Enduring Understandings, Artistic Processes, and the New Visual Arts Standards

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EDITORIAL ROOM IN THE ELEPHANT in the Room?
This special issue of Art Education corresponds with the Summer 2014 issue of Studies in Art Education and is dedicated to the discussion of the relationship between theory and practice. The authors make room for new theories and practices within those that already exist.

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National Coalition for Core Arts Standards Writing Team member discusses what to expect from the new “next generation” Visual Arts Standards, detailing the 4 Artistic Processes and 15 Enduring Understandings of the new standards.

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EDUCATING ARTISTS: Theory and Practice in College Studio Art
Results from a survey are summarized, in which first-year college students share pedagogical ideals for how to be taught in order to get the best out of their college experience, life, and artmaking.

Stacey McKenna Salazar

PLAYING WITH THE TENSIONS OF THEORY TO PRACTICE: Teacher, Professor, and Students Co-Constructing Identity Through Curriculum Transformation
Inviting student life experiences into the classroom creates a more relevant avenue for student learning; the authors reflect on their professional identities to help develop a more meaningful curriculum involving risk-taking, play, and Big Ideas.

Amy Pfeifer-Wunder and Rhonda Tomel

DEMYSTIFYING THE PROFESSORIATE in Visual Art and Design Education
Art education professors detail their professional responsibilities in tenure and non-tenure tracks, with ordinary, extraordinary, and marked/unmarked experiences visually displayed throughout the article.

Amber Ward


Above: Contemporary art workshop (detail), page 27, from “Social Engagements With Contemporary Art: Connecting Theory With Practice.” Photo courtesy of the McNay Art Museum.
This special issue of *Art Education* corresponds with the Summer 2014 issue of *Studies in Art Education* and is dedicated to the discussion of the relationship between theory and practice. This theme was developed in conjunction with *Studies* Editor Sydney Walker, who writes in her special issue editorial, “Although the papers in this special issue... address theory and practice with rich demonstrations, often productively worrying this confluence, they will not resolve nor banish the theory/practice divide. Our ambition is rather to draw attention to this breach while perhaps creating a ground for rethinking the proverbial elephant in the room” (p. 267).

One such “elephant in the room” may, in fact, be the very relationship between these two journals. What is the perception of these journals in the field of art education? Is it thought that *Studies* deals with theory, while *Art Education* emphasizes practice? When we look to the mission statements of both journals, we find that they are similar. As stated on the *Studies* homepage:

*Studies in Art Education* is a quarterly journal that reports quantitative, qualitative, historical, and philosophical research in art education, including explorations of theory and practice in the areas of art production, art criticism, aesthetics, art history, human development, curriculum and instruction, and assessment. *Studies* also publishes reports of applicable research in related fields such as anthropology, education, psychology, philosophy, and sociology. (www.arteducators.org/research/studies, para. 1)

And the mission statement from the *Art Education* homepage:

*Art Education*, the official journal of the National Art Education Association, covers a diverse range of topics dealing with subjects of professional interest to art educators. It is published bi-monthly in full-color, and each issue features an Instructional Resource section, making *Art Education* a great addition to every teacher’s reference library. (www.arteducators.org/research/art-education, para. 1)

These descriptions differ primarily in the amount of detail provided to the reader, and do not seem to reify the practice/theory divide. *Studies* reports upon “explorations of theory and practice,” while *Art Education* covers “subjects of professional interest.” Why, then, might this perception exist?

Perhaps the issue at hand rests not with the perception of these journals, but with the perception of the very relationship between notions of theory and practice. Is there not theory in the practical, ideas and concepts that guide action, just as there is practice in the theoretical, where experiences form and influence ideas? When addressed in these terms, we see a similarity to the Cartesian mind/body split that has guided many art educational approaches. The authors included in this volume are careful to avoid simplistic binary
descriptions of complicated areas of inquiry. Each speaks to numerous aspects of the practical and the theoretical, in ways that are engaged and enlightening.

Marilyn G. Stewart begins this special issue with an invited essay that deals with the recently unveiled National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS). As a member of the NCCAS Visual Arts Writing Team, Stewart has been instrumental in the development of these “next generation” arts standards. This essay addresses the instructional aspects of the standards, and looks at how the standards can help to bridge the gap between theory and practice in K-12 art classrooms.

Lisa Hochtritt and co-authors Anne Thulson, Rachael Delaney, Talya Dornbush, and Sarah Shay describe the development of a professional development community, in “Theory Loves Practice: A Teacher Researcher Group.” This article features the voices of art educators involved with practice in K-8, museum, and university settings, and points to the productive force that such interrelationships can produce.

The relationship between practice and theory as it is formed in the spaces of the art museum is also addressed, in “Social Engagements With Contemporary Art: Connecting Theory With Practice.” This article, by Maria D. Leake, describes similar opportunities for developing collaborative communities through the visual arts, highlighting the role that the museum educator can play in addressing the relevance of contemporary art within the interactive spaces of the museum and the blogosphere.

In “Educating Artists: Theory and Practice in College Studio Art,” Stacey McKenna Salazar addresses the relationship between theory and practice as it exists in college-level foundations courses. Salazar presents survey data from foundations students, describing the relationship between learning and teaching, and suggesting five “pedagogical ideals” that educators at all levels should strive to uphold.

Similar ideals are echoed by Amy Pfeiler-Wunder and Rhonda Tomel, in “Playing With the Tensions of Theory to Practice: Teacher, Professor, and Students Co-Constructing Identity Through Curriculum Transformation.” In this article, the authors present the reader with a dialogue that addresses issues of identity and power in educational settings in an honest and probing manner. This dialogue leads to propositions for curriculum development that might allow art educators to “map new landscapes of possibility—to honor the complicated stories and landscapes within sites of artistic practice.”

Amber Ward presents a visually and conceptually rich analysis of various aspects of teaching at the university level, in “Demystifying the Professoriate in Visual Art and Design Education.” This article looks to the experiences of three art educators at very different institutions, suggesting that those interested in teaching at the university level begin by considering ordinary and extraordinary circumstances, and the unmarked qualities of the professoriate.

Each of these articles establishes a space that can allow for further conversation and careful consideration in art educational practices. While these essays, along with those included in Studies, can help us to rethink the “elephant in the room” represented by the theory/practice divide, they might force us to reconsider the perceptions that we have of theory and practice within these very publications. They may do so by helping us to make room for new theories and practices within those that already exist. In other words, they allow us to ask:

Is there room in the elephant in the room?

—Robert Sweeny, Editor

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have had the privilege of working with a team of art educators charged with writing the new Visual Arts Standards. After a strenuous review, the standards are public and we’ve begun the process of examination to determine how and under what conditions they might be implemented. In what follows I discuss the new standards in light of what they suggest for curriculum and instruction.¹

The Visual Arts Standards and Teaching for Understanding

There are 195 new standards. While that number may be off-putting, it begins to make sense when one considers how the standards are philosophically tied to a commitment to teach for understanding.² The focus on understanding is drawn in part from the work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe in their seminal work, Understanding by Design (2005), and recognizes that identification of what students should know and be able to do, evidenced in the 1994 standards, is not the same as identification of things we wish students to understand deeply. The authors suggest that we ascertain the significant ideas central to our subject and then teach for deep understanding of these ideas. In developing the new National Visual Arts Standards, the Writing Team identified 15 such significant “Big Ideas.” In the standards, they are known as Enduring Understandings.

Enduring Understandings represent ideas and processes we want students to integrate, refine, and keep as they move through the art program and eventually into adulthood. These are the ideas that need to endure when details and certain minimal skills fade away. This kind of understanding implies a degree of sophistication relative to a concept, with insights that can be demonstrated through a variety of performances (Stewart & Walker, 2005, p. 12). Accordingly, certain behaviors can indicate deepened understanding. Perkins and Blythe (1994) explain that when students understand, they “do a variety of thought-demanding things with a topic—like explaining, finding evidence and examples, generalizing, applying, analogizing and representing the topic in a new way” (pp. 5-6). A row
of 13 performance standards organized horizontally from preK to advanced high school indicates behaviors that are designed to gradually deepen understanding of the enduring idea. All 195 standards serve to help students develop, deepen, and demonstrate those 15 Enduring Understandings.

As art educators scrutinize the performance standards they will find descriptions of many behaviors they currently hope for, if not expect from, their students even if they have not explicitly identified them as such. In the context of the new standards, these behaviors benefit from careful articulation and ordering. Viewed horizontally, as they build from one grade level to the next, scaffolding makes sense. Viewed vertically, as all standards for one grade level, they also make sense in developmental and conceptual terms.

Artistic Processes

The 15 Enduring Understandings are separated further into four groups having to do with the processes signaling full engagement in the visual arts—Creating, Presenting, Responding, and Connecting. Standards associated with these four Artistic Processes delineate anticipated student behaviors and reveal assumptions about what is important to each process. In my view, the best way to initially approach the new Visual Arts Standards is to grasp the overall rationale for and the Enduring Understandings associated with each of the Artistic Processes. This broader perspective then becomes the framework for understanding and appreciation of the specificity contained in each of the 195 performance standards.

Creating

“Picasso did not simply deposit in *Guernica* what he had thought about the world; rather did he further his understanding of the world through the making of *Guernica*” (Arnheim, 1962, p. 10). Psychologist Rudolph Arnheim reveals a perspective on the artistic process of creating that is echoed and reinforced throughout the new standards. This view that links the creative process with the emergence of ideas and the construction of meaning is especially apparent in the progression of performance standards in Creating.
The six Enduring Understandings of Creating draw upon multiple ways in which artists and designers engage in artistic investigation—breaking with or following traditions; experimenting with ideas, materials, forms, and approaches; interacting with objects, places, and design; balancing experimentation and safety; critiquing, reflecting upon, revising, and refining work—while highlighting the importance of developing the life skills of innovative thinking and creativity. Students increasingly grasp artmaking as an important way to explore and gain insights about the world, themselves, and others.

The standards recognize the richness of creative investigation and reveal increasingly sophisticated processes for students to generate ideas and envision artistic work. From imaginative play and exploration of materials and tools, to brainstorming alone or in collaboration, the standards acknowledge the cognitive work involved in initial and later phases of artmaking. In the early grade levels and throughout the grade-by-grade progression, they emphasize experimentation and the possibility of employing multiple approaches to art or design problems. Eventually, in later grades, students become responsible for formulating their own problems, shaping their own investigations as they explore personally meaningful themes, ideas, or concepts.

With a strong emphasis on experimentation, invention, and discovery, the standards recognize the importance of developing and practicing skills and habits. While not media specific, the standards recognize the need for students to develop skills in working with various media, methods, and approaches. Students are to develop studio habits regarding use and care of art materials, tools, and equipment; and demonstrate openness to new ideas and willingness to experiment, innovate, and take risks. Attention to these skills and habits is important to the conception of the student as a serious and reflective artmaker.

From the earliest years, students are expected to share and talk about their own artwork, learning to describe their choices and reflect upon their process. Over time, the standards expect students to create artist statements; determine and apply relevant criteria to reflect upon, revise, and refine their artworks; and engage in constructive critique.

Central to these standards is the significance of the student’s contemporary life and world. Students are encouraged to draw upon and create relevant content as they tap personal interests and experiences in and through their artmaking practice. Through the progression of standards, students attend to the practice of artists and designers working in their own time and adopt contemporary modes such as collaboration. As makers, students develop increasing recognition of the communicative power of images, objects, and places in their contemporary world.

Presenting

The inclusion of Presenting highlights a practice long associated with the making of objects. When people make things, they tend to share them with or “present” them to others. We have conventions for such sharing, and these vary depending on the nature of the object and the context in which it is shared. We humans also have a long tradition of collecting objects, artifacts, and artworks. Again, the ways in which our collections are presented to others vary depending on what it is that we wish to make public and the context in which it will be presented.

The Presenting standards make explicit something that always has had a place in art education—the practice of presenting or displaying student work. Here, though, we involve students in the process and help them recognize factors and issues that enter into the decisions about the presentation of their own works. They investigate the possibilities and limitations of spaces and technologies, for example, and consider different requirements in displaying two- and three-dimensional work. Throughout the grades, the Presenting standards require an increasing sophistication in curatorial practice, all the while allowing for a shift of focus from the display of one’s own work to the presentation and preservation of artworks, objects, and artifacts made by others.

Students increasingly understand that decisions made regarding what, how, and where to present objects, artifacts, and artworks carry meaning. A preK student simply identifies “places where art may be displayed or saved,” but by Grade 6, students “assess, explain, and provide evidence of how museums or other venues reflect history and values of a community.” An advanced high school student should be

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able to curate “a collection of objects, artifacts or artworks to impact the viewer’s understanding of social, cultural and/or political experiences.” The Presenting standards are important because they extend and refine the process of Creating, in recognition of the tendency we have to share what we make. These presenting standards take this tendency seriously and, over time, provide opportunities for students to recognize and examine multiple methods, venues, and criteria for displaying their own work. The standards also increasingly fund students’ understanding of the societal role of and values embedded in preservation and display of objects, artifacts, and objects made by others; hence, extending into and having implications for yet another artistic process—Responding. Ultimately, students develop the deep understanding of the ideas advanced with Presenting—ideas having to do with the way in which objects, artworks, and artifacts are presented; the factors considered when preparing them for preservation or presentation; and the societal impact of and cultural roles played by collections and presentations.

Responding

The Responding standards reflect understanding of our tendency to pay attention to and “read” what we see, to make sense of our visual world. These standards take seriously our inclination to look for, find, and construct meaning. They also suggest an even weightier implication, put forward in an Enduring Understanding that states, “Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.” As we think about what it is that we want our students to carry with them into adulthood, we often talk about empathy. We do believe that engagement with art can provide ways of thinking about others and ourselves, and we generally aim for a deepened appreciation of the world in which we live.

In moving toward this appreciation, the Responding standards have young children simply “recognize art in their environments” or distinguish “between images and objects.” Eventually, students are asked to attend to expressive properties of imagery, explain the ways in which they respond to objects in a variety of contexts, and analyze the impact of or cultural associations prompted by specific images. With increasing sophistication, students recognize and explain how their responses to the natural world, constructed environments, and visual imagery shift and change depending on context.

When we seriously reflect on meaning constructed through our experiences with objects, artifacts, and artworks, especially those in a variety of contexts, we have the opportunity to try on other perspectives, stretching our own views and coming to a deeper understanding of the roles that art, design, and visual culture play in all of our lives. The grade-by-grade standards have students attend to contexts in which they encounter and the factors that influence their responses to works of art and design. Other

Responding standards more directly address visual culture and gradually have students become aware of the power of images to reveal and influence values and behaviors. In creating the Responding standards, we recognized that even a preK child will offer an interpretation of an artwork, often referring to subject matter as “scary” or “happy.” We ordered the standards in such a way that student interpretations increasingly reference various characteristics of artworks. We introduced the importance of attending to contextual information—the circumstances under which the artwork was created, information about the artist and/or time period, the conditions surrounding the way in which an artwork or group of artworks is presented—when constructing interpretations. Beyond this, the standards stress the importance of determining the relevance of certain kinds of contextual information. This progression of learning aims for students being able to construct compelling and plausible interpretations.

The standards associated with valuing and evaluating artistic work move students from a recognition that they like some artworks better than others, to an understanding that such a preference is different from an evaluation based on criteria; that one might dislike a particular artwork and yet, given certain criteria, judge that same artwork as meritorious. These important understandings increasingly deepen as students also come to recognize the importance of employing or constructing criteria relevant for evaluating specific works of art or design; that some criteria can be more relevant than others and that much depends on specific contexts and purposes.

Connecting

Many of the performance standards in Creating, Presenting, and Responding reference how art, design, and visual culture are connected with personal experience, community values, and cultural history. The two Connecting Enduring Understandings and their associated performance standards focus more directly on these ideas, and they do so by highlighting two different catalysts for making such connections—our responses to art and our experiences in artmaking.
Early on, at preK, students simply recognize that people make art. In Kindergarten, they identify one purpose for which art might be made. Increasingly, students come to understand that purposes of art vary from place to place and time to time; that changes in art are often connected with changes in beliefs, values, and traditions; that art can not only reflect but also reinforce cultural identity; and that our personal connections to art may be influenced by our knowledge of the various contexts in which art is encountered, understood, and appreciated. These standards essentially ask students to step back and consider art and its connections to their world—to think about art, culture, and history, in general.

With artmaking experiences as a catalyst, the second strand of Connecting standards situates artmaker and artmaking processes firmly in the world, reinforcing the notion that in artmaking, alone or with others, we draw upon personal experience—our stories, our perceptions, events, and traditions in our communities—and try on alternate ways to see and understand the world. Students increasingly understand artmaking as an investigative process, recognizing and using inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation as means for exploring their own evolving interests and concerns as well as for constructing new knowledge and insights.

Curriculum Planning

With these new standards, as in the past, educators will exercise innovation in planning lessons and units of instruction that ignite the imaginations of their students, address student and community interests and needs, and tap into substantive art content. Since the standards are voluntary, states, districts, or individuals may choose to adopt, adapt, or ignore them. The standards also are silent on specific themes, materials, works of art and design, names of artists and designers, instructional strategies, and so on—considerations that routinely enter into curriculum planning. In articulating performances related to the Artistic Processes of Creating, Presenting, Responding, and Connecting, however, they do suggest ways that students might engage with ideas, objects, and materials, and how these behaviors might progress in order to develop deep understandings. To promote such progression, curriculum planners may design lessons and instructional units that incorporate the standards and engage students in any number of these performances.

Curriculum planning involves an assessment of student needs, interests, and questions; local considerations; institutional mandates; and a host of other factors, including the passions and expertise of the teacher. I believe that teachers will continue to draw upon their passions and areas of expertise as they plan for their students’ engagement in relevant and mind-stretching art and design practice. The 15 ideas, presented in the form of Enduring Understandings and grouped according to processes central to full engagement with the visual arts, will offer guidance in these efforts. The grade-by-grade descriptions of desired behaviors will assist planners in articulating expectations aimed toward students developing lasting understanding of these ideas. While reinforcing many of our past assumptions about artistic practice, these new standards also provide a vision for moving forward and deeply enriching the lives of our students now and in the many generations that follow.

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**REFERENCES**


**ENDNOTES**

1 An earlier article on the new Visual Arts Standards, “Assessment and Next Generation Standards: An Interview With Olivia Gude” (by Robert Sweeny, in *Art Education* 67(1), pp. 6-12), provides an overview of the process of writing and organizing the new Visual Arts Standards with an additional focus on how they relate to issues of assessment.

2 Even before the Visual Arts Writing Team convened, the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS) had created “A Conceptual Framework for Arts Learning,” a document that provides the philosophical assumptions, goals, and other important information that ground the creation of new standards in dance, media arts, music, theater, and visual arts. For those seeking such foundational information, I recommend this framework and other related documents available on the NCCAS website, http://nccas.wikispaces.com/Conceptual+Framework.

We can teach a student the skills necessary to shade an object or render a space, but why? Theory gives us that larger framework to draw upon as we ask students to connect their own experiences to larger and more diverse settings. Theory is what tells us why a lesson on the color wheel, or on shading shapes, is simply not enough. But theory doesn’t have to worry about doing formative and summative assessments. And theory doesn’t have to make sure that empty mixing trays aren’t piling up in the sink.

—Sarah Shay, K-8 Studio Arts Teacher

Above: Rachael Delaney, Redacted. Photograph by Rachael Delaney.
Once a month, art educators from the Denver metro area have been gathering together in the spirit of inquiry to explore issues of the perceived theory and daily practice divide. The Theory Loves Practice (TLP) group was started in 2010 by Professors Rachael Delaney and Anne Thulson from Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU) and now has 40 members. A fluctuating group of 10-20 art teachers meets monthly at the Center for Visual Art (CVA), an off-campus art gallery run by MSU and located at the heart of the Denver Arts District on Santa Fe Drive.

This article discusses the theory/practice divide and the process of collectively embracing contemporary ideas, initiation of the Theory Loves Practice group, monthly topics of discussion and action, a visual art teacher’s experience in the group, and recommendations for starting such a professional development community. The story of Theory Loves Practice is told collaboratively through multiple voices: an art education professor outside of the immediate group who wanted the story to be told (Lisa Hochtritt); TLP originators and art education professors (Rachael Delaney and Anne Thulson); CVA Education Director and TLP member (Talya Dornbush); and K-8 Studio Arts Teacher and TLP member (Sarah Shay).

The Theory and Daily Practice Divide: Anne Thulson

When Carrie Mae Weems spoke at the NAEA National Convention in 2010, she said that if you want to know about the social power structures in a place, pay close attention to the architecture. At that particular conference, themed Social Justice, the class divide between the theoreticians and practitioners seemed ironic. Indeed, the gap was very evident in the architecture. Often the practitioners were in the basement experimenting among the pastels with the Modernist-leaning vendors and publishers. The theoreticians were upstairs talking to each other about art-as-research, gender mash-ups, and deconstructing government and secrecy enclaves. And never the twain shall meet.

Why does this frenetic, parallel play occur at our conferences? Each occasionally acknowledges the other in rare moments: in passing, a professor warmly greets a previous student, now an art teacher; or the back row of an academic’s lecture is turned colorful by orange, Dick Blick bags attached to courageous elementary teachers

Theory Loves Practice participants honing questions. Photograph by Anne Thulson.
who really want to get a grip on Foucault. But these are occasional encounters and we have few structures in place to lengthen their duration.

I believe bell hooks (1994) when she said that she came to theory because of pain. Many of us feel the rift at our conferences and it is a kind of pain. From this pain I’ve come to a theory. It is the theory of the intentional, durational bridge.

Soon after this conference, I left my K-8 art classroom to teach university students. I mourned the loss of my research lab of small children, my primary source, my silver mine. I reassured myself. University professors rely on secondary sources, their colleagues teaching in the K–12 art room. But how does that work without the rich and profound duration of being with children 35 hours a week?

In my first semester at the university, Rachael Delaney, the art education coordinator, asked me if I wanted to help her develop a study group with local teachers. There are many professional development offerings in our town for art teachers. But this one would be different. It would center on teachers’ own inquiry into their current practice, with an emphasis on contemporary art. I wondered. This sounds like another mine—maybe not silver, but I think there’s something precious in there.

After our first semester of Theory Loves Practice meetings, it was evident that Rachael and I were not the main protagonists. We weren’t even the best supporting actors. Instead, we were like bartenders in a coastal town serving drinks and listening hungrily for the tales from our sea-faring friends. We feasted on what we heard and with the whole group, listened to the stories, observed student work, asked questions, read texts, looked at contemporary art, and discussed the hardest parts of wedding contemporary theory with daily practice.

John Gardner (1984), in his advice to writers, notes that any literate, educated person can write a decent short story, but the commitment to the practice of writing over time is what makes a writer’s work profound. Likewise, my occasional meetings with classroom teachers—popping in and out of schools, chatting at First Fridays or professional development events—creates decent relationships, but the commitment to meeting over time is what makes the theory and practice relationship profound. The key is duration. It is only through time that theory and practice can loop over and under one another with any kind of authenticity to form a robust web.

University and Kindergarten art educators need each other and they need each other over time.
After Talya Dornbush—the Education Director at our university gallery—joined us the second year, the web got denser. We had a chance for an exhibition. Can a K-12 classroom teacher make art about teaching? Can that art be taken seriously? Jorge Lucero (2012), a guest lecturer to our group, gave some of us the courage to see that the work of teaching is the art. Others in the group saw this as a chance to use objects from their classroom in their art (confiscated toys, administrative memos, student writing). Several made lyrical odes to our current culture of assessment. To play poetically with our practice of teaching was exhilarating.

Starting our fourth year, I heartily believe that the bridge of intention and time works. Theory is alive and tested. Practice is revised and enlightened. University and Kindergarten art educators need each other and they need each other over time.

Curriculum and instruction student collaborative classwork, Metropolitan State University of Denver. Photograph by Anne Thulson.

How Theory Became a Verb: Rachael Delaney

The idea of the Theory Loves Practice art education community stemmed from my direct experiences as a student teacher supervisor at the university level. Every semester, teacher candidates provide evidence of their ability to accomplish Integration of Theory during their teaching practicum experience. This required evidence is part of a series of documentation exercises in the Teacher Work Sample, a long and meandering document required by the State of Colorado that can be evaluated and then function as the certification of a successful student-teaching experience. For the category of Integration of Theory, student teachers are asked to define a theory and then describe how they incorporated that theory into their lesson to meet the standard for proficiency. They are supposed to use clear and affirmative language to summarize a theory into a brief paragraph describing how it was appropriately incorporated into an instructional moment. The messiness of theory as a tool for use in the classroom is omitted because theory is no longer seen as something with substance to tinker and reason with, and as a result the teacher candidate and their students rarely modify or adapt it.

The Real Site for Theory. Photograph by Anne Thulson.
In the Teacher Work Sample, the animated conversations from the teacher candidates’ history and philosophy courses are long abandoned for attendance, supply lists, staff meetings, and instruction. Theory quickly slips to the bottom of the priorities list and is easily categorized as a privileged practice to use when the fancies of the mind have the time to amuse themselves. Knowledge in this context is not subordinate to thinking (Dewey, 1916). Accurate accounting of a fact is used to evaluate performance in the classroom. The practice of student teaching as the urgency of instruction displaces the reflective experience.

As head of the department and a student teacher supervisor, it was an uncomfortable reality for me to face that I was an active participant in setting the stage for demoting theory as a sticker to apply to an action. I could see that teacher candidates were using prior learning as they student taught, but the pieces of content they used seemed to be separated into two distinct and separate content areas: the discipline of art education and the practice of art education. The discipline of art education was more tautological in nature, where inquiry on the topic of art education was bound to thinking about the importance of information to the topic of art education, while the practice of art education focused more on the experiences gained from inquiry directly connected to the fieldwork completed in the K-12 classrooms.

Establishing a framework for the authentic integration of theory that made the boundaries between the discipline of art education and the practice of art education porous meant finding ways to make theory less of a topic to think about and more of a tool that could be adapted and modified for use. While our current format and space of student teaching created limitations and stifled the authentic integration of theory into classroom practice, there were other possibilities I wanted to explore what would provide a more hospitable environment for developing a dialogue with theory. Moving the conversation beyond the traditional classroom walls and the required coursework of the program meant beginning with research that originated from experiences in the classroom instead of just responding to those experiences. It was time to experiment in alternatives and privilege the conversation as a mode of inquiry that could have resonance within practice (Thompson, 2012).

The prospect of doing this type of work within alternative settings was an opportunity to highlight the interactive connection between theory and teaching; in the fall of 2010 the research group Theory Loves Practice was formed. The group has been continuously meeting once a month during the 9-month academic calendar. The initial start-up of the group involved Anne Thulson and myself working as facilitators to support communicative action with a focus on the teachers as the authors of their spaces. The continuous and evolving exchange of ideas for each meeting was informed by the participants in the group, driven by their interests, challenges, and questions. Conversations deemphasized the focus on uniform solutions because divergent viewpoints generated more questions and possibilities then answers.

The removal of evaluative criteria allowed for frank and honest discussions that put the unpredictable aspects of teaching at the center of the dialogue. Together we replaced proficiency mandates with conditional language that paid close attention to the processes of coming to an understanding.

Establishing a framework... meant finding ways to make theory less of a topic to think about and more of a tool that could be adapted and modified for use.
versus seeking complete knowledge (Dewey, 1916). This dialogic approach has been a central tenet of the group throughout the years we have been meeting. Theory no longer functions as a cantankerous and unruly proposition; instead, theory has provided the necessary framework needed to support the inquiry of each member. Theory became a verb, something to act upon through relational dialogue. Over time the group has grown and, with the addition of Talya Dornbush as another facilitator, we have been able to affirm our mission as a community-based research group committed to supporting professionals working in the field of education as they research ways to integrate contemporary art theory within their day-to-day classroom practice.

The Dialogue and Cataloging of Art Education: Talya Dornbush

I joined the TLP group when I was a public middle school art teacher and seeking engaging collegial opportunities. After 10 years in classrooms, I made the transition to the university community and the CVA at MSU. The CVA serves as an interactive art laboratory for MSU Denver students, alum, and the larger community. A division of the MSU Denver Art Department, the CVA is dedicated to providing its students with an unparalleled urban learning environment and a strong sense of community within the global arts population. The central location and innate connection to a state university makes it an ideal space for professional conversations. The beauty of the vaulted ceilings, white walls, and ever-changing gallery of challenging contemporary art encourages transformative dialogue.

In many respects my professional move to MSU Denver reflects that of the group’s move to the CVA: It was a conscious attempt to secure a passionate community of reflective practitioners who wanted the conversation about art education to be rooted in art in addition to pedagogy, community, cognitive
Development, 21st-century skills, and all the other reasons that we choose to work in art education. Housed in the CVA, we benefit from the access to research-based theories, exposure to incredible contemporary art, investment in urban Denver, and—perhaps most importantly—we identify as practitioners equipped to contribute to the field of art education through action research.

Each year the Theory Loves Practice group follows a thematic exploration that is influenced by theory, art, pedagogy, and community. This year we are looking closely at student work through inquiry protocols, making collective, hybrid curriculum-units by “mashing” together our isolated curriculum ideas, and discussing contemporary artists and scholars that we will hear present at the CVA. The themes we discussed frequently last year were documentation and research strategies and how they inform assessment of artwork. Colorado, like many states, has made significant strides in understanding and implementing authentic assessment. In response to statewide concerns—and our group’s keen interest in exploring these themes—research, documentation, and assessment became the foci of our group’s exhibition. This art installation was the culminating research event for the year.

CV A donated a gallery space for the show and published an affiliated catalog.

In my role as Education Director I have been a primary contact for the Theory Loves Practice exhibition and catalog, sharing the story of the group with visitors to the space as well as documenting the process. Each artist was invited to present research through a visual medium. The exhibition became a catalyst for conversations, elevating the voices of 18 arts educators and making their research and practice more “audible” to the public. Sculptures, paintings, installations, etchings, videos, and more illustrated the context of art education including assessment, space, apathy, censorship, complexity, identity, disillusionment, inspiration, and conceptual frameworks. Through the artwork, this context was unveiled for an audience of
5,000 visitors during the 11-week exhibition. Audiences included children from neighborhood schools, a women’s education philanthropy group, members of the Colorado Department of Education and the National Assembly of State Arts Agency Arts Education Managers, and the families and friends of Theory Loves Practice members.

An art gallery can facilitate curiosity and engage in the role of “town square.” Contemporary art illustrates individual experiences and global perspectives illuminating concepts of the artists’ concern. In this case the CVA chose to become an immersive space for observing, questioning, exploring, reflecting, and exhibiting art education research. In a world that thrives on innovation and the promise of newness, we are doing a great disservice to both our students and teachers if we fail to support conversations between educators and the public. The dialogue of art education reform relies on the perspectives of theorists, contemporary artists, children, and educators. Reform movements in education are often written about, spoken about, or calculated about. In the case of the Theory Loves Practice exhibition and catalog, teacher researchers amplified their voices in the production of critical works of art.

How Theory Informs My Teaching Practice: Sarah Shay

I have the fortunate opportunity to work with contemporary artists in their studios every day. Most days, in fact, I work alongside as many as 220 artists as they grapple with the big ideas of their work, craft the visual messages they wish to send to the world, and explore the materials and processes that will best fit their burgeoning artistic ambitions. I listen in as these artists engage in ongoing dialogue over the development of their work, give impromptu critiques to improve the quality of their work, and push each other to go beyond what they previously thought was possible.

Finding such authentic contexts for arts-based learning is rare, and not a day goes by that I am not reminded of just how lucky I am to be in an environment where active research and discovery of new ideas are not just supported—they are the norm. The opportunity to work in this environment took me back to the K-8 classroom from higher education, where too often theory felt isolated from my own practice. In my K-8 Studio, the critical questions students are asking challenge me to dig deeper into contemporary art practices and to build stronger connections from art practice to their everyday.

Every day, I am inspired to find each one of these students at a different place in their thinking than they were just one day before, and compelled to reach them with increasingly higher expectations as their thinking grows. I teach because it is how I learn—having to respond to a question I may not have considered on my own, being excited by a connection I could not have made on my own. Each day in our Studio, I teach with purpose.

Sarah Shay, Play With Purpose. Photograph by Sarah Shay.
I ask my students to develop a stronger visual vocabulary, and they in turn challenge my own experience with something unexpected, and often unimagined by, myself.

The challenge to engage in this dialogue with my students is a rewarding one, but one that art educators must often face alone. The sheer task of planning a scope and sequence for such a diverse age range, and then to differentiate for each student within that age range, is a daunting one. Then there is all the material management, the parent communication, and the assessment. All this, and still the hopeful task of staying engaged in one’s own process of artmaking, of living the creative process in one’s own life, and then determining how to translate the artistic process to even the youngest of learners. Simply said, education is not a one-person job—it requires ongoing dialogue, an active research of learning to inform one’s teaching.

Too often, we art educators are the “only” person with our content expertise in our schools. We embark on this should-be dialogue on our own, often isolated from the collaboration that truly rich teaching requires. The TLP group is that dialogue; it is the collective discourse of peers who are trying the same things in their own classrooms, and willing to share the notes of their successes, their challenges, and their unexpected learning along the way. Through the collaboration of a team of my peer art educators, I am not only armed with a myriad of possibilities as I plan for my students, but I am also encouraged to create the very contexts that embolden students to raise their own questions through their engagement with contemporary artists and their artistic processes. With a network of peers who are all trying to go after something bigger, the task seems less daunting.

Simply said, education is not a one-person job—it requires ongoing dialogue, an active research of learning to inform one’s teaching.
Closing the Divide With a Community of Teacher Researchers

The Theory Loves Practice collaborative continues in Year Four as a larger community of reflective practitioners and researchers working together to bridge the theory/practice conundrum. As a group we challenged assumptions about theory getting in the way of spontaneity and creativity (Gude, n.d.; McKenna, 1999) and we were inspired by ideas about professional growth from Buffington and Wilson McKay (2013); As they suggest, “Internalizing an attitude of openness and willingness, acknowledging the partial understanding of our practice, and a curiosity to know more deeply are skills that mark art teaching as an ongoing process aided through a research lens” (p. 7). These are strategies and recommendations that have emerged from the monthly TLP meetings and have helped to guide the growth and resilience of the group:

• **Create and practice a democratic culture.** The teachers are the primary participants. The job of the leaders and facilitators is to create an environment for that to happen.
• **Have a main administrative contact** to coordinate the meetings and inform participants.
• **Use social media and Internet-based tools** such as Facebook, Twitter, a blog, a website, or a listserv to reach out, bridge meeting times, and link/connect people who cannot attend in-person meetings. Our listserv is a dynamic place for teachers to pose questions and post resources and links to interesting artists and happenings.
• **Make sure people know the group is accessible to all.** No membership is required and they can attend when they are able.
• **Link to PK-12 professional development needs.** For example, use this opportunity to link what your principal is asking you to do to what you want to do to meet your needs. You could use this group to create your own professional development plan.
• **Share assessment and documentation strategies**, realizing this can take many forms and can exist in artful ways.
• **Renew your interest in research.** Teachers of students of all ages can share moments in the classroom where the theory/practice mix occurs. Reflection as a group can help to uncover the nuances of this action.
• **Collaborate with others to make it work.** This process cannot happen alone and the multiple voices can make this experience richer.
• **Provide opportunities for public dialogue.** The Theory Loves Practice exhibition allowed teacher researchers to enact praxis in a public space.
Studio Arts Teacher Sarah Shay discusses the cyclical process of teaching and learning in her K-8 classroom and how the Theory Loves Practice group has supported her:

My students’ research drives me to seek out expertise and resources that extend well beyond my own areas of interest, expertise, and energies, while the Theory Loves Practice group drives me back to the classroom to challenge my own thinking about what students are capable of and the potential of art education as a center for creative thinking at its most impactful level.

Self-initiated and self-directed professional development learning communities for teachers are useful in supporting collaborative inquiry and bridging the aloneness that some teachers can experience in their classrooms. The research and theory mix of informing the daily practice can dissipate if the opportunities to infuse are not encouraged and nurtured. Teacher researcher groups are necessary to foster reflection, challenge notions, share new resources, reinvigoration and growth, and to encourage and support the important work of making evident possibilities for theory and practice connections.

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ENDNOTE

1 See www.msudenver.edu/cva/education/theorylovespractice
In this article, Leake is arguing for the relevance of contemporary art as a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the spaces of art education. Graeme Sullivan develops a similar argument in his Studies article, “The Art of Research.” Where Leake looks to possibilities for contemporary art as it is presented in museums, Sullivan reminds us that contemporary art is, in itself, a form of research. Both converge when discussing the power of contemporary networked technologies, seeing potential in data visualization (Sullivan) and social media (Leake). This convergence, if channeled in a productive manner, can provide artists and educators with the ability to harness the “power of discourse and social interactions” (Leake, p. 25).

Recently, I was taken aback when attending an art opening at a venue that traditionally focuses on British contemporary art. Stepping inside and seeing raw clay, marbles, and paint splattered everywhere—rather than experiencing the pristine environment that I have grown accustomed to—definitely took me by surprise (see Figures 1-3). The exhibition, called Playground, featured the creative play of 26 elementary students from a local, faith-based organization. According to Kevin Jacobs, one of the organizers of the event, rather than follow the traditional gallery routine of taking down an exhibition and preparing for the next show, the goal of this workshop and consequential exhibition was to use the transition period to repurpose the site—allowing new audiences to make and share art with others in a fun and collaborative environment (K. Jacobs, personal communication, August 3, 2013).
Encounters with innovative outreach programs such as this prompt the question: How might we as educators reconsider how community engagements with contemporary art and social learning theory are relationally interconnected and why is that important? As noted by Bain and Kundu (2010), when theory is seen as more than “a set of plans to be implemented but constitutes practice through an active process of planning, acting, and evaluating,” (p. 2) engaging in meaningful interactions with others opens up possibilities for learning within our field. This article explores how using contemporary art to spark dynamic social learning interactions illustrates how theory can inform practice.

**Contemporary Art and Social Learning**

Contemporary art is about now! It’s about figuring out who we are, who we are becoming, and how to live, know, and act. Just as our students are looking at the worlds around them and wondering what their role might be, what events mean, or what difference they can make, today’s artists are pondering the same questions through their art. When we teach with contemporary art, the potential is present for learning that is centered not in the classroom, but in all the worlds beyond it and students’ efforts to negotiate their relationship to those worlds. What could be more relevant? (Mayer, 2008, p. 77)

Indeed, learning through the exploration of contemporary art can serve as a venue by which members of a community can connect important social issues and life experiences through art, thus offering a more holistic form of educational engagements (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002; Sullivan, 2002). Engaging with and interpreting contemporary art encourages multiple and varied voices to share ideas and ways of working to negotiate meanings (Barrett, 2002; Mayer, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Villeneuve & Erickson, 2008). Teaching and learning through contemporary art has the potential to unite members of the community by capitalizing on human-to-human interactions to expand ways of knowing and understanding. Furthermore, it can be used to engage communities in
shared learning that reflects local interests and concerns. Understandably, some interactions might involve a feeling of discomfort between individuals who share different perspectives; however, Bailey and Desai (2005) see this as a critical learning response that might occur when community-based contemporary art is used to spark conversations. While not all contemporary artists seek out active interactions of people from the local community to inform their artistic practices, others do put a priority on these forms of engagement—particularly when addressing difficult social issues (Leake, 2012). Learning in, with, and through the lens of contemporary art recognizes the power of discourse and social interactions to encourage the emergence of multiple perspectives between individuals with diverse areas of interests, backgrounds, and life experiences. Exploring contemporary art inside and outside of the classroom is an effective approach to connect learning about real-world issues and concerns with our own personal experiences, thus reinforcing how art is a reflection of life.

Social learning theory supports an open and fluid framework for coming to understand self and others by blurring boundaries between teacher and student; together, we are in a state of becoming and evolving without fixed outcomes. Social perspectives on learning do not put emphasis on transference of knowledge or assimilation; rather it is the ongoing and generative processes unfolding between participants when we learn the most (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). “Learning cannot be designed” (Wenger, 1998, p. 225). It is more about the negotiation of meanings that transpire and are nurtured between individuals. It is about building bonds between members of the community who are invested in engaging in meaningful conversations. While fostering ongoing conversations focusing on contemporary art is important to bring people together who might not otherwise interact, this cannot happen without access to opportunities to connect. Finding ways to encourage different levels of engagement between members of the community is the challenge (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

**Community and Networks of Learning**

What is community? Marche (1998) reminds us that there are internal communities that exist within the classroom, and external communities referring to the local environments that influence both our students and ourselves. Hicks (1994) also clarifies that people often belong to a variety of communities reflective of our interests, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, ideological beliefs, education, and other factors. Congdon, Blandy, and Bolin (2001) recognize that community can also be reflective of a place where people come together; a learning group where both formal and informal discourse can take place; and ethnic and family groups who share histories, values, and traditions. Supporting mutual understandings and in-depth examinations of multiple
vantage points is when community is viewed as reflecting our social good (Villeneuve & Sheppard, 2009). Thus community, as situated within art education literature, is reflective of the various ways and reasons why humans interact and make meaning from these engagements. But how do we learn from such engagements?

We all learn in different ways, at different times, and conditions for learning are always in a state of flux. “At its best, education forms collectives—many fleeting collectives that ebb and flow, converge, and fall apart. These are small ontological communities propelled by desire and curiosity, cemented together by the kind of empowerment that comes from intellectual challenge” (Rogoff, 2008, pp. 6-7). Within this network of learning, the ongoing process of learning between individuals is complex and shifts between participants (Sweeny, 2013). As May (2011) points out, this decentralized form of curriculum allows “for importance to be placed on the flow of conversation and dialogue between participants” (p. 37). For example, social media platforms support the flow of information between people who share a common interest without the limitations of geographical boundaries. Decentralized networks of learning such as social media can supplement educational opportunities for students and teachers beyond the classroom by setting the conditions for peer interactions, as discussed by Castro (2013). Networks of learning are transforming how we see communities as crucial in expanding how teaching and learning is understood and embracing the unknown outcomes of these human interactions. Inspired to reflect on how social engagements with contemporary art are being facilitated and received in my own hometown, I invited two museum educators, an artist/curator/educator, and two art enthusiasts to share their vantage points for consideration. Their combined and varied approaches to engage members of the local community to share in the exploration of contemporary art speaks to the relevance of connecting theory with practice in art education.

The Museum Educators’ Perspectives

According to Bergeron and Tuttle’s (2013) 3-year study of U.S. museums, high-performance organizations succeed when they invest in personal relationships, forge emotional connections, and create meaningful experiences. Similarly, Wenger (1998) says organizations should ask themselves if they are effectively communicating with their audiences, allowing for various forms of knowledge to emerge and be reciprocally exchanged, connect issues from the local to the global, and be aware of not privileging perspectives. To consider how these recommendations relate to perspectives of museum educators from the San Antonio community, I invited two museum educators to share their perspectives. Kaela Hoskings works for a contemporary art foundation2 that deals exclusively with contemporary art, artists, and programming, while Kate Carey works for a modern art museum3 that has an emerging contemporary art collection.

Kaela (see Figure 4) believes engaging with contemporary art can be an intimidating experience, but when someone talks and shares their ideas about art with you on a personal level, this is important in breaking down barriers. It is important that everything be a conversation, because these forms of social interactions set people up for success and allow individuals to extend stories to others. Kaela likens the broad range of programming that takes place within and beyond the museum setting to a menu with a variety of dining options.

There are different learning styles and activities that attract people in different ways. Some people like the lecture format and want to be like a sponge in a lecture, while other times, you might want to make art, work with the artist directly, or have a chance to meet with other people and learn about the art together. Program variation gives people choices about how to engage with art. (K. Hoskings, personal communication, July 2, 2013)

Kate (see Figure 5) also touches upon the importance of a variety of programming as these opportunities reach different audiences with diverse interests and learning styles through formal and informal activities bringing vitality to the learning experience. Kate is proud of the many firsthand experiences and points of view that are gained when people are given opportunities to talk directly with a living artist, as this can be a rare learning opportunity that people might not otherwise have access to.

People don’t often have opportunities to hear from people who make those objects and hear about the processes, influences, and significance that they hold to the artist. In museums, people often come and view the work and make their own interpretations and connections to the work, but by having the artists there to talk about them is what makes these social engagements unique and important. (K. Carey, personal communication, July 1, 2013)

Both Kaela and Kate see the efforts of the museums they represent as strengthening community by serving as community centers where people from inside and outside of the art world come together. Together they are starting conversations and serving as a springboard to encourage visitors to come back. As Kate said, it’s not about promoting the museum’s vision about art: “It’s about being a good partner and sharing in the community

Figure 4. Museum educator Kaela Hoskings interacts with students during a teen contemporary art camp at Artpace San Antonio. Photo courtesy of Artpace San Antonio.
Networks of learning are transforming how we see communities as crucial in expanding how teaching and learning is understood and embracing the unknown outcomes of these human interactions.

The Artist/Curator/Educator’s Perspective

Alex Rubio (see Figure 6) is a local legend in the San Antonio art community. He has always made a strong impression on me because not only is he an artist, gallery owner, and curator, but also he has been actively involved in art education programming in various housing projects, prisons, and cultural arts centers for most of his life. Alex began his art career as an apprentice working as part of a “crew” and continues to follow this philosophy for engaging and teaching others about art. Just as social conversation” (K. Carey, personal communication, July 1, 2013).
learning does not see the relationships between the master and apprentice as fixed. Learning is more about the ongoing conversations and interactions between participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Alex exemplifies these practices when he invites his after-school art students to attend artist lectures, workshops, and art openings to experience the dialogues and visual explorations as members who share a passion for the Arts. Learning is not hierarchical; rather, it is unilateral.

Alex views the types of social engagements that he has been involved in as empowering individuals and groups to build self-esteem. For example, when he spoke of working with the prison inmates during art classes and subsequent mural programs, where he recruited some of the most talented inmates to make murals for each floor of the detention centers, he noted that the prison guards really appreciated his efforts because no one wanted to be kicked out of the art programs due to bad behavior. These individuals wanted to become part of a community, although sometimes it meant working with people that normally they would physically confront.

By learning how to organize with others and work together as crews, there is a community that develops between inmates that would not be possible otherwise. This process broke barriers because under “normal” conditions, the inmates would be in opposing gangs and have little in common. By having a shared interest and focus, they built bonds and formed friendships. (A. Rubio, personal communication, July 2, 2013)

Alex values art centers and organizations because they serve as a “social stimulus” to bring people together to celebrate stories of individuals, informed by our memories, and other experiences that go well beyond limited explorations of art that might focus on less important issues. Alex values how social engagements with art, particularly from his experience using the apprentice approach to art education, can spark cycles of inspiration that continue and evolve over time. These “cycles of inspiration” or “cycles of mentorship” continue to link individuals through time and space by allowing individuals like Alex and others to give “back to the community what the community has given me” (A. Rubio, personal communication, July 2, 2013). Alex continues to look for new opportunities to keep building those cycles of learning, and for that, I am grateful.4

The Bloggers’/Art Enthusiasts’ Perspectives

When Rogoff (2008) speaks of the “educational turn” as being “the moment when we attend to the production and articulation of truths—not truth as correct, as provable, as fact, but truth as that which collects around it subjectivities that are neither gathered nor reflected by other utterances” (p. 9), I think of how technology, including blogs, is a contemporary forum for articulating subjective truths. Blogging allows participants to share and extend their own insights and observations with others without borders to learning (Miller & Williams, 2013). While attending an informal luncheon conversation with artists at yet another contemporary art foundation in San Antonio, I saw Page Graham taking tons of pictures during and after the event, and I heard Tami Kegley asking the artists questions regarding their current work on display. After introducing myself to them, they shared that they were beginning to work on creating a blog on different art events taking place in San Antonio as a way to chronicle their subjective experiences exploring art.

Both Page and Tami agree that hearing artists speak about their work is the foundation of understanding their inspirational drive. There were few art events that I attended the summer of 2013 where Page and Tami were not present. When I did miss an event, they were certainly in attendance and reported on their experience in their blog. They shared with me some of the events they felt made a favorable impression on them and the ones that seemed to fall flat from their perspective and why—ideas they discuss openly on their blog. For example, they shared how all of one museum’s events hosted in relation to The Jameel Prize: Art Inspired by The Islamic Tradition meant so much to them. They appreciate the museum’s forward thinking concerning the content of the exhibition, despite some local opposition to hosting the work (Luber, 2013). Knowing that San Antonio was only one of two sites for the exhibition in the United States; that our community partnered with a major London museum to host the event; and that other art events such as dances, films, and artist dialogues were also held in conjunction with this exhibition; opened the door for multiple levels of dialogue and engagement to take place in connection with the exhibition, Tami and Page do not focus exclusively on the major art events taking place in the community; they also gravitate to the extensive, yet less publicized events at emerging galleries, which are often artist run spaces. While Tami and Page acknowledge that San Antonio does need to promote more public communication about upcoming art events on popular media outlets, they have self-empowered themselves to address this gap through their blog.

Closing Thoughts

Can social engagements with contemporary art help to promote broader discourse in art education? Does it matter? Blurring boundaries of learning and valuing our navigation of meaning with others may not be a requirement of education, but it certainly makes the learning process more dynamic, fluid, and unpredictably fun for those of us who are invested participants. Insights shared by contemporary art enthusiasts from the San Antonio community suggest that theory directly informs their practice on a regular basis. The museum educators value setting up the conditions to facilitate the exchange of information and encourage interactions between members of the community without privileging the voice of the institution speaks to their commitment to encourage decentralized learning opportunities. Both Kaela Hoskings and Kate Carey value incorporating formal and informal educational programs that bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds—hoping to encourage museum visitors to come back, not only to experience the art, but also to engage in the human interactions that make the meaning-making
process personal and enjoyable. As the voice of the artist, curator, and art educator, Alex Rubio's words and actions also speak to his unwavering acknowledgment that long-term learning and mentorship is best supported when they are shared experiences. Through his ongoing relationships with fellow artists of differing ages, Alex uses these social interactions as opportunities to fuel what he describes as “cycles of inspiration” that appear to continually manifest and evolve over time. Alex's actions shift learning away from the notion that the teacher is the master to one where the teacher is part of the collective whole. Tami and Page's work as blogging enthusiasts who chronicle their personal experiences engaging with artists in San Antonio illustrates their efforts to broaden the conversation in the San Antonio community and beyond about the big and lesser known events. Indeed, even now as I live and work in Dallas, reading their blog keeps me connected to what is happening and transcends our separation in physical space. Through their writing and inclusion of photographs documenting openings, dialogues, and exhibitions, they articulate subjective truths and have worked to address the gap in local Blurring boundaries of learning and valuing our navigation of meaning with others may not be a requirement of education, but it certainly makes the learning process more dynamic, fluid, and unpredictably fun for those of us who are invested participants.

Figure 6. *Rubio*, by Vincent Valdez. Alex Rubio and Vincent Valdez have shared a lifelong friendship that began first as a mentor/mentee relationship. Photo courtesy of Alex Rubio and Vincent Valdez. Photo Credit: Ansen Seale.
media coverage of the Arts by empowering themselves to be the voice of community art advocates. Collectively, these individuals recognize that shared learning experiences between participants are not only relevant when exploring contemporary art in the community, but they are also essential to promoting meaningful dialogue.

As individuals, we decide for ourselves how much we choose to be engaged in outside conversations about art—either within or beyond institutional walls. We may choose to accept or oppose ideas supported by institutions, or be critical of the efforts of to be engaged in outside conversations about art—either within
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be engaged in outside conversations about art—either within
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to establish, thus informing our level of engagement (Wenger, 1998). So thinking back to my initial visit to see the opening of Playground, eavesdropping on the stories being exchanged by the young participants with their families, friends, museum staff, and guests, I realized that the impact of making learning social definitely changes our local communities’ perspectives about contemporary art. Closing the gap between theory and practice is in our best interest as art educators if we hope to impact lives, just as Kaela, Kate, Alex, Tami, and Page have shown us.

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ENDNOTES
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2 KaelaHoskings works at Artpace San Antonio. For more information about this organization, please see http://artpace.org/ and http://blog.artpace.org/category/fresh-art-first
3 Kate Carey works for The McNay Art Museum. For more information about this organization, please see www.mcnayart.org/ and http://www.mcnayartmuseum.org/blogs
4 To see and hear Alex Rubio and high school students discuss how they work together to create community art as partners in the MOSAIC program, please see www.walleyfilms.com/ Blue-Star-MOSAIC
5 The site was at the Blue Star Contemporary Art Museum. For more information, please see http://bleustartart.org
6 http://artbloggsa.com
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ELIGIBILITY: Nominees should be members of USSEA or InSEA and persons who have brought distinction to international aspects of art education through an exceptional and continuous record of achievement in scholarly writing, research, professional leadership, teaching, professional service, or community service bearing on international education in the visual arts.

NOMINATIONS: Nominations may be submitted by any member of USSEA, InSEA, or NAEA. Forms are available at the USSEA website http://ussea.net

DEADLINE DATE: Nomination materials are due by November 1, 2014 or as soon as possible (some flexibility). Letters of nomination, acceptance, and support must be written in English.

MAIL NOMINATIONS to: Patricia Belleville, Department of Art, Eastern Illinois University, 600 Lincoln Ave, Charleston Illinois 61920. E-mail: pkbelleville@eiu.edu.

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Salazar is drawing from observational research and survey data in order to propose her Five Pedagogical Ideals. David Pariser is writing on similar topics in his Studies article, “Coping With Flying Sandwiches: Where’s the Educational Theory?” As he states: “The problem, in a nutshell, is that educational theories are often couched in terms so vague and abstract that their operational implications are not obvious” (p. 303). Instead of avoiding the thorniness of language, Pariser suggests that art educators attempt to determine the theory that exists within practice, much in the way that Salazar analyzes the foundations-level art studio practices. Salazar suggests that potent theories might be extracted from current practices, informing theories that are yet-to-be.

I was quite inspired by some of your research [and] hoping to report on some of these issues to our faculty.

—Professor at a public university in the Ohio Valley

My faculty would really benefit from this information.

—Professor at a community college in the Southwest

I found your research into what students want out of their Foundation year particularly relevant.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t type fast enough to capture all of your lists. Would it be possible to get a copy?

—Professor at an art college in the Northeast

We are in process of redefining our undergrad program, as well foundations. I will look forward to sharing your findings with my colleagues... really compelling details and statistics.

—Professor at a large state university in the Rust Belt

I would love to share your research with my faculty.

—Professor at a state university in the West

This is a sample of the messages that flooded my inbox in the days following a research presentation I gave at the 2013 conference of Foundations of Art, Theory, and Education (FATE). On that warm spring day, professors from all over the US gathered, standing room only, to listen to my report on teaching and learning in college studio art. The responses to that presentation suggest that today’s college studio art instructors, teaching in a wide variety of higher education contexts, are hungry for accessible and relevant information on the theory and practice of art education. Their interest could be indicative of a shift in postsecondary faculty culture—from one in which faculty discuss only their art practice (Singerman, 1999) to one in which pedagogy is also a topic of mutual interest and discussion. Such a shift could be due to a number of relatively recent academic pressures: institutional and pedagogical accountability, increasingly diverse undergraduates, debate about educational values inherited from Bauhaus and Academy traditions, and the influence of digital culture and the contemporary art world on college curriculum and pedagogy (Salazar, 2013b).
Theory and Practice in College Studio Art Education

Whatever the causes may be, the conference attendees’ e-mail requests for my theory summary suggest that many professors are unaware of, or outside of, the conversation that exists among K-12 art educators regarding the theory and practice of art education. In fact, over my years in higher education I have encountered very few college studio professors who read (or even know of) *Studies in Art Education* and *Art Education*, despite the fact that these journals have, in recent years, published substantive reports on higher art educational practice.

Similarly, few studio professors of my acquaintance know of the recent College Board publication on child development and arts education (2012), which included developmental theory relevant to the first 2 years of college. In fact, in my 2 decades as a studio art instructor—in a community college, a large public university, a private liberal arts college, and an elite art school—if my colleagues sometimes expressed a desire to know the theory and practice of art education, they found few resources. Since postsecondary studio art education remains under-researched and under-theorized (Salazar, 2013a, 2013b), there are no readily accessible and relevant resources that might both inspire the accomplished artists-who-teach to reflect on aspects of their teaching practice and invite them into the conversation about art educational theory.

What might a “readily accessible and relevant resource” for college studio art educators look like?

This essay is my attempt to initiate that resource. This essay is, in a sense, a reimagining of the presentation I gave to the art professors at the FATE conference. Therefore, most citations are located at the conclusion of each section in order to maintain a conversational flow similar to that of the presentation. The citations I have chosen to include are readily accessible for any who choose to investigate further.

**TWO LISTS: Teaching and Learning**

I begin with two lists that represent my synthesis of the educational research and theory relevant to college studio art. Each list is prefaced with an introduction to provide context. The content of the two lists is drawn from research on adult and adolescent learners, creative individuals, college students, teaching in nonstudio art college classrooms, and studio art teaching and learning in both secondary and postsecondary settings. Then I describe, in richer detail, five pedagogical ideals identified by first-year art college students (McKenna, 2011). The two lists in combination with the five ideals provide college studio professors a (beginning) framework through which to reflect on teaching practice and further explore theories and practices in studio art education.

**Teaching**

In contrast to the traditional structure of college courses in which a professor lectures to an entire class, an *atelier*, apprentice-style, one-on-one model of instruction is the typical structure of studio art classes. In an atelier model, the professor’s personality, values, own formative studio instruction, and personal aesthetic choices have a substantial influence on how and what students learn. Given such influence, it is important for studio art instructors to teach thoughtfully and well. To do so, the literature suggests that an effective studio art instructor:

- maintains a deep, evolving knowledge of their field of expertise
- understands their particular college and community
- facilitates substantive relationships with students
- facilitates meaning making by connecting works and ideas with the world beyond the classroom
- teaches skills in making, in harnessing imagination, and in careful observation
prompts reflection on the varied contexts in which art is made and why it is made

• involves students deeply in the studio domain over a significant period of time
• gives students ample opportunity and cause to reflect on emerging understandings
• encourages regular interaction with individuals who are somewhat more sophisticated
• provides opportunities to engage students in issues of space and place
• creates opportunities for students to learn-by-doing
• addresses content in artwork
• makes theory relevant
• teaches expectations for critiques
• orchestrates the physical space
• structures the creative process
• implements liberating constraints
• initiates dialogue with students
• models what it is to be an artist and adult in the world
• regularly reflects on and revises curriculum and pedagogy


Learning

As adults, whether young or old, we learn if and when we encounter experiences that do not fit with our way of being in or understanding the world (Kroger, 2004; Mezirow, 2000). Such encounters create a crisis. Multiple crises are typical among college students, prompted by situations in both academic and social contexts (Skipper, 2005). During these times of crisis, students need safe spaces to imagine and explore options before choosing and proceeding; negotiating these crises leads to reframed, new, or "transformed" ways of being in the world (Kroger, 2004; Mezirow, 2000). Creative individuals, in particular, describe college as the time during which they found their voice, discovered they had something of value to offer their culture, and first encountered cohorts and teachers who were capable of appreciating their uniqueness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). If college is a time of transformation for creative young people, students completing undergraduate studio art programs may:

• be better able to think about their own thinking
• entertain different possibilities on an idea, problem, or experience
• be able to make ideas flow
• be more likely to keep an open independent mind
• understand multiple points of view
• value the process of making
• work for hours without outside reward
• be more comfortable with uncertainty
• appreciate different kinds of art
• have a greater sensitivity to aesthetics
• value feelings and observations more than realism
• be able to articulate their thoughts about art
• value art as a primary mode for communicating what is most important to them

(Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004; Burton, 2000, 2005; Eisner, 2002; Gardner, 1990; Gruber & Wallace, 1989; Gude, 2004, 2010; Hetland et al., 2007; James, 1996, 1997, 2004; McKenna,
Five Pedagogical Ideals

Some 21st-century, first-year art students have contributed to our knowledge of teaching and learning in college studio art. Ninety students, half from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and half from the School of Visual Arts (SVA), volunteered to participate in a survey I created. Survey topics included: experiences in foundation studio courses, how studio teachers used class time, descriptions of what was learned, descriptions of quality teaching, and advice to next year’s freshman class. The questionnaire, comprised of mostly open-ended questions, prompted many students to write in a (sometimes passionate) narrative style. To express emotional emphasis, students often employed profanity, or ALL CAPS or underlined multiple times. Many survey participants wrote at length, scrawling over all available margins and on the blank reverse sides of the paper survey. Not surprisingly then, many students took an hour, sometimes two, to complete the survey.

Since students filled out the survey in my presence, I could make a number of general observations about the respondents: my impression was that most were Caucasian, the majority female, and nearly all appeared to be of “traditional” college age—that is, having recently graduated from secondary school. The SVA student participants seemed to be slightly more diverse than the MICA group—based only on appearance, there seemed to be more students of African and Asian decent among SVA respondents. In addition, student grammar and spelling suggested that there were more students for whom English was a second language among the SVA participants than there were in the MICA pool. None of these factors were included in the survey participant selection process; any student near the finish of the first year could volunteer to take the survey. In addition, while some of the survey respondents may have had one or more faculty members in common as their teachers, if such overlaps occurred, it was inconsistent and by chance. It was made clear to students (by me, in person, and on the survey instructions) that the survey was not an assessment of particular professors, but instead was a reflective assessment of the students’ own first-year experience.

Patterns of responses in the survey data suggested five “pedagogical ideals.” Pedagogical, because these patterns refer to how students are taught rather than what. Ideals, because these were qualities students considered particularly valuable to their foundation studio experience. Below I describe each pedagogical ideal by summarizing my findings from the surveys, highlighting student responses, and contextualizing these within the literature.

1. Know Us

Art students want their teachers to get to know them—to take a personal interest in their individual artistic inclinations and abilities, their lives, and their futures. First-year art school students praised their best teachers for frequently chatting with them individually before class; for sending personal e-mails recommending a book, an exhibition, or an artist; for asking them about their weekends; and for attending off-campus events of importance to students. The best professors were those who treated them as “fellow artists” and “equals,” with the professors, as one student said, “just happening to know more.” The majority of student respondents made it clear that they valued the highly individualized personal interaction that characterizes the atelier studio model.

However, to get to know their students, professors need not rely solely on individual interpersonal interaction. There is recent research that may assist professors in understanding the developmental challenges their students may encounter. For example: female students tend to thrive when they feel a sense of connection and belonging, whereas male students seem to prefer a more competitive atmosphere. Minority students tend
to experience identity development in relation to their cultures of origin. Current college students, as members of the Millennial generation, tend to be more compliant and conservative than students in prior decades and therefore may need to be taught to be active, not passive; to question authority; and to think critically (Bain, 2004; Belenky, Clichy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Burton & Hafeli, 2012; Campbell & Simmons, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Kroger, 2004; Salazar, 2013b; Skipper, 2005; The College Board, 2012).

2. Help Us Make Personally Meaningful Artwork

Students praised their best professors for teaching them how to come up with their own ideas. Students learned to tell their “own stories” and that “art should come out of life.” Across K-12 art education, postsecondary studio art, and higher education in general, the literature advises teachers to help students connect their lives with their art and to make learning real by connecting the subject with the world beyond the classroom. Consensus in the field of art education suggests that an effective way to stimulate meaningful student learning is through an inquiry approach that includes strategies of exploration and play or existential questioning. In so doing, the teacher structures dialogue or activities that unlock the door to reflective critical thinking and imagining, so that student understandings of self and world emerge in and through the process of artmaking (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004; Bain, 2004; Burton, 2000, 2005; Campbell & Simmons, 2012; Carroll, 2007; Castro, 2007; Gude, 2004, 2010; James, 1997, 2004; Schön, 1990; Walker, 2001, 2003).

3. Teach Us Skills (but not for their own sake)

While students wanted to make meaningful work, they also appreciated knowing skills—that is, how to do things. Students praised their best foundation instructors for teaching them these skills while being “honest” and “encouraging,” and wrote that their best studio professors helped them develop skills as a way to help them find their “own voice,” “gain confidence,” or “feel empowered.” Conversely, students said that those professors who failed to make connections between technical skills and bigger ideas were, overall, poor instructors. Research across higher education and art education suggests that learning technical skills is, in fact, empowering for students, but that refining processes and techniques for their own sake, rather than for the purposes of making meaning, is ultimately unsatisfying for students. In educating artists, therefore, we must bear in mind that studio art education is neither teaching skills nor transmitting knowledge, but rather creating a space for our students to pursue inquiry, make meaning, and generate knowledge (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2004; Bai, 2004; Campbell & Simmons, 2012; Carroll, 2007; Castro, 2007; Gude, 2004, 2010; James, 1997, 2004; McKenna, 2006; Schön, 1990; Tavin, Kushins, & Elniski, 2007; Walker, 2001, 2003).

4. Create a Safe Community for Us

Students praised their best professors for creating a positive classroom environment by telling stories, facilitating interaction among peers in the classroom, and engaging students in meaningful dialogue. Students said these studio professors created an atmosphere that made it easy to “try new things,” to feel “encouraged,” to “help everyone connect,” to make “class fun,” to make “you want to be there.” Said one student, “I [was] always sad when class was over,” and said another,
“I always looked forward to see what would happen [the] next week!” These student comments echo findings in the emerging field of brain-based education that suggest deep learning is stimulated by three qualities of the learning environment: variety (daily class structure varied or contained unexpected events), narrative (much teacher–student communication took the form of sharing stories), and safety (students felt integrated into the class community and were better able to take creative risks). Similarly, consensus in the fields of art education and higher education suggests that variety, safety, and narrative are important to learning (Bain, 2004; Burton & Hafeli, 2012; Campbell & Simmons, 2012; Carroll, 2007; Gude, 2004, 2010; Hetland et al., 2007; James, 1996, 1997, 2004; McKenna, 2006, 2011; Salazar, 2013a; Shulman, 2004b; Walker, 2001).

5. Teach Us How to Live Creative Lives

Only 6 of the 90 students identified a skill or art concept as “the most important thing” learned during the foundation year. Instead, most students said they learned to “think and create from the heart,” “balance life and art,” “be a better person,” and “live a creative life.” One student wrote, in so many words, “I learned how to live a creative life.” A few students said, “I learned to be creative.” Most students told stories or wrote comments that revealed three traits: risk taking, confidence, and perseverance—qualities that appear in the literature as important, even essential, to creativity (Burton, 2009; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gruber & Wallace, 1989; Gude, 2010; James, 1997, 2004; Zimmerman, 2009).

Risk taking. The vast majority of freshmen said “risk taking” was the most important thing learned during their first year of art school, saying they learned to “break rules,” “not fear failure,” “just do it,” “experiment,” “seize the day,” “not be afraid to change,” “be fearless,” and “just f*cking go for it!” Students said that if they could do freshman year over again, they would be “more daring” and “less precious.”
Perseverance. Students said the most important thing learned was to "be determined and patient," "you have to practice in order to grow," "don't procrastinate!" "scrab it, then do it again," and "hard work pays off!" Some respondents admitted if they had the year to do over, they would have "worked harder" and not have "procrastinated so much." Perhaps it is no surprise then, that by a substantial margin, "manage your time" was the advice most often offered to the next group of high school students making their way to art college.

Confidence. Students said the most important learning of freshman year was that they "gained confidence" and grew a "tough skin" as a result of their foundation studio coursework. They also found out that "a grade is only a letter," "your learning is up to you," and you must "trust that you can."

In my view it is important to note here that students did not identify creativity as a thing to enact, but instead described ways-of-being (a risk taker, a hard worker, a confident person) that contribute to living a creative life. Perhaps because the foundation year of art school is a time when, for many hours each week, students are immersed in artmaking, the students learn how to live a creative life through the act of making itself.

Conclusion
In this essay I have attempted to summarize a significant amount of theory and practice so that readers, especially those who teach studio art to college students, might be better able to reflect on and articulate the value of teaching and learning in studio art. By providing citations at the conclusion of each section, I have endeavored to make sources accessible to those for whom a dissertation sponsor. Thirteen Hundred West Mount Royal Avenue) (McKenna, 2011). Special thanks are extended to Judith M. Burton, dissertation sponsor.

This summary, featuring as it does theories of adult and late-adolescent education, may also be useful to artists who teach outside postsecondary settings, such as middle school, high school, and in museums and communities. In particular, the five pedagogical ideals are likely to be relevant for high school learners, as those young people are 1 year removed from foundation students; secondary-level art educators may find it useful to consider these ideals in preparing their students for college-level instruction and for living creative lives.

Nearly 25 years ago, renowned educator Howard Gardner wrote that didactic training of adults toward more sophisticated understandings of art is destined to fail; instead new understandings must be allowed to emerge over several years of study as a result of regular, immersive interactions in artistic, physical, and social contexts (1990). I wonder if the same can be said of educating studio art instructors about the theory and practice of art education? It seems to me that, to humbly paraphrase Dr. Gardner, new understandings of higher art education must be allowed to emerge over several years of immersive interactions in theoretical, physical, and social contexts. Therefore, all of us—artists, art educators, researchers, and administrators—must together create the contexts in which those immersive interactions can occur. This is our most immediate and urgent challenge.

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REFERENCES
REFERENCES continued


ENDNOTES

1 Special thanks to the organizers of the 2013 Conference of Foundations in Art, Theory & Education (FATE), and especially to my colleagues, Brett Reif of the Kansas City Art Institute and Jan Feldhausen & Jason Yi from the Minneapolis Institute of Art and Design who, with me, collaborated on the 90-minute FATE session, “What’s Happening in Art College Foundations Program?”

2 While this publication format does not allow for as many images as were in my presentation, I chose a few images from traditional studio art education settings to accompany the text. These images act as visual metaphors for the key ideas embedded in the adjacent text, while also referencing the atelier model of traditional postsecondary studio art and design education.

3 For a full range of sources, including unpublished dissertations and conference presentations, please see the references in Salazar 2013a and 2013b.

4 The questionnaire in its entirety is available in an Appendix to my dissertation (McKenna, 2011).
Beginnings: Playing With Identity

“The role of theory is ‘not to lay down laws but to force us to be aware of what we are doing and why we are doing it.’”

—Robert Scholes (as cited in Potteiger & Purinton, 1998)

AMY: “Don’t forget the little people” were the words shared by an art teacher as I moved to my position in higher education.

RHONDA: Graduate school allowed me to ask, “What and who am I really?”

AMY: The first graduate course I taught during my first year in higher education felt similar to that first year teaching K-6, when I was suddenly deemed an “expert” but I wasn’t quite comfortable in my new role. Part of me was still nostalgic for the role of student.

RHONDA: Alongside my own curiosities of self, I noticed similar wonderings about identity—the many versions of the self that make us whole—budding in the consciousness of my students.

AMY: I saw something of myself in Rhonda’s reflective practice—her deep engagement in doing the challenging work of questioning one’s professional identity and ways in which curriculum functioned to suggest new possibilities for herself and her students.

RHONDA: By my mid-twenties, I found myself teaching among those with power and realizing that power was embedded in my position as teacher (Wise & Case, 2013). I wanted to use this knowledge to guide my students toward questioning and expressing understandings of identity that allowed them to actively unpack and examine what they already knew and what they hadn’t ever thought about themselves.

AMY and RHONDA: We immediately saw in each other the opportunity to dig deeper—to ask the “What if?” questions about our teaching practice: How does theory really unfold into practice? How do our professional identities feed into this? We wanted to examine how the landscape of our stories, who we were as professionals, played into the decisions we made as art educators. This included the K-12 classroom and also the landscape of a graduate course for art educators. We also wanted to potentially challenge and rewrite the stories of how curriculum unfolded.
AMY: As the “professor” I tried to “strip away” this title; yet even though our relationship felt open I was still the “researcher in the corner” when I visited her classroom. I was also the “tenure tracked professor” in my early years of my profession figuring out my voice and what it meant to share these ideas through publication.

RHONDA and AMY: We wanted to tell our stories to reflect what Potteiger & Purinton (1998) describe as an opportunity to “create a web of relationships” to open up possibility for others to reflect on their own professional identities and how this interacts with curriculum development. Our conversation flowed endlessly and we felt that in order not to be swept away we must acknowledge our questions and struggles, dig deeper, and ultimately perhaps even push against our natural tendencies in how we saw the professor/teacher relationship, our students, and curriculum.

**How Our Story Unfolds:**
- Sharing our professional identities
- Examining possibility in curriculum
- Implementing the curriculum and moving from the local to the personal
- Learning from each other and the students
- Asking what this project/our stories told us

**Background of the Project**

RHONDA and AMY: We worked together as Rhonda implemented a new curriculum project [titled IBAL (Identity Based Art Learning)] using the “Big Idea” of identity and representation with her 4th-grade students. The curriculum project was a direct result of shifts in her views of art pedagogy while taking her first graduate course as a master's student. Through our dialogue, we sought to unveil the interconnectedness between student experiences and our professional identities, at both the K-12 and graduate levels (Rolling, 2010). This became a means to gain a deep understanding of what teacher and student identity could reveal about curriculum and the often-felt tensions between theory and practice. Our research continued the call by Anne Thulson (2013) “to bridge the gap between contemporary theory and current practice” creating “professional development which requires a more reciprocal exchange of ideas” (p. 23).

With this in mind we drew from literature in the field to examine professional identity within the intersection of playing with curriculum through keen attention to theory and practice implementing Big Ideas (Check, 2002, 2005; Garoian, 2002; Gude, 2010, 2013; Hicks, 2004; López, 2009; Rolling, 2004; Stewart & Walker, 2005; Thulson, 2013; Zurmuehlen, 1990).

As our partnership developed we clearly saw in each other a deep desire to play with “creativity, and possibility” (Gude, 2010) by designing a curriculum that removed resistance (Gude, 2010) from students’ meaning-making endeavors through the creation of projects that allowed for immersion in Big Ideas (Stewart & Walker, 2005). We also sought a curriculum that created a space of “psychological vs. psychologically safety and freedom” (Gude, 2010). In addition, we were both wrestling with how our undergraduate training and the expectations of typically more conservative or traditional forms of teaching art education (such as reliance on elements and principles of design) were being passed to our students (Hicks, 2004).

We desired to be “interactive agents in social and political contexts” (Hicks, 2004). Using Big Ideas was part of our graduate training and, although we were enamored with this approach as a context for meaning making and had practiced this approach in our classrooms, we also honestly felt this was a risk set next to the visible and often invisible expectations of what the school community deemed worthy and interesting when it came to displaying student artwork. This was in the context of both Rhonda, working within the schools, and Amy, pushing on particular forms of curriculum through the graduate course.

This fed into the exploration of our professional identities. We needed to examine how our many intersections between our beliefs and practices along with our values, norms, experience, and cultural backgrounds were at play (Dinkelman, as cited in Irving, 2006).
So Our Stories Begin… Unraveling and Intertwining Our Professional Identities

AMY: Theory-in-practice is something I committed myself to as a graduate student while simultaneously teaching students in pK–6. I wanted the deep theory of my graduate and doctoral coursework to seep into my teaching. I believe it did. I felt a transformation in my teaching. At the same time, I felt a disconnect between the pedagogical approaches of my classroom practice set against the school culture. Recalling the multiple paradigms and philosophies presented in my graduate courses, I continually questioned and changed the language I used, my approach to teaching, and my views of the child. At times, these approaches moved against the way in which many of the teachers “saw” children and curriculum. This illuminated the sorts of tensions that Ann DiPardo, (1993) professor of English education, revealed from interviews with MA students as they began their graduate studies. Many teachers saw themselves “playing” with the tension of wanting to share new ideas coupled with a feeling they would be deemed an outsider (see Pfeiler-Wunder, 2013a, 2013b).

What Rhonda and I both attempted to do was to listen to the call by James Haywood Rolling Jr. (2010) for “art educators [to] write and overwrite our stories of K–12, community, and university education practices, making the intractability of the positions we often occupy more public…” (p. 7). I hoped that Rhonda would find in the graduate course a voice to share the conflicts of her identity within the landscape of her school culture.

RHONDA: Examining and unpacking the layers of my identity—of my existence as biracial, half Asian and Caucasian—working class, feminist, art educator, and mother—is an ongoing, living process for me. I conceal or expose different layers of self as a measure to preserve my emotional health. I’m insecure about exposing too much, out of fear of rejection, ostracism, or manipulation. My ethnic difference was the main subject of the peer scrutiny I endured, and as a result of such circumstance, my means of finding a safe place to grow and learn in a positive and nurturing environment—a place where I could simply and happily exist—was slow, difficult, and painful.1

AMY: I desired to break down the power relationship embedded within the relationship between professor and student using the work of Michel Foucault as shared by Valerie-Chapman (2005). She feels that the very notion of the academic tongue challenges the intimate mentor relationship individuals establish in the very feminist “language” of teaching involving the caring for others. I deeply desired finding a place where my graduate students were comfortable using theory in practice. I wanted it to be accessible.

RHONDA: Often, I find myself in a state of professional otherness, identifying with my students far more easily than with my professional peers. Few educators of color or those that are working class exist in my immediate professional peer group—yet a large number of my students have been minorities, working class, or both. I find myself forming strong bonds with such students in ways that many of my colleagues do not. However, I did eventually learn to embrace my otherness, not only in race and class, but also in pedagogical styling.

AMY: When I first began teaching, I found myself immersed in a school culture much different from how I had been schooled. Coming from a rural farming community, the students in my class seemed homogenous. We were mostly German Catholic farm families with middle or low incomes. Many of our parents carried on the farming occupation from a long lineage of ancestors. As a beginning teacher, I worked in urban settings with a more diverse student population in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

RHONDA: I exist as an anomaly in my professional peer group in that I am biracial and working-class identified, unlike many others who, as Time Wise and Kim Case (2013) state, unknowingly enjoy the privilege of socially dominated identities such as White, middle class, or Christian. I found as a student and later as a teaching professional that the study of art lends itself not only to investigating understandings of identity but also to expressing and questioning it.

AMY: For me, life on the farm involved hard labor, long bus rides home, and little formal art training. I did not have art class during elementary school and only sporadically in middle school. My parents did not take me to museums on the weekends. Instead, we traversed the 380-acre landscape of the farm during Sunday walks. It acted as a large playground where building forts and dams in the creek and sledding were the usual pastimes. Despite the hard labor, it was also a place of profound beauty, a landscape lush with green pastures in the spring and summer, a place I wandered in solitude even as a young child. It would be later as I traversed those large fields of memory that I came to realize the aesthetic nature of my upbringing.

RHONDA: When I was very young, I was oblivious to the notion that being different could be viewed as negative. In that time of innocence, what I knew best was that my mother was Korean and I desired to grow up to be like my father, a Veteran and federal corrections officer. I was in 1st grade when the bullying began, continuing throughout my K-12 experiences and forever shaping the lens through which I view and interact with the world.

“Art and play are most obviously connected when we focus on the process of artmaking. Making art is an attempt to come to understand the world—a world that is sensible and physical, as well as social and cultural.” (Hicks, 2004, p. 289)
AMY: I found my story of being raised on a farm deeply embedded in my early teaching philosophy and my beliefs about art education. Early on I taught to the “great masters” because I had not been exposed to these artists as a child or teen. Later, because of my graduate work, I became critical of the linear and patriarchal dominant world of art—and “added” more female artists. I was also drawn to “untrained” artists, and travels to Mexico added folk artists to my curriculum. The landscape of my teaching was deeply impacted by memories of lacking art experiences, my narrative of growing up working class, and the notions of what it meant to be a “good” teacher. This illuminated Hicks’ (2004) notion that once students and educators see themselves as “interactive agents in social and political contexts,” we come to realize how these limitations are shared with our students (p. 287).


AMY: Through our conversations, our playfulness with possibility, and a revealing of our identities, I was also committed to providing students this opportunity to play with their own conception of identity. Charles Garoian (2002) suggests we invite student identity into classroom dialogue for more meaningful learning. Through these authors, we were driven to experiment with pedagogy... specifically, Rhonda asked, “What would happen if I taught with identity in mind?”

**From Our Stories to Playing With Possibility in Curriculum**

RHONDA and AMY: By knowing our professional identities, we were more open to deconstructing the tensions between our theoretical worldviews and classroom practice. From here we attempted to be playful. Play was about possibility. For me (Rhonda) it was about rethinking curriculum. For me (Amy) it was playing with how power functioned in the classroom, finding where it can best be utilized as discourse and reconstituted to locate opportunity.

Michel Foucault (1978) referred to these as “Games of Truth,” meaning the subject is in constant dialogue with the discourses they occupy. I (Rhonda) used my theoretical work as a way to see how my professional identity at times came in conflict with the school’s expectation of curriculum. We used her position as “other” and “outsider” to resist and push against the established curriculum.

Through the creation of a curriculum rich in content and personal meaning for students, and infused with Big Ideas (Stewart & Walker, 2005), we employed play described by Laurie Hicks’ (2004) discussion of infinite and finite play. We wanted to look at curriculum, our discussion of the tensions between theory and practice, and the students’ work as a form of play; we were open to allowing ourselves to be vulnerable by pushing “ourselves to our limits” challenging ourselves with “exploration... and unfamiliar potentials of play” (Hicks, 2004, pp. 288-289). For us, this involved moving the curriculum from a focus on the formal elements and principles to something that reflected the life experiences of the artists.

RHONDA: I thought about how we could create spaces where children could change the rules. I sought the type of conversation where we would be open to examining which theories felt relevant in the classrooms against those that didn’t, allowing children to see themselves as interactive agents in social and political contexts (Hicks, 2004). “Art and play are most obviously connected when we focus on the process of artmaking. Making art is an attempt to come to understand the world—a world that is sensible and physical, as well as social and cultural” (Hicks, 2004, p. 289). This played into reflecting on the community and culture where the children created and our own positionality within these spaces.

We started with familiar material culture, such as hex sign imagery seen throughout their community’s visual culture landscape. We then moved them outside their comfort zone, asking them to critically consider how dress and appearance communicates the personal, as they created paper doll versions of themselves.

**Beginning With the Familiar: Engaging Students With the Curriculum Project**

RHONDA: As students designed their hex signs in the first project—Pennsylvania German radial designs particularly unique to their region—they were asked to create personally significant, self-designed symbols to produce artworks that had personal relevance layered with a sense of connectedness to the local visual and material culture landscape (Bolin & Blandy, 2003). They were asked: “What symbols tell about your connections to your community?” Here there was an attempt to move from reproductions of symbols and colors used locally in Hex signs to symbols selected or designed by the students.

AMY: From a children’s developmental standpoint drawing from their personal world was significant (Wilson & Wilson, 2009). Children were making meaning by transforming themselves from mere doers (copying) to makers of meaning (Zurmuehlen, 1990).

RHONDA: Some students commented on recreational activities such as sporting events and flea market shopping. A newly transplanted student to the community described his sense of disenfranchisement, remarking how this community has “no middle class” and is “full of rich snobs or farmers.”

AMY: Initially, Rhonda noticed that the “nicest-looking” artworks (more focused on elements and principles of design) were less embedded with personal meaning. The most contextual, symbolically rich works drew from the child’s own “kid culture” creating self-driven symbol making (Dyson, 1997).

RHONDA and AMY: We also asked students to describe ways in which their community influenced their sense of identity. Most students referenced their families’ involvement in the local farming culture.

AMY: As the first project unfolded in this study, Rhonda was beginning to figure out how to guide them in a way that elicited authentic visual, verbal, and written responses, such as the latter, rather than responses they thought would please her (Figure 1). Students were also becoming comfortable with revealing their identities in what would be considered a homogenous, White, rural, and predominantly Christian community.
Moving From the Local to the Personal: Playing With Identity

RHONDA: In the second project, students were asked to consider the question, “What would you like your appearance to say about you?” as they made and dressed paper doll embodiments of themselves (Figure 2). Students were playful as some boys tried “girl clothes” and some girls tried more risqué clothing on their dolls. When asked about their decisions, some boys giggled, indicating that they were just being silly, trying to get a rise out of their classmates. One boy admitted to me that as a male living in a house full of females, he identified with feminine clothing. His final product featured a skirt, pumps, and a purse. He did this consciously (Figure 3), confirming through conversation that it was his intention to deeply answer the project’s essential question. No peer questioned his work, and he gave full permission to display it at the school’s annual art show.

AMY: Had she not made it safe for her students to explore this facet of themselves, the paper doll project may not have elicited such a sincere response from the child.

RHONDA: I relied heavily on the teachings of Ed Check (2002, 2005, 2006) as I encountered the various and sometimes surprising student responses during the paper doll project. Check’s works bolster support of students’ ideas, fueling my determination to make it safe to examine and deconstruct elements of identity through artmaking. Check asserts the need and value to create safe places for both teacher and student identity. Otherwise, individuals grow overly concerned with appeasing the status quo and under concerned with making relevant connections between their world and their lives.

AMY and RHONDA: We simultaneously had to be playful in noticing where we included structure and where we allowed more fluidness in how the curriculum unfolded. We attempted to see our ongoing dialogue during the study as infinite, not fixed. Examining our stories mattered to what we paid attention to and what we didn’t pay attention to. We were drawn to the local community as curriculum inspiration just as our local culture was embedded in our personal and professional identity. We also found the paper doll activity emerged out of our own desire to imagine ourselves outside the view we held of ourselves or felt others placed on us. This playfulness with curriculum went much deeper. We also wanted to see how the work of our graduate courses had transformed our practice.

AMY: It was in working with Rhonda that I was able to accept my former tensions as a K-6 teacher and see how richly they contributed to new curricular approaches. It reaffirmed how I worked with my art education graduate students, revealing these tensions as fuel for developing fluid curriculum. This was the same for Rhonda as meaning more fully emerged from her students rather than her ideas.

RHONDA: Through Garoian’s teachings (2002), Rhonda discovered that inviting student life experiences into the art classroom truly did offer a more relevant and meaningful avenue for student learning. Students more readily attached the new content presented in class to their established understandings of the world, allowing for what Garoian refers to as “interplay.” Through such experiences, students expressed conditions within their personal lives, responded to encounters with material and visual culture, and then to each other, empowering themselves as valid resources for their learning and construction of identity (Bolin & Blandy, 2003; Garoian, 2002). They relished the idea that their interests and life experiences were as relevant as more formally presented school material.
Because in the end, “Who is this about??”

Learning From Each Other and the Students

AMY: According to Hicks, (2004) play—such as what some students experienced with the paper dolls—is about taking risks, examining possibilities from lived experience, and exploring new encounters with the cultural world. We took risks in opening our conversations to the vulnerabilities of teaching—the constant dialogue between learner and mentor where roles were fluid and one construction was not more powerful than the other. Our bodies are mapped and marked with our experiences inside and outside of school. It is about both receiving and repelling how we are in the “space” of school and how we might open up new paths to traverse. We examined our encounters from the cultural world and lived experience as we saw and experienced how our bodies were mapped with our professional identities and how this marked the ways in which we influenced the landscape of our classroom practice. In allowing her students to play—to make their own rules within Rhonda’s established limits of safety and respect—there was a level of risk. The learning opportunities she offered her students were also subject to the worldview of the community at large.

RHONDA: I encountered internal tension in my concern with how school and community might judge my practices. As boys played with gender-bending appearances in the paper doll project, I wondered if I might be questioned for accepting and supporting actions that might be discouraged by expectations of others in the community. As girls played with appearances that their parents might disapprove of, would my approach to teaching be misconstrued as challenging family values?

What Did This Project/Our Stories Tell Us?

RHONDA and AMY: James Haywood Rolling Jr. (2004) reminds us that the knowledge we transmit in art cannot always be transmitted scientifically. Artmaking was the fluid space for students to play with their understandings of the self within their community and also to play with possibility in how they viewed themselves. This play extended to an arena where we, as mentor and mentee, simultaneously broke away from the tensions between theory and practice by making theory a living and breathing aspect of the curriculum landscape. Through our dialogue we could tease out the tensions between the formal curriculum and the IBAL project where personally meaningful content and Big Ideas were presented. Because we were able to talk about the discourses we operated within, to name our otherness, we were more willing to risk playing together, opening student possibility in curriculum, and in the end illuminating the richness that develops from curriculum that derives from students’ identities. And because our curriculum afforded deep reflection, we understood how our professional identity greatly impacts what we choose to teach, how we teach, and how we position ourselves and our students.

So What Does This Mean for Our Teaching Practices?

RHONDA: For me, discussing, probing, and revealing one’s professional identity is essential. Educators need to be open and reflective in how they see “other.” This is especially important in examining identity from the lens of White, middle to upper-middle class, and Christian privilege. Also of significance is the openness with one’s mentors where individuals guide each other in navigating one’s understandings of us as teachers, researchers, and students. In turn, this creates a space to reflect on our teacher–student interactions related to identity and its impact on curriculum.
AMY: This work reaffirmed my earlier research as a doctoral student, which explored how my personal and professional identity impacted my teaching and choices in curriculum. I have gone deeper by unpacking the impact of socioeconomic status on my teaching to the ways in which being White also deeply embodies and privileges my professional identity. This is part of the process.

We must also examine the deep entanglement of bringing theory to practice with the challenges and threats faced by many art education programs. One of my continuous internal struggles as both a supervisor of student teachers and my work with graduate students is the sensitivity in honoring the demands of teaching art in K-12 settings, teachers’ own feelings of resistance when they want to push and play with curriculum, to the safety of remaining within the confines of the status quo because of the challenges of time, lack of resources, and particular expectations of the art curriculum based on the culture of the school and community.

We attempted to “let go of some of the old familiar projects” based on elements and principles of design but we know we have farther to go (Gude, 2013, p. 6). Rhonda continually felt challenged by the expectations of the established school curriculum and the focus on finished products. This also fit with Gude’s (2010) skepticism of evaluating final projects because of the contradiction with opening spaces for cultivating creativity. We wanted projects to be meaningful through Big Ideas implemented at the center of students’ artistic practice (Stewart & Walker, 2005). Because of ongoing tensions within our own field, support through mentoring and ongoing dialogue is necessary in order to traverse the “muddy waters of our consciousness” (Dillard, 1999) and map new landscapes of possibility—to honor the complicated stories and landscapes within sites of artistic practice.

RHONDA and AMY: Because in the end, “Who is this about?”

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ENDNOTE

This work was further completed in Rhonda’s thesis: Tomel, R. (2014). A pedagogical exploration of teacher and student identity in relation to art classroom practice (unpublished master’s thesis). Kutztown University, Kutztown, PA.
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In the Studies article "Multiple Interruptions: Creative Encounters in Public Art and Public Pedagogy, A North–South Dialogue," Danny Wildemeersch and Astrid von Kotze write about the productive force of blurring institutional boundaries. They state: "As we negotiated our different relations of engagement with theory and practice across different contexts and scholarly traditions, we did not wish to pit one interpretation against another in a binary either/or competition of testing validity; instead, we explored how a dialogue on understandings generated from different contexts and places could lead to the emergence of new insights, questions, and values" (p. 314). Amber Ward is enacting a similar form of negotiation in this article, exploring the structural forms created in academia through playful and provocative textual interruptions. Where Wildemeersch and von Kotze engage in dialogue, Ward converses with her research subjects; she also establishes a dialogue within the data, creating codings that provide the reader with multiple interpretations and hypertextual possibilities.

As a first-generation doctoral student, I have often found the path toward an academic career both daunting and mysterious. The lack of scholarship on faculty preparation and responsibilities (Gaff, 2007) related to visual art and design education exacerbates the issue. A comprehensive and balanced illustration of the professoriate in our field might remedy these concerns and would arguably include a variety of extraordinary (e.g., artmaking) and ordinary (e.g., service) experiences.

I build on Brekhus’ (1998) notion of the marked and unmarked “as basic features of social perception” (p. 36) to include extraordinary experiences [denoted in orange throughout], which represent the “uncommon features of social life” (p. 34) and ordinary experiences [denoted in blue], which embody the “taken-for-granted elements of social reality” (p. 34). Visual disruptions in the text give readers, or current and prospective graduate students in visual art and design education, the space to internalize these professional experiences from a range of academic careers. My aim below is to demystify the professoriate by highlighting what unmarkedness does (Colebrook, 2002). I have placed interpretative-meanings about unmarkedness in-
I use “thick descriptions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 227) of three participants’ marked and unmarked experiences to provide a detailed account of the professoriate. Both purposeful convenience and maximum variation sampling (Merriam, 1998) allowed for possible differences that might result from varying ages, titles, responsibilities, and institution affiliations. I interviewed each participant for 1 hour via Skype using a semistructured format consisting of 12 questions, and conducted two brief follow-up interviews by e-mail for clarifying purposes. Member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling helped establish trustworthiness. In what follows, I present the participants individually and arrange their experiences into three themes: (a) considering the professoriate, (b) professional responsibilities, and (c) tenure and nontenure pathways.

Each participant’s story begins in one of the following distinct institution types: special-focus, research-intensive, and post-baccalaureate. A special-focus institution, as defined by Carnegie Foundation (2008-2010b), is “based on the concentration of degrees [at least 75%] in a single field or set of related fields at both the undergraduate and graduate levels,” (para. 26) whereas research-intensive institutions are those with “very high” aggregate level and per-capita research activity (para. 14). Post-baccalaureate colleges and universities include both professional (e.g., law school) and master’s degree programs but do not award doctoral degrees (Carnegie Foundation, 2008-2010c). Of the 4,500 public and private secondary institutions in the United States, Carnegie Foundation (2008-2010a) lists 129 special-focus institutions with an emphasis in art, music, and/or design; 108 doctorate-granting institutions with very high research activity; and 1,704 post-baccalaureate institutions. Institution affiliations contribute to the participants’ marked and unmarked experiences. I now highlight the career-related experiences of one faculty member working in a special-focus institution.

DR. SUMAN:
Special-Focus Institution

Art College1 was established in the late-19th century as a private institution and continues to be a leader in the fields of visual art, design, and art education. Located in the heart of a large city on the east coast, it is home to a community of around 2,000 students working toward bachelor’s or master’s degrees. Art College’s avant-garde programs have a reputation for being both rigorous and thoughtful. Dr. Suman’s roles as the co-director of and instructor in the Masters of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) Program complement her earned doctorate in Art Education.

Considering the Professoriate

“As an exercise in matchmaking,” Dr. Suman recommended that graduate students considering the professoriate research various institution types and their departments. Adams (2002) offered similar advice:

Because a single position announcement can elicit hundreds of applications, it is critical that graduate students become savvy about how best to match their skills and interests to potential jobs and thus make wise decisions about where to apply. They must also learn how to best present their credentials in order to stand out among a large number of qualified applications. (p. 9)

According to Dr. Suman, a candidate should present clear and thorough credentials in a peer-edited curriculum vita (CV). Current and prospective graduate students may also want to attend CV-building workshops at college campus career centers to gain additional insight.

Regarding her faculty preparation, Dr. Suman stated, “I should have tried to get myself published before I graduated.” Publishing as a doctoral student can (a) make for a more marketable professoriate candidate, (b) provide a supportive foundation for future scholarship, and (c) help establish effective writing habits. After entering the professoriate, making time for research and writing can be difficult because it takes discipline. Dr. Suman said, “Learning how to craft time is definitely the most challenging part of my job. I have a tendency to over-commit.” On finding balance, she strives to stay organized, exercise regularly, and practice “Sacred Saturdays,” where she suspends all work communication for 1 day. Her students have consequently learned to respect Dr. Suman’s time and those clearly defined boundaries.
**Professional Responsibilities**

**Teaching.** Teaching loads may vary depending on institution affiliation. Dr. Suman stated, “Teaching proficiency is Art College’s number-one concern for its faculty” and would, therefore, be considered a teaching college—or one that places less emphasis on research and more on teaching. She maintains a 3/3 teaching load (three spring courses and three fall courses) while advising numerous art education students pursuing Art College’s graduate teacher preparation and certification degree. As an advisor, Dr. Suman’s responsibilities range from tutoring and mentoring to assisting students with course selection and time management (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Teaching and advising represent 60% of her professional responsibilities.

**Research.** Dr. Suman spends 20% of her time working on research and/or making art. It is important to note that Art College views artmaking and participation in juried exhibitions as viable research. A potential or current graduate student should consider her/his self-identity as an artist-teacher, because some institutions emphasize and value artmaking, while others may not.

**Service.** In addition to teaching and research, Dr. Suman dedicates around 20% of her time to committee work and faculty meetings. Art College encourages its faculty and students to be involved in community relations and development through its numerous outreach programs. Beyond the institution, Dr. Suman has a strong record of presenting at state, regional, and national conferences.

**Nontenure Pathway**

When I asked Dr. Suman about tenure at Art College, she replied: “We don’t have it; instead, each faculty member undergoes a 3- to 5-year renewal process through a portfolio review. I like this because it keeps people from sitting back on their laurels.” Art College’s portfolio-review process may contribute to its reputation for excellence in teaching. Gappa and Austin (2010), however, claimed that nontenure appointments require… rethinking how to maintain such important academic traditions as academic freedom, shared governance, and a collegial community of scholars (p. 4), as these faculty members often feel marginalized and isolated. Dr. Suman’s nontenure-track position at Art College ironically seems to provide Gappa & Austin’s recommended essential elements for satisfaction, including: (a) respect, (b) employment equity, (c) academic freedom and autonomy, (d) flexibility, (e) professional growth, and (f) collegiality. We now travel nearly 1,500 miles west to State University.

**DR. MENTIS: Research-Intensive Institution**

Students enrolled in State University, located in the Midwest, can expect to study alongside 50,000 others. This public flagship institution has a reputation for very high research activity and is a member of the Association for American Universities. Dr. Mentis works in her chosen field of art museum education as an Assistant Professor of Visual Art Studies and Art Education at State University. While State University is a doctoral-granting institution, The Department of Art and Art History offers BFA and MA degrees only.

**Considering the Professoriate**

Dr. Mentis encouraged prospective graduate students in the field of visual art and design education “to attend the best schools they can or find advisors that they admire and want to work with.” Future- and current graduate students considering the professoriate may want to reflect on their strengths and overall perspective on teaching and research when applying for schools and faculty positions. When Dr. Mentis and I talked about marketability, she strongly recommended that candidates make a record of publication a top priority. She stated, “Art education professors must have something to contribute to the field. Publishing and research bring prestige and recognition to your school and program.” Dr. Mentis reported that she wished she had identified her research topic early enough to begin publishing her work as a doctoral student; she offered the same advice to faculty-track students.

**Research.** After we discussed teaching and advising, Dr. Mentis and I returned to the theme of publishing: “The dean expects about 1-2 articles a year. The department cares very much about the length of our articles and the reputation of national and international publications.” Some journals are more revered than others (West & Rich, 2012). In the field of visual art and their appointments. Tenure-track faculty members typically have 6 years to establish a strong portfolio of teaching, research, and service in preparation for promotion and tenure. Writing a dissertation during an inaugural academic assignment often means working on borrowed time. Nontenure-track faculty, however, need not worry about the proverbial tenure-clock.

**Professional Responsibilities**

**Teaching.** Dr. Mentis has a standard 2/2 teaching load of an assistant professor at a research-intensive university. Fewer teaching responsibilities give professors more time for research. Tenure-track faculty members ordinarily dedicate 40% of their time to teaching, 40% to research, and 20% to service. Depending on the institution, advising responsibilities usually fall into either the teaching or service category.

Dr. Mentis advises nearly half of the institution’s 40 MA students. Advising at State University looks very much like that at Art College with one exception: the M.A.T. degree at Art College includes teacher-certification while students seeking State University’s professional M.A. degree are already teachers. Students enrolled in the latter complete a master’s thesis thereby elevating Dr. Mentis’ advising responsibilities. On this she stated, “I appreciate the stimulation, conversation, and camaraderie.” Dr. Mentis’ favorite part of the professoriate is working with the students “in [State University]’s diverse three-track program where they gain exposure to the schools, museums, and community.” These sentiments are consistent with what Lindholm (2004) found while interviewing 36 full-time professors: “Teaching is… a highly rewarding component of faculty work. The degree of pleasure that [faculty members] derive from their work-related pursuits is substantial enough to lead some to conceptualize their professional activities as more analogous to play than work” (p. 625).

**Research.** As we discussed teaching and advising, Dr. Mentis and I returned to the theme of publishing: “The dean expects about 1-2 articles a year. The department cares very much about the length of our articles and the reputation of national and international publications.” Some journals are more revered than others (West & Rich, 2012). In the field of visual art and
design education, for example, higher-tier journals have low acceptance/high rejection rates. Submitted manuscripts generally go through a rigorous double-blind review process where the author(s) and their reviewers are mutually anonymous. The lower-tier practitioner-based journals—often emphasizing instructional design—carry very little weight during the tenure review process.

Adams (2002) stated, “Graduate faculty... are tied to a reward structure that reinforces research productivity above all other responsibilities that faculty assume” (p. 12). It is important to note that this structure also reinforces gender inequality. Women often have less time for research because they tend to work in disciplines that have high teaching loads (Aguirre, Fairweather, Tierney, & Bensimon, as cited in Umbach, 2007). Dr. Mentis stated, “I can get into trouble with the publishing thing because I love teaching. While I write well, I should spend more time doing it.”

Service. In addition to an active publishing record, State University expects its faculty to be engaged in service to the field. Dr. Mentis has been the Instructional Resources Coordinator for Art Education; worked on an NAEA research committee; and presented at state, regional, and national conferences. She has also worked on an NAEA research committee; presented at state, regional, and national conferences. She has also worked on an NAEA research committee; presented at state, regional, and national conferences.

Tenure Pathway

Dr. Mentis began her career on the tenure-track at a neighboring institution but “applied for a nontenured position at [State University] in hopes of returning home.” She accepted State University’s offer, but eventually secured a tenure-track position. During our conversation, Dr. Mentis mentioned her family several times: “My father also earned his PhD and my mother was a lecturer at [State University].” Her mother played a pivotal role in initiating State University’s museum education program. Although Dr. Mentis did not explicitly say so, I suspect “the influence of [her] inherent personal characteristics coupled with family dynamics and parents’ vocational pursuits resulted in a... determination that an academic career likely was ‘right’” (Lindholm, 2004, p. 615).

The promotion and tenure process at State University has a reputation for being demanding; accordingly, Dr. Mentis has the option of taking leave for one semester in order to prepare her portfolio. This perk is rare in most academic settings. As an associate professor, Dr. Mentis would have an opportunity to experience many of the essential elements for satisfaction that Gappa and Austin (2010) suggested earlier, including academic autonomy and freedom. Dr. Mentis’ story ends here, as we transition from State University to Jasper University in the Southeast.

DR. BERBET:
Post-Baccalaureate Institution

Situating in an agricultural town of about 20,000 people, Jasper University is a public, flagship institution with five other campuses in the state. The entire student population of Jasper University is around 30,000. A majority of the degrees awarded have been in professional fields (bachelor’s) and in business (master’s) (Carnegie Foundation, 2008-2010c). Dr. Berbet recently earned her doctorate and accepted a full-time nontenure-track lecturer position at Jasper University.

Considering the Professoriate

She began applying for full-time academic positions in visual art and design education in the spring shortly before graduation. Dr. Berbet recommended in hindsight that prospective and current graduate students begin this process about 1 year before graduation. She also suggested that individuals “get as much teaching experience as possible, especially at the college-level.” Like most college classrooms, Dr. Berbet’s “instructional classroom” is outfitted with computer technology including a projector, document camera, Mimio interactive board, and Control Module. She learned how to integrate unfamiliar equipment, applications, and programs into her curriculum in a very short time to adapt to her new environment. Dr. Berbet accomplished this “while juggling the other responsibilities that come with a new position.” In sum, she said that individuals considering the professoriate should be technologically literate.

Professional Responsibilities

Teaching. Dr. Berbet taught visual art and design at the elementary level for 17 years while working toward a PhD in Educational Research during the last 7 of those years. After earning her doctorate, Dr. Berbet accepted a position outside of her preferred field of visual art and design education to “teach art appreciation courses for nonmajors.” She maintains a 6/6 teaching load (four face-to-face and two online courses) at Jasper with around 45 students in each class. This is a massive
Presenting these experiences within a range of institution types has provided a varied understanding of what it looks like to be a visual art and design education professor.

Service. Dr. Berbet’s history of active service includes being (a) invited to participate on Jasper’s Thesis Committee and the institution’s Student Art Education Association chapter of NAEA, (b) a member of two NAEA research committees, and (c) the President-Elect of the Art Education Association in her state. Kezar and Sam (2010) said that full-time, nontenure-track faculty members often spend 51% of their time engaged in service. Unlike Dr. Suman and Dr. Mentis, however, Dr. Berbet does not have any advising responsibilities. Considering her teaching load, research activity, and committee work, Dr. Berbet still manages to make time for herself. She finds balance by not bringing work home in the evenings so that she can instead read, exercise, and Skype with family.

Nontenure Pathway

Nontenure-track faculty members in post-baccalaureate institutions earn salaries comparable to their tenure-track colleagues; however, disparities surface when research-intensive institutions (Baldwin & Chronister, as cited in Kezar & Sam, 2010) like State University enter the comparison. Dr. Berbet’s salary decreased by $11,000 when she transitioned from a career in elementary to higher education. A pay cut is unfortunately the norm for visual art and design educators transitioning into the professoriate. According to Umbach’s (2007) analysis of the 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty and the Survey of Earned Doctorates, faculty members “doing the women’s work” (p. 188) in undervalued disciplines such as education earn less than their peers in other-content areas. Salaries also vary by institution type. An assistant professor at a public doctoral institution, for example, may make around $86,000 while an instructor at a public post-baccalaureate institution may earn around $40,000 annually (Chronicle of Higher Foundation, 2013). It is important to note that “these figures include salaries of highly paid faculty in professional schools like medicine, law, and business as well as other fields” (Gaff, 2007, p. 17).

During the interview and hiring process, Dr. Berbet negotiated a nontenure-track lecturer position on a 12-month contract with benefits instead of the adjunct position that Jasper originally posted. On nontenure pathways, the American Association of University Professors reported (1993):

Non-tenure track faculty account for about half of all faculty appointments in American higher education. The non-tenure track consists of two major groups: those who teach part time and those who teach full time but are not on tenure-track lines. Part-time faculty now hold 38 percent of faculty appointments, and non-tenure-track, full-time faculty hold 20 percent. (para. 1)

The percentage of nontenure-track positions has increased since the Association’s Council adopted the report 20 years ago (J. Hart, personal communication, January 28, 2013). Shuster stated, “In the year 2001 only about a quarter of new faculty appointments were to full-time, tenure track positions...” (as cited in Gaff, 2007, p. 13). This means that many individuals entering the professoriate will find themselves in positions similar to Dr. Berbet’s. In the following discussion, I compare and contrast the three faculty members’ experiences and make recommendations for the future of the professoriate.

Discussion

Dr. Suman, Dr. Mentis, and Dr. Berbet’s experiences have led to different thoughts about professional responsibilities, identity, and pathways. Presenting these experiences within a range of institution types has provided a varied understanding of what it looks like to be a visual art and design education professor. Both Dr. Mentis and Dr. Suman recommended that graduate students establish evidence of research and examine departmental characteristics and personalities when considering the professoriate, while Dr. Berbet underlined teaching and technology experience. In this case, the research-intensive and special-focus institutions value faculty publications/shows while the post-baccalaureate institution highlights instructional applications.

During an academic year, the participants’ teaching loads range from 2/2 and 3/3 on one end to 6/6 on the other. The research-intensive and special-focus institutions seem to support faculty members’ holistic development as teachers/advisors, researchers, and patrons of visual art and design education. Research responsibilities...
also vary among the participants. The research-intensive institution, for example, expects Dr. Mentis to spend 40% of her professional time on research or written scholarship. The special-focus institution provides neither time nor support for Dr. Berbet to engage in research. Scholars might argue that conducting research at some level is important because it has the potential to improve pedagogical practices and career marketability in higher education. While all three participants seemingly spend over 20% of their professional time on service to the field, the breadth and depth of Dr. Berbet’s commitments are noteworthy.

Being informed about the un/markedness of both nontenure- and tenured-track positions is important because many current and prospective graduate students end up on nontenure-track pathways. While Dr. Berbet seemed professionally content-with a nontenure-track position-in a post-baccalaureate institution, she also seemed overworked and undervalued. Her academic career differs from both Dr. Mentis and Dr. Suman’s in that it lacks similar levels of employment equity, academic autonomy, and opportunity for professional growth (Gappa & Austin, 2010). Placing interpretative meanings like these in strike-through font has revealed a silencing of the bleak career-rewards forecast for prospective and current graduate students considering the professoriate. In light of this silence and disparity, said students might want to reflect on the following questions if/when considering the faculty track: Can I afford a decrease in salary? Do I value academic freedom and autonomy? Do I value opportunities for professional development? What is my perspective on academic and gender equity? How might my gender inform the division of my time? What is my opinion of teaching and research? What are my strengths as an artist/researcher/teacher? Do I value my artist-teacher identity? Would I enjoy mentoring/advising students? Am I technologically-literate? In what ways am I disciplined?

The un/ marking of faculty members’ varied experiences has presented a need for future research in our field about our field to address identified woes. Such studies may include educational diversity, ethnic and racial representation, and gender, salary, and employment equity in higher education. In light of the current state of the professoriate, one might ask: What is the incentive for visual art and design educators like myself to pursue an academic career? A preservice educator named Shelby responded to this question most semester within the context of a moving thank-you note: “Through your class I have become empowered to change myself for the better, confident in myself for the first time in my life, and never more sure about where I’m going.” A more diverse and equitable field of visual art and design education scholars would offset the aforementioned bleak career-rewards forecast by empowering the 21st-century learners of today and leaders of tomorrow.

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REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

1 All institutions in this article are pseudonyms.

2 All names in this article are pseudonyms.
Practice Theory: Seeing the Power of Art Teacher Researchers

MELANIE L. BUFFINGTON and SARA WILSON MCKAY, EDITORS

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