections. Most of the children used their sketchbooks to jot down ideas, and some sat and quietly sketched. After about eight minutes of silent reflection we chatted as a group; going from one question to the next. I recorded their feedback in my sketchbook during our discussion. Collectively we came up with some ideas for the next class. The reflections presented three main suggestions: better layout to provide more space to work, a project that would allow free choice but also structure and instruction for those who want it, and working with clay as the medium. It was a rough list that I would have to work with in order to make a cohesive lesson. I felt really happy with how

the reflection had gone, and at this point I determined that there would be benefit in having reflections at the end of each class. After the kids left I continued with my own reflections. I reflected on how I noted my enjoyment of the process. I enjoyed sitting along side the children to make art. Additionally, I noted that I felt that I was beginning to connect to the theoretical lens of relational pedagogy in my practice and considered how I would continue to engage with the theory.

To implement the changes based on our cycle one reflections I rearranged the tables in the room in order to create more space for working. I had acquired clay based on the input of the group from the previous reflection. I came up with a plan for clay sculptures based on alter egos. A way to consider the different personalities or masks we might wear around different people or in different situations. I chose this theme for the project because I felt it would provide structure and entry points for those who wanted a framework, while also allowing for free choice. Additionally, I planned to express that they could engage with the clay in many different ways, not simply the way I was presenting. Additionally, I made changes in my actions from my own reflections on relational pedagogy. I limited the amount of instruction I gave in order to allow for the knowledge of others to come forward. Furthermore, I decided that I too would sit and make clay sculptures. I had enjoyed making art with the children in the prior cycle and wanted to carry that success forward into the next cycle. Finally, I felt that the group reflection had created democracy and valuable dialogue amongst the group. In order to support this positive outcome I decided that we would reflect at the end of each session.

Five kids attended this session. I briefly introduced the lesson and pointed out a few techniques for working with the clay. But I wanted there to be a more casual approach. In an

attempt at this I addressed issues or questions as they came up, rather than going into a lengthy demonstration and outline of how to work with the clay and what to make. I played music and we talked about a range of different topics as we worked. As with the previous session we worked until 2:30pm, wrapped up, then had our reflection time. This became the routine. The group reflection brought forward the following successes and suggestions. The group expressed enjoyment of the project and an eagerness to continue by painting the sculptures in the next session. The group agreed that it was nice to have music playing, and that the session felt very relaxed. Brenda expressed a desire to have more conversation in future sessions.

As before, I reflected on the class once the kids had left. I too had enjoyed the relaxed feeling of the session and considered ways to bring that feeling into upcoming sessions. I reflected on the impact my communication with parents had on my practice. I ascertained that the growing communication with parents had led me to feel more relaxed about my practice. Hearing from the parents that the children were enjoying the class confirmed what they were sharing during our reflections. The increased communication also helped in that I knew about absences before the session.

The fourth class came and as before my confidence continued to grow. I followed through on the reflections from the previous session. We continued working on the sculptures and worked on painting them. to carry forward the successes from the previous sessions I sat and worked on my sculptures, I played music, and limited the instruction I gave to allow for the exploration of multiple possibilities. Six kids attended the session and I found that this was a great size of group. It allowed for more working room and more interaction within the group. There were three kids who had missed the previous class and I wanted them to be able to jump in

and not feel as though they'd missed out. As they arrived I shared the plan with them and helped them get materials if they needed assistance. We continued with our routine as established in prior classes. Reflecting, discussing, planning and heading out. The group reflection brought forward a desire to bring together science and art in our next session. We decided that we could perform different art experiments. Additionally, the reflection presented the successes of our iterative practice. The children expressed their enjoyment from the session with both the art making and the overall feeling of the class. They liked the freedom of the projects, and the relaxed nature of the sessions. It became evident to me that as a group we were settling into a routine of critical reflection, implementation, and action. In my reflection I grappled with my position and the frustrations that arose during the class. I considered how to better support others, while also providing them with freedom and fostering independence.

Entering the third and final iteration brought me anticipation and excitement. I continued to communicate with the parents, and I had acquired materials for printmaking in order to engage in art experiments. I presented two processes, screen printing and experimental printmaking, with a theme of op art. There were six kids in attendance. A big difference with this session was the lengthy demonstration I had to do in order to introduce the new media and exploration of op art. There was a lot going on. Lots of movement, lots of materials and a lot of assistance needed. I was feeling scattered, and spread very thin. This was different from the other classes when I was able to sit and make art with the rest of the group. Just as before we followed the same routine. We worked until 2:30pm at which time we gradually began cleaning up. We then did our individual reflections and the group discussion. The group did not share my feelings of stress and chaos. They, however, really liked the class. What a relief! The children expressed their

enjoyment exploring a new process and that they had not been negatively affected by the increased instruction. This reflection made me feel that I could bring in new media in a way that still met the desires of the group. We decided that the last class would be dedicated to finishing projects from earlier sessions. We had discussed a way to tie the program up, and commemorate it in a way. We would create an art book, each member of the group would submit a work of art and an accompanying description. Additionally, there was a disappointment that the art sessions were coming to an end. Several children asked if there would be more art sessions in the future.

I found my reflection from this session to be crucial. I had to take some time to process what had happened and consider the feedback from the group. My reflection on the session highlighted my internal struggle balancing control and freedom. I reflected on the pull I felt between being the leader and acting in a way that promoted positive relationships. I had entered a different realm of self reflection. One where I was becoming acutely aware of the impact my actions had on my feelings of security and authenticity.

Making my way to our last meeting, I was feeling mixed emotions. I was happy with how the research was going. I was thrilled with the relationships I was making and I was feeling very inspired. However, I was sad that it was coming to an end, and feeling the weight of moving on to the next step of writing the thesis. Following up on our reflections, I brought out the materials required for finishing the different projects. I attained the materials required for our art book. Furthermore, in order to provide some options for those who wanted something additional or different, I prepared materials for mono-prints and did a short demonstration of the process. In my desire to balance structure and freedom I limited my instruction time, but continued to provide support when needed.

For the last class there were seven kids present. They arrived at staggered times and I presented the plan individually as they came in. I sat and made prints, finished painting my own sculptures and helped with the selection and addition of artworks to the art book. Our last reflection was slightly different as we would not be planning the next class, this time I asked them to reflect on what stood out the most from the whole program. During the reflection I engaged each student, going around the circle to hear feedback from everyone. Many of them expressed that the thing that stood out the most was me. I was humbled by their kind remarks. Not only that, it cemented my belief in the value of pedagogical relations. We shared mixed emotions, as they expressed that they did not want the class to end. I shared my greatest appreciation with them as we wrapped up. After the kids left, I did my reflection but was at a loss. I was really sad that it was over and I was exhausted. I think I was experiencing the feeling of my brain and body realizing the end of the classes. Like the air slowly leaving a balloon. However, I was feeling more fulfilled by our shared experiences than I had felt about any of my previous pedagogical experiences.

As I worked through the data four major themes emerged. The following chapters will outline the major themes that emerged in the research; enacting relational pedagogy in shared practices; learning about my practice and myself by being in relation with others; reconsidering roles; and the balancing act of enacting relational pedagogy. Each of the major themes are broken down into sub themes, and connect to the theoretical lens of relational pedagogy. The last of the four themes, however, deals with my struggles as practitioner- researcher balancing control and freedom while engaging in a pedagogy of relation.

## Chapter 5: Enacting relational pedagogy in shared practices

*“Human relations exist in and through shared practices”* (Bingham et al, 2004, p. 7).

In the analysis of the data, the theme of shared practices emerged through the theoretical lens of relational pedagogy. Shared practices presented sub-themes of collaborative actions, the inclusion of dialogic practice, and perceived observational learning. In this section, I discuss the theme of shared practices through each sub-theme.

### 5.1 Collaborative Actions

During the course of the three cycles, members of the group worked collaboratively in many different facets of the program. I believe some the collaborations were encouraged by the method of the research, while some seemed to develop organically. From reflecting and planning, to sharing techniques with one another, the shared practices of collaborative actions enabled me to engage in a pedagogy of relation.

The first of the collaborative actions I will discuss here is the inclusion of the participants in the research process. At the beginning of the first and second sessions I discussed the research and the children’s involvement with the group. To emphasize their role as active participants, not just subjects of research, I consciously used inclusive language. For example “we” and “our” were used when describing the procedure for the action research and the overarching idea for the art program. I made a conscious effort to invite them into the collaboration of this study. After all, its success was at the mercy of the group. In an effort to include them in the research I

addressed the use of the video camera and asked them how they felt about being recorded.<sup>1</sup> I picked up the small GoPro camera and showed them how it worked, asking for feedback about where it would be placed. They responded with approval and stated that it would not be too distracting. I observed throughout the class that Superman engaged with the camera. Figure 5. 1 illustrates Superman’s interactions with the camera. His interactions ranged from quick glances at the camera to approaching it and talking to it. These interactions seemed to happen when he

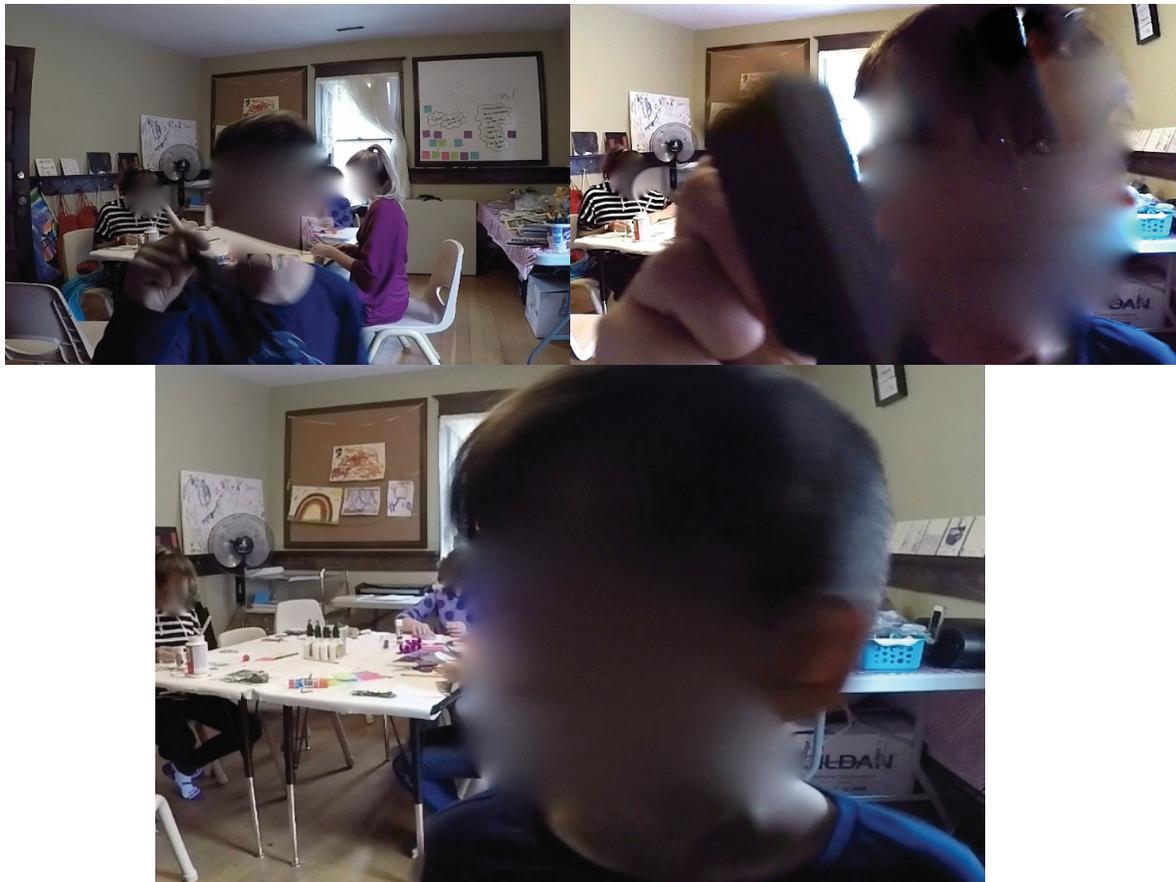


Figure 5. 1 Superman interacting with the camera during the first cycle

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<sup>1</sup> This was after the assent and consent forms were thoroughly explained and signed. This conversation was a casual reiteration of what they had already been made aware of in the signing of the assent forms.

did not appear to be engaged in his art project. He made a few glances to the camera in the second session, but by the third session it was as if the small device had ceased to exist.

Early in the second iteration Brenda initiated a conversation with me about the research. It seemed as though she was starting to consider my experience as the researcher having to watch all the session videos. She asked about “the episodes” and if I was watching them. Her use of the term episodes leads me to believe that she was engaging with the research process in a way that related to familiar aspects of her own life, watching TV episodes. We talked about the things that I did at home, including my reading, reviewing video, and reflecting on my strengths and weaknesses as part of the research. I shared my perception of how I thought it was going with her. After this conversation I perceived a change in her actions in the class. I saw that she was taking initiative and acting in a way that would help others and help me. I will elaborate on this change in her role later in the chapter 8: Reconsidering Roles. Before the final session, she suggested that we create an art book to commemorate the class. She suggested it could be a book with art from each of them that I could keep. I perceive this to be related to my sharing the research process with her. Perhaps she had an increased motivation by contributing to the collaborations, or by promoting the collaborations.

These examples of engagement in the research process demonstrate an interest in the process. The next section will focus on the direct collaboration of participants and researcher and students and teachers through the methodology of action research. I had planned to include a brief reflection for each cycle of the research. This would have been every other class, but I quickly discovered the benefit of the reflection as a collaborative practice. Toward the end of the first class, I casually assessed what the group wanted to work on for the next session. This

assessment was conversational rather than a formal reflection. It provided me with insight into how the group wanted to spend their time in the next class. With resounding affirmation for continuing with their collage projects I obliged and let them know that we would continue working on the collages, and I could even bring some additional media. While it was difficult to gauge the full range of implications and possibilities for the research at this early stage due to a low attendance, it allowed me to test the waters.

At the end of the second session we did our first reflection. I wanted each person to be able to engage in the reflection process and I wanted him/her to feel like s/he could contribute. In order to provide time and space for them to reflect we spent a few minutes in silent reflection, followed by a group conversation. The reflection started with positive feedback, where they expressed that overall they liked the class. This was the first hurdle for me to overcome - get them to like it! Next, the reflection turned to how we could improve the class and the responses were a mixed bag. There was feedback suggesting more structure, while others suggested more freedom. The group was then faced with a dilemma, how could we meet everyone's needs? Sure enough, Paintbrush, the eldest student, brought together ideas for how we could have structure and freedom. She suggested that I introduce the project and concept, but if someone felt they wanted to do something different they could. This was the environment I had hoped for; one where my lesson was not the law, and one where the children could follow their interests in a creative and productive way.<sup>2</sup> Paintbrush's suggestion was met with positive response from the group, and others even elaborated on how this could work.

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<sup>2</sup> Here, I refer to educationally and relationally productive, not just producing art as evidence of productivity.

The next part of the reflection was to come up with a plan for the next class. Ideas went off like firecrackers. I was unable to discern one crack-bang from the next. Once the cacophony of ideas lulled, I was able to invite each individual from the group to share his/her idea for our next class. It seemed as though one idea inspired another and what they had written down in the earlier silent reflection didn't matter as much anymore. This seemed to be evidence of the influence of the collaborative practice on each individual. The excitement was truly contagious and I found myself ready to burst with anticipation for our next meetings. After a few minutes of coming up with very elaborate plans, we narrowed the ideas down and came up with a plan for the next class. Margonis (2011) suggests that this method of collaborative planning can "reconceive the social space of the classroom; the curriculum, the patterns of discussion and decision making, the products students would produce" (p. 437). This re-shaping through relational pedagogy gave rise to, what I found to be, my most inspiring teaching experience.

This first reflection highlights the excitement that was generated by the reflection process, both for me and for the children. It also led me to incorporate the reflection into each session rather than once per cycle. This collaborative planning during each of the reflections led me to feel more confident about the lessons and comfortable with the media and projects with which we would engage. In addition to my increase in confidence, I had perceived that the reflection had provided the children with an opportunity to be heard and to begin to take ownership over the art program.

I relate my feelings of confidence and comfort with the feeling of being supported by the group in the process of planning the upcoming classes. This engagement by the group relieved the pressure for me to introduce ideas I hoped they would like and it allowed me to better

understand what they were interested in trying or practicing. Additionally, it provided me with a gauge of their past art experiences. In this shared practice I asked myself if I had created a space for caring relations. Goldstein (1999) examines reciprocity in relational pedagogy through the “cared-for” and “one-caring” framework. She points out that for teachers, the one-caring, simple forms of acknowledgement act as payment for the care they are giving to their students, the cared-for. Goldstein writes,

It is possible, then, for adults to remain in the role of one-caring for extended periods of time when interacting with children, provided the children’s responses suggest some pleasant form of acknowledgement. The cared-for’s reciprocity need not be a formal expression of gratitude, expecting such from young children, for example, might be inappropriate. A student who responds to his teacher simply by wordlessly nodding his head and hurrying back to his desk to return to work has offered a response as rewarding to a teacher as an explicit “thank you” would be (p. 660).

I relate my experience to this notion of reciprocity. In working collaboratively to plan the classes. I presented a platform for the children to have their voices heard and to have their ideas considered and implemented. This was my act of caring, and their reciprocity was their engagement in the process. Here, as Goldstein (1999) would suggest, all those who entered into this relation were gaining some pleasure from our shared practices.

As I entered the second iteration, I was feeling excited and more confident about the class and the projects on which we worked. Analyzing this further within the lens of relational pedagogy I am able to understand how relations led me, as the practitioner-researcher, to gain confidence and comfort in the classroom with the children. In the scenario Goldstein presents

about the one-caring getting something in return from the one cared-for, I can place myself in the role of one-caring. It is true that a simple head nod, or a smile made me feel rewarded and this sense of reward led me to continue in my actions.

Not every reflection was as excited and energetic as the first, but they all had acts of reciprocal care. For example, during our reflection of the fourth session Peter, the youngest of the group who was attending the classes with his older sister Amanda, proclaimed, “I don’t know how to write yet!” My response was simple. I asked him if he’d like to think about some things that he wanted to share in the conversation and assured him that reflections did not always have to be written. He could just think his reflections. Here I was trying to acknowledge his needs, his level and provide him with an alternative that would not make him feel inadequate. The range of ages of the class meant that I had to consider different strategies to meet everyone’s needs during our shared practice. In the example with Peter, I perceived the youngest student to have been feeling like he couldn’t participate. In working through this issue to try to make him feel that he could participate I had to be flexible in the moment and think critically and creatively. According to Nel Noddings (2013), one of the biggest issues with standardized curricula and content is that it stifles teachers’ creativity. In my context I was not bound by standardization and was able to adapt a plan in order to be inclusive to a student. The freedom of being an art educator in this setting invited me into a practice that was open to creativity and a pedagogy of relations.

As the reflections continued and became a regular part of our routine, I sensed an increase in the children’s ability to provide feedback, perhaps because I demonstrated I was open to their ideas by following through on the plans we had discussed. With each session and each reflection they seemed enthusiastic to share ideas for what to do in the next class. Their feedback

was valuable for me as I felt that by giving them a voice and an important role in the planning of the classes they would feel empowered. I perceived that they were more open to sharing ideas, and as the weeks passed, it appeared to me that they were also able to work off of one another's ideas. It seemed that they were ready to let go of their own plans and follow someone else's suggestion. I felt that I too was increasingly able to let go of my preconceived ideas for the class and follow different paths and different interests.

## **5. 2 Creating a dialogic praxis**

The notion of inclusion brings me to my next sub-theme: the creation of a dialogic praxis through shared practices. Lysake and Furuness (2011) describe the relational, dialogic approach:

This approach stands in contrast to a transmission view in which the teacher as the authority would "handout" knowledge of research methods didactically and students would be expected to take up this knowledge language of traditional educational research "as given." Rather, we choose a dialogic, relational approach in which our students' knowledge and experience are immediately important and brought directly into the curriculum through ongoing opportunities for personal and social dialogue (p. 186).

This resonates with my experience in the research. The first action that I introduced to the class was the setting of expectations for our shared workspace. I wanted to include the voices of the children in the setting of expectations for our shared space and experience. At the beginning of the first class I invited them to join me in setting expectations. Their opinions about how we could conduct ourselves and our class was valuable in the sharing of practices and creation of a dialogic space. I did not want my opinion to be the law. I was attempting to create a dialogue by introducing this collaborative way of setting expectations for our space together. Reflecting back,

I recognize that this was the initiation of using dialogue to create democracy and share power. Sidorkin notes, “the type of relation most beneficial in educational encounters is dialogue. The first problem is how to reconcile dialogical relation with power asymmetry” (2002, p. 139). The use of dialogue as shared practice was a balancing act of power, which I will further explore in chapter 8.

The act of collective bargaining over art room expectations was one of our first collaborative actions as a group, and thus it was the beginning of our shared practices. Since the children could contribute their thoughts about expectations for the class, they were being introduced to the dialogic praxis that I hoped to create in the class: a space for dialogue and democratic process. The children wrote their ideas on post-it notes and we put them on the white board. We talked about what these expectations meant and how we would carry them out. For example, we discussed how to respect each other and the materials. Each different idea was a glimpse into how the individual was coming into the collective and what he or she had to offer the others. This was the first opportunity for me to introduce dialogic praxis in the class. A teacher can use her power in order to create opportunities for her students’ to connect with one another. Her role in the group is to create a dialogue between the different ideas, interests and individuals of the group (Sidorkin, 2002). Here she is like a conductor, film director, or a novelist. Sidorkin outlines the value of her power in creating said opportunities in order to transform the classroom and relations within it. He states, “Her authority is based on her usefulness to children - she is the only one who can write, and she can give their story-telling some time and space” (2002, p. 146). The story we were writing in our first exercise was that of our own expectations coming into being with the expectations of others. As the novelist, as

presented by Sidorkin, I created a venue for each of the characters to enter into the plot. Each of us had a role within the plot and we brought different perspectives and ideas. In my experience, this relational practice was successful in creating a space for dialogic praxis. I perceived this creation of a shared practice to have opened the space to the many different voices of the group. I stated that the expectations could be re-worked as we worked together, verbalizing the contextual nature of our shared experience. I found that although we didn't formally re-visit the expectations, there was an open atmosphere that lent itself to different negotiations and mediations as scenarios arose. Thus we had the freedom to be flexible with our expectations, while continuing to respect them. For example, in the third iteration Superman was using paint in a way that the others in the group found distracting. He was squeezing the bottles and watching the paint bubble and ooze out of the lid. Gradually, the group seemed to grow concerned with his actions. As I focused on helping another student, the traditional role of teacher as authority was absent. They watched as paint bubbled out of the bottle, and eventually Amanda suggested that he probably had enough paint. During the reflection it was brought up that we should be mindful about how we are using the materials, and not be wasteful. The happenings of that particular class brought us back to our conversation about expectations. This was a little reminder that although we had freedom to work independently and use different techniques, we were in relation with one another and needed to respect the boundaries of others. Sharing the space and the experience with others meant that we needed to talk about our expectations. I use this example to illustrate that each member of the group was responsible for carrying out the expectations that we, as a collective, had agreed upon. It was not just my responsibility to govern over the group. As our relations grew we all had a role in managing the class. A shared practice

of setting and meeting expectations is presented here as evidence of a dialogic praxis. I will further explore how this invited us to re-consider our roles within the group in chapter 8:

#### Reconsidering Roles.

Returning to Sidorkin's (2002) example of the teacher as a novelist, I will elaborate on my experience of the reflection and discussions creating of a dialogic praxis. The practice of reflection allowed each individual to explore his or her own feelings about the class and pushed them to consider the future. Earlier I discussed the chaos of the first reflection in some detail. This multi-layered, multi-voiced and multi-directional reflection presented so many different viewpoints and allowed each individual a different entry point into the dialogue. Going further with Sidorkin's notion of the teacher as novelist, I recognize my role in the dialogic process as novelist to capture the voices of the characters as they drive the plot forward. Furthermore, I was learning that I was responsible for creating many different pages on which the characters' dialogues could be written. The first reflection had two or three main characters in a cast of ten, but I wanted every character's voice to grace the pages of our story. In the second iteration I became more conscious to include each voice, to give turn to every member in the dialogue. Most of the time, I drew connections between thoughts to try to create some cohesion and connections between the different ideas. As I discussed earlier, on occasion the lines were drawn together by some of the older members of the group. Eventually we had a routine in the reflection where each person would have the opportunity to share his or her thoughts that we would then discuss; however, I will admit there were challenges. As one can imagine working with a group of children, each having a distinct personality, there are some children who are more eager to share than others, which can result in a monologue. To balance the dialogue I tried

inviting each student to share something, drawing on the earlier conversations of the class to get some of the quieter members of the group to share. I too shared some of my reflections. The different voices created a context-specific art program. Through our dialogue, we revealed ourselves to one another furthering the development of relations. The notion of revealing oneself will come up again in the next chapter as I explore the way we come to know ourselves through relations.

I believe that by creating opportunity for multiple voices I was encouraging each individual in the group to come forward to share his or her voice with others. In my experience of this polyphony I felt that I was able to honestly share my thoughts with the group. A relational, dialogic epistemology encourages social dialogue that allows all voices and experiences to contribute to the curriculum (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011). At first I felt I was acting more as a record keeper going along with the suggestions of the group without sharing my reflections. In the second iteration I started to see that when I actively reflected and discussed with the children it seemed they were more open about what they were feeling. Perhaps by making myself vulnerable by including my thoughts in our text lowered the risk of sharing. I also felt that for it to be a true dialogue between all of us, I needed to bring my voice as well, so it wasn't a theme dynamic. I needed to assert that I, too, was an active participant of this shared practice.

### **5. 3 Observational Learning**

The third sub-theme that emerged from shared practices was the observational learning that came from collaboration. A number of different actions that I observed lead me to consider observational learning within relational pedagogy. As discussed earlier, the reflections created a dialogue in which different personalities and development levels presented themselves. I

described my observations of the eldest student synthesizing the different ideas coming forward in order to come up with a plan that could work for everyone. The age range of the group may have created this wide spectrum of ideas within our dialogue, but it also allowed for different stages of idea generation, communication and synthesis to occur. I perceived that when I or the older members of the group tried to bring multiple ideas together, the younger children seemed to join in, offering a sign of approval, like a head nod or an enthusiastic “yeah”. At first glance this may seem like a way to fit in with the group by mimicking others; however, I consider it as an extension of observational learning.<sup>3</sup>

The observational learning I witnessed is consistent with aspects of Vygotsky’s theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPDs). Vygotsky (1935/2011) explains, “What the child is capable of doing today with the help of others, tomorrow he will be doing himself” (p. 205). Reflecting on Vygotsky’s words, I understand how the potential for intellectual development is connected to relations. It is by working with others who are more intellectually mature that one can increase their ZPD, or the “level of possible development” (Vygotsky, 1935/2011, p. 204). While the ZPDs were unmeasured in this research, I believe the level of peer-to-peer cooperation and my demonstrations aided in increasing the potential for future development. I will illustrate this with the example of the younger children in the group. I observed that they had the potential to continue working after initially announcing that they were finished. The younger children in the group tended to announce that they were finished their projects quite early in the class, as early as five minutes into the project. This quick approach to art making was something that I

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<sup>3</sup> This is my perception and can not be measured with the scope of this research but I did observe more visible signs that lead me to believe that observational learning was happening in our shared practices

have seen before in my experiences as an educator. It is also why initially I thought that the age span would be a challenge for this research. In this study I observed that in the first half of the sessions, at least one of the three youngest children would announce their completion of the project very early in the session. In some cases they would come over to me and show me their completed work, and in others the announcement was made from their seat. My reaction to this was to ask them about their work, ie. what they had made, why they made certain decisions, or where they got the ideas. They would engage in this conversation, look around the room at the others, then return to their seats and go back to work on the piece that they had just considered finished. My observations during class led me to tune into this act of announcing completion then returning to the work after a few minutes.

When I watched the videos I saw actions that lead me to perceive this as being evidence of inter-relational learning (Goldstein, 1999). For example, in the second session Peter quickly announced that he was done his collage. At the time he announced this, I was occupied with another student, but looked up and made note that he had told me he was finished. In the video data I observed him looking around at the other children and their work. He paused and looked back at his mixed media collage. He then got up and looked at the material on the side table again and collected some more media to add to his collage. He returned to his seat and to working on his collage adding new materials. A few minutes later when he announced again that he was finished, I remained seated and asked him about his work. After we talked, he looked around and again returned to his work. This pattern of announcement followed by re-working occurred again in the second iteration. However, by the third iteration he worked for much longer before announcing his completion.

There are several possibilities to explain what was happening with Peter. It is possible that he was killing time after his first announcement. Perhaps seeing that I was busy he decided he would wait until I was available. Or maybe, as is common with art, it is just difficult to know when you are done and he needed a few moments to pause and reflect. While I am not dismissing these possibilities, I believe his actions reflect the kind of inter-relational, inter-subjective learning as discussed by Goldstein (1999). I read Peter's observations of others as his opportunity to witness a different use for a particular material, one he had not considered. Perhaps he observed a method or technique being used by another student and thought he would try it as well. I believe this to be the case because I observed Pumken and Superman to have had similar actions when they announced they were finished. In considering these examples I am highlighting the observational learning that can happen in a group that spans a wide range of ages and levels of cognitive development. In our shared practices I was allowing for inter-relational learning to support my transformation and the transformation of others.

In addition to this form of inter-relational learning I observed skill sharing within the group: another example of the relational nature of ZPDs. I observed that as we worked we provided one another with support by suggesting solutions to problems and providing feedback. It was not just me providing all the advice. In our sessions with clay there was a lot of discussion about how best to attach pieces that had fallen off. The skill sharing seemed to be based on what they had tried with their own process of working with the clay. They sought out help from one another by asking specific questions relating to what they saw others doing. I observed them taking turns, waiting for one another to finish with certain tools and they shared materials as needed, offering up extra clay to those who needed it.

In the shared practice of observation I found that I was altering my approach as well. I observed the group closely and tried to ascertain what worked well and what didn't. This keen observation often meant that I would change my approach in order to meet the needs of the group. For example, in the third iteration I was demonstrating printmaking methods. I started with silkscreening, which was very labour-intensive. I had planned to have three different printmaking methods for that class, but mid-demonstration I clued in to how overwhelming all the information must have been for first timers. I quickly modified the project and reduced the plan down to two printmaking methods in an attempt not to be too overwhelming, for myself and for the others. Being in relation and having care for those with whom I was in relation meant that I had responsibility to follow the cues I was receiving, even if it meant I had to step out of my own comfort zone. Noddings (2004) asserts:

Knowing that they will meet students with widely varying interests, teachers must continue to learn and to share their learning in response to the expressed needs of students. This mutual benefit - enhanced learning for both teacher and student - is an important product of relational pedagogy (Noddings, 2004, p. viii).

In our relations, I had come to value the interests of each of the children, and presume I had some influence on them but I had to follow their lead as well. For example, I suggested that we could create stop motion animations with our clay sculptures. Some seemed interested in the idea, but it never came up in our reflections and as such we did not follow through on the suggestion. Alternately, when the lesson plan decided upon by the group was experimentation I felt that there was some room for me to bring in something new for them that would likely fit their interests and work with experimental printmaking.

## **5. 4 Conclusion**

This research study presented the notion of shared practices in relational pedagogy coming into being through the collaborative actions exhibited, the inclusion of dialogic praxis, and perceived observational learning. Reflecting on the sessions through the lens of relational pedagogy brings certain phenomena into a realm in which I can better understand my actions and better understand those of the children. The shared practices may have acted as an entry point into our relations and I will later explore how this developed further into the other themes.

## **Chapter 6: Learning about my practice and myself by being in relation with others**

*“The self is a knot in the web of multiple intersecting relations; pull relations out of the web, and find no self. We do not have relations; relations have us”* (Bingham et al, 2004, p. 7).

In my search to understand how I enact relational pedagogy I discovered that it is through others that we come to know ourselves. It could be argued that I was learning about my practice and myself by being in relation with others (Bingham et al, 2004; Lysaker & Furuness, 2011; Sidorkin, 2009). In the process of conducting this study I found that as the practitioner, the relations encouraged me to be authentic, honest and transparent. The sub themes that emerged from learning about my practice and myself by being in relation with others are: aspiring for authenticity, honesty and transparency; revealing and uncovering identities; embodied communication; and expressing and reading emotions.

Going into the first class I had mixed feelings about the research project. I felt both nervous and excited. There were so many factors that seemed out of my control as I set out to work with a new group. Naturally, I felt nervous about the things that could go wrong: low attendance, no buy-in, or conflict within the group. I was stressed about external elements. This stress may have caused me to be distracted during the class or may have increased the fear and worry I was feeling regarding the class itself. As I waited for participants to show up my confidence was low because there was only one participant present on time, compounding my insecurity about low attendance and commitment. My excitement, however, was rooted in the possibilities: high attendance, enthusiasm, and group cohesion. The polarities of my feelings led to me being insecure about the plans for the class and my focus on relational pedagogy. I had

opened myself to feeling insecure and I was not going to deny it to myself. This was the initial action of acknowledging myself and being honest about my experience. Going into the second session of the first cycle, there was an increase in my comfort level from having a better idea of what to expect. While I felt an increase in my comfort level and less anxiety I was still aware of elements that I did not have full control over: attendance, and buy-in. The collaborative process of reflecting and planning as a group led to a decrease in my anxiety. The relations allowed me to be more comfortable with the process and I found that I was influenced by the presence of others in a positive way. I acted more naturally and felt at ease to be myself and less rigid in the researcher-practitioner role. Moving into the second cycle the influence of the group on my feelings of excitement was significant. I was optimistic and excited because I witnessed the group coming together to make decisions about the upcoming class. In learning about myself through others I was able to let go of these anxieties and be present in relation. By being honest with myself I could enter into relations with others.

### **6. 1 Aspiring for authenticity, honesty and transparency**

In the planning of the first lesson I chose to present a project of identity collage and considered the role of media in encouraging relations. By engaging with art in a way that may reveal ourselves to others, we could start building relations through art making. I viewed collage as a medium that has the capability to connect with themes of relational pedagogy in a number of ways, including identity, context, reflection and collaboration. Furthermore, collage is viewed as a medium that allows for different modes of knowledge formation (Vaughan, 2005). In addition to using the medium as a way to connect to themes of relational pedagogy, and knowledge generation I was choosing media with which I enjoy working. My enjoyment as a practitioner

was important and I felt there was value in sharing that enjoyment with the children. This part of revealing my interests, likes and dislikes, was a way for me to open up to the group and be authentic with the children I presented pieces of who I am through the art that I made.

Additionally, when we worked with clay I expressed how my opinions about the particular kind of clay. I was really enjoying working with it. As I started saying how I liked it, Galantis chimed in agreeing with me. This was followed by Brenda and Butterfly with a quiet but approving smile. This prompted a conversation about where to buy the clay. After seeing how interested they were in knowing about the materials we were using I continued to share this information with them. I felt that by being transparent about the materials I was revealing an aspect of my role as practitioner with them.

My role as practitioner-research increased my desire to be transparent. I had an ethical requirement to be open and honest about the research but as a practitioner my dual role had the potential to blur as our relationships grew. In my mind there was the possibility for the children to forget they were participating in research because I was not actively taking observational notes or formally interviewing them. I wanted the art program and the research to be an authentic experience for all of us, without neglecting my ethical duties to be transparent about the research. In the first iteration, I introduced the art program as being my research for school. I explained what I was doing and the role they played in the research as active participants and co-researchers. I picked up the small GoPro camera and explained how and why I would be filming all of the sessions. I placed it on the counter and invited everyone to wave and say hi. I was conscious about the perception of deceit. I wanted them to know they were being recorded and that I was not trying to be sneaky about it. As I briefly discussed in the previous chapter, I

observed that throughout the class Superman acknowledged the camera. I was comfortable with his actions; making faces at the camera, moving to the camera and whispering jokes. I viewed his interactions as a curiosity with the research tools and an interest in engaging with them, rather than destructive or distractive behaviour.

In the second session of the first cycle I too was more comfortable with the technology. I continued to be transparent about the use of a video camera, acknowledging its whereabouts and the use of video as a tool. However, I refrained from talking about it as much as the previous class. As a result, the children did not seem to be distracted by the camera as much as in the previous class. Only two children looked at the camera, and their glances at the camera were short and non verbal. As we continued working together I found that in the last iteration there was little to no contact with the camera. Despite the decreased interest in the camera, there was still an interest in the research process and I continued to remain transparent about my role as researcher-practitioner and their role as participants and co-researchers. In the second session of the second cycle Brenda entered the art room first. She asked me about the research and I told her how I felt it was going.<sup>4</sup> I was honest about the amount of work it was to conduct research. Sharing with her the number of hours I spent working on the research between our bi-weekly meetings. I told her that it was basically my life but even though I was busy with it I was excited about the possibilities. I use this conversation as an example of my transparency because I feel it demonstrates the interest of the children in the process and the way I tried to be honest about my role as the researcher.

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<sup>4</sup> This conversation was discussed previously in chapter 6.

## **6. 2 Revealing and uncovering identities**

In the first iteration I observed that I was initiating the majority of the conversations. I was interested in knowing more about the participants and sharing more of who I am with them. Their engagement with the conversations varied, with some remaining silent and others briefly engaging in the conversations. Early on I observed that although the children may not be speaking and sharing a lot with one another in the first iteration, they looked around at one another and seemed to be observing one another. Subtle glances over to another's artwork and small smiles when eyes met were commonplace in the art room. These were the early connections being made, and I became more aware of the need to foster these small interactions in order to promote revealing one's identity with others.

I observed different personalities and modes of communication emerging from the group. I noted that Superman would address the group as a whole, almost as though he was making announcements about his progress and his ideas. Others joined the conversations when it related to their own experiences. In the second session of the first cycle there was a small increase in the conversation. I continued to initiate many of the conversations but found that there was more engagement and some conversations that were initiated by the children. Wise Owl sat beside me and asked me a number of art related questions. She shared information about her life with me: the colours she likes, the school she goes to, and what her little sister is like. She revealed herself to me and I in turn shared some of my interests with her. I tried to relate to what she was sharing in a desire to connect with her. Here was a chance for our relationship to grow. In examining this example I feel that the act of making art allowed us to engage in casual conversation and reveal ourselves to one another. Through this casual conversation I was learning about her identity and

she was learning about mine. There was a comfort level that I felt while I sat and made art. Being comfortable allowed me to reveal more of my identity with the children and I wondered if others in the group shared this feeling.

As time progressed and we moved into the next cycle the conversations flowed more naturally. While the individuals in the group (myself included) engaged with one another in different ways and in varying degrees, the conversations became more about personal experiences. The conversations connected different subjects from other contexts with what we were doing in the class; connecting art making with different personal experiences. There was one instance when Brenda was using a hot glue gun to attach pieces of her sculpture that had fallen off and she was reminded of an experience she had using hot glue while in the hospital. She shared that while she was making art in the hospital strings of hot glue somehow got all over her bald head. She continued to share that she was bald from the treatment and had to work alone because she couldn't be around other children after having radiation. This example highlights how the conversations connected the art making in our program with other contexts and experiences.

Additionally, I perceived that the environment of the art room influenced conversations. When music was playing individuals remarked on the different songs, connecting to their prior experiences. This would elicit sharing about family members and revealing something about their interests and personalities. For example, Rainbow shared that her cousin loved one of the songs playing and that it was from one of her favourite movies. Others joined in, Brenda stated that she really liked the song, and Paintbrush said the name of the movie, *Footloose*. This was followed by Peter stating that he had never seen the movie but loved the song. I added in that I

loved the movie and it always made me want to dance. The music prompted our sharing of interests and knowledge. It seemed to stimulate a conversation that allowed us to reveal elements of our identity. In the third iteration I observed the group engaging in casual conversations with one another. One conversation started with us talking about setting up our Christmas trees and ended with talk about family members. Brenda asked if I had a real tree or a fake one, when I told her I had a real one she shared that she wanted a real one. I then told her about how I helped my mom get a fake tree this year because it would be easier for her to set up on her own.

When the conversations flowed and the group was sharing their stories, past experiences and familial relationships it proved that as suggested by Sidorkin, “Every person who enters a relation brings along all other relations, past and present.” (2002, p. 122) In sharing our experiences we brought to light our other relations, and thus no relation can ever be removed from the complex web of human relations. I believe this created a feeling of calm and casual exchange. An invitation for everyone to share, or start a new conversation. With these casual conversations I felt like I was getting to know each individual in the group and I was revealing more of myself to them in turn.

Early on I had tried to invite all voices, whether the comment seemed completely relevant or not. Superman often made announcements to the group about his work, but on occasion his comments seemed to be non-sequiturs. For example in the first session he held up post-its and said “Pixels” while we were sharing our expectations. As I tried to make sense of the non-sequiturs, I considered where these responses came from. I acknowledged what he had said in an attempt to welcome all voices and promote connecting to different contexts. Margonis (2011) describes the relational teacher as creating a social context that encourages and fosters different

“efforts of expression” (p. 438). Superman’s announcements, Peter’s changing of the topic discussion, Rainbow’s singing, and my dancing, along with the varied conversations in the group demonstrate that my engagement with relational pedagogy allowed for these different modes of expression and communication.

### 6.3 Embodied communication

In addition to the different “efforts of expression” influencing the relations of the group, I started tuning into the embodied communication between individuals in the group. I was intrigued by the body language and posture I observed in both the children and myself. I observed that children’s posture changed throughout the class. At the beginning there was more closed posture, shoulders down, gaze down to the table and hands close to the body. Figure 6.1



Figure 6. 1 Group setting expectations with closed posture during first session

illustrates the closed body posture early in the first session. The image shows the group during the setting of expectations. This closed posture became more open as the session progressed.

By the end of the first session of the first cycle the posture was more open; shoulders and chest up, gazing upward and looking around at others, and sitting closer to the table with arms moving away from the body. I perceive this to be an increase in comfort. I observed the most notable change in body language in Rainbow. In the first class she looked down, had her shoulders forward and head pointed downward. By the last iteration she danced at her work station and looked up to engage others in conversation.

I was conscious of the way body language influenced others, and as such I tried using body language to demonstrate my openness to new and different ideas during our reflection. I sat back in my chair rather than forward and kept my chest and shoulders open to the group as a sign that I was open to their feedback and that I was not the authority or only voice that had power. I also tried to read body language to better understand what each individual needed from me. In the second iteration I saw that Superman was getting very fidgety. He finished working on his clay sculptures and had retrieved his sketchbook from the drawer. He came to understand that the routine was to draw in the sketchbooks until it was time for the reflection. As he tried to follow this routine he could not sit still. It appeared to me that he really did not want to draw at all. I noticed him attempting to contain his energy and asked him if he wanted to go play. I was being attentive to his need by hearing and reading his body rather than waiting for him to express his needs with words. Being in relation meant being attentive to the needs of others. A difficulty with attentiveness that arises in pedagogy is that the other in the relation may not always speak with words to communicate what they need. Dixon and Senior (2011) state, “In other words, seeing is the involvement of reading with body and emotion, that is, reading with the whole body” (p. 475).

Overtime my awareness of the unspoken communication in the class and its influence on relations grew. I wondered if the presence of siblings had an influence on the growth of relations and perceived increase in comfort. I observed that initially the majority of the child to child relations were between the siblings in the group and I wondered if these familiar interactions would trickle into the other relations. Would it allow others to open up or would it have the opposite affect and alienate those who do not have siblings? I can not definitively state whether they helped or hindered the other relations. My observations, however, lead me to believe that the sibling relationships created a feeling of familiarity and did not influence the group negatively. In the second iteration, I observed siblings setting boundaries with one another. Despite spending every day together there was still a need for them to communicate with one another about what they needed from the other. For example, Amanda seemed to be getting annoyed with Peter entering into her workspace. Initially when Peter entered her space she looked over and glared at him. When it happened again she sighed and glared at him. Finally, she told him that his actions were bothering her and asked him to move away from her so she could have more room to work. This communication about boundaries lent itself to create an open space for expressing what one needed from others. Additionally, the embodied communication between Amanda and Peter demonstrated that there were different negotiations and interactions between students taking place and I became more aware of the dynamics between individuals in the group.

Looking back at the video from each session I observed certain patterns of movement and energy develop in the group. Initially, I considered them as the ebbs and flows of energy in the class, however I now view these patterns as embodied communication. There were times of high

energy that manifested in increased movement around the room and low energy or focused energy, which manifested in relatively silent working. In my observations the patterns of movement appeared to increase or grow stronger each session. An example of this pattern of movement would be when one person would stand up from the table another would follow soon after, and another, followed by another. Soon there was a high energy level in the class. This was followed by a period of low energy; no one would rise from the table for an extended period of time. The longest I observed from the video data was over ten minutes of silent working, which is a long time with 6 to 13 year olds. I do not interpret this as copying or mimicking. I understand it more in terms of relational embodiment. In observing movement as embodied pedagogy I begin to see the unconscious positions that are taken in the class. Dixon and Senior (2011) describe their research of relational embodiment in classrooms. They state:

We can 'read' before language, conversation and interactions in embodied ways. Tracing affective manifestations through the images provides evidence of matter-energies between bodies. We have moved into an area of 'bodily between' - the pedagogical relationship between self and other is not metaphorical. It is only that the learning and teaching are bodily, but the form of the relationship *is* bodily. As the body of each extends past its apparent boundaries, these connections are felt by other, seen by others (Dixon & Senior, 2011, p. 482).

Watching the video of each session allowed me to observe these embodied interactions from a different vantage point. As an outsider looking in rather than that of a participant.

Additionally, I observed that these physical connections were present in seat selection. I observed Paintbrush and Brenda sitting beside one another and helping one another. Paintbrush

asked about a paint colour Brenda was using, and Brenda showed her the colours she mixed. They continued sharing information throughout the class. Additionally, I observed Amanda and Galantis becoming more comfortable with one another. Amanda chose the seat next to Galantis and by the second session of the second iteration the two engaged in conversation immediately upon entering the space. Furthermore, I observed that Butterfly chose a seat near Brenda almost every class. The two shared small comments with one another, but mostly smiles and giggles. In the second and third iterations Peter gravitated toward Superman. From these observations, I started to consider the increased comfort between individuals in the group and the impact that had on overall group dynamics. It appeared that individuals could find comfort working with someone close in age and it seemed those relations created an overall sense of comfort in the group. It is now as I start to connect the dots that I wonder whether the earlier discussed embodied relation was informed by the seemingly involuntary patterns of movement or the intentional seat selection.

#### **6. 4 Expressing and reading emotion**

My perceptions of embodied communication were not the only observations that allowed me to learn more about myself, my practice, and those with whom I was in relation. I witnessed that as we continued in our sessions together, members of the group were more open about sharing how they were feeling during the art class. In the second iteration I observed that Galantis was open about working through her frustrations and moving past an idea that didn't work out. It seemed she was working with failure rather than allowing it to stop her. She tried to create a mask out of clay and expressed that she had created several masks at home but never with clay. She tried several different methods to build the skeleton of the mask, but the clay kept

falling apart. She tried using different materials as apertures, ie. bowls, crumpled papers and more clay, but the clay continued to fall apart and flatten. She voiced her frustrations but never gave up. She calmly expressed a new idea, and explained what wasn't working. Others looked over and offered alternate strategies to her clay mishaps. I perceived her openness to have influenced others. Her ability to lay the cards out for all to see may have influenced others to be honest and open about frustrations they were experiencing. In the next class it was Brenda having difficulty. I observed her actions to be similar to those of Galantis. She expressed her frustrations but never gave up. I wondered if this openness to the different emotions one encounters when working was allowing others to open up about their feelings as well, possibly adding to the overall openness and comfort of the class.

Furthermore, my awareness of the needs and moods of others increased as I became in tune to those with whom I was in relation. I noticed that I was matching or mirroring energy and tone. My tone changed as I conversed with different people to match their energy level. For example, I observed that while I was talking to Superman I was energetic and used humour as a way to connect with him. Whereas when I turned to talk to Butterfly my voice was soft and calm, mirroring her calm and quiet presence in the class.

This kind of mirroring did not seem unnatural or inauthentic to me. It felt like I was adopting pieces of each person in the group and trying to connect. Additionally, I recognize this as an attempt to tune into what they needed from me and what I needed from them. A mindfulness about others is required in relations. Noddings (2012) states, "The attention of the carer is receptive. Its objective is to understand what the cared-for is experiencing - to hear and understand the needs expressed." (p. 772) What do you need from me? What do I need from

you? By being in relation with my students I attended to their needs and my needs in this relationship. I have a greater sense of duty to the relationship and commitment to others with whom I am in relation. I became aware of the need to attend to others in relational pedagogy. As I attended to others and considered their experience and needs I brought their energy and feelings into my being. Goldstein explains that the one-caring must engage in “Feeling with the other attempting, to the greatest degree possible, to feel what he feels.” (Goldstein,1999, p. 656) Attending to others in my relationships became critical and required presence, adaptability and a sense of responsibility to the relationship.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, I sensed that the mood and energy level of one individual could influence that of the entire group. During our reflection of the second cycle I was feeling very unfocused and scattered from the busy class. It seemed that my lack of focus influenced our reflection, resulting in a very unfocused, tangential and chaotic reflection session. In considering my practice within the lens of relational pedagogy I was aware of the way my mood could influence others and vice versa. In the third cycle as I presented the group with printmaking processes Superman and Peter almost couldn't contain their excitement. As they watched me demonstrate the process, I could hear them say “Wow” and “Ohhhh.” Their excitement made me feel more excited about the processes as well. Soon the whole group was expressing a shared excitement to get started as they echoed one another's “oos” and “aawws.” The growing awareness of the many ways in which an individual can influence another when in relation heightened my sense of responsibility.

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<sup>5</sup> These elements will be discussed to a greater degree of depth in the Chapter 9: The balancing act of relational pedagogy: the challenge of theory meets practice

## 6. 5. Conclusions

In my reflecting on how I learnt about my practice and myself by being in relation with others I appreciate the statement “The self is a knot in the web of multiple intersecting relations” (Bingham et al, 2004, p. 7). My observations influenced my relations, my relations influenced my observations. Within this context everything was intertwined. The lens of relational pedagogy had opened my eyes to my responsibility to others. The influence I had on others, but also the influence they had on me. This last iteration made it apparent to me that I had to put my feelings of anxiety or insecurity aside. When I doubted their enjoyment or engagement the feedback I received was positive and did not support my anxieties. By attending to their needs I was able to grow more comfortable with the silences or moments of staring off. I started recognizing these actions as part of an individuals need to take a break or part of their process. Sidorkin writes, “Existence is an honour, bestowed by others; it is impossible to achieve on your own” (2002, p. 94). The theme of learning about my practice and myself by being in relation brings his words into fruition and allows me to gain insight into the contextual nature of relations and the dependence each action has on the other. It allows me to be comfortable with the so called “chicken and the egg” nature of many of my observations. Without the others I would not have discovered key things about myself and my practice.

## Chapter 7: Reconsidering Roles

*“Authority and knowledge are not something one has, but relations, which require others to enact.”* (Bingham et al 2004, p. 7)

In this study, I found that the theoretical lens of relational pedagogy allowed for new considerations of what roles exist within a class. The data presented the roles as dynamic and fluid, thus allowing me to reconsider my role as researcher-practitioner and the roles performed by the children. The sub-themes that emerged from the data are autonomy, leadership, and taking initiative; understanding my changing role; and rethinking authority. Finally, the last section of the chapter will address the absence of discussions about cancer and how it relates to my role as researcher and art educator and my perception of the role the children wanted to perform in the art program.

### 7.1 Autonomy, Leadership and Taking Initiative

Thayer-Bacon’s (2004) definition of education highlights the fluidity of roles in education. She states:

For my purposes here, I will assume that education is a studenting-teaching process that involves a teacher and a student (whose roles are fluid, flexible, and often interchangeable) and something that is taught (the curriculum, the content) in some kind of setting and in some manner (the form of instruction, the context) (p. 165).

In the first iteration I was conscious of my role as teacher, but wanted to create a space that would allow for more fluid conceptions of the roles within the class. I did not want to dictate how the children should engage or be in relation. My internal struggle with balancing flexible

roles and understanding my changing role will be discussed in chapter 8. Here, I will focus on my observations of children sharing the leadership role, and my actions to share the role of leader or to create a space for fluid roles to emerge. In the first iteration I found that I moved in and out of the leader role. For example, when setting the expectations for the class, I did not dictate my expectations. Rather, I allowed the group to establish the expectations in the shared practice.<sup>6</sup> In the context of reconsidering roles, I perceive this shared practice to have led to the sharing of roles. Thus allowing the children to take the lead and allowing me to follow their ideas.

In an effort to promote more independence I tried giving the children the opportunity to take initiative. In the first iteration, some children asked or looked for instructions and guidance as it related to the artwork. They often asked what they should do next, how to draw or paint certain things and what materials they could use in their collages. In some ways it seemed like they were asking permission to move on or do something differently. I found that I was responding in open, positive and supportive ways, saying for example, “It’s your artwork, if you want to use paint, go for it!” I observed a change in their need for guidance in the second iteration. The questions beginning with “Can I…” became fewer, and I observed the children taking more initiative. At the beginning of our third session together I recognized that as children entered the room they autonomously got their sketchbooks and pencils, and took their seats. Additionally, when they completed their artwork they prepared themselves for the reflection by getting their sketchbooks and jotting down notes. Their autonomous acts started to become a routine. It seemed to me that there was an increase in independence and initiative being taken. I

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<sup>6</sup> As discussed in Chapter 6: Enacting relational pedagogy in shared practices.

observed that as our sessions progressed, the children gained more autonomy. They got their own materials, and most of the time they would begin working on their projects without needing me to help them get started. I observed a significant change in Peter. In the first iteration he relied on his sister to help him get materials or instruct him on what to do. He was very much playing the role of the little brother. He stayed close and followed her directions. In the second iteration, I perceived him to be starting to pull away a bit and wanting to work more on his own. When she tried to give him directions he ignored her and carried on with what he was doing. Finally, in the last iteration he worked almost completely independently from her, getting all his own materials and even telling her that he did not want to do what she told him. He had gone from following her directions to verbally asserting his independence.

Furthermore, I observed that the initiative taken by one child silently guided others. In this a leader was formed simply through embodied learning as discussed in the previous chapter. These observations lead me to believe that there was a need or desire by the group for a leader, and for some routine and pattern. It didn't seem to matter whether I was the one who was the leader or not. The group would find a way to guide itself. Sidorkin's (2002) study of educational collectives illuminates how the changes in roles, or adoption of roles by the children materialized. He writes:

The educational collective is a human machine that reproduces educational relations. To some extent, it blurs the distinctions between teachers and students; some students begin to act as teachers toward other students, but teachers have to share some of their authority with students (p. 118).

I am further able to connect with Sidorkin's discussion of collective educational as I witnessed some children become helpers in the group. For example, I noticed Brenda taking initiative to be a helper in the class. Figure 7. 1 illustrates Brenda taking initiative to write questions on the white board while I was working with another student. In the first class she was fairly quiet, keeping mostly to herself. She briefly engaged in conversations with which she could relate. As each session progressed she seemed to be looking for jobs to do in order to help out. I observed her getting pencils and markers for the whole group before we started our reflections. Additionally, in the fifth session she helped pass out materials to everyone. I found



Figure 7. 1 Brenda writing questions on the white board

that the more she wanted to help, the more comfortable I was to ask her for help and share some of the responsibilities. It appeared that at times she put the needs of others before her own. For example, when she needed my help with screen-printing she told me that she could wait and I should help others first.

During our group reflections Brenda often broke the silence by sharing her feedback and listing her ideas for the next class. In addition to considering this example in dialogue with Sidorkin's discussion of collective education, I understand it to be evidence of the way children view their role as giver and receiver of help in relations. Lyon McDaniel (2004) writes:

I propose that as the model of a good-enough relationship is approximated, students come to understand themselves to be related to one another, not as soul mates, but as human beings whose dignity and uniqueness are dependent on the recognition they receive from others. Because they are caught up with one another in this way, students consider themselves to be both givers and receivers of the care that human beings need and deserve in order to thrive (p. 100).

Furthermore, in conversation with collective education and the good-enough relations brought forward by Lyon McDaniel I gained insight into the group dynamics that were at play. I observed the influence age may have had on the development of roles within the group and establishing leaders. I discussed in chapter 5 that the younger children appeared to be eager about many different possibilities but unable to focus on a logical application for their ideas within the framework of the class. The older children were able to synthesize the information and create potential solutions. I presented the ways in which Paintbrush and Brenda attempted to come up with ways to incorporate the different ideas in a manner that would still allow for an enjoyable workspace. They were careful not to put down the ideas of others, while being realistic about what would be possible in a ninety-minute class. These actions can be seen as the respectful caring that takes place between humans in relation.

Earlier in the thesis I discussed how I saw that children were seeking help from one another and sharing techniques with one another. I believe these shared practices were indications of the ways in which we were reconsidering our roles and relationships in the class. At the beginning of the fourth session Amanda and Peter arrived late. Amanda walked right over to Galantis and asked what we were working on. Galantis replied and explained the project to her. This exchange demonstrated to me that they were looking to one another more than they were looking to me and leads me to believe that we were in fact sharing leadership in the class. Additionally, I consider this to be an example of a desire to lead. This desire was evident to me when Val, the director, entered the room while we were printmaking. She asked what we were doing and Brenda and Butterfly eagerly explained the process and showed her their work. This led to them showing Val the steps in the process, almost teaching her what they had just learned.

Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter I had a growing consciousness of the language I was using. I presented the way in which language influenced my experience. However, I also observed that some of the children started using “we” language in a manner that may have influenced the roles they were taking, or the way they were thinking of the group. For example, I observed Brenda saying “we” on several occasions and appeared to be considering the group as a whole in her reflections. At one point Brenda offered to bring materials that “we” could use in the class, saying she would have enough for everyone. Additionally, when Val entered the class and asked what the project was Brenda replied by showing her what others had done and using the we language to explain the process to Val. I believe this use of “we” rather than “I” demonstrates that she was considering the experience as a group experience, not an

individual experience. I perceive this to be another example of the caring relations that were being created in the class.

## **7. 2 Understanding my changing role**

Further to the increased autonomy, leadership and initiative being taken I felt that my role was changing as well. My role of teacher morphed. I position this transformation within the discourse of relational pedagogy. Thayer-Bacon (2004) states:

A relational (e)pistemology is an approach to knowing that emphasizes that knowledge is something that is socially constructed by embedded and embodied people who are in relations with each other and their greater environment. We are fallible, our criteria are corrigible, and our standards are socially constructed, and thus continually in need of critique and reconstruction [...] An (e)pistemology that rests on an assumption of fallibility entails pluralism, both in terms of there being no one final answer at the end of inquiring, and also in terms of the need to be open and inclusive of others who help us compensate for our own limitations. A relational (e)pistemology strives for awareness of context and values, and seeks to tolerate vagueness and ambiguities (p. 166).

Her words resonate with me in my experience of (re)learning what it is to be an educator.

Influenced by the context within which I was working I had a new concept of my role as a relational pedagogue. The act of teaching must coexist within the interchange of teacher, student, subject and context (Macintyre Latta, 2013). With my role in a state of flux I was compelled to rethink the ways in which I could best contribute to the group. I used my past experiences in order to follow through on the ideas brought forward during our group reflections. For example, our second cycle reflection brought up a desire for experimentation and projects that connect art

and science. These ideas were not specific enough for me to acquire specific materials as desired by the group. I had to draw on my previous experience as an art educator to come up with some projects that would fulfill the groups' demand for experimentation and science in art. After some brainstorming I decided to acquire materials for printmaking. I proceeded to plan the next class to be a printmaking factory. Although the group did not specifically say they wanted to do printmaking I felt that the medium would allow for experimentation and a connection to science.

In my enactment of relational pedagogy I felt the need to respect our reflections and needed to find ways in which I could utilize my experience. Furthermore, as my role changed I found that I was more open to showing my vulnerability. In sharing responsibilities I could be open about not knowing all the answers or having uncertainties about a particular material or technique. I believe this open vulnerability changed my role from the all knowing authority to a co-inquirer in the process.

### **7. 3. Rethinking authority**

In my realization that my role was in a state of flux, I began to recognize ways in which I could share authority with others through my pedagogy of relation. I tried to demonstrate equality and a sharing of authority by sitting at the table with the children rather than standing and instructing them. In the first iteration I sat and worked on my own collage alongside them. I found the act of sitting with the children to be evidence of my attempt to model behaviour, actions and relations, rather than giving direct instructions or orders. Another example of my modelling was when the time came for us to clean up. I started cleaning my work station and refrained from giving orders to clean up. The children then gradually began cleaning their work stations. I perceive that this practice initiated the sharing of authority. I became more aware of

the influence I could have on the children and wanted to harness this influence in a positive manner.

In my embodiment of relational pedagogy, I was increasingly more aware of the way my perceived authority influenced others. I reflected on my conversations with Wise Owl during the first iteration. She had initiated a number of conversations with me while we were working on our collages. She began by telling me about her school. The conversation evolved to discussing how colours in art reflect the true personality of the artist. She was explaining why she was using the violet and blue on her collage. She then opened up about her sister's personality and the colours that she would use to paint her sister. Wise Owl talked with me for nearly the entire class and I wondered if she opened up to me because of my authority as the teacher. If she was sharing with me because of my authority as the teacher it would leave me to believe that her past experiences with teachers as authority figures were positive and she was bringing the previous relations into our new relation. Sidorkin's (2002) statement "The raw material that goes into the new relation is other, previously existing relations" illuminates that all relations are influenced by other relations (p. 118). In this light it could be that the perceived authority and her comfort with teachers was the reason why she opened up to me and not to another child.

Furthermore, as I consider shared authority I come to a new understanding of the power I had as educator and how I could use that power to promote shared authority. To illustrate this change in my conception of power I will briefly return to the discussion of dialogic praxis from Chapter 5. Earlier, I examined the way in which shared practices allowed for a dialogic praxis by using my power in order to create opportunities for students to connect with one another. I believe that through my careful use of power the relations within the classroom could change and

new understandings of our roles could be considered. Sidorkin (2002) asserts, “But her power concentrates on encouraging students to write their own stories, which means giving them the tools of interpretation and, therefore, the power to redefine classroom relations” (p. 146). In using my power or authority to connect students with one another, I was shifting “the center of gravity from the student-teacher relationship to the student-student relationship” (Sidorkin, 2002, p. 146). Drawing the children to one another aided in sharing power and authority. I found that as the cycles progressed they were more likely to seek help from another child.

In my enactment of relational pedagogy I found a growing consciousness of the effect of “authority” on relationships. Be it teacher and child or child and child, there was still the presence of authority in our relations. The child-to-child authority that I observed was influenced by the age differences between the children. For example, Paintbrush picked up a box of crayons and remarked on how they have sharpeners built into the boxes. She stated, “They didn’t have that when I was a kid” asserting that she is no longer a kid. I found the comment interesting because it seemed that she was acknowledging the age differences in the group and in a way characterizing herself as more mature. Despite the acknowledgements about the age gaps and younger children looking to older children as leaders I did not perceive there to be a younger versus older scenario here. I experienced it more as a scale where each individual fit somewhere and brought something to the group. Whether it was experience, leadership, humour or openness; these all played a role in the dynamic of the group and in the relationships.

#### **7. 4 The absence of cancer**

Reconsideration of roles was not only present in the actions and spoken words of the children. Aspects of reconsidering roles became evident in what was not done or said. There was

a notable absence in the data relating to the subject of cancer. Cancer is something that has affected all of the children in the group. It is something they all have in common, yet the word itself almost never came up. The experience of treatment, or watching a sibling battle the disease was not a subject for reflection or discussion. Other than the example of Brenda sharing a story about making art while in treatment there was no mention of illness or treatment, battle or survival. This void informs my understanding of how the children wanted to engage in the art program, the role of the art program, my role as educator, and their roles within the class.

When I considered the possibilities for research at the KWCS it was not my goal to have the children explore or relive their experiences of childhood cancer through art. Nor was it my aim to provide therapy. I am an art educator, not an art therapist. Going into the research I made great effort to communicate with the KWCS staff that this would not be art therapy. There is much debate over the objectives, differences, and similarities of art therapy and art education (Haynes, 2013). Keeping this debate in consideration I approached this study carefully. While I knew that it was not the goal to provide therapy, I was not naive to the potential for the art program to be therapeutic. Haynes (2013) asserts:

Firstly, educators can choose to act in ways that recognize the circumstances of children's lives and help mitigate some of the individual consequences of social problems. They have choices of action in their relationships with children and their families, in their teaching and in the school environment. Secondly, such actions and relationships can be more educationally beneficial than those associated with narrow pedagogies of instruction. Thirdly, an understanding that the rhythm of playful, creative

activity often gives way to fruitful educational conversation is of particular significance for educators seeking to enhance expression (p. 307).

I felt prepared to engage in conversations about the children's experiences with childhood cancer with an ethos of compassion. When such conversations did not present themselves I was somewhat surprised.

As researcher, it is my duty to listen to what the data tells me. In this case, the silences in the data spoke volumes. I interpret the lack of conversations about cancer to support the notion that the children did not want to be in the role of child affected by cancer or the role of sick kid. I believe it demonstrates the desire to have the role of a "normal" child, not a patient. In reconsidering our roles, I did not view the children as defined by their experiences with illness, either their own or the illness of a sibling. As such, they were invited to move between different roles in the art class. They could be whatever they wanted within the walls of the art class. Whether it was leader, comedian, sweetheart, helper, or thinker.

## **7.5 Conclusions**

In the exploration of my enactment of relational pedagogy I found myself rethinking the traditional roles in a class. In reconsidering roles there appeared to be a transformation in the children and in myself. The changes I perceived in the children relate to the relational learning presented by Fraser, Price, Aitken, et al (2007). Their study brought to light the changes in children, noting "shy children becoming braver, quiet children being more assertive, and disruptive children learning to become more focused and engaged" (p.45). As discussed, I witnessed similar changes in the children in the reconsideration of roles. Relations allowed me to be open to sharing leadership, which in turn allowed others to take initiative. I came to a better

understanding of how my role in the group was transforming along with those of others. Finally, I discovered that in reconsidering our roles, fostered by relations, I was able to rethink authority. It was when I reconsidered the roles we play in a group that I could listen to the silences and accept each child for who they were in the context of the art program, not who I thought they should be.

## **Chapter 8: The balancing act of relational pedagogy: the challenge of theory meets**

### **practice**

In the exploration of how I enact relational pedagogy I observed a number of different developments in myself as an educator, as well as in the group of children. I had prepared myself for some of the developments and felt very optimistic about the observations. Exciting moments and revelations of seeing a group come together in shared practices, learning about myself, others and my practice and moving fluidly between different roles. One thing I was not prepared for, or had not anticipated, was the strong pull I felt between control and freedom; structure and independence. As outlined in my methodology, action research allows for multiple, unpredictable outcomes to emerge from the data. The balancing act was by far the most challenging of those unpredictable outcomes. In this chapter I will present my experience of the constant pull I felt between the desire to provide freedom and foster an environment that promoted independence for the children. Simultaneously I tried to provide enough structure and support to create a sense of safety for the group. I will illustrate the case of Control vs. Freedom<sup>7</sup> with the sub-themes that emerged from the data; encouraging multiple possibilities; the communication of relations; and allowing my insecurities to inform my practice.

### **8. 1 Encouraging multiple possibilities**

In the previous chapters I presented the example of establishing or creating expectations for the class. This activity was an example of shared practice, sharing roles, and establishing different opinions about authority. It was also the first action during which I felt conflicted. I became aware of the challenges I would face in my attempt to create an equal, democratic, relational space that would allow for all voices to be heard. As I sat with the post-it notes in front

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<sup>7</sup> Here, control refers to the traditional role of teacher controlling her class through her assertion of power and authority over them. Whereby freedom refers to removing the direct assertion of power and authority over others. Freedom in the art room is relative to the expectations and boundaries established by others and determined by needs of others.

of me, just as the children sat with their's in front of them, I started questioning what I was doing as I was doing it. I instructed the group to create art room expectations, and I too was going to write some down. But in that moment I realized that my expectations may be different from those of the children. My art room expectations may force certain behaviours and outcomes. My expectations may introduce researcher bias before any data would even be collected and analyzed. On the other hand, if I didn't participate would I be excluding myself from the group. By doing so I would potentially be creating a gap between myself and the children. This was my dilemma. How do I participate as an equal without influencing the group with my bias? Or without further cementing the presumably pre-constructed notion of educator and child as separate and unequal? In the moment of my realization I stopped writing my art room expectations and waited for the children to finish up writing their expectations.

In order to further encourage multiple possibilities, I held back on being authoritative and consciously acted in a way that was more hands-off. My video observations showed that when children asked for my help I hesitated. There was a reluctance in my actions that illuminated my struggle navigating my role. I tried to shift away from providing an easy solution to their problems and moved towards allowing them to resolve the issues on their own. Although I tried to promote critical thinking, I observed that I did fall back into the traditional role of educator by providing instructions or guiding children in certain directions with their work. For example, making suggestions as to how to continue with their collages, or what they could add to it.

Part of the struggle I was experiencing may have been connected to gaining a better understanding of the different personalities and needs of each individual with whom I was in relation. In relationships it takes time to get to know how much support others need from you.

The act of shifting away from providing answers and rather creating space for problem solving created an opportunity for me to learn more about those with whom I had recently entered into relation. When I sat back and observed their work and methods I learnt so much more about the children. I witnessed many different strategies of working with different materials, different approaches to testing materials, and infinite ways of working through their problems. Each different personality brought with them a number of different possibilities. I realized that by letting them work through issues and by limiting the amount of instruction I gave I was encouraging multiple possibilities. I discovered that by instructing on a process, I was only allowing my way of working and knowing to come through. My knowledge is limited to my experience. However, by observing others and working along side others we all were presented with many different perspectives and approaches to the same themes and media. Thus heightening our capacity to learn from the experiences of others and through our relations (Noddings, 2004; Sidorkin, 2002; Thayer-Bacon, 2004).

In my struggle to balance structure, support and independence I found that by providing the children with space to create and be informed by one another I was creating space for multiple possibilities. I entered into a new educational world where I was listening to the children and that allowed me to let go of any sense of primacy in my knowledge. Haynes (2013) asserts, “listening to children might involve a form of thinking that forgets what we think we know about children’s development and their capacities: a ‘radical unlearning’”(p. 309). These words give me a greater understanding of what I was experiencing and how I was evolving in my practice. Additionally, I found that my awareness of the struggle encouraged me to let go of my assumptions, thereby opening myself to the myriad of different outcomes that would come.

## 8. 2 The communication of relations

In my attempt to create an open space for multiple possibilities I quickly became mindful of the ways in which I communicated affected my relations. This mindfulness led me to analyze and critique my methods of expression. Biesta (2004) suggests, “The relation between teachers and students can be understood as a process of communication” (p. 11). Learning how to communicate with others and the role of communication in relations proved to be an ongoing process of inquiry. In my reflections and observation of the video I discovered my use of guided or leading questions. Half way through the first session, however, I observed a dramatic change in the language I was using and the types of questions I was asking. I started to say “we” rather than “I” or “you” and “our” rather than “mine” or “yours.” I cannot speak to whether or not the children were affected by the use of inclusive language but I can speak to how it affected me. In the first iteration, my conscious use of this inclusive language made me feel that we were all engaged in the process together. As we moved into the second iteration, along with other factors, the language helped me feel that I was supported by the group. I wasn’t alone in the research, the teaching or the learning. My use of we language helped me to break my prejudice of educator and child. My anxieties were fading away in the second session of the second cycle, and I attribute this partially to my new relational vernacular.

Language continued to be a critical aspect of my pedagogy in the third iteration. I observed that I used language that acknowledged and promoted our relations and our praxes. For example, I often referred to the group as “my friends” rather than students, kids or children. Furthermore, I announced the reflection time by stating “as usual.” I believe using this language promoted our relations by demonstrating fellowship in our shared experience.

In addition to using inclusive and familiar language I used language as a means to minimize the perceived risk of failure with a new process. Low risk scenarios allow children open up to try new techniques and new boundaries (Fraser, Price, Aitken, et al, 2007). I introduced the group to screen printing and experimental mono-print techniques. From a quick survey I discovered that these printmaking methods were new to everyone. In my demonstrations of the processes I used phrases such as, “play with screen printing” or “try out printmaking.” This conscious and strategic use of language was an attempt to lower risk. If I am playing I can make mistakes. If I am trying something out perfection does not need to be attained. Furthermore, “play” and “try out” acknowledge the unfamiliar and lack of experience with the process. I had hoped that communicating in this way would encourage open-mindedness and experimentation with the new techniques. I found that for the most part it had. The new processes, however, also meant I had to provide more support and instruction than when we had worked with familiar materials. The children needed me to guide them. I felt a distinct change from an almost open studio vibe where I was a co-inquirer and co-experiencer to a structured process where I instructed the children. This change affected my communication and my energy. I began to feel apprehensive about how the children experienced the new media and about the change in communication style. I found that in our working with new media I had to explain the equipment and technique. I felt anxious moving into the reflection for the printmaking session. I worried that the new processes had led to frustrations and possibly negative feelings about the class. However, I found that this was not the case. The group was very enthusiastic about the experiments and getting to try something new. Had the language of “play”, “try out” and

“experiment” helped provide support and create a space where it was safe to make mistakes and embrace failure?

Moreover, as my vernacular evolved I observed that I asked more open ended questions, rather than yes or no questions. Additionally, I almost ceased using guiding or leading questions. In recognizing my influence on the children and how it could limit possibilities led me to acquire different methods of communication. Leading questions would only steer the group to the outcomes that I could conceive and would neglect their voices and insights. The language and modes of communication I had utilized seemed to encourage inclusion, equality and dialogue.

One of my biggest internal struggles was the careful balance of classroom management. I discovered that language played a key role in managing situations that arose. I discussed my increased sense of responsibility in the chapter 6. The heightened sense of responsibility to others led me to scrutinize my strategies in attempting balancing control and freedom.

The increased responsibility I was feeling as our relationships developed made me consider whether or not I was being supportive of the needs of others. In chapter 5, I discussed the example of a instance when Superman used paint in a wasteful manner and the group helped mitigate and remind him of the expectations for the art room. This event was one of the greatest challenges in the balancing act of my relational pedagogy. I contemplated how to approach his behaviour. When I saw him squeezing the paint tube and watching as the black paint oozed out the top, I tried to express my expectations for the use of paint. But I failed to use clear and direct language and he continued to go about using the paint in this wasteful and distracting manner. In my desire to create an open and free space I had distanced myself from authority. As discussed in the previous chapter, I had shared the authority of the class and I wanted to continue to share the

authority. As this event was playing out I did not want to be authoritarian because I thought it would negatively impact the relations we had built. As a result I ended up being too passive. I made suggestions for how he might use the paint otherwise. I asked if he was done with the paint. I inquired, "Maybe we could find another way to do that." The use of ambiguous language like "maybe," "could," and "that" was not helpful to his understanding of what I, and others needed from him. Initially, I did not ask him to reconsider his actions or stop what he was doing because it was wasteful. My passivity led to more "fooling" around and more waste. I tried a different approach and expressed why I was asking him to use the paint differently. Stating, "Superman, I understand you want to experiment with the paint, but that is causing a lot of wasted paint." I continued, "We need these materials to last for other art classes and other kids." Thus establishing some reasoning for why his actions were wasteful and why waste would hinder the group. Finally I suggested a plan, "You can take the excess off the edges of the lid and put it on your palette to use on your sculpture." Reflecting on this encounter I recognize that clearly communicating boundaries with others is necessary in all relationships. I did not want to discourage his interest in discovery and experimentation. Furthermore, I am able to situate this experience within the discourse of relational pedagogy. The increased responsibility prompted me to acknowledge and honour the context of my relation with Superman. Sidorkin (2002) states:

Relativism obliterates responsibility, because all actions are deemed to be equally valid.

Contrary to that, relationism extends responsibility to new territory; one has to answer not only for what one did but also for what one's actions actually meant to specific others in a specific situation (p. 198).

I asked myself what my actions meant and what they meant to him. In return I was inviting him to engage in the same reflection.

Through this experience I became cognizant of his need for the establishment of clear boundaries within which to play and experiment. My desire for creating a free space resulted in poor communication and my neglect for his need for clear boundaries to be established in the relationship. Through this experience and reflection I have come to a better understanding of the relational need for communicating expectations in pedagogy. As the class progressed I used more straightforward language. I asked him questions plainly and provided him with guidance when he needed it. Additionally, I let him know what I needed from him. Noddings (2004) writes:

Adopting a philosophy of relational pedagogy also influences teachers' pedagogical choices[...]They are also likely to vary teaching methods and resist accepting one best way. For example, a teacher who has established a relation with a particular student may understand that the student needs more structure and even coercion than the teacher would like to give. The recognition of relation, not a fixed ideal of teaching, steers the teacher's choice of methods (p. vii).

His needs informed my pedagogical choices. I recognized his need for structure and I had to change the way I communicated with him. In the end providing him with clearly stated boundaries within which to play.

Another example of the responsibility having me re-consider the way in which I communicated involved Galantis. In the third iteration I observed Galantis hesitating as it



Figure 8.1 Galantis standing considering what to do next.



Figure 8.2 Galantis sitting considering what to do next.

appeared she was considering what to do next. Figure 8. 1 and 8. 2 show Galantis standing in and then later sitting as she contemplated what to do next after she has cleaned up her work space.

Galantis' hesitation went on for quite some time and I attempted to create space for her to ask for guidance or decide what to do next on her own. I smiled at her, and asked if she was

thinking about what was next. She replied with a simple yeah. Rather than making suggestions I just nodded and smiled. Initially, in this interaction I felt that I had neglected her need for support but upon further reflection I am considering whether or not this was part of her desire to be independent. Had the hesitation to ask what to do next been a way for her to be independent and consider what to do on her own terms? I found that being in relation with others created a great sense of responsibility. I felt guilty that I had potentially neglected her, or not communicated effectively. However, on the other hand I would have felt guilty if I have stifled her independence by telling her what to do next. In my reflective practice the scenarios played out in my mind and I started playing the “what if” game. As a relational pedagogue I had become more critical of my actions than ever before and I was questioning everything I was doing. Was I being destructive, constructive or de-constructive?

### **8. 3. Informed by my insecurities: listening to myself and others**

My self scrutiny throughout the research was driven by my need to carefully balance control and freedom. My belief that my relations with the children would be negatively affected if I failed to balance these aspects prompted my criticality and constant questioning of my actions and practice. This resulted in the manifestation of my insecurities. The insecurities could have guided me into a negative space, where I felt like I was a failure. I decided, however, to use the insecurities to inform my practice. I began tuning into my feelings, listening, and uncovering wisdom from the relations.

In the first cycle I was critical and at times unsure of my actions. I tried to negotiate between practitioner and my new role as researcher. I had never been an educator who was also officially conducting research. This new role may have contributed to my insecurities about

perceived control and presumed freedom. In my reflections from the first cycle I expressed a need to balance these roles in an authentic and inclusive manner. It became apparent to me that within a lens of relational pedagogy I had to be true and honest about my experience to myself and to others. Being focused on relations allowed me to feel free to relax and to have fun making art with the children. I decided that I would be comfortable sitting and making art along side the others, offering help and support as needed. However, the presence of control lingered. I continued to feel that inner teacher trying to instruct and solve problems. Initially, I questioned children when they told me they were done. This doubt in my voice may have led them to feel that I did not accept their artwork as done and they should continue working. While I have considered other reasons or influences for their continuing to work in chapter six, I was conscious of the perceived authority I had and influence over their decisions. This led me to feel at odds with my actions and attempts at democracy as relational pedagogue and the prejudice of my authority as the educator and adult in the room.

I had been feeling insecure about this issue of control and freedom and the prejudice of authority. I was questioning whether or not the children even wanted the class to be as open as I was making it. Maybe they wanted me to show them what to make and how to make it, step by step. Had the openness created confusion or chaos? While a child centred, and constructive approach was in my comfort zone and interests, it may not have been in theirs. During the group reflection from the first cycle several individuals stated that they liked the freedom and independence of the class. There were others, however, that expressed their need for more structure. When Paintbrush began articulating this pull between freedom and structure several others nodded in agreement. Thus providing me with insight into their thoughts and feelings on

the matter. She went on to express that she liked that I was not telling them what to do with their artwork, but acknowledged the need for focus and structure. The discussion led to a better understanding of what the group wanted and the way in which the reflections would help guide decision-making. I felt a great responsibility to balance these elements in a way that reflected the wants and needs of the group.

After this discussion about structure and freedom I started reflecting upon my actions and the small changes I could bring to the group to help bridge the gap between the dichotomy. In the first reflection Wise Owl mentioned that having a very organized workspace may help create structure. She expressed that this way everyone could have their own space to work and find what they needed with ease. In addition to her comments, I observed cramped workspaces and apparent difficulty moving around the cramped art room in the first iteration. In the second iteration I made some small changes to mitigate the issues that were brought forward. I rearranged the tables in order to have a bigger workspace and more room to move around. I wondered if the cramped room led to feelings of constraint. Would an organized room feel more free? The new layout allowed me to set out all of the required materials for our next project. I could move around the room with ease. This made me feel more accessible to the others; possibly fostering better relations. Additionally, I found that having the materials set out in a more organized and accessible manner allowed the children to help themselves to what they needed when they needed it. Thereby allowing me to take a step back. It would seem that this change to increase structure had also increased my sense of freedom.

The previously mentioned group discussion about balancing structure and freedom had also led me to consider what I could do to make the space more open and free. In the first

iteration I had waited for everyone, or almost everyone, to arrive before officially starting the class. This resulted in an official start to the class and I was the authority in determining the start. I felt that this contributed to an atmosphere where those who arrived early waited to engage with the art making and with others. While those who were late may have felt like they missed something. I reflected on what I could do to invite everyone to engage with the space, the art and one another as soon as they arrived. In an attempt to create a free, engaging and open space I chose to engage each child as soon as they arrived. Initially, it seemed to be more work for me as I explained the project to each child as s/he arrived. However, as a result I found that I adopted a more casual approach to getting started. For example, in the second iteration as children arrived, I briefly explained the clay project, gave a thematic framework. My introduction and theme of alter ego clay figures had become more of a suggestion rather than an order. As such children engaged with the theme in different ways and enthusiastically worked with the clay. I sat and gave tips or advice as issues came up rather than performing a full demonstration of how to work with the clay at the beginning of the class. I felt that I could step back as our previous discussions revealed to me that all of the children had worked with clay or sculpting materials before. There was some base of knowledge, familiarity and comfort with the medium and I could use that to build upon and encourage a free working space.

I continued to feel the pull between control and freedom, despite this near utopic working environment where we could all sit and make art together with little stress and be equals in relation. In our second session working with clay, I witnessed how children were dealing with problems as they arose. Some of the small pieces of their sculptures had fallen off during the drying process. It seemed that this led to some frustrations surrounding the issue of how to re-

attach the stray pieces. I wanted the children to work through the issues on their own to come to a solution. I did not want to tell them what to do and stifle their problem solving or feelings of empowerment. However, I also wanted to be able to support and help them. I asked myself, how can I share my knowledge without coming off as the all knowing and powerful teacher? I addressed this insecurity in the moment. I decided that I would be present. I would listen, wait and be patient as they worked through certain issues. I was ready to help when they asked for my help. It was, after all, my duty as the educator to help (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011). I was beginning to see that the notion of presence in relation was starting to guide my struggle balancing control and freedom. If I was controlling a situation I was not listening and being present. Being present allowed me to recognize the needs of each individual with whom I was in relation. Being present alleviated assumptions. The new outlook allowed me to recognize the value in being present in relation and allowing the context of the relation guide my actions.

I discovered that being present required me to continually gauge the groups interest and adapt to their needs. I observed that during my demonstration of the screen-printing process Superman and Peter seemed to be losing interest. They were looking around and began fidgeting and grabbing for tools. Others seemed to be getting restless and anxious to start as well. In the moment, I felt my insecurities bubbling back to the surface. Perhaps I had brought in too much for this class. I feared that I would not be able to get their engagement in the new processes. I decided in that moment to cut out one of the processes. A relational pedagogue can follow her students and adapt to their needs (Macintyre Latta, 2013). Additionally, as we worked my assistance was requested by several individuals at once. Although I tried to help as much as I could, I was feeling stretched thin. My insecurities began to compound. Too many new

processes, not enough time, growing frustrations, and almost a constant need for help. This felt so different from the previous classes where there was a lot of independence and freedom. Where we sat and made art and listened to music together. I felt like we were going backwards. No longer could the children work independently. No longer could I follow their lead. However, now I consider this example as evidence of the need to be flexible and present in relations. I could learn from being insecure and feeling rattled. A reminder to be present. I had to get outside of my own head and experience the moment for what it was. The children had expressed interest in trying something new. A new art experience for them would require me to lead or guide them in order to provide them with support. In the end they loved it and I learnt something extremely valuable. I did not cave to my insecurities, I embraced them and allowed them to inform me. I learnt that limiting the number of new processes could help relieve stress. More importantly, I learnt that no matter how crazy I thought things were getting, the children were still having a good time and I should have a good time with them. In my attempt to gain a better understanding of the pull I was feeling in different directions, I turn to Whitehead (2000). He writes:

The nucleus of my epistemology of practice is the inclusion of 'I' as a living contradiction. All I am meaning by 'I' as a living contradiction is the experience of holding together two mutually exclusive opposite values. I am thinking of values such as freedom, fairness, and enquiry. I experience myself as a living contradiction when I recognize that I hold a value such as fairness, yet deny it in my practice. (p. 93)

In reflecting on my experience in this way I do not have to deny or ignore my insecurities. I can acknowledge and be informed by uncertainty, knowledge, comfort, confidence, failure, safety and risk within my practice.

## 8. 4 Conclusions

The narrative of my struggle to balance the freedom and control demonstrates the truly contextual and subjective nature of relations. My responses to each individual with whom I was in relation would be completely different depending on the context. My actions in each of the examples could have been different under any number of different factors. The contextual nature of relations demands flexibility, what seems right at one moment may be wrong in another (Sidorkin, 2002). My actions were influenced by something that I could not hear or explain, but something I could feel. Goldstein (1999) argues that a caring relation is contextual. She writes:

The one-caring takes into consideration the other's wants, desires, and goals, which she has apprehended as a result of her receptivity, and reflects upon both his objective needs and what he expects of her. The appropriate caring response then is contextually specific rooted in the particularities of a specific pair of individuals in a concrete situation (p. 657).

As I navigated the myriad of relations, the different needs and how to address them was at times overwhelming, but in the end satisfying. Reflecting on fostering multiple possibilities, the different modes of communication in relations, and allowing my insecurities to inform my practice I am taken to a different realm of understanding for relations. This understanding is based in merging practice and theory. The holes that theory neglects become infused with the experience of my practice. Furthermore, considering this balancing act within the lens of relational pedagogy allows me to better understand that relations are complex. They are not bound by rules and they are different for everyone. The struggle I had encountered was not a

moment of weakness or a sign that I was ill-prepared. Rather it was a sign that I had entered into relations with the children. I found that they would influence me as much as I influenced them.

## **9. Final Conclusions**

### **9.1 Reflecting on action research**

In addition to the open-ended nature and spirit of inquiry of action research, my goal was to empower the participants of my research. Action research allowed me to involve the participants in many aspects of the research process. It encouraged feedback and strengthened their voices by taking into consideration their input from one cycle to the next; thus supporting a process informed by relational pedagogy. Action research is not done to participants, rather it is done with them, therefore, I was not experimenting on children or conducting research exclusively for my own gain. Furthermore, it allowed me to examine my own practice in the lens of relational pedagogy.

I involved participants as co-researchers, allowing them to contribute to the actions and the learning from the systematic actions. Thus supporting the notion, “Action researchers believe that all people are equal and should enjoy the same rights and entitlements” (McNiff, 2013, p. 27). My research involved three cycles in which the children (co-researchers in this phase of the research) engaged in the reflection, planning, and action phases of the cycle. Hence, reflections on the cycles presented both my learning and experience, and the learning and experiences of the children involved. Research is often seen as an elite practice that is removed from practitioners and their students. Action research allows teachers or practitioners to collect data and make decisions to improve their practices (Mertler, 2012). From my experience conducting this action research I agree with Mertler. I concur that action research can be seen as an empowering form of research, as it brings the power back to the practitioner.

I discovered that while action research can be seen as empowering practitioners to inquire, act on the inquiry, and reflect and report on the process. Additionally, conducting action research within a theoretical framework provided me with a strategic plan to implement the research that was rooted in theory. I was able to make discoveries about how we engaged in the process of art making, and how we learnt through these processes and what I learnt through the process of analysis. Furthermore, it addressed the “so what” of research. The theoretical lens of relational pedagogy provided the action research with a strong connection to contemporary educational theory.

I discovered that Mills’ (2014) approach to data analysis allowed me to manage the quantity of data produced in action research. The three steps of memoing, describing and finally, coding and classifying the data in themes provided me with a path to follow as I ventured through the raw data. Rather than attempting to directly code over 100 pages of raw data I coded the descriptions. It was a process of filtering the data to its finest form, themes. Through this process I developed an intimate understanding of the data. Finally, I was able to reflect on the themes through the writing of a narrative. As suggested by Walker (2007), the re-telling in this narrative allowed me to bring focus to the most pertinent or powerful events from the art program as they related to my stated research question. She explains:

In action research the narrative style is profoundly bound up with the substance of action, and is integral to our search for truth and meaning in what we do. Stories of the concrete and the particular listened to intently, respectfully, ethically and responsively enable discernment and wiser professional judgements. Above all, good stories help us to think well about practice (p. 296).

Furthermore, McNiff (2007, 2013) suggests that it is not enough to simply report on what was done. The actions were connected to my pedagogical values. Those values were illustrated through my narrative of actions and the themes that emerged. She asserts, “This idea of showing how you are trying to live your values in your practice is at the heart of debates about demonstrating and judging quality and validity in action research” (McNiff, 2013, p. 26). Additionally, I engaged in my own reflections to consider the role of relational pedagogy in my attempt to live my values.

## **9. 2 Limitations**

Mills (2014) recommends stating what’s missing in your research as this will ensure transparency and eliminate pre-judgements. I brought the limitations and questions to light in my narrative. While I went through all cycles of the action research there are still unanswered questions, and new questions that came to light during the process but were out of the scope of this research study and my methodology. The scope of the research question presented some limitations in the collecting, gathering and analysis of data. In my reflexive practice examining my embodiment of relational pedagogy I made note of participant actions and my perception of their relevance within the theoretical framework. While I was considering my experience as a practitioner-researcher engaging with relational pedagogy, I acknowledge that the actions of the participants with whom I was in relation influenced me greatly. In my dissemination of the research findings I acknowledged the limits of the research question as presenting my own experience and perception of the events within a specific context. The context specific nature of my research findings can thereby inform the reader that the themes can not be held as universal understandings or truths.

Additionally, in my consideration of the research question additional questions arose that pertain more specifically to the experience of the others involved in the study. These questions, however, were not answered in the implementation of the methodology and procedure due to ethical considerations. If further research was to be performed, I would be interested in expanding the scope of the research and procedure to include a method for gaining further insight into the experience of the participants and the implication of the art programs for KWCS programming as a whole. It was brought to my attention by the KWCS that the success of the art program from this research has led them to consider how they approach other education and therapy programs. While this is an interesting point in program development and worth further consideration, it is outside the scope of this research.

Finally, I acknowledge the limitations of time for this research. While the research presented valuable data and themes emerged related to a pedagogy of relation, six sessions is only a small sample of time to engage in relational studies. It would be valuable in the future to conduct a longer research study to further investigate the implications of relational pedagogy over time.

### **9.3 Implications**

This research investigated relational pedagogy in practice with children affected by childhood cancers. Implicating my findings within art education and relational pedagogy scholarship. Although my experience is specific to the context of the art program at KWCS, I believe it provides a voice for practitioners exploring educational theories, the struggles and the successes. In addition to presenting my experience of the theory the research created an avenue

for me to address the wants and needs of the children. Working together to plan the art sessions led to art explorations that were tailor made to this particular group of people.

The success of the program in both engagement and attendance has already impacted other programs offered by KWCS. I was informed that low attendance has resulted in KWCS programs being cancelled. The regular attendance of the participants in this study has led the KWCS to examine how to achieve better attendance rates for other programs. Additionally, after completion of the art program for this research the registration for fundraising art classes for KWCS reached capacity within the first week they were announced. Additional classes were added to accommodate more participants in the fundraiser. At this time, however, it is difficult to determine with certainty whether or not the research led to the full registration. These factors may serve as a foundation upon which to build future programs.

Through shared practices, learning about myself and my practice, the reconsideration of roles, and performing a careful balancing act I come to understand how I, as art educator, embodied relational pedagogy. The themes that emerged from the study have provided me with a greater understanding of the role relations play in my pedagogy.

Moreover, my practice evolved into a pedagogy that connects to the four facets of relational pedagogy as outlined in chapter 2. First, I have presented the ways in which my feelings of responsibility to others guided my pedagogy of relation. As my practice evolved I became more aware of the influences and factors that were at play in the relations. The awareness prompted me to consider a more holistic view of art education. In my relational practice I attempted to connect the prior experiences and knowledge of the children with the meaning-making taking place in the art sessions. Lastly, I feel that the relationships that were

built in the art program were positive relationships. By engaging with others with respect, care and inclusion I was able to set the tone for the relationships being built amongst the group.

Furthermore, I have placed my practice within the discourse of relational pedagogy and have gained insight into the practice of the theory. The research has brought me to consider the challenges and benefits when practice and theory meet. I engaged in a reflexive practice that will inform my future pedagogy and lead me to prioritize a relational epistemology. In conducting research at KWCS my practice has evolved and I have opened myself up to the possibilities of relational pedagogy, allowing myself to let go of the reins and listen to the relations.

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## Appendix A: Ethics Approval Certificate



### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

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Name of Applicant: Adrienne Alton

Department: Faculty of Fine Arts \ Art Education

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: Relational Pedagogy for Program Development  
in Non-Profit Organizations (working title)

Certification Number: 30004561

Valid From: July 10, 2015 to: July 09, 2016

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "J. Pfaus".

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Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

## Appendix B: Sample Consent Form



### INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**Study Title:** Relational Pedagogy for Program Development in Non-Profit organizations (working title)

**Researcher:** Adrienne Alton

**Researcher's Contact Information:**

email: adrienne.alton5@gmail.com, phone: 587-341-6722

**Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Lorrie Blair**

**Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:**

S-EV 2627

Computer Science, Engineering and Visual Arts Integrated Complex,  
1515 St. Catherine W.

Phone:

(514) 848-2424 ext. 4642

Email:

lorrie.blair@concordia.ca

Your child is being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want your child to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the participant recruiter, executive director of KWCS, Val Figliuzzi.

#### **A. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the research is to create an art program for the Kids with Cancer Society (KWCS) of Northern Alberta. Participants will work with the researcher to create a program that reflects the wants and needs of the members of the KWCS of Edmonton to support existing programming that focuses on the overall well-being of KWCS members. This research will explore how to develop arts programming in order to empower participants by giving their voices and perspectives equal weight as that of the instructor. Following the art sessions the researcher will focus on examining data to determine how the group learnt from working with one another, asking how do our

relationships with others teach us? And, how can we create art programs that foster relationships and learning opportunities?

## **B. PROCEDURES**

If your child participates, she/he will be asked to participate in six art making sessions that will explore a variety of different art making techniques and materials. At the end of each session participants will be asked to write a journal entry as their reflection on the session they had just completed. During sessions 1, 3 and 5 participants will engage in group art-centred reflections in order to work together to plan the upcoming sessions. The thematic focus, medium and method for the art sessions will be determined by the participants working with the teacher-researcher. All art sessions will be video recorded for the sole purpose of data collection. Video footage will remain in the care of the researcher and will not be presented or published. Val Figliuzzi, executive director of KWCS Edmonton will act as the third party recruiter, therefore the teacher-researcher will not be aware of the individuals who are participating in the study until the art sessions have completed. This will ensure that there is no preferential treatment in the delivery of the art program and that there will be no consequence should your child choose not to participate in the research. Participants may choose to remain in the art sessions even if they withdraw from the research. There will be no negative repercussions should your child choose not to participate in the research.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 12 hours.

As a research participant, your child's responsibilities would be:

- choosing a pseudonym (fake name) that will protect their real identity when the research results are shared
- attend art making sessions and engage with the practices explored
- provide feedback related to the art making sessions in the form of journal entries and art-centred reflections
- participate in group reflections and discussion to plan upcoming sessions
- allow the researcher to take pictures during art sessions and photograph or scan artwork and journal entries for data collection
- allow researcher to videotape the art sessions for the sole purpose of data collection
- review selected data to ensure accurate analysis by the research
- bring forward any concerns about consent or withdrawal to Val Figliuzzi
- help ensure that the developments and findings of the research remain confidential until the results have been shared through the writing of the Master's Thesis.

## **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

Your child might face certain risks by participating in this research. These risks include:

- art making may elicit the recollection of certain memories that may be difficult, however this is not the goal of the research and support staff will be available to anyone who may need help during this process
- risks will not be greater than what your child encounters in her/his daily life, for example at school or in other group activities

Your child might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include but are not limited to:

- gained knowledge and skill through a variety of art making practices
- building relationships with other individuals in their community
- sense of power by acting as co-researchers and co-educator in this study
- knowledge and exposure through an introduction to the world of art and research
- sense of purpose by helping develop a program for others involved in the KWCS of Edmonton and participating in research that can be used to benefit other children's groups
- potential for growth in emotional and psychological well-being

## **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will gather the following information as part of this research:

- Date of Birth
- grade currently enrolled
- Brief History: diagnosis and treatment information (age at diagnosis, diagnosis, treatment completion), art background and exposure
- Place of residence

By consenting to your child's participation, you agree to let the researchers have access to biographical information, information about diagnosis and treatment, and experience with art. This information will be obtained from completed questionnaires.

We, Val Figliuzzi and the teacher-researcher, will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

To verify that the research is being conducted properly, regulatory authorities might examine the information gathered. By participating, you agree to let these authorities have access to the information.

The information gathered will not be identifiable by name. That means it will have a pseudonym (a made up name) rather than your child's name directly on it.

The teacher-researcher will protect the information by keeping all data under lock and key, in the safe keeping of the researcher.

The teacher-researcher intends to publish the results of this research. Please indicate below whether you accept to have your child be identified in the publications. Please mark all options that you agree to:

I accept that a pseudonym and the information my child provides may appear in publications of the results of the research.

I accept that pictures of my child may appear in publications and presentation.

I accept that pictures of my child's artwork may appear in publications and presentation.

I accept that pictures of my child's journal may appear in publications and presentation.

In certain situations the teacher-researcher might be legally required to disclose the information that your child provides. This includes situations where there is evidence of trauma or abuse. If this kind of situation arises, the teacher-researcher will disclose the information as required by law, despite what is written in this form.

## **E. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

Your child does not have to participate in this research. It is purely your's and their decision. Since this research involves group discussions it is impossible for the researcher to remove data provided by your within group interactions. Your child can discontinue participation at any time, but cannot request that their data within group interactions be withdrawn. Your child may request that any pictures of them and their artwork be excluded from analysis. If your child decides that they want to withdraw from this research you must tell Val Filgiuzzi by January 5, 2016.

We, Val Figliuzzi and the teacher-researcher, will tell you if we learn of anything that could affect your decision to stay in the research.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

**F. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION**

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to allow my child \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) to participate in this research under the conditions described.

PARENT OR GUARDIAN NAME (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN

\_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

## Appendix C: Sample Assent Form



### INFORMATION AND ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**Study Title:** Relational Pedagogy for Program Development in Non-Profit organizations (working title)

**Researcher:** Adrienne Alton

**Researcher's Contact Information:**

email: [adrienne.alton5@gmail.com](mailto:adrienne.alton5@gmail.com), phone: 587-341-6722

**Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Lorrie Blair**

**Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:**

S-EV 2627

Computer Science, Engineering and Visual Arts Integrated Complex,  
1515 St. Catherine W.

Phone:

(514) 848-2424 ext. 4642

Email:

[lorrie.blair@concordia.ca](mailto:lorrie.blair@concordia.ca)

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the participant recruiter, executive director of KWCS, Val Figliuzzi.

#### A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to create an art program for the Kids with Cancer Society (KWCS) of Northern Alberta. Participants will work with the researcher to create a program that reflects the wants and needs of the members of the KWCS of Edmonton. This research will explore how to create art programs that give power to participants by giving their voices and ideas equal importance as that of the teacher-researcher.

#### B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will take part in six art sessions that will explore a variety of different ways to make art. In addition to making art, you will be asked to write journal entries and participate in group discussions to plan the next art session. The themes, and materials will be decided by you, the participants, working with the instructor. Art sessions will be videotaped, but the video will only be seen by the researcher, she will not share it with anyone. You can decide that you no longer want to be a part of the research at any time. There will be no negative consequence for your decision and you can continue in the art sessions if you choose.

As a research participant, you will

- attend art making sessions and make art
- make your own journal entries and participate in art-centred reflections with the group
- help plan upcoming art sessions
- choose a pseudonym (a fake name) to protect your real name for this research
- bring forward any concerns you have about the research with your parents or guardians and to Val Figliuzzi, Executive Director of Kids With Cancer Society Edmonton
- help keep what we are doing special and private by not discussing what happens at the art sessions with people who are not a part of it (parents and guardians are a part of it)

### **C. CONFIDENTIALITY**

By participating, you agree to let the researcher know some information about yourself by filling out a short questionnaire.

The information you give the researcher and what you say and do during the art sessions will be protected. That means it will have a pseudonym, a made up name, rather than your real name directly on and the information will stay in the safe keeping of the researcher.

### **D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

You do not have to participate in this research. It is completely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the Val Figliuzzi by January 5, 2016.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

**E. PARTICIPANT’S DECLARATION**

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

I WANT MY PSEUDONYM TO BE: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or [oor.ethics@concordia.ca](mailto:oor.ethics@concordia.ca).

Appendix D: Raw data and memo sample - Video notes

Cycle 2 - Session 2 Video Notes  
November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015

*Arrival time*  
[redacted] enters the studio first. She sits down in the same spot she has been for all previous classes. - seat selection (same seat)

*Connecting res. to her "episodes"*  
She asks if I've been watching the "episodes" - asks about research process

*Colloquial & making accessible*  
I start explaining to her my research process. I sit down and explain to her about my reflections. she nods as I explain. She smiles and leans in and giggles. - explain my process (charity)

*Interest in how she works*  
She then shes that a piece has fallen off her clay sculpture, or conversation changes toward fixing the sculpture. I get up to check the hot glue gun and she gets up right after me. - change focus, she follows me (umm...)

*Showing experience*  
I then tell her that basically my whole life is this class right now. She responds "Really?" and walks over to the hot glue gun. - returning to conversation

*early contact*  
She explains how she came early but the door was locked, but she noticed another car parked. saying "there are two of us here" - language of group - US

*Independent working habits*  
She starts gluing the piece back on her sculpture - independent

*Problem Solving together*  
I get my sculptures and place it down at the table, saying, "I'll sit here today" - seat selection (different) (planning it)

*Is this restoration?*  
I take water containers to the bathroom to fill up while [redacted] working on gluing her sculpture.

*helping her set up - how in*  
She says with worry in her voice "Mine's just falling apart" I respond "Oh no, probably the more it moves another piece loosens" I look at what shes doing and allow her to continue gluing. She says "I think I'll glue the coconuts on last" - independence + support (voicing first, 2 method)

I say I think I hear someone, and step out of the room. [redacted] finishes to glue. [redacted] turns to see who is coming into the studio. - movement in 2 act of studio

[redacted] enters then leaves again, while I talk to her grandpa in the hallway. [redacted] turns to the table but moves her stuff over to the spot beside me. - seat selection (moves closer to me)

She goes back to glue another piece. She returns to her seat, looks at her sculpture, takes the tree back for more gluing. - independence + working & thinking freely

She then looks at the plexi boards. - looking around - exploring

I enter the room with [redacted] place the water containers back on the side table. - explain ind. 1 on 1

I explain to [redacted] at he did last class and explain the plan for the class. - allowing freedom - own pace

I show her the clay and explain how she can use the dowel, and then say I'll let her get comfortable.

I check the time and notice that it is 1 o'clock. [redacted] talks in. - timing

I ask how she is. she says "Good" I repeat her and ask if she had a good week, she quickly nods, I say good to hear. - repeating

I ask if anyone's getting ready for Christmas yet. [redacted] "That's too early" - repeating

I repeat her "Too early" I say that I'm really in the Christmas spirit this year. that I must've been sprinkled with elf dust or something. They giggle. - open about my current mood

[redacted] standing. [redacted] goes to the table to get clay, and [redacted] back to the glue gun. - moving around freely

I explain to [redacted] what we are doing. I say we are going to do what we planned last week. She nods as I explain the backdrops and the possibility for stop motion. - reiterating process / planning & follow thru

I tell [redacted] that there is a lot more clay.

I watch [redacted] work, she moves to the glue again. She's says it'll work eventually. I say "Patience, patience grasshopper" - optimistic despite frustrations

*working through problems*

## Appendix E: Raw data and memo sample - Personal reflection notes

Reflection

November 7

Session 1 Cycle 2

*routine activity*  
 On my way to class today I was really excited for what today could bring. I had purchased quick dry clay after our discussion from the previous class and had a theme of alter egos that they could work with if they wanted to. From previous experiences I have seen that clay is a very popular medium in the art class and I have found that this age group really enjoys playing with it and working it into different things. I felt that there would be a lot of freedom for us to work with the clay in many different ways and that everyone would be able to connect with this medium in some way.

When I got to the house I re-arranged the tables in the art room in order to create more working space. Once the two larger tables were placed together in a pod in the centre of the room there seemed to be ample room to accommodate everyone. I knew that we would be missing at least three of the kids today, and that possibly another 2. The side tables were used for setting up the clay, tools, water bins and two water basins to better accommodate cleaning as per our discussion in the last class. There was more room to move around the pod in the centre of the room and the side tables were tidy with easily accessible materials laid out. The side tables also acted as drying tables at the end of class.

[redacted] arrived slightly early so they went up to the playroom while we waited. At about 1.10 I decided we would just start and the others would easily join in when they arrived. I made this decision because I felt that in order to create a space where the kids feel they can enter and immediately be engaged it would be valuable to enact that engagement. I also thought that the freedom and openness of the project would allow for kids to seamlessly join in and not feel awkward about entering at different times, more like a maker's space/art hive than a formal, structured class.

I put on a playlist, a variety of different "family friendly" songs and had the music a bit louder than last class. As we got started I sat with the kids and worked along side them. I brought up some ideas that I had for the clay but really left it up to them to decide what they wanted to do. I gave a few tips as we worked, how to attach pieces, how wet to keep the clay, but mostly let the group lead the project. We discussed some possibilities for future work with the sculptures. I suggested that we could paint them next week and in the future if they wanted to do some stop

*or suggestions, planting seeds but reiterating that it is not my decision. I wanted to initiate their thinking about possibilities for future classes.*

*Excited about possibilities*  
*acquiring materials following through on discussion*  
*previous experience is educational*  
*medium allows freedom*  
*follow through speciality*  
*comfortable to knowledge of attendees*  
*follow through logistics*  
*accessibility and ease to move around*  
*not waiting as long for starts*  
*engagement on arrival - not having to wait*  
*not relying on or instructing or discussing*  
*less formal*  
*conscious of the music*  
*new position as facilitator/leader*  
*integrating tips or instructions into working time as they come up - more vocal?*  
*making suggestions but not stating how it will be*

*- I put in the effort to follow through - respect the decision we had made.*  
*- I had confidence from previous experiences as educator*  
*- medium allows for freedom*  
*- better sense of attendance, ease that anxiety*  
*- considering organization of materials for better accessibility*  
*- trying to accommodate everyone or create a space that makes everyone feel welcome when they arrive.*  
*- more casual approach*  
*- music factor in class*  
*- not choosing to sit for almost the whole class in order to support equality*  
*- advice about working with the clay as they come up - more authentic*

## Appendix F: Data Description after colour coding for emergent themes (Sample)

### Data Description

Cycle 3, Session 2 - December 12, 2015

The last class brought mixed emotions; I happy with how it has gone but also sad that it would be over. It seemed to have passed quickly. This was shared by others, Amanda stating that she couldn't believe this was the last class, then during the reflection wanting to drag it out so that it wouldn't end.

For this class we didn't wait for everyone, going back to the approach in the second iteration for immediate engagement upon arrival. Superman acknowledged the class structure and plan and his desire to work on his sculpture before I explained the plan. I explained the plan for the class as we had discussed in the last class. This prompted me to give him options to work and to check in with what he wanted. I presented several options for what they could work on in the class and tried to promote freedom and independent working. Unlike the last class, where I felt the demo was too long and complicated, I did a short demo of mono printing, while seated and then encouraged them to choose what they wanted to do. I acknowledged having done this process with Paintbrush in a different art class and she expressed that she remembered it. I observed signs of interest in the process as I demo'd and I expressed my personal interest in the process. Superman demonstrated that he was considering what he would do with the mono prints when it was time. I continued doing mono prints from my seat so others could observe the process as they arrived. As individuals entered and they got to work. This introduced the group to working at their own pace and freely moving from one thing to another. As in the second iteration this approach led me to feel more relaxed, as the individuals in the group acted more independently and I was there to help support them with what they needed. I believe this led to a sense of openness and comfort. As the group shared their experiences with one another in conversation, we revealed more about our personalities and character traits.

The timing seemed good, there were enough things to do that everyone was engaged and busy for the majority of the time and I didn't feel that timing was an issue. This probably added to my ease and the casual nature of the class.

The group seemed involved in what one another was doing. This came up in a few different ways. Seat selection presented different relationships based on proximity (commenting on neighbours work) and presented where individuals were comfortable, same seat as previous classes (Superman, Brenda and Rainbow ). Superman offered up materials as he was working, asking if anyone needed any paint (for example). I noticed the group concerned with Brayden's overuse of paint and at times they tried to influence him not to do what he was doing. I observed

them engaged in the processes of one another. I perceived his actions to be attention seeking, or trying to make others laugh, he would look around to see if someone was watching and then do something silly with the paint. I also observed that the group was engaging in casual conversations with one another. This created to a feeling of calm and casual exchange. With these casual conversations I felt like I was getting to know each individual in the group and I was revealing more of myself to them in turn. I felt comfortable to be my authentic self rather than playing the role of a teacher. I tried modelling respect, kindness and forgiveness in my own interactions in hopes that this would carry on through their relationships with one another. They were also eager to show off their work to one another and visitors to the art room, this is drastically different from the first iteration when they had to be prompted to share their work with their neighbours. There seemed to be interest in group attendance, maybe trying to establish 'the group' or wondering if they would get to see certain individuals. I asked the group before playing music to get their input for it or not and what kind of music they wanted to listen to. This provided Brenda with an opportunity to share her preferences for certain artists (Elvis) and Superman begin singing "Deck the Halls". When Brenda was having trouble remembering the colours of the Pokemon ball I put it out to the group to draw on the knowledge of the group before finding a picture for her to look at; Rainbow shared her knowledge of what the colours were but Brenda still wanted to see a picture. When Amanda and Peter came in late, Amanda asked Galantis what we were doing this class and Galantis shared, with enthusiasm, "Whatever we want." Amanda going to Galantis before coming to me to ask. The two got right to work on their sculptures after I filled them in on the plans for the class. I continue to observe the older to younger sibling dynamic between Amanda and Peter, as Amanda instructs Peter and Peter pushes back. I observe more student to student interactions than earlier iterations, not all interactions are prompted or initiated by me.

I observe patterns of movement as one person would initiate moving to another task or leaving the table and I perceive that this would act as cue for others to follow. Galantis moved on to choosing her work for the art book, as she did this Brenda followed and selected hers and brought it to be scanned. If I got up from the table others followed suit, not copying or following me around but a break in the focus. I also observed several members of the group re-considering their work, having said they were done going back and working more, this time not just the younger participants. Rather than stating "I'm done" they asked what to do next.

I tried relating to what kids were sharing. When a conversation about current events (Christmas trees) came up I joined in and shared my experience this year. Also, as Brenda worked she shared who her sculptures were for and the other gifts she had made. I related to this by sharing that I had also made some gifts and that I would be so happy to get a gift that was made.

I observe that I used the word "cool" often as feedback when someone would share their work with me. I became aware of this at some point during the class and made an effort to use more specific comments in order to not come off passive. There was more showing and sharing this

## Appendix G: Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan - October 17, 2015  
KWCS Research Art Class

Theme

Who am I? Who are we?

Objective

This class will focus on exploring self identity through art making. Examine the way art can reflect who you are, and how you envision yourself. Working collaboratively we will move the I to the we. How does my identity fit within and contribute to a group identity?

Media

Mixed media, collage. Materials: Magazines, calendars, cards, ribbon, string, bread tags, plastic and paint.

Procedure

Action - What	Who	How	Time Allotted - When
Introduce the theme	Everyone	Discuss collage, gauge experience level with media. Ask questions about art and identity "How can art making help us to reflect on our own identity? What ways can art help us share who we are with others?"	10 minutes
Demo collage	ME	Present the different materials available to work with. Demonstrate layering, and use of different materials in collage. Show possibilities for working collaboratively on the group collage	5 minutes
Time to Create	Everyone	Everyone will work to create their own identity collage and work on the collaborative board.	60 minutes
Clean Up!	Everyone	clean work stations, put materials away and wash hands	10 minutes

Action - What	Who	How	Time Alotted - When
Pair and Share	Everyone	With the person sitting beside you, share your work. Tell them what you chose to include in your collage and why. Rotate around the table to share with a new partner	10 minutes
Reflections	Everyone	Following the procedure for the research the group will engage in reflection on the following questions: What did I like from the class? What could be improved for next class? What art explorations we should try for next class?	15 minutes