

ARTIST AS TEACHER AS ARTIST

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by

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## Inspiration – Narrative of Practice

I believed that Art was only possible as a spare time pursuit until I received guidance from my grade twelve art teacher. An art teacher that is knowledgeable about possible future careers in art, able to practice his or her art and apply it to his or her career as an art teacher becomes the perfect role model for artistic youth. My grade twelve art teacher made all the difference in my world as a student passionate about art. She was the one to show me that art had a more significant role in the world than just as a *fun* class to take in school. I discovered that an individual could pursue Art as a career and turn it into a successful future. Without the encouragement of my grade twelve Art teacher, or the vast knowledge she had through indulging in her own artistic practices, I do not believe I would be in a classroom teaching. She made being an artist and a teacher work together in harmony to create the best circumstance for inspiring and motivating students in her teaching practice, personal artistic practice and local art community. The assignments she gave to students in class were stimulated by her practice as an artist. They were not your everyday, run-of-the-mill drawing or collage assignments. Through her guidance, we learned techniques to build skill and methods to express our own individual creativity. All of our student works were proudly displayed upon completion and constructively critiqued with helpful suggestions and advice from other students and the art teacher.

She would sit at her desk and often work on her own art during class. I remember being the student that looked over her shoulder, curious to see what she was doing and how she was doing it. She would often give me extra projects to work on once I completed the in class assignments. The projects were similar to something she was working on herself. I particularly remember being sent off to the Industrial Arts room to sand down the edges on a piece of Plexiglass to

make an intaglio printmaking plate while my classmates continued their work on a class assignment. I engraved, inked, and printed a series of work. Upon request, I gave my grade twelve art teacher a print from the series. Through her vast knowledge of art theory, techniques and creation of her own work, my grade twelve art teacher empowered me as a student through meaningful art experiences. She allowed me to be a collaborator and facilitator of my own learning in art class making it a meaningful experience. I realized that Art had the possibility of being so much more than a spare time hobby. I discovered I could turn my passion into a career.

I grew up with skill and ability in art. It was something I practiced all the time. My earliest memories are colouring with my mom in colouring books. Drawing and colouring was something I loved to do. Some of my friends could play multiple instruments, others were on every sports team at school, but I was good at art. I chose art as an elective all through high school. I enjoyed math, chemistry, physics and art class. Classmates would often ask for my help to better explain how to do problems in math and physics. A classmate made the comment one day that I would be a good teacher. It was a career choice that had never occurred to me as there were no other teachers in my family. I knew if I was going to consider teaching that I would have to teach something that I enjoyed.

By my grade twelve year it was time to start thinking about University. With more guidance from my grade twelve art teacher I found the Arts Education program at the University of Regina. In pursuit of my Art Education degree, I wanted to become the inspiration and role model my art students would need to pursue their passion for art as a future career. I entered into the program choosing a major in visual art. The classes required were approximately ninety percent education classes that developed and trained me as a teacher. After the five year

program I had learned how to teach art. I considered myself lucky that I was able to find a career as a teacher of Art, a subject I truly enjoyed.

I have always been anxious for the bell to ring that signals the start of art class. As a student and now as a teacher, art class allows me to understand, communicate, and express myself and the world around me to the people that surround me. Art class is mandatory in elementary and junior high school. One class in a strand of Art or Practical and Applied Art is necessary in high school in order to complete requirements to receive a high school diploma. Art is a class that can be incredibly difficult and painful to get through if students do not see its importance, lack confidence in their ability, or feel they have no skill in the field of art. A remark I hear students make in my classroom is, "I suck at art because I can't draw." I have heard students question their need to take art class. They feel it is something they will never need or does not apply to their life. I have seen repeated situations where students enter art class with a preconceived negative view that they cannot "do art" because they do not have the skill to accurately copy an image. Somewhere along the line these students were told or made to believe that they were not and never could be successful in art. They may have been told that their picture or drawing of a tree did not really look like a tree. Even though the comment was a result of one individual's perception, that individual may have been a teacher whose opinion really mattered to the student. What a tree should look like is up to the person drawing or painting it. Art around the world is the result of a variety of perceptions. I have been witness to the consequences of negative criticism. It results in a lack of self confidence and willingness, on the student's behalf, to put any effort into junior high art class or any other project that may involve an art activity.

My grade twelve Art teacher's knowledge of artists and art periods surpassed the knowledge of previous Art teachers. She continually provided students with a variety of examples of artist

styles and methods. She would point out the value of different perspectives and encourage each student to portray the assignment, whether it be a still life or abstract work, how they saw it. I gained deeper meaning and understanding of an assignment when examples of how my teacher, and different artists throughout history, expressed a specific theme in their artwork. In grade twelve we participated in an Art field trip that took learning about Art beyond the mere classroom experience. A little more than an hour bus trip took us to *Art Africa* just outside the city of Weyburn. It was here that my grade twelve Art class participated in creating and learning about the artwork and culture of Africa from African artists. This experience helped create bigger, deeper, and more meaningful connections of how Art existed beyond the classroom and as an important part of people's lives. Memorable art experiences are meaningful and enjoyable for all students no matter their ability.

Art exists in everyone's life; from the clothes we choose to wear, how we design our living spaces, to watching TV, movies, or surfing the internet. Art and design impact our lives. I want to show students that there are a *variety* of answers in art, not *right* answers. I want to enhance and give deeper meaning and importance to my art program by connecting my art making to my teaching practice. I want to give the world of art outside the classroom a pertinent place inside the classroom. The more meaningful I can make a student's educational experience in the classroom, the more student ownership there is in the learning experience through higher order thinking, independent learning and creative inquiry. I have taught middle years Arts Education for eight years and believe that a curriculum carried out in the classroom should engage and motivate students in meaningful learning experiences. A lesson should be interesting and intriguing, relevant to the students, engaging and create higher order thinking skills which empower students and focus on big ideas.

I am passionate about teaching art and sharing the knowledge I have about art. I smile every time I hear a student excited that art is on their schedule for the day, or when they respond with an exasperated sigh that they do not have art class today. I succeed at making art class fun. I make the class fun and interesting but does learning a new technique of shading with pen or intaglio printmaking really *mean* anything to me or my students? I have a deep interest in creating art that holds meaning and purpose in my life. There must be value and purpose in things I do in life otherwise, what sense is there in doing them? I am motivated and interested to pursue independent learning when a project has purpose and meaning. I want to ensure that the topics and assignments I give to my students have importance and value in their eyes. I want to motivate students and create interest in them to learn and discover significance in their own art and art around them. I believe a meaningful art class has the ability to increase a student's self confidence, give them an outlook about their own capabilities, and bring them new awareness of their surroundings.

Students often project the attitude that art has no importance or relevance to them or their lives. How a teacher approaches the subject matter they teach greatly influences how students learn. The art I created as a student were assignments with specific requirements put in place by the teacher. In my first years of teaching, the only artwork I created were examples for assignments I would give to students. I have the knowledge, skill, and ability to use a variety of materials and successfully execute different techniques. There was no connection to the artwork I created for assignments or examples of assignments for my students because there was no presence of myself in the art I created. It never expressed my own thoughts, feelings, or ideas. The art I created as class examples was not authentic. It was a visual representation of skill that lacked meaning. I felt that a true artist created artwork for personal expression. An artist's work speaks

visual volumes about an issue or concern central to the artist's life. I was not an artist. I just did art well. This was reflected in how I developed my lessons for students. My lessons focused on theory, skill and technique. My students created art to fulfill requirements and just skimmed the surface of a meaningful experience. The lessons I developed explored interesting techniques and materials but did not explore the interests and needs of students. I have not tapped into the wealth of knowledge and experience I have as an artist to create a deep learning experience for my students.

In my last few years of teaching, I have become highly involved in my local art community by teaching adult workshops and creating personal art exploring issues and concerns important to me. My art has taken on new meaning for myself as well as my students. Many issues and concerns I explored in my art evolved from my studies in the Master of Education Curriculum and Instruction program. These issues held personal value and became a form of inspiration and motivation to create art with meaning. I gained a renewed purpose for my approach to teaching and art practices. *How does my role as an artist inform my teaching practice in my art classroom?* This was the question I chose to pursue through this Action Research project.

My initial concern about merging my art practice into my teaching practice made me question my own identity roles. Was I an Artist? Did my students see me as an artist? A short time after entering the Master's Community Based Program, I gained the inspiration and motivation to explore and pursue a commitment to my own art making. The artwork I created prior to entering into the Master of Education program consisted primarily of examples for class assignments. I rarely created artwork for myself that expressed my thoughts, feelings, or ideas, I never worked on or created art with my students in class. My students never saw me involved in the process of creating art. Once I began creating artwork with a purpose and solely for myself, I never



displayed the finished product. My students have never seen any of the artwork I created outside of the classroom, based on issues and concerns I found important in my life. Creating art in the confines of my own home was comfortable, it was a safe place far from any negative comments or criticism. I always said I like to do art, but I never referred to myself as an artist. Even though I had recently started creating art for a purpose, did I have the right to call myself an artist if I never exhibited my work? I knew that in my first action I took for my project, I had to present myself as an artist to my students.

Through my reconnaissance journey, I accessed research and viewpoints from other art educators across North America. In the course of interviewing my critical friend, individuals, and artists in my community, I discovered how others perceived my identity role within the classroom, school, and community as an artist teacher. The viewpoints presented in the literature opened my eyes to see that the majority of art teachers struggle with the artist teacher identity issue. I was not alone. The interviews I conducted helped build and define my own perception of myself. The conversations with individuals I saw as artists, who did not see themselves as artists even after years of practicing their art helped me become self aware of my artist identity. Many friends and colleagues have seen me as an artist even when I did not see myself as an artist.

The actions taken for this project are the context for me coming to better understand my identity as an artist within the classroom. I first had to present myself as an artist to the students in my classroom. The students needed to understand that art existed, as part of my life, outside the classroom. I needed to bring my art practices into the classroom by sharing the art I created beyond the classroom with my students. I wanted to share the importance of art in my life, and the connection it had to my teaching and me as a teacher. The steps I take in creating my own art outside of my teaching practice needed to become part of my lessons and exist in my classroom.

In creating my own art, I look for inspiration, problem-solve, and explore the use of materials and techniques. A purpose must exist for the creation of artwork in my own art practice and, therefore, should exist in the creation of student artwork. The purpose to create provides motivation and invests personal meaning into an individual's work. The display and reflection of finished artwork brings about new perceptions, empowerment, and pride for one's accomplishment. I believe sharing my own artwork I create outside of the classroom with students illustrates the importance art can play outside the classroom in the community.

Observations and data were collected on each action I took from student and colleague responses in surveys, questionnaires and informal interviews. After sharing my work and incorporating other important aspects of my art practice into the classroom, I analyzed the data and found new understandings about how my artist role contributes to my teaching practice. My journal reflections and evolution of art making also became an important tool for self-discovery and awareness showing me how my role as artist and teacher influence each other. My reflections of how each action impacted my role in the classroom brought new understandings to my identity roles as artist and teacher. This Action Research project created new understandings of how my artist role outside the classroom contributes to the best teaching practice inside my classroom. Finding my best teaching practice in the classroom also played a part in developing my artist identity and practice.

## Exploration – Literature Review

I identified exclusively with the art teacher role prior to my Action Research project. Through my reconnaissance, I became more understanding of the qualities and attributes I bring to my teaching practice as an art educator and as an artist. I found reassurance and support in the literature review I conducted prior to undergoing any actions for my Action Research project. It helped me to see connections between my roles as art educator and artist and realize that I was not alone in facing identity issues, obstacles, concerns and challenges in the attempt to combine and balance the identity roles of artist and art educator in my teaching practice.

The literature also allowed me insight into the existing difficulties of maintaining an effective dual practice. Thornton (2005) believes that “artist teachers are constantly confronted by an identity crisis in which their artist and teacher roles, identities and practices are in conflict” (p. 171). Zwirn (2006) recognizes that an artist as teacher struggles with the conflicting attitudes they hold towards their creative and professional roles. Anderson (1981) notes that one thing separating the role of art teacher and artist is the higher level education received from institutions. Orsini (1973) concluded that “the artist-teacher is the merging of irreconcilables, for the demands of art and the demands of education do not coincide” (p. 299). Along with educational differences, the demands of art educator and artist personal perceptions, how each role views the other and the beliefs, practices, support and agendas of the artist and art educator seek various outcomes.

Constance Huddleston Anderson (1981) remarks in her article that art educators enter into educational programs where roles are often predetermined for them. The roles are often classified as professional artist or professional art educator. The two roles are segregated by

separate training, methods of instruction and prerequisites in the pursuit of professions, studies and advanced degrees educational institutes require. Hatfield, Montana and Deffenbaugh (2006) recognize that post-secondary programs can reduce the distinction and challenges between the role of artist and art educator through thoughtful and thorough art education preparation that recognizes the importance of both identities and the influence they have on each other. This would potentially build foundational identities of the artist and art teacher allowing them to weave together the two identities. The weaving of identities would create stronger, more confident, effective artist teachers upon their entrance into the work force.

In an art educator's profession they look for clarity, support, encouragement and motivation to discover their best approach displaying both expertise and excellence in their field of teaching art. Art educators have a sensible understanding that they must be educated and proficient in the area of technical skills to create art. They are also compelled to be confident in methods and strategies that induce and contribute to learning. Hausman (1967) suggests that a teacher of art must display the values, attitudes and expectations that they themselves encourage in their students. An art educator must believe in, develop and give reason for art making and convey art's importance as a form of communication and self expression.

The artist's professional outlook and way of being differs from that of the art educator's. The artist engages in the application and experimentation of techniques throughout their art making profession. For example, Hatfield, Montana and Deffenbaugh (2006) declare that "a well-developed artist identity is grounded in technical knowledge, practice and creative philosophy" (p. 43). Artists are often concerned with exploring "new, radical perspectives of self, culture, and the world of art" (Zwirn, 2006, p. 167). An artist creates a content and context for their artwork based on ideas and experiences from the artist's life. Professional artists often use these

big ideas as the content of their artwork as a means of self expression and to communicate their ideas and experiences to others.

The artist and art educator perceptions of each other are often in opposition. Burnaford (2003) describes that an art educator sees an artist as a visitor in the classroom. They come in, make a mess, make some noise, cause change and leave. They do not have to deal with the day to day classroom management, formalities of routine or structure and discipline. In the eyes of the art educator, the artist receives the glory. An artist entering the education system is expected to conform to a resolute curriculum model that rarely encourages or supports artistic growth or creation of the professional. Artists see teachers being determined to communicate traditions of the public norm and not striving for individual creativity, self-expression or aesthetic development. An artist often looks down upon the field of art education because it does not promote the importance of creating a personal or professional collection of artwork for exhibition (Zwirn, 2006).

A common stereotype from an artist's perspective is the belief that an art teacher is not good enough to be a full-time artist. This exists in the belief that those who cannot do, teach. My understanding is that in most cases, artists have another means of earning finances to help supplement their art endeavours and that ability as an artist has nothing to do with it. "It is a grave misconception to assume that art educators are an artist-trained group who did not or could not succeed as practicing artists. To accept this would imply that the profession of the teacher of art is inferior to that of the professional artist" (Anderson, 1981, p. 46).

Opposing philosophies of the artist and art educator create another obstacle in the fusion of artist as teacher. The philosophy of an art educator puts learning at the heart of their practice. The art

educator's commitment is to student learning. The curriculum and program of learning for an art educator unfolds through a process of methods and strategies of instruction to students. Anderson (1981) believes this creates the view that students are the product and the art making becomes a by-product of art education. The impact and value of the art experience created by the art educator must be explainable and measurable. The art educator motivates and encourages students in the classroom, defends the necessity of the art program to other colleagues and administration in the building and discusses the progress of student artists with parents at report card time. An art educator's responsibility is to the student. Anderson (1981) alludes to the fact that the art object or experience is the primary concern of the artist. An artist is content to simply appreciate the visual aspect of the artwork. Artists put a distinct value system on art products by paying "reverence to art objects which show evidence of creativity, originality, technical skill, self-expression, function, and aesthetic quality" (Anderson, 1981, p. 45). The context in which the artist and art educator function impacts their practice. The artist creates mainly for him or herself and is accountable only to them. Their responsibility is to continued professional growth for the creation of a body of work.

The insufficient knowledge colleagues and administrators have about art programs continues to be a challenge in the practice of artists and art educators. Respect and support of the artist identity from colleagues, administration and community provide the groundwork art educator's and artists need in their practice to build a sustainable identity for both art educator and artist. The preconceived notion that an art teacher must identify with either teacher or artist prevents personal, professional, creative, and intellectual growth. "In realizing the contradistinction between the roles of the artist and the teacher of art, one must bear in mind that the role of each is not a separate entity, but that there is a great deal of interdisciplinary fusion" (Anderson, 1981,

p. 45). Thornton (2005) defines an artist teacher as an individual who is both committed and dedicated to making and teaching art. “Armed with this knowledge, teachers can set about creating classroom environments that encourage students to work as artists work and thereby make it easier to learn about art” (Roberts, 2005, p. 43). VanDeWeghe (2006) comments that artists as teachers exhibit an increased enthusiasm and engagement to hard work and lifelong learning. Students observe this commitment and gain understanding of the importance of art. The student art experience becomes genuine, authentic and meaningful by incorporating content into the curriculum that relates to student interests and experiences. The students engage in real art making and not just exploration of media or application of technical skill.

It must be recognized that both artist and art educator share several common qualities amongst their differences. Artists in the classroom are a way to ‘enrich and support the curriculum’. (Kind, de Cosson, Irwin, Grauer, 2007, p. 840) The artist as teacher is the only art expert many students will know. There is constant reciprocal learning between artist and art educator. The artist and educator influence each other and help to shape one another’s practices. Although artists and teachers of art may have different processes with varying end results, both identity roles value and see learning as an on-going, life-long process. To help sustain the fusion of identities, both roles must be simultaneously endorsed. A successful art program is developed by the maintenance of both identities in the classroom and community. The artist teacher experiences a renewed commitment to art and teaching through the maintenance and validation of identities. Recognition as an artist and teacher is extremely empowering for individuals who are able to fuse the two roles together. (Hatfield, et al., 2006)

The impact an artist as teacher can have on an individual can leave a lasting impression and affect future decisions of those students passionate about Art. A discussion with my cousin-in-

law led us to talk about our own school experiences in art. She reflected how her brother and sister had an art teacher who was passionate and involved in the arts. Both her brother and sister have moved on into art related careers. She feels their experience with that teacher impacted the choices they made in future careers. Her own experience in art class was less encouraging, with a different teacher, who she felt did not reflect the same enthusiasm and art practice as the teacher of her brother and sister. (A.S. Blair, personal communication, October 13, 2008)

Stefanie Harrington, a local artist guest teaching in a classroom, commented that she felt sharing her photography profession with the students created more of a connection with students. They were better able to understand where the photography came from and see that artists are everyday people. Students are exposed to many artists no longer living and it is important to expose them to artists who are practicing, “creating, and pushing boundaries to what is considered art” in today’s society (S. Harrington, personal communication, March 29, 2009). Artists in the classroom, as teachers or guests, give insight into the art experience that students may not otherwise receive. Having a professional artist in the classroom gives students the chance to see the viability of pursuing art as career.

My critical friend in this project is an artist of the musical kind. Her identity as artist teacher often shifts back and forth, each role having prominent moments in certain situations, but both staying intact and in balance. She feels that everything about her music teaching comes directly from her artist background. “A lot of our area [of teaching the arts] is internalized; it’s a part of us, right. It’s not just a job” (Personal communication, November 5, 2008). The set curriculum allows her to pull from her experience and her knowledge as an artist allows her to enhance her classroom curriculum. The experiences she has had in life such as traveling, playing in a Latin band and performing with an orchestra enter into her teaching practice. She felt teaching was



restricting to her art in the beginning. Finding a way to bring her artist experiences into the classroom established and continues to maintain her dual identity and practice. 'Teaching music in school or teaching art in a school is the perfect outlet to being an artist.' (Personal communication, November 5, 2008) If a teacher is living and practicing their art, the students are going to become more engaged, absorbed and part of the learning because they can see its importance and part in their teacher's life.

Before departing down the path on which this project would lead me, I saw myself as only identifying with the role of art teacher. I had a great depth of knowledge about art, media, styles, artists and techniques. However, I did not feel I identified with the role of artist. The art I created was skill based and made as examples for the activities students created in class. I incorporated little content or context base for work that gave students opportunity for self-expression. No other artists were guests in my classroom and all work and art experiences took place inside the classroom. I attended little to no professional development opportunities to develop my artistic practice or my art teaching practice. Students created assignments to be handed in, which were marked and often displayed in the hallways. I did not initiate group discussion, reflection or class critiques as part of our classroom experience. Understanding the differences and separations between the role of the artist and teacher helped me to make sense of my own identity issue as both artist and teacher in the classroom. Defining the purpose and goals of the artist and teacher separately, allowed me to see the areas where the roles fuse more clearly. I better understand what the artist and educator hope and want to achieve through seeing the similarities. The literature made me reflect on my motives, beliefs and commitments to my artist and art educator identity. I reflected on my reasons for teaching art and the aims and goals in my practice.

Through reconnaissance, I knew my first area of inquiry for my project would as a necessity reveal and explore my identity as artist in order to create a dual practice of artist teacher. My artist identity needed to be introduced and present in my classroom in order to understand the effect of my artist on my teaching practice. I needed to recognize, acknowledge and gain confidence in my identity and purpose as artist in order to create a dual practice. By sharing a slide show of my artwork, I introduced myself to my students through my artwork. In order for my students to see me as an artist in the classroom, they needed to see and understand that I created art in my time outside of school. I needed to see that my art practices outside of the classroom had value and purpose in the classroom.

## Application - Methodology

I see many similarities between the processes of action research and my own art making process. Identifying the concern or question I wish to pursue in my practice is much like finding the inspiration for creating a work of art. The concern is something closely related to or affecting me as the artist. The reconnaissance of my concern as teacher researcher corresponds with the acquisition of technique and ability in an artist's desired medium. I also like to discover as much as possible about the subject of my artwork through research. I find a variety of sources that enable me to gather as much information as I can about the idea, place or object on which my art is based. Application and experimentation of techniques and media result in varying effects of the artwork. These become the actions in the artist's art making. I then reflect and assess the information I gathered to see if the techniques and media created desired effects for the subject of my artwork. Exhibition of the final artwork allows the artist to acquire feedback on the impact their artwork has on viewers. Reflecting on feedback and the amount of artwork sales gives the artist acuity into their success of practice. The artist is at the center of art making and it embraces every part of the artist's life and world.

McNiff (2001) notes that it is a personal aspect of an individual's practice being explored in action research. The issues and questions raised are present and meaningful to the individual and their practice. Action research is a cyclical process allowing me to get at the heart of a question that is meaningful to me as researcher. The cycle of action research has allowed me to gain a deeper understanding for improving my practice. Upon review of my practice, I identified a concern I wished to explore that would inform my best teaching practice. Once I identified my concern in my practice, actions were made to alter the outcome of my concern. I made observations and collected data to determine the result of the action taken, and then reflected on

the collected data. I continued to repeat this cycle taking a number of actions that helped me to answer my question and develop my best practice.

The individual is the center of action research. In action research O'Brien (2001) points out that the individual becomes the researcher and learns by doing. An individual gains pertinent knowledge of their own issues and concerns when they solve problems and find answers themselves. Action research has allowed me to explore a personal aspect of my teaching practice and lead me to discover my best practice.

The social factor of action research takes place in the everyday world dealing with everyday issues. My issue and area of concern affects the confidence and certainty of my everyday teaching practice and the students I impact in my classroom. The action research process offers me the flexibility in my classroom to see immediate impact of my actions and to quickly determine the next, best suited action according to the needs of the situation. This method of research has allowed me to focus on an issue that directly applies to the better understanding of my practice. Action research has allowed me to gain a well-formed perspective of my issue from taking on the role of facilitator, listener, observer, analyzer and reporter. Based on the action taken, I have been able to gain immediate feedback in order to help determine my next course of action.

The participants involved become an integral part of the study and often become researchers themselves, concerned with the outcome. The participants in my study have included students in my classroom, fellow colleagues, a critical friend who is an artist teacher working in the classroom and local community artists. These participants became part of my action research by sharing common interest or concerns about the presence of the artist's role in the classroom. The

various methods and sources from which I collected data helped me to gain a more reasonable understanding of my issue. I collected data through student answered surveys and questionnaires, student artwork, informal dialogue and interviews, as well as documenting my own thoughts and reflections through journaling to help me gain the most impartial, informed understanding of my question. Documentation of comments and responses to surveys and questionnaires were recorded from students to gain an understanding of the effects of my actions from their perspective. Informal interviews were conducted with local artists, students and my critical friend to gain differing perspectives on the role of artist in the classroom and learning experience. Visual and literary responses were also obtained from student participants. During the action research project, my personal responses and reflections were recorded through daily personal journaling in response to various aspects of my practice and actions taken in my project. These various methods of data collection from many sources allowed me to gain an impartial understanding into my situation. Much of my time allowed me to reflect upon the data collecting and analyzing in a cyclical nature in order to alter or change following actions to fit the needs of my situation.

Action research is carried out in real-world situations; much of the communication involved is open dialogue and requires close attention to ethical consideration. Before beginning my action research, I remitted consent forms to my administrator and school board, before beginning the project, stating the project and guidelines that would direct my venture. Students were made aware that participation was strictly voluntary. Consent forms were sent home with students for parents to review and returned by the students who wished to participate in my project.

Information collected via surveys, questionnaires, observations and interviews were obtained from only those participants from whom I had permission. No names or identifying remarks are

used in any circumstance to maintain confidentiality in my research. Wherever possible, information was aggregated. Participants were made aware about the nature and purpose of my research process from the beginning.

The use of a critical friend throughout my research has offered me an alternative view with fresh insights and expertise. Independent of my project, my critical friend has provided me with thought provoking questions to view and approach things in multiple ways. She has been my sounding board and offered valuable judgements through her understanding of education and art making. My critical friend has helped me to think through the development of my surveys and questionnaires and kept me on track and in focus of the key issue when I begin to merge in too many directions. My critical friend has helped me to include a variety of perspectives and values in review of my practice. The critiques offered have been essential in assessing the quality of my research. It has helped me to be accountable and to note the importance of including the participants' voice in my research. She offered support and insight on the identity roles I utilize in the classroom and how these identity roles evolved throughout my project.

## Experimentation – Action Research Cycles

My project focus is all about my emerging understanding of my artist identity and practices and those of my teaching practice. The initial distinction between my artist and teacher identities is that as an artist, I am concerned with the creation of a body of work. As a teacher I am concerned with students learning via meaningful experiences. Introducing myself as an artist to my students by showing them a body of artwork I created outside of the classroom in my role as artist seemed to be the most logical first action to take. This allowed me to fit one part of my artist identity into my teaching practice. My introduction as an artist, showing students my artwork, had to be more than just a display of my art; it had to fuse my artist identity with my teacher identity. I created a slideshow of images of my artwork that reflected the three units of study we would look at during the year. Sharing my artwork with students in this way became part of the learning experience, and not just a display of art. It gave students an introduction to the art curriculum we would be exploring this year and an introduction to their artist teacher.

The artworks I selected for the PowerPoint reflected the three units of study we would focus on throughout the year in our art curriculum. The first category was artwork I created from viewing the world around me. The images consisted of paintings of fruit, flowers, landscapes and the people who are part of my life. The second grouping of artworks focused on how I created art through reinvention, change and alteration of objects and images. The pieces in this category included old furniture, snowboard equipment and old artwork that I refurbished and enhanced with aesthetic qualities. The final category was artwork I created as personal expression. With each image I was able to give students background information on the reason it was created as the works were created to express my own ideas about specific issues I was presented with in a public mural, poster design and personal tattoo design.

The first sharing of my PowerPoint was with a grade nine class. “The fact that they have known me for a year, gave me some reassurance and comfort, but I was still nervous, shaky and talking extremely fast – not giving a lot of time for responses” (Journal Notes, September 10, 2008). I was surprised at how much my confidence became a factor in sharing my artist identity with students. I am not a nervous person as a teacher. Sharing my artwork exposed a very vulnerable side of my identity. The grade nine students were quiet, very engaged and attentive to the PowerPoint of my artwork. My grade nine students expressed surprise in my technical ability and that I had created the artwork they were viewing. Without prompt, two of my grade nine classes offered a round of applause to show their appreciation at the end of the PowerPoint show of my artwork. The more often I engage in the actions of an artist, specifically exhibiting my work, and receiving positive feedback, the more confidence I feel in my ability as an artist and purpose as an art teacher.

I felt “a stronger connection was established with my grade nine students as having taught them the previous year” (Journal Notes, September 10, 2008). A bond had been built after having taught art to most of the grade nine students in their grade eight year. I felt more at ease and comfortable with them and found it easier to share my personal artwork with them. I found it much more difficult in sharing my artwork with the grade eight students. I had only known them for approximately two weeks and having not taught them last year; no prior rapport had been established.

The reactions from the grade eight students varied significantly to those of the grade nines. I wondered if it was due to the age group or that a previous teacher student relationship did not exist. The grade eight students displayed a lesser amount of engagement and respect towards my first action of sharing my artwork as an introduction to our art curriculum for the year. Their



actions made me feel somewhat insecure in my ability as an artist. “I wonder if rapport, trust and respect will grow faster with having shared this side of me with my grade eight students who I have not taught in previous years” (Journal Notes, September 12, 2008).

A new concern that arose from this action was that if students don't feel my art creating is pertinent to the classroom, how will they view my ability as an art teacher? The response of some grade eight students showed lack of interest and care, but other comments I recorded reflected their interest, surprise and astonishment at the materials I used, my ability and the quantity of art I produced. In previous years at this time, I still felt very uncomfortable with the grade eight students and had little interaction with them in the hallways. I did not know much about them and they knew little of me. This year I have felt more comfortable and secure enough to joke around with them already. I offered personal information about myself through the PowerPoint introduction. “They did not react like the grade nine students but I feel this action may contribute to a faster connection strengthening the student-teacher relationship” (Journal Notes, September 17, 2008).

From this initial action, I gained the understanding that various aspects of my art making practice easily fit into my art teaching practice. The depth of understanding and knowledge I have in art practices compliment my teaching practices. My own experiences as an artist enhance and supplement my classroom curriculum. The students make more of a connection to what they are learning in the classroom when I share examples of my artwork and how I am able to apply it to my life. I feel this first action strengthened the trust and confidence my students had in me as their art teacher. It gave them insight and an understanding as to why I am an art teacher and the passion I have for art. The value of learning about art impacts students when they see the importance and application art has in my life. My nervousness and apprehension to perform this

first action came from my lack of confidence in my artist identity and art practice. My students were surprised to learn that I did not see myself as an artist. The grade nine students commented that they saw me as an artist last year without seeing or knowing about my art making outside of school. I question what actions I took last year for students to draw this conclusion? I feel sharing personal aspects of myself through the art PowerPoint has strengthened already existing bonds, established my role and ability of artist as teacher identity respect, and shown students the dedication and commitment I have towards my role as their art teacher. The last grade eight class to see my artist introduction PowerPoint questioned me about my role as artist. They caused me to reflect on questions I had never asked myself. The intro to my art PowerPoint with my last grade eight class offered up my view of how I did not see myself as an artist. My comment caused some students to question my reason for this. Student A questioned me directly about why I don't think of myself as an artist. I replied that I didn't know. I really had never thought about it before. Is it because I don't create art on a regular basis, earn an income from it or display it in a gallery for public viewing? Is that what makes an artist?

Through the comments offered by students as they viewed my art PowerPoint, I believe they saw me as an artist. To them I am both a teacher and an artist without participating in public exhibits, earning a steady income or creating artwork on a regular basis. It is not the time I devote to it, but the effort, passion and dedication I give to art making when I am engaged in the process of making art. That effort is the effort of an artist. My intuitive grade eight students continued to ask me about my role as artist in the following classes. "Student C asked this afternoon what I was working on. I immediately thought she was referring to what I had introduced to the other art classes I teach. After clarification, I was surprised to learn she was asking me what artwork of my own I was currently working on at home in my studio" (Journal Notes, October 7, 2008).

After my surprise subsided I proceeded to tell the class that I was currently working on a painting for the local coffee shop based on fair trade and the environment. They thought it was “neat” and “cool” to hear how I was creating it like a puzzle and using rice and coffee grounds as some of my media. My expectations of fulfilling what I believed an artist to be may take me years to meet. I meet and exceed my students’ expectations of an artist and art teacher by practicing art. I gain ownership and empowerment by continuing my growth as both artist and teacher one step at a time.

After the introduction of my art PowerPoint, I was concerned with the impact it may have had on students. I had concerns after sharing my artwork that some students may have felt intimidated and self conscious about their own art ability. After students viewed the PowerPoint and we had completed one assignment, I surveyed students to gain a perspective on their thoughts and impressions towards art class and the impact my role as artist teacher may play in their learning experience. The results showed that 70 percent of the students surveyed would like to see more examples of my work or student work to introduce assignments and projects. No student expressed intimidation after viewing my artwork or feared they may not meet expectations for assignments in my classroom. I feel it was obvious for students to see my vulnerability, insecurity and uncertainty as I shared my artist identity with them. Sharing the personal aspects of my own art making practice creates an ease and comfort level in my classroom and the art making environment. The final aspect of the survey had students answer a question about how they felt having an artist teacher impacted their learning experience in the classroom. The students’ answers were thoughtful and insightful. They felt that I provided more exciting lessons and creative projects due to my background, knowledge and experience of art making. They had more freedom of choice in assignments and were able to incorporate their own ideas, style and

subject matter. I offered encouragement to find solutions to problems that arose and positive feedback to help achieve their best possible outcome. As an artist I was more experienced with application and knowledge. The experience and knowledge offered the students the opportunity to experiment with a variety of media. The students included that the art experience was educational; they created art for personal reasons and did not just create art for the sake of creating art. Students felt that as a practicing artist, I was more understanding about making mistakes because I understood the creative process. The students are now more confident to ask for help because they know I have artistic ability and skill. They wanted my suggestions and advice on what could make their work better. They felt that I valued the entire process of making art and not just on how good the end product turned out. This first action was a breaking point in showing me the impact an artist presence has in the classroom.

This initial action led me to my second action of bringing in local artists from the community as guest teachers. I contacted a local potter in town to help introduce clay hand building techniques. After completing an architecture lesson focusing on two point perspective in our grade eight unit of recording the world we were going to build clay houses using a slab building technique. My favoured art medium utilizes drawing, painting and collage material. I have small amounts of experience working with clay. I hoped to offer students a deeper learning experience by bringing in a local artist whose expertise exists in working with clay. The clay artist visited my classroom prior to working with the students to make sure that the resources and equipment in the classroom would coincide with the techniques she could share. “Having Deb come to check my available supplies gave me knowledge of procedures, processes and supplies that would allow the students to be more successful. The tips and tricks an artist has in their area of media are invaluable, can make all the difference between success and disaster and are

meaningful and valuable to pass on to all levels of learners” (Journal Notes, September 10, 2008).

The potter went over the process of keeping clay moist enabling students to continue their work from class to class. I gained great knowledge of the materials we could use without spending large amounts of money on slab rollers and cutters. The students would be able to use rulers to create consistent thicknesses in their slabs and large doweling as their rollers. The potter was also able to share her knowledge of firing clay in the kiln that has been sitting unused in the classroom for years. She gave me a short in-service on firing times and temperatures. I learned where I could buy clay and supplies and how to acquire a manual for the Skutt Electric Kiln in the classroom. I expected having a local artist as a guest teacher in the classroom would be a meaningful experience for students but I didn't imagine or consider the benefits I would gain.

Local artists are a valuable resource for instruction in the art classroom. Professional development also comes out of the networks and sharing knowledge and resources between artists and teachers. The local potter was never able to visit my classroom due to working a full time career and utilizing her weekends to prepare for art sales and shows. The students were not able to experience working with clay from a first hand clay artist but the knowledge I gained from her allowed me to facilitate our clay slab house building experience with much more confidence. I was curious as to what opportunities and learning experiences a local artist would bring into another classroom.

Every year the grade eight students study a unit on photography. One of the local artists I know very well is a photographer who was very willing to share her expertise with students. Not only did the photographer provide an introduction to photography elements and composition but she

was able to provide the aspect of photography as a career. “Having a guest artist in the classroom breaks the monotony of a classroom teacher’s delivery. It provides a different perspective and way of presenting material. An experienced expert radiates an enthusiasm and passion for their field that a classroom teacher cannot convey.” (Journal Notes, September 23, 2008). The photographer expressed her immediate response to her experience as a guest teacher by commenting how interactive, involved and perceptive students were with comments and questions. The Industrial Arts teacher reflected on how he would be more than willing to invite a guest artist into his classroom again. He commented that he felt, for the first time, like he was actually teaching students something and they were provided with a valuable learning experience.

The networks I have built with local artists in the community have provided me with valuable resources for my classroom. Bringing artists into the classroom shows students the connection of classroom learning to the community beyond the school doors. I believe it is a very empowering experience for artists to know that a value is put on their practice and important enough to be studied in classrooms. Students will be able to take pride in knowing the talents of local artists in their community.

The next logical course of action for me to take seemed to be involving students in art practices and experiences that take place outside of the school. I have never taken students on an art field trip in the nearly six years I have taught in my current position. In my school experience, art gallery and museum visits were some of the most memorable learning experiences. It enhanced my understanding when it was connected to classroom studies. This action stemmed from a collaboration with the Language Arts teacher connecting a cross curricular unit of study on storytelling. In Language arts students were exploring myths and legends of various cultures and

writing their own legends. In Visual Arts we discovered the aspect of storytelling contained in the art of First Nations people.

The day was planned to take the one and a half hour bus ride to the city of North Battleford with 75 students, three teachers, two buses with bus drivers and two chaperones. The experience included the visit to both the Allan Sapp Gallery and the Chapel Gallery. The students participated in hands on activities after viewing each exhibit. Through art contacts we were able to have the artists at each gallery to talk about their work and be part of the activities.

At the Chapel Art Gallery, local artist Holly Hildebrand interacted and led a discussion about how the stories of her life and family inspired her to create her exhibit of textile and printed works. At the Allen Sapp Gallery, the students had the opportunity to view the original artwork of Allen Sapp portraying the stories and events of his childhood and hear his own personal stories about the events in his life.

Taking the learning experience outside of the classroom offered students the opportunity to see how art contributes to the quality of life in society. For many students this was their first visit to a gallery and would possibly be their only visit. Meeting professional practicing artists within a community increases their appreciation and perception of a viable career in art. “It offered a new and exciting way for students to learn about art. Student participation in the Gallery field trip allowed them to see how storytelling is applied to art in the real world, how professional artists use it as a tool in their works and the different forms of storytelling. Stories do not always come from the pages of a book.” (Journal Notes, October 22, 2008). The collaborating teacher saw this interdisciplinary unit as a special opportunity that generated excitement in learning. Not only were Language Arts and Visual Art important as their own individual classes, but they are

important enough to enter into the learning process in other subject areas and experiences beyond the classroom.

Viewing the artwork of local artists helped increase the importance of art. This collaborative action allowed for the Language Arts teacher to reflect on how teachers teach. She believes if more teachers incorporated various ways and places for learning, teachers would reach more students by offering memorable learning experiences. The collaboration with another teacher, art galleries and the library made real world connections to the students learning. Making connections across curricula strengthens a teacher's practice and student's learning, making the experience have deeper meaning and higher levels of engagement.

The final action I focused on in my project involved the exhibition and display of my own artwork as well as student artwork. As my teaching practice developed to find the place of my artist identity in the classroom, my practice as an artist grew to include exhibiting my artwork for a community of many people I did not know. The previous exposure of my artwork included access by only friends and family. My confidence grew from the positive feedback I received from friends and family. They had seen me as an artist long before I saw myself as one.

As I exhibited my artwork in the Local Artist's Gala in the beginning of November, I did not retreat to a back corner, but took a place alongside other local artists networking and mingling with the crowd of supporters and artists. I felt even more vulnerable having my artwork on display for people I did not know, rather than my students I see every day. As the evening progressed I grew more curious to what viewers were saying as they lingered over my artwork. The encouraging comments from people I did not know were empowering. I thought there would be little connection between involvement in the Local Artist's Gala and my classroom.



The coverage the event received through the media not only brought awareness to my students but also my colleagues. Many students and fellow teachers heard the follow up interview I had with a local radio station the next day and congratulated my success. The students were quick to point out, as soon as they saw me, that they had heard me on the radio for the art show. They expressed pride in knowing what their art teacher was doing in the community. I have found that by sharing and displaying my artwork, I have gained more confidence in my practices as an artist. The empowerment I have received as an artist transfers to the credibility I feel my artist identity has given me as an art teacher.

As I prepared for the Local Artist's Gala, I made title cards to be displayed with each of my artworks. Upon completion of artwork, artists often have a gallery show to share their views with the world. I had originally hoped to collect responses from student attendees at my art showing. Very few students attended the Local Artist's Gala and I found it difficult to connect my artist identity from the action in the community to my classroom practice. The Artist's Gala had a more profound effect on my own self confidence as an artist than that of my teaching practice (Journal Notes, November 16, 2008). I thought about what I had students do with their work upon completion. By having gone through the action of exhibiting my artwork I feel I am more understanding of my artist identity. I have become more aware of my artist identity. I am able to create an action based on my understanding of exhibiting artwork in the classroom. As students are completing their sculptures, I have them make a title card displaying the title of the artwork, the artist's name and materials used.

From reflecting on my own experiences, I decided that I may be able to develop student artist identities by exhibiting their work upon completion. I transferred my experience as an exhibiting artist into the classroom by encouraging all of my art students to share their artwork with others.

Not only do they receive empowering remarks and confidence boosters, but they offer inspiration to their peers. It is one thing to see a teacher or an adult create art, but a much more enriching experience when it is a classmate or peer. In the past I provided little opportunity for students to be recognized as the artists of their artwork unless they signed the front legibly. The artwork would be hung in hallways without artist recognition for the artwork. Other students viewing the work would always be curious of who the artist was. Setting the tone of sharing artwork in a positive and constructive manner helps diminish the vulnerability and fear one feels when sharing and explaining their artwork.

After students completed their visual story assignment, we gathered in a circle and every student had the opportunity to share the experience that was the basis of their illustration. The classmates and I gained knowledge about each student from their art making inspirations. It helped create bonds and an atmosphere in the art class. I then ventured outside of the classroom putting student artwork on display for the entire school body. Many students expressed apprehension in filling out the artist name on the title cards for their artwork. Upon seeing the admirers and hearing the comments made about the artwork, the apprehension about being accountable for their artwork had disappeared. “During the mornings, breaks and noon hour students from all grades stopped at the display cabinet to view and admire the creative “creatures” and sculptures students had made. The artists often stopped by to show off their work to friends or admire the creations of classmates” (Journal Notes, November 28, 2008). Every spare minute had been spent rotating artist’s sculptures on display to allow everyone’s artwork an opportunity for exhibition.

Not only did students get to show off their creative problem solving of turning everyday junk into art but they also shared in the experience by viewing the imaginative creations of their peers.

Accompanying student work with title cards adds value to the art making process, creates student credibility, confidence and pride. Exhibiting completed artwork gives an added dimension to the purpose of creation rather than engaging in art making for art's sake or self expression. One creates artwork to share a part of themselves with others. It allows others to see the world from the artist's viewpoint. It also allows students to engage in their art making at a higher level.

These actions have allowed my artistic and teaching practices to grow. I now put value on relating my own art making practices to the art making process I lead my students through in the classroom. Examining my art making practices has caused me to alter my art teaching practices with a similar purpose that creates meaning in the students learning experience. Art making originates from the artist. I am at the center of my art making, thus my students should be at the center of their own art making. My curriculum has gone from a muddle of activities to sequential units uniting the world of my students inside and outside of the classroom. I have provided students with choice in creating a learning experience that best suits their interests and needs.

My identity as a professional educator has blossomed with confidence. I fully understand and am aware of the steps in creating a meaningful art learning experience for students. My understanding and involvement of art making enhances my teaching practice. My critical friend made the observation after being in my classroom that it was "Jinny the artist" teaching the class and how I seemed completely in my element. That was interesting to hear as I have specifically focused on specific aspects of my artist identity and applied them to what I teach and how I teach my students this year beginning with planning and carrying out the process through experimentation, problem-solving, reflection and exhibition of completed work.

I provide students with a much larger foundation from which to pull inspiration and purpose in their art making by sharing my understanding and application of art making with students in the classroom. Having been through various art making processes I can share my expertise with students and allow them to achieve personal success and pride in their art making. “From the doodles to assignment examples that I make, students are curious and interested to see what I have created and watch me as I work. I think back to the Circle of Courage model and the Mastery component. Techniques for learning in the Aboriginal culture traditionally come from watching or mentoring with an elder or experienced “master” in an area.” (Journal Notes, December 11, 2008) Allowing students to watch me engage in my art making practices provides them with learning opportunities. I become a mentor to students by participating in and understanding the art making process.

### Production - New Understandings

“It was never my confidence or ability as a teacher that was missing from my practice; it was the lack of confidence as an artist that has been holding me back” (Journal Notes, October 21, 2008). My ability in fusing my artist and teacher identities has been held back due to my belief that the artist and teacher belonged in separate worlds. My students have always accepted me as an artist in the classroom. It was the view I had of myself that prevented me from fusing my artist identity and practices with those of my teaching practice.

I have gained confidence as an artist by forcing myself to employ artistic practices at higher levels. I engaged in reflecting on my own purpose of art making and exhibition. Despite my feelings of vulnerability and insecurity in putting the focus on myself, the encouragement and mentoring I received from local artists, students and community members helped show me the value my own art making experiences have in my classroom. In finding my practice as artist teacher, I have become a model and mentor for the artistic behaviour of my students. I take on qualities of a student as I investigate, explore and experiment in my art making practice. Transferring that knowledge as artist to my role as teacher has made me more aware, understanding and able to meet the needs of my students.

I found that fitting my art practices into my teaching practice was much easier than I expected. There were fewer identity contradictions and opposing values than I expected. As an artist my desires are to share my expertise with others, enabling them to get the most out of their own art experiences. I achieve my teaching philosophy of creating a meaningful learning experience by including my beliefs as an artist. I have found through my action research that the artist teacher provides the most valuable experience for students. My artist and teacher identities complement

and inspire each other. I have drawn on my experiences as artist in the planning and design of my classroom curriculum. My art making practice provides students with a foundation to explore and experiment with techniques, materials and their own ideas. Understanding the art making process has allowed me to pass on advice, tips and tricks of the art world that students have found intriguing and invaluable. My expertise as an artist has helped students achieve success in their art making.

As a teacher, I have created an environment of support, encouragement and respect. The roles of student and teacher are often reciprocal in my position. I gain inspiration from watching their art making practices and learn new ways of approaching ideas. I understand that making mistakes and problem solving are something students will endure throughout the art making process. The relationship established between teacher and student is one of collaboration. My experience as teacher allows me to put the student at the centre of the learning experience. The artist teacher identity has allowed me to draw on an area of knowledge and expertise that provides students with a deeper level of learning. Recognizing my identity as artist teacher has strengthened the respect and validity of my practice.

The fusion of artist and teacher in the classroom empowers students. I provide choice in learning that reflects student interests and not the teachers' interests. This choice creates connections for the students and the learning experience, giving them ownership and a voice. My students become artists and not just learners in my classroom because learning about Art becomes more than acquiring a grade. Students discover a new perspective of their environment, world and self. Sustainable art making is generated when a part of the artist exists in the art making. Maintaining a valuable art program requires making learning connections beyond the classroom. I believed that time constraints and the lack of support and knowledge the administration of my

school had about my art program was preventing me from incorporating art experiences that stretched beyond the school walls.

In actuality, it was my own lack of confidence that kept me second guessing the value of bringing in guest artists or taking field trips. As my confidence and evidence increased in the value of learning extending beyond the classroom, I was able to stand up for my beliefs and provide evidence and support of the value for learning extending beyond the classroom. My philosophy for learning has evolved from being exclusively for the students in my classroom to inclusive of all community members. This new possibility has me in the pursuit of opening up a studio workshop space that will promote the work of local artists and provide a variety of art workshops to community members of all ages.

I was already an artist when I chose to teach art. Through my public school education I was encouraged to develop my ability in art. It was my area of strength. My post-secondary education experience focused on the practice of teaching, not what or how we would be teaching. The five years I spent in the Arts Education program developed my teaching ability. Student learning was to be my strength. I entered into my teaching career developing my practice around the purpose that the students must learn something. I put little emphasis into developing how or what they were learning. Little support was given to the concept that my art making could be a part of my teaching. I gained the impression that art making was not a factor in my teaching and it became all but forgotten until I entered into my action research project. I devoted my time to the art of teaching. The only way I made art making fit into my life was if I was creating an example for an assignment I would be teaching in class. There was no time to create art for myself. I believed indulging in my own art making would take away from the developing of learning experiences for my students.

Through this project I have learned that including my art making practices in my teaching practice creates the most valuable, engaging and meaningful learning experiences for my students. My authentic practice is created by the fusion of the two roles. I continue to grow and sustain my roles as artist teacher in my educational situation by combining them in my practice.

My research has helped inform my best practice. My artist teacher identity connects, provides and creates learning experiences that take place beyond the classroom. Including my artist identity with that of the art educator has created my best practice. My commitment to a practice engulfed solely in learning or art making will cease to exist. Instead it is replaced with my commitment to create a practice that enhances learning by connecting art making practices to everyday experiences in the world of my students. Students will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own art making, the art making of their teacher, as well as fellow community members.

I believe I have developed a new outlook towards my art program as a result of my research. Both colleagues and administration have witnessed the impact of my strong pursuit to connect artist to classroom. I will enforce the need for continued support and development as an artist and teacher as I present my project to colleagues, administrators and the directors of the school board.

I feel I have helped increase the value Art holds as an educational subject. Through the connections and importance Art retains beyond the school walls, students have gained a new appreciation for Art as a valid career opportunity. I have structured my curriculum around the purpose Art occupies in the lives of artists. The presence of my artist identity has helped me to restructure my yearly plan.



I have generated a classroom environment promoting critical thinking. I encourage students to find their own solutions through answering questions with questions. I tell them where to look for answers but not the answers. I have increased my use of art terminology and vocabulary in the classroom to establish a model for learning.

The most rewarding possibility that presented itself through my project was the development of a strengthened bond between me as artist teacher and with the artist students in my classroom.

Student reception of my artist identity was one of respect. I shared personal aspects of myself through my artwork opening up a communication path. Student confidence increased in understanding and awareness that I was not in the classroom to judge but to provide purpose, meaning and success in their art experiences. The students ask for and value my opinions and advice when they arrive at their own obstacles in art making.

The various conversations I have had with local artists over the course of this project has shown me that no matter the number of years of experience, artists hold feelings of inadequacy about their formal identity as an artist. The viewers and society outside of the artist role recognize and identify artists much easier than artists do themselves. Before starting this project, I was a “closet” artist. I created work at home but never shared or displayed my work for the public to view. The persistence from my husband to share my work rubbed off and I slowly began taking quick digital pictures of my finished pieces and posting them on my internet social network page. The amount of positive responses from people expressing their love of my artwork and former students stating they were proud to have me as a teacher was surprising, humbling and extremely encouraging.

As my confidence as an artist began to grow I was aware that it had an effect on my teaching and transferred directly into the classroom. The validation and empowerment I received for my artistic ability gave me a stronger sense of purpose in my identity as an art educator. I am the key to empowering students in my classroom. My role as artist and art educator will continue to be a work in progress.

## Insights in Action Research - Growth and Development

Learning is a lifelong process. Action research is about learning how to do things in a new way to improve your practice. It is a process for personal and professional growth. Most professional learning is structured as training with little focus on learning. As a professional I already had a fair amount of professional knowledge about practice. Action research as professional development puts the focus on learning about practice and gives teachers ownership of knowledge. Professional development has the most profound effect when we can live it. Training was not needed as all I required was support and ways of discovering new knowledge. The aspect of a critical friend in action research was a pillar of support and collaboration in discovering new approaches to my practice. I was able to employ my own professional development allowing me to investigate my own personal practice and ways of improving it. By gaining an understanding of what action research is and how to apply it fully to my practice it has given me the opportunity to investigate my practice in depth. I provided a contributing voice in the professional development of my practice by creating my knowledge.

Action research became a method of professional development, allowing me to improve my practice for my benefit. No one else was able to provide me with the learning I needed for my practice. The social context of my practice will not only provide me benefit, but influence others I work with, and benefit students in my classroom. I became an investigator, learner and evaluator with the support of my critical friends. The answers I was searching for already existed within me. Through dialogue I was able to challenge my actions and approach situations in alternative ways.

Action research allowed me to grow professionally. Through research I examined my practice to evaluate my expectations goals. I was able to assess whether or not my actions matched my beliefs. Valuing the voices of participants helped maintain the quality of my research. The quality of my research was put beside the criteria negotiated with the participants. I investigated how my practice display the criteria established by all participants involved in my action research. I recognized that a sustainable practice is achieved by maintaining professional learning and that my practice will continue to be a work in progress. The continued investigation of a professional's practice should be a natural process of education.

I grew personally and professionally through the process of action research. It allowed me to extend my professional knowledge, live up to my philosophies and create collaborative learning experiences. Action research is a process of valuable professional development. It allows the researcher to apply learning in a way that is specifically geared to suit their needs. Action research is a self conducted research that allowed me as a teacher to participate in my own professional growth which leads me to believe that there should be no end to action research as professional development. I now have the tools to maintain my professional learning. There is no ending to professional growth. Action research is a professional development model that focuses on learning. It continues to challenge me as teacher researcher in finding new ways to do things. Reflection has allowed me to continue and grow as both a teacher and as an artist in which new questions, concerns and issues will arise. The tool of action research will allow me to tackle these questions and provide solutions that are thoughtful and effective.

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## APPENDIX



UNIVERSITY OF  
REGINA

Community-Based M.Ed Program  
Action Research: Theory and Practice  
ED815



North West  
Regional College  
*Just for you!*

Date September 5, 2008

Dear Mr. Glen Winkler,

I am currently taking a graduate course to complete my Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction through the University of Regina. As part of that course, I am studying my own teaching practices to make learning experiences better for students. The professor is Dr. Stephen Kemp.

I am specifically interested in how my knowledge and own art practices affect students in my classroom.

For this project I need to talk to the students and record their perceptions on the value of learning art techniques, having guest artists in the classroom and my ability, skills and knowledge as an artist. I may need to use their work as examples in my research. From time to time, I may need to give them a survey that asks for their opinions. All of these activities will be part of my everyday teaching strategies and in no way be excess work or homework for students. This information will be used for my Action Research project in my graduate class to show how my role as an artist impacts my teaching of students in my classroom. I require the consent of the North West School Division No. 203, to conduct my Action Research with the grade eight students in my classroom at Jonas Samson Junior High.

In order to protect the identity of students involved, I will not share the names of students or any personal information. The results I get from any interview or survey will be presented in my Action Research project class as general feedback from the group of students, not from any specific student. Involvement in this project by the students is entirely voluntary; they can withdraw at any time without it affecting their treatment or marks. Their involvement will take place during school time. After my course has been completed in June 2009, I will destroy the information collected.

This project was approved by the University of Regina Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board, and the school system. If you or your child has any questions or concerns about the rights or treatment of the students in this project, you may contact the Chair of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board at 585-4608 or by e-mail: [patrick.lewis@uregina.ca](mailto:patrick.lewis@uregina.ca), or call my professor, Dr. Stephen Kemp at 933.4618 or e-mail: [stephen.kemp@sasktel.net](mailto:stephen.kemp@sasktel.net).

If you consent to my conducting this Action Research project as part of my Master's in Curriculum and Instruction Degree, please return the attached page to me and retain this letter for your information.

Sincerely,  
Jinny Nieviadomy, B.Ed.  
306.236.5686  
[jinny.nieviadomy@nwsd.ca](mailto:jinny.nieviadomy@nwsd.ca)





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### CONSENT FORM

Ms. Nieivadomy's Research

*"The Role of Teacher as Artist in the Classroom"*

I have read the letter and have kept it for information.

I allow you to proceed with your Action Research Project, using students in your classroom at Jonas Samson Junior High. \_\_\_\_

I do not allow you to proceed with your Action Research Project, using students in your classroom. \_\_\_\_

Administrative Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to Ms. Jinny Nieviadomy at Jonas Samson Junior High School.



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Date September 5, 2008

Dear Mrs. Roberta Patterson,

I am currently taking a graduate course to complete my Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction through the University of Regina. As part of that course, I am studying my own teaching practices to make learning experiences better for students. The professor is Dr. Stephen Kemp.

I am specifically interested in how my knowledge and own art practices affect students in my classroom.

For this project I need to talk to the students and record their perceptions on the value of learning art techniques, having guest artists in the classroom and my ability, skills and knowledge as an artist. I may need to use their work as examples in my research. From time to time, I may need to give them a survey that asks for their opinions. All of these activities will be part of my everyday teaching strategies and in no way be excess work or homework for students. This information will be used for my Action Research project in my graduate class to show how my role as an artist impacts my teaching of students in my classroom. I require your consent as the principal of the school, to conduct my Action Research with the grade eight students in my classroom at Jonas Samson Junior High.

In order to protect the identity of students involved, I will not share the names of students or any personal information. The results I get from any interview or survey will be presented in my Action Research project class as general feedback from the group of students, not from any specific student. Involvement in this project by the students is entirely voluntary; they can withdraw at any time without it affecting their treatment or marks. Their involvement will take place during school time. After my course has been completed in June 2009, I will destroy the information collected.

This project was approved by the University of Regina Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board, and the school system. If you or your child has any questions or concerns about the rights or treatment of the students in this project, you may contact the Chair of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board at 585-4608 or by e-mail: [patrick.lewis@uregina.ca](mailto:patrick.lewis@uregina.ca), or call my professor, Dr. Stephen Kemp at 933.4618 or e-mail: [stephen.kemp@sasktel.net](mailto:stephen.kemp@sasktel.net).

If you consent to my conducting this Action Research project as part of my Master's in Curriculum and Instruction Degree, please return the attached page to me and retain this letter for your information.

Sincerely,  
Jinny Nieviadomy, B.Ed.  
306.236.5686  
[jinny.nieviadomy@nwsd.ca](mailto:jinny.nieviadomy@nwsd.ca)



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### CONSENT FORM

Ms. Nieivadomy's Research

*"The Role of Teacher as Artist in the Classroom"*

I have read the letter and have kept it for information.

I allow you to proceed with your Action Research Project, using students in your classroom at Jonas Samson Junior High. \_\_\_\_

I do not allow you to proceed with your Action Research Project, using students in your classroom. \_\_\_\_

Administrative Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to Ms. Jinny Nieviadomy at Jonas Samson Junior High School.



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September 5, 2008

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am Ms. Jinny Nieviadomy and your daughter/son is in my art class at Jonas Samson. I am currently taking a graduate course to complete my Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction through the University of Regina and as part of that course I am studying my own teaching practices to make learning experiences better for students. The professor is Dr. Stephen Kemp.

I am specifically interested in how my knowledge and own art practices affect students in my classroom.

For this project I need to talk to the students and record their perceptions on the value of learning art techniques, guest artists in the classroom and field trips. I may need to use their work as examples in my research. From time to time, I may need to give them a survey that asks for their opinions. All of these activities will be part of my everyday teaching strategies and in no way be excess work or homework for students. This information will be used for my Action Research project in my graduate class to show how my role as an artist impacts students in my classroom. I require your consent to use the information gathered from the student for whom you are the parent or guardian. I have explained the project to my students.

In order to protect the identity of students involved, I will not share the names of students or any personal information. The results I get from any interview or survey will be presented in my Action Research project class as general feedback from the group of students, not from any specific student. Involvement in this project by the students is entirely voluntary; they can withdraw at any time without it affecting their treatment or marks. Their involvement will take place during school time. After my course has been completed in June 2009, I will destroy the information collected.

This project was approved by the University of Regina Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board, and the school system. If you or your child has any questions or concerns about the rights or treatment of the students in this project, you may contact the Chair of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Board at 585-4608 or by e-mail: [patrick.lewis@uregina.ca](mailto:patrick.lewis@uregina.ca), or call my professor, Dr. Stephen Kemp at 933.4618 or e-mail: [stephen.kemp@sasktel.net](mailto:stephen.kemp@sasktel.net).

If you consent to your child being a part of this study, please return the attached page to me by sending it to school with your child. Please retain this letter for your information.

Sincerely,  
Jinny Nieviadomy, B.Ed.  
306.236.5686  
[jinny.nieviadomy@nwsd.ca](mailto:jinny.nieviadomy@nwsd.ca)



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**North West**  
Regional College  
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### **CONSENT FORM**

Ms. Nieivadomy's Research

*"The Role of Teacher as Artist in the Classroom"*

I have read the letter and have kept it for information.

I allow my daughter/son/charge \_\_\_\_\_ to take part in this project. \_\_\_\_  
(name)

I do not allow my daughter/son/charge \_\_\_\_\_ to take part in this project.  X   
(name)

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please send this form to school with your son/daughter/charge. He/she can turn it in to Ms. Nieivadomy.

# Feedback Survey

October 1, 2008

## Enthusiastic

- Explains techniques
- Gives demos
- Patient
- Organized
- Knowledgeable about various forms of art
- Plans interesting lessons
- Introduces a variety of materials for students to work with
- Encouraging
- Is an artist
- Challenges students
- Creates an art atmosphere to work in
- Allows for individual student expression
- Shows examples of their work
- Shows examples of student work
- Shows examples of other artists' work
- Brings in guest artists
- Evaluates on effort
- Displays student art
- Gives advice, tips & tricks

I want to understand more about the way I teach Art. Check off as many of the statements that you think apply to me and my teaching.



1. How is your art class, this year, different than last year? Please don't use "fun"... are there some things in the list on the left that make it different?

2. Does it make a difference if the art teacher is also an artist? HOW?

I also want to know how you think about the artwork you create in our classroom.

1= little, 2= some, and 3= lots.

- Makes me want to try my best
- Makes me think that I could never do that.
- Makes me interested.
- Makes me think that with practice, I could do that.
- Intimidates me and makes me scared to do art.
- Makes me want to see more of the teacher's, student, other artists' artwork.
- It will be o.k. if I make mistakes.
- Experiment with different materials.
- Confident to create art.
- Want to share my own ideas and be creative.
- Comfortable to ask for help.



## Reflecting on Art Class

1. Draw, illustrate, collage or pull an image off of the computer or out of a magazine that you feel -

BEST REFLECTS YOUR EXPERIENCE OR FEELINGS ABOUT ART CLASS THIS YEAR or HAVING AN ARTIST ART TEACHER!

A large empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a student to draw or illustrate their reflection on art class.



2. How has having an artist as a teacher affected your experience in art?

3. What things have helped you be successful in class?