

VALUING PRACTICE IN VISUAL ARTS EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the transformative potential of studio-based learning in middle school visual arts education, positioning the studio not only as a site of making but as a dynamic space for mutual learning between students and educators. Initially conceived as a study of student engagement, the research evolved into a reflexive and transdisciplinary inquiry, centering the artist/educator's own practice as both the subject and method of investigation. Through immersive studio exploration, this research embraces the multifaceted identity of the artist/educator, encountering both educator and learner contained within the self. Prioritizing making and exploration as a means of inquiry revealed profound shifts in my pedagogy, personal philosophy, and approaches to assessment. Rather than focusing solely on the development of student outcomes, the research foregrounds the ways in which sustained creative practice reshapes the educator's understanding of teaching and learning itself. By prioritizing process over product, and embracing the uncertainties inherent in creative practice, this research advocates for a pedagogical shift that recognizes the studio as both a research environment and a catalyst for rethinking the purpose and value of visual arts education. The findings aim to contribute to the discourse on student-centered learning and support the argument that arts-trained educators are uniquely positioned to cultivate meaningful practice-based experiences in the visual arts classroom.

Central to this inquiry are the following questions: how can the implementation of a studio in a classroom inform an educator's practice and lesson planning, and how can a transdisciplinary approach serve as both a collaborative and individual endeavor, particularly when engaging with external experiences through personal perspectives. My practice, jotted notes, doodles, and explorations, evolved into the creation of zines; self-published works that serve as both

repositories for information and tools for inquiry. This evolution reflects a shift from passive accumulation to active reflection, bridging personal experience with pedagogical practice.

Through this process, I have come to recognize the value of integrating artistic practices into educational settings, not only as a means of personal expression but also as a catalyst for pedagogical innovation. The act of creating zines has facilitated a deeper understanding of how engaging with external experiences through a personal lens can inform and transform teaching practices.

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INTRODUCTION

For many years, I allowed my identity as an educator to overshadow my role as an artist. The structured and linear pathways of my educational career left little room for artistic nuance. Within that rigidity, I felt a sense of false security, boundaries that I believed would rein in chaotic or ungrounded ideas. My experience with this research study which implemented a 4-week studio unit into my classroom taught me the opposite: It was not until I began to explore the intersection of my artistic expression with my lesson planning with this studio-based model that I realized the profound impact my artistic practice could have on my teaching and vice versa. Embracing this dual identity has allowed me to reintegrate my artistic self into my professional life, enriching both my personal fulfillment and my pedagogical approach. I believe what I do as an artist/educator to be valuable. I see richness in my everyday life and enjoy developing ideas with my students for our classroom.

Art-based research is a vital methodology for both artists and educators, offering a dynamic space for inquiry, reflection, and meaning-making. By engaging in creative processes as a means of investigation, artists and educators can explore complex ideas that transcend traditional academic frameworks. This approach is particularly valuable in educational settings, where learners come from diverse backgrounds, bringing unique perspectives, abilities, and experiences into the classroom. In this research, I employed art-based methods to explore possibilities as well as model this mode inquiry for my students. This research is not only a way to gather information, but it allows for the exploration of aesthetic possibilities. It is not a simple mode of research but can be admittedly a complex one where I am continually being engaged with generations of new inquiries, enriching both teaching and learning experiences.

The discourse in education has increasingly emphasized the integral role of fostering holistic student development. In contemporary education, this means addressing not just academic skills, but also the emotional, social, and creative growth of students. A holistic approach acknowledges and embraces the diversity of learners, recognizing that each student brings unique strengths, challenges, interests, and prior experiences to the classroom. As students enter the classroom with varying levels of skill and understanding, it becomes crucial to implement learning environments that promote exploration, personal growth, and the development of a well-rounded set of competencies. Holistic classrooms emphasize not only academic achievement but also personal well-being, self-directed learning, problem-solving abilities, and confidence in creative decision-making. Some philosophers and scientists have suggested that engagement with the arts holds significant moral value, as it encourages individuals to reflect on the well-being of others, enhancing both our moral compass and self-awareness (Sherman & Morrissey, 2017). Educators are encouraged to collaborate regularly, use surveys, and have direct conversations with students to assess and enhance the learning environment, tailoring it to the unique cultural climate of each school. To further support holistic student development, professional development sessions are provided for teachers, equipping them with the tools and strategies needed to create inclusive spaces, foster effective communication, and ensure accessible learning opportunities for all students.

Another great opportunity for learning for both the student and the educator is art integration. This creates an inclusive platform where learners can express their identities, share their perspectives, and engage with learning in meaningful ways that go beyond traditional assessments and rigid pedagogical structures. However, art integration should not be confused with simply incorporating hands-on activities or art-based skills as a supplement to learning.

Instead, it is a transformative approach that embeds the arts into the very process of learning itself—using visual arts, music, theatre, and movement as fundamental tools to shape how students absorb, process, and apply knowledge across disciplines. By doing so, art integration fosters deeper engagement, critical thinking, and a more holistic understanding of subject matter. An art education extends far beyond the realms of creativity and self-expression; it serves as a conduit for nurturing cultural experiences, accommodating diverse learning styles, and fostering comprehensive student growth. In the context of the art educational landscape, understanding the nuanced dynamics of art-based learning initiatives becomes paramount in sculpting an educational paradigm that caters to the holistic needs of learners. By embracing these approaches, educators can cultivate a more inclusive, responsive, and dynamic learning environment that empowers students to thrive both academically and personally. Art based learning is an educational approach that uses the processes, practices, and experiences of creating and engaging with art rather than focusing solely on the end product. Art-based learning values the process of making, reflecting, and meaning-making, encouraging learners to connect emotionally and intellectually with the subject matter. Key thinkers such as Julia Marshall, Patricia Leavy, and Alphonse Kohn inspire my approach to teaching and learning, reinforcing my belief in the significance and transformative potential of art-based education for contemporary learners. Their work informs both the pedagogical and methodological underpinnings of this study. In this research, I explore how Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), the Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM), and the Reggio Emilia approach can be utilized as frameworks for learning through artistic practice. These methodologies foster multiple pathways for exploration, emphasizing open-ended inquiry and valuing the creative process over the final product. I argue that these methods are modes of research as well as provide freedom and legitimacy to

alternative forms of learning, understanding, sharing, and personal and pedagogical growth. They challenge traditional hierarchies of knowledge and advocate for artmaking as a valid and impactful form of inquiry.

This thesis is composed of both written and art-based components, reflecting a transdisciplinary approach to research. It is organized into four main sections: a literature review, methodology, synthesis, and conclusion—each containing subsections that support and expand on key ideas. Alongside these written elements are eight zines, created throughout the research process. While the writing provides context and critical framing, the zines form the core of the inquiry, serving as the primary site of art-based research. Housed in the NSCAD University Library, the zines are available for public viewing and are presented together with this written work. Each one was developed independently, yet collectively they represent a dynamic and evolving exploration of my experiences, environment, and understanding of education and artistic practice. They function as both documentation and experimentation—artifacts of how I learn, reflect, and imagine new approaches to teaching. The zines include collections of ideas, prompts, and personal reflections that emerged during the course of research. The titles of the eight zines are as follows:

1. *See My Words*
2. *The Researcher*
3. *Behaviour and Habits*
4. *Standards and Traditions*
5. *From There to Here*
6. *Time & Space*
7. *Conversations*
8. *Studio Based Learning*

These zines function as parallel components of the written thesis, advancing art-based research by activating the zine format as a reflective, generative, and accessible method of knowledge sharing.

PRACTICE AND PURPOSE

My research supports the importance of students at the centre of their learning, and it highlights the journey and processes of the educator. Each day educators attempt, struggle, grow, as well as explore and experiment with multiple audiences of varying age, skill and interest. All educators, like students, require stimulation, collaboration and an opportunity to initiate growth and change. The field of education is always evolving and so too should all educators. Many scholars summarize John Dewey's educational philosophy with the popular paraphrase, "If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow," which reflects Dewey's belief that education should be future-oriented rather than rooted in outdated practices. Teaching does not have to be directed at the students but rather it can involve them and include their knowledge. Dewey advocated for participatory, collaborative learning grounded in experience and shaped by the environment in which it occurs (Dewey, 1938; Maida, 2011). My research includes an exploration of how educational centres, policy, and governments ministries in many countries emphasize the core learning subjects such as literacy and numeracy as foundational and significant for a child's educational development. For this reason, literacy and numeracy are heavily supported and considered to be the core of a child's education, while the elective or other subjects, such as fine arts education are vague in importance unless a direct correlation has been made and proven to support literacy and numeracy. In 2017, the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development announced a \$3.2 million investment in its action plan to support literacy and numeracy in the province (Nova Scotia

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017, p. 3). This opacity reinforces the lack of attention regarding other learning subjects; like visual arts, therefore they are deemed less important and of less value towards learning and development. Professional development and support teams are implemented in schools to support literacy and numeracy but, rarely if at all, offered to those educators who work in the remaining disciplines.

As an artist/educator, I have spent the last decade fielding the same question from colleagues, parents, and students: What is the value of visual arts education in public schools? The answer is clear; visual arts education is invaluable to students, the school community and staff. Artists/educators do more than teach artistic techniques. We create spaces for critical thinking, self-expression, and diverse perspectives. Unlike many subjects that emphasize a singular correct answer or a fixed historical narrative; the visual arts encourage exploration, interpretation, critical thinking, and personal connection. Artists/educators are trained professionals that explore and participate in varying learning theories and artistic practices. They are equipped to analyze, critique, and support their own creative and intellectual growth as well as those of their students. We foster choice, amplify voices, and cultivate an environment where multiple perspectives are not just accepted but celebrated. In doing so, we do not only teach art we help to shape new ways for students to see, think, and engage with the world. For artists who work in the field of education, their creative practice offers a unique and symbiotic relationship that fosters both professional and personal growth. The intersection of teaching and artistic practice creates an ongoing dialogue where inspiration, inquiry, and reflection move fluidly between the studio and the classroom. Educators who actively make art engage with students not just as instructors but as fellow creators; they model the creative process in real time. This dual identity enriches both roles by deepening artistic engagement and reinforcing pedagogical

approaches that prioritize exploration and meaning making rather than with rigid instruction and guidelines. As an educator I am prepared to face scrutiny, defiance and confusion for the benefits of growth and adaptation when implementing a studio-based unit in the classroom. Students, colleagues and some staff will not understand or support the benefits of the learning process over the creation of a final product. Students with limited exposure to the arts might struggle at first with the freedom to choose. These varying experiences such as insecurity, joy, anger and confusion affect planning and preparation for ideas, current and future challenges, and perspectives that emerge in the classroom and among my colleagues.

My research investigates how the educator is affected when implementing student centred learning in a studio environment. A studio-based learning style set up in a traditional classroom for a four-week period is intended to challenge perceptions of assessment, witness engagement and pedagogy and make clear the active role of the educator. The aim of this studio-based learning approach is to shed light on the experiences artist/educators have when engaged in the classroom/studio focusing on the following inquiries:

- How can implementing a studio-based, student-centred approach in the classroom transform an artist/educator's teaching philosophy?
- In what ways does the transdisciplinary approach influence artistic practice and teaching pedagogy?
- How does integrating transdisciplinary concepts and mixed methodologies impact the planning, decision-making, and artistic growth of the Artist/Educator?

Educators learn, reflect, and adapt each day as they plan and prepare for their audience of learners. They dedicate their careers to the wellbeing of their students. It is important to

emphasize that the wellbeing of the individual who receives support is directly connected to the wellbeing of the one who provides it. An educator, understood as a lifelong learner, recognizes their responsibilities to their students. Just like their students, educators also need opportunities that stimulate the expansion of their perspectives and knowledge. They benefit from encouragement to step outside of their comfort zones and request supportive structures that can help them to continue their own learning journeys.

This investigation explores the identity of both an educator and an artist through the lens of arts-based research. It draws on several methodologies, including Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM), and the Reggio Emilia approach, over a four-week period. The goal of this research is to highlight how teaching and artmaking inform one another and to show how this intersection fosters both personal and professional growth in artistic and pedagogical practice. A four-week period reflects the typical length of a unit of study in the classroom. During this time, I created, observed, and reflected, gathering insights from my instruction, student interactions, and the learning environment. Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM), and the Reggio Emilia approach all emphasize student-centered, hands-on, and collaborative learning through exploration. These methods not only support diverse learning styles but also align closely with my own way of knowing. They reflect how I learn through doing, questioning, observing, and making connections between ideas and materials. In particular, the Reggio Emilia approach reinforces this alignment by viewing the classroom as the "third teacher." It emphasizes the thoughtful design of the learning environment and the careful selection of materials to support inquiry and creativity. This , this approach positions the teacher as a researcher who actively observes and documents students' interactions with people, ideas, and materials. This view of teaching resonates with my own values as both an

educator and artist, where learning is a shared and evolving process that is ground in reflection and engagement (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind, & Kocher, 2015).

The following literature review maps the journey that led to the development of this study. It explores the key methodologies and themes that not only inform my research but also shape my evolving identity as an artist and educator. By engaging with these ideas, I lay the foundation for understanding how my teaching and artistic practices converge and guide the direction of my inquiry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To situate my work as an artist/educator, this literature review draws on four key areas: studio-based learning, the enduring value of arts education, the dynamic climate of the classroom and the dual impact on teacher and students, and the role of lifelong learning. Together, these frameworks illuminate how creative practice, and educational environments continuously inform and sustain one another.

Scholars like Julia Marshall (2015) and Rita Irwin (2022) emphasize the multidisciplinary aspect of art-based research and underscore the crucial role of social connectivity in art education. By delving into connections between approaches and disciplines such as sociology, education, and cultural studies, art-based researchers enable a deeper understanding of complex social issues and events. This interconnectedness not only enriches artistic practices but also fosters a more inclusive and empathetic approach to addressing societal challenges, highlighting the indispensable link between art education and social connectivity and well-being (Marshall, 2015; Irwin 2022). These approaches embrace studio platform art-based research where people learn together in a space where the action or process is the learning and

the participants are influential even when they are not directly collaboratively contributing their ideas.

Often, I encounter and reflect on my personal experiences with my students, their parents, and my colleagues, many of which reveal a common misunderstanding or undervaluing of what art education truly offers beyond just making things look “pretty” or just “fun.” Many students enter the art classroom with discontent or interest stating that art is not required for learning and being productive in society. They do not and in some cases will not engage in certain activities because they have not been taught or supported in connecting with other forms of communication or in critical thinking. Their exposure to an arts education has been very limited or delivered by a general education teacher. When I first started thinking about this research, I was curious about the history and deeper influences that shape how we value art education in public schools today both in Canada and in other contexts. From my own experience of bringing studio-based learning into the classroom I have seen how powerful it can be for students and educators, all those who are involved in learning. I have first-hand knowledge of how this approach supports creativity, confidence, and meaningful engagement and this has led me to look more closely at the historical and educational ideas that continue to shape how art is understood and supported in schools today.

Kristen Snyder and Karen Cooper’s article, “Innovating Schools Through Dialogic Arts-Based Practice: Ingredients for Engaging Students with a Whole New Mind,” (2015) focuses on why some students leave school early and how introducing an art-based pedagogy helps re-engage learning interests. Most art educators know the power of an arts education and its ability to realize and involve student’s individual knowledge development. Snyder and Cooper stress that “The majority of successful examples in which the arts are used to create learning remain

outside the general classrooms, despite the fact that most national curricula articulate the importance of the arts for human development, learning and creativity (Snyder, Kristen, et al. 2015 p14).” When arts-based research is used to engage students in learning, it allows more of their senses to be involved for example, through making, observing, or moving. This sensory engagement helps learners draw deeper connections to their own experiences and ways of knowing. Studio environments can nurture all learners and engage creatively with both students' as well as the artist/educator. Studio environments support this by offering flexible materials, open-ended tasks, and a culture of inquiry that encourages experimentation, reflection, and collaborative meaning-making. Those learners who have experienced art-based learning support its way of holistic development. Canadian provincial governments websites support the arts and the wellbeing of their students but encourage a focus on specific subject; stating that their Student Success Plan (SSP) is intended to be a strong and cohesive strategy that will guide our system to improve student well-being and achievement in mathematics and literacy (Regional Student Success Plan, HRCE, <https://www.hrce.ca/students/elementary/regional-student-success-plan#>:). An art education can captivate students by offering diverse methodologies that nurture their interests and engagement with the world. It does so by providing multiple sources that students can use in various ways. A fine arts experience is a well-rounded experience, engaging with the senses, emotions, intellect, and imagination. It invites students to explore complex ideas and make personal and cultural connections through creative processes. This exposure to arts-based learning in education involves and evolves a student's well-being quite differently when compared to those subjects characterized as core learning areas. While institutions recognize the remarkable potential and benefits of the arts, such as studio and music, they often fail to allocate sufficient investment towards its development and advancement (Nova Scotia Department of

Education and Early Childhood Development, <https://curriculum.novascotia.ca/>). According to the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2023), funds saved through administrative changes will be reinvested into classroom support, with a focus on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for students.

As a female white settler teaching visual arts in Mi'kma'ki, I draw on arts-based inquiry and practice-based research to frame my classroom as a space for mutual and collaborative learning, where the dynamic processes of the studio support both my students' growth and my own evolving practice. My middle school classroom holds the foundations of a well-developed arts research space, where exploration, reflection, and making are central to learning. Art-based research emphasizes the value of experiential learning and affirms the essential role of creativity in nurturing the holistic development of learners. My work as an artist and educator has merged together to create a dynamic environment that fosters studio-based learning for students. My research aims to explore the intrinsic value of arts education by examining methodologies that effectively achieve specific outcomes, such as participation, engagement, and creative expression. These outcomes will serve as indicators of how arts education fosters knowledge acquisition, builds confidence, and promotes overall well-being among learners, artists, and educators. Through this investigation, I hope to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the transformative potential of arts education.

TIME IS ART

In the next section, I discuss how core subjects are prioritized in a student's schedule limiting time for art education. The amount of time we spend on subjects across various studies often provides a good indicator of their value. Jonathan Lilliedahl's (2022) article, "Why the Arts

Are not Considered Core Knowledge in Secondary Education: A Bernsteinian Analysis”, focuses on how and why teaching aesthetics is not considered a basic course and the multiple attempts to change a government policy in Sweden, to include the arts as a core subject. Lilliedahl (2022) discusses how the Swedish governments have placed importance on ‘practical’ knowledge. This knowledge dictates what is included in the school curriculum and determines the basic subjects such as mathematics and literacy. This focus is intended to produce a future workforce. Successes in these ‘practical’ courses (or core courses) are meant to churn out a productive society. Similarly in Canada, when consulting educational websites, provinces gauge the success of students in public schools primarily through their achievement rates in fundamental subjects: mathematics and literacy. Provincial standardized tests that are implemented and regarded as significant by public educational institutions emphasize adherence to standards in these core areas. These tests provide a means of accountability for teachers and schools, and the government utilizes the data derived from these tests to address demographic needs and implement curriculum outcomes. Consequently, these standardized tests influence the allocation of time dedicated to core subjects within schools. Given their importance, basic subjects take precedence over elective courses, leading teachers to prioritize preparedness for these provincial tests. Learning is then sacrificed to prepare students for these standardized tests. Alfie Kohn is a prominent critic of standardized testing, arguing that it undermines both teaching and learning. He believes these tests promote a narrow, superficial form of education that is focused on mere memorization and test-taking skills rather than deep understanding, creativity, and critical thinking (Kohn 2011). Kohn contends that standardized testing shifts the purpose of schooling from fostering genuine learning to simply producing measurable results, often at the expense of student curiosity and teacher autonomy. He also points out that although these tests are not meant

to measure everyone's success in learning, they disproportionately harm students from marginalized communities and reinforce inequities rather than addressing them (Kohn 2011). A holistic approach to education is an inclusive one. Acknowledging and honouring differences among learners is both vital and necessary when providing opportunities to learn. Educators must offer various ways of learning and sharing in their classrooms while also being observant to alternate ways of doing, listening, and understanding diverse perspectives. As educators, we must reimagine the hierarchy of learning not as a pyramid but as a platform where we can all stand, learn, share, and grow together. Inclusion means to embrace, acknowledge, and support all ways of knowing. In any environment, the artist/educator and the learners share the responsibility of creating a safe space for everyone to share and learn. Without this acknowledgment and commitment to all participants, teaching and learning become merely time spent, rather than meaningful learning. An educator must actively research and seek out support for both them and their students. An educator who embraces such support demonstrates a consideration that extends beyond their own culture, learning, and ways of knowing. The following statement by Bartlett and Marshall emphasizes the importance of grounding curriculum development in the ancestral knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples, ensuring that efforts to integrate Indigenous and mainstream knowledge remain respectful and true to their sources:

We believe an important question must be asked when encouraging or attempting to weave indigenous and mainstream knowledge together within today's educational curricula, namely: what can curriculum developers do to ensure that efforts remain true to the ways of knowing and knowledge systems of indigenous peoples? This is exceedingly important because, as Elder Albert notes, there is great temptation today for some people

to 'just make it up' and so validation by recognized community Elders and Knowledge Holders, of that which is brought forward is exceedingly important (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012, p. 332).

This quote is included to highlight the need for ongoing respect and responsibility from non-Indigenous/settler teachers when integrating Indigenous knowledge into educational curricula, a principle that is crucial for all areas of learning, including the arts.

Throughout my teaching career, K-9 art courses have been offered but with a limited allocation of time, which may lead both students and society to perceive these classes as insignificant. Despite the requirement for students to complete one credit of visual arts, drama, or music to graduate high school, this prerequisite holds little bearing on post-secondary institutions' admissions criteria and the broader societal emphasis on academic subjects (About PLANS, plans.ednet.ns.ca/, <https://plans.ednet.ns.ca/about-plans>). Certainly, students can choose to study fine arts at post-secondary institutions; however, many do not have the opportunity to explore fine arts during their K-9 education. Lilliedahl et al. stress the impact this lack of exposure can have on future learning and post-secondary opportunities.

The weakened status of arts courses in secondary school education is probably also linked to the lack of entrance requirements in that area from institutions of higher learning. If colleges and universities do not ask for the arts course credit for admission, there are no strategic reasons for students to acquire it during secondary school. Instead, students are likely to prioritize subjects of value to them for college entrance or employment (Lilliedahl, et al 2022 p166).

Lilliedahl (2022) also states that in the US the No Child Left Behind Act focused the curriculum on the core subjects only or the subjects that emphasize the basics: mathematics, reading and

writing, indicating that visual arts were nothing but basic. That leaves us to understand that it was too complicated for students to focus on. Joel Westheimer (2010) writes about this focus on core subjects in Canada. His concern was with statements by educational institutions supporting critical thinking and skill development but with increasingly narrowing curriculum goals for students with basic/core courses. Westheimer (2010) quotes a CEO of a Washington DC center of education policy:

What gets tested gets taught. Under No Child Left Behind (and he could be talking about EQAO in Ontario or British Columbia's FSA, or testing elsewhere across Canada), there is reading and math and then there is everything else and because there is so much riding on the reading and math included on state tests, many schools have cut back time on other important subject areas, which means that some students are not receiving a broad curriculum (Westheimer, Joel, 2010 p6).

These key scholars in art education make it clear that educational priorities have shifted in ways that sideline subjects like visual arts. From these key scholars in art education, we can see how the strong emphasis on reading and math, driven by standardized testing, has caused many schools to reduce or eliminate time for other important areas of learning. When the focus is placed almost entirely on what can be measured through standardized tests, subjects that don't directly contribute to those scores, like the arts, are often viewed as less important. As Westheimer points out, "what gets tested gets taught," and this has led to a narrowing of the curriculum that denies students access to a well-rounded or holistic education. This contradiction claiming to value critical thinking while cutting the subjects that best support it, reveals the need to advocate more strongly for the arts as an essential part of education.

Time is needed for students and teachers alike to produce a space to nurture learning. As Lilliedahl (2022) states, art provides students with tools to express themselves and it helps cultivate social significance with democratic values and human rights influencing the wellbeing of students. Lilliedahl's article (2022) acknowledges that in Sweden, art is significantly important in learning and the productivity of a country. "Sweden is one of the most creative countries in the world. "We have a rich flora of internationally successful companies, services, products, fashion designers, artists, actors, and filmmakers. We should, of course, be proud and manage these resources well (2018 Lilliedahl, p173)." In Nova Scotia, while schools acknowledge the importance of arts education, they often fail to allocate sufficient time for students to engage meaningfully in visual arts experiences. This situation reflects a broader systemic issue where arts education is marginalized within the curriculum. Despite advocacy for the integration of visual arts throughout a student's educational journey, the reality is that arts programs are frequently underfunded and undervalued. Attempting to address this gap and advocate for the arts is Halifax Regional Arts (HRA). This group is funded through supplementary taxes paid annually by all residents of the Halifax Regional Municipality. The HRA supports enhanced Fine Arts programming across the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) (Halifax Regional Arts, n.d.). The HRA supports enhanced Fine Arts programming across the Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE). However, this funding mechanism does not extend to rural centers, leaving them to seek alternative means to support arts education. HRA operates with its own administrative structure, including principals, vice-principals, and specialists, who collaborate with schools within HRCE. Upon teachers' approval, HRA personnel integrate art-based lessons with the classroom teacher. While this initiative aims to enrich students' artistic experiences, it underscores the limited and often reactive approach to

arts education, rather than a proactive, integrated strategy. The program employs fewer than 100 specialists across three disciplines—visual arts, drama, and music. A specialist is assigned to a family of schools within the Halifax Regional Municipality. On average, each specialist supports arts integration for several hundred to over a thousand students. With 136 schools and nearly 60,000 students across the HRCE, the demand placed on each specialist is significant (Halifax Regional Centre for Education, n.d.). While this is a wonderful service for some students in Nova Scotia, art integration prompts a critical reflection: why does contemporary society perceive the engagement of art and well-being as non-essential for acquiring knowledge and developing future members of a civil society? From my research and experiences as an educator, I have observed diminished value placed on art practice and the role of artists. This trend aligns with a broader instrumentalist value system in education, which prioritizes measurable outcomes and economic utility over the intrinsic value of artistic expression. Such a perspective not only undermines the significance of the arts but also neglects its vital contribution to holistic human development. "Valuing arts education involves recognizing its importance not only in measurable standards but also in fostering holistic learning that connects with our culture and knowledge. As learners, we should engage in all ways that support a deeper understanding of ourselves, others, and the world, encompassing our whole being. Sherman and Morrissey (2017) state "Philosophical views hold or imply that art appreciation is socio-epistemically valuable insofar as it cultivates other understandings through processes like emotional sharing or imaginative understanding" (Sherman and Morrissey 2017, pg. 12). Following these ideas, psychologists and neuroscientists have begun to empirically assess how art appreciation deepens other forms of understanding. (Sherman and Morrissey 2017). This states then that art appreciation is important, and art appreciation is a vital part of an arts education. The scholars I

reference in my research (Kohn, 1999; Marshall, 2009; Leavy, 2015; Irwin, 2017) support the value of arts education, recognizing its benefits for both the learner and society as a whole. We all deserve to learn in this way. Moreover, the current model of arts education raises questions about equity and access. HRA's programs are concentrated within the Halifax Regional Municipality, leaving rural areas without similar opportunities. This disparity highlights the need for a more inclusive approach to arts education that ensures all students, regardless of geographic location, have access to quality artistic experiences.

In today's world, students have great interest in the imagery and artistry that they engage with on a daily basis, yet we are not accommodating and prioritizing that area of interest with relevant education; an arts-based program. Visual literacy can actively engage young individuals in exploring and understanding the world, providing them with a technologically controlled educational environment that ensures their safety while learning, as opposed to relying on other platforms beyond the boundaries of formal education. Linda Kreger Silverman (2004), an American psychologist, states that

ironically, more and more image-thinkers are being born throughout the world. In past generations, they were often crippled in our schools and marginalized in society. But this millennium belongs to those who are gifted in imagery. It is their genius that created the technological era, and they are the ones who will thrive in the 21st century workforce. The left-hemispheric curriculum of reading, handwriting, and calculating, which dominated schools for centuries, is obsolete. These skills are not sufficient to gain employment in today's world (Silverman, 2004, p4).

It is quite odd or rather contrary that, at a time when entertainment, media and the arts are at the forefront, arts education is still not adequately supported or valued. Persistent societal

stereotypes frame the arts as less intellectually rigorous or impractical for workforce success, reinforcing the misguided notion that creative fields lack productivity or economic value.

Scholars and practitioners such as Marshall, Sullivan, Irwin, Leavy, and Gude discuss how art-based learning is a valid and meaningful method of inquiry that actively engages students. They also explore how educators can use this approach to deepen students' understanding of both the arts and the subject matter being studied. As an artist and educator, I've noticed that one aspect rarely addressed in literature is the positionality and expertise of the educator.

The role of a visual arts educator can differ significantly from that of another subject teacher. A key question that I returned to throughout my research and my day to day studio-classroom pedagogy practice was - in public schools do art educators with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, trained in learning how to see, create, critique and explore expression and ideas - have an advantage over other educators teaching visual arts? Can any educator effectively integrate art into their lesson planning and research, or does it require a background in the arts to fully grasp the potential of art-based learning? This raises important questions about the skills and knowledge needed to successfully implement art-based methodologies in education. Having exposure to the arts is most important when delivering an arts education, as Marshall states:

There are many ways to bring art into schools, and they vary in their capacity to enhance or transform what and how young people learn. Visual art can be taught as a distinct and separate discipline; it can be inserted here and there as an ancillary activity; or it can be integrated into the curriculum. For art to truly transform education it must not be treated as an isolated subject; it should not be a "frill". It should be deeply integrated into the school curriculum and part of pedagogy in all disciplines (Marshall, 2011, p88).

While systems exist to support the arts in education, their reach remains confined to urban settings, leaving rural areas with limited access. This disparity raises questions about the value placed on the arts and the opportunities available to students outside metropolitan centres. Programs like PERFORM! and the Artists in Schools initiative aim to bridge this divide by bringing professional artists into schools across Nova Scotia, including rural communities. These programs provide students with direct engagement in dance, music, theatre, and visual arts, enriching their educational experience. (PERFORM!, n.d.; Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, n.d.). While these are valuable initiatives, their implementation often relies on the interest and initiative of individual classroom teachers. They are neither systematically embedded in the curriculum nor do they provide consistent or reliable income for practicing artists.

The next section discusses how exposure to the arts is integral to fostering understanding, respect, and a deeper engagement with the world and how an arts education is not designed for specific learners but rather can be a space for all types of learners and in this way for everyone.

WHO IS ART FOR?

In this section, I discuss how visual arts educators have significantly different interactions with students in comparison to other subject areas. The art classroom is unconventional with an abundance of supplies and resources often capturing the curiosity of the students. The development of students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills are seen by visual arts educators. Whether a visual arts teacher provides a studio-based learning environment or a more directive environment, students display their ideas using various tools differently from one another. As students navigate the challenges of translating ideas into tangible artworks, they learn to assess and refine their work continuously and also learn to build a nuanced relationship

with materials and process. I believe teaching visual arts allows an instructor to see another side of students, the side that shares and depends on experiences internal and external to a school environment, a side that draws on instincts and interests. Marshall and D'Amano's 'Thinking Lab', was a lab designed setting created to explore and illustrate how an art classroom can function as a space for collective engagement, idea generation and the cultivation of metacognitive skills through creative activities. This lab promotes metacognition through art-based research and the lab fosters an inclusive environment where students can delve into and build their cognitive and technical skills based on their distinct strengths (Marshall and D'Amano, 2017). Marshall and D'Amano further explain the role of the lab:

By cultivating an environment that values personal growth, the lab champions the recognition and empowerment of various ideas and forms of expression. Approaches that emphasize the journey rather than the result yield significant benefits for students. Rather than evaluating a product, their capacities for contemplation and introspection are assessed. Fewer discrete finished artworks emerge from this approach but the thinking that goes into the work is deeper and more metacognitive (Marshall and D'Amano, 2018, p11).

Marshall and D'Adamo have crafted an immersive educational experience that serves both their students and them as educators and researchers. Their article supports the studio-based learning strategies I advocate in my research.

Action, participatory and practice-based research are all great ways to engage every student, educator and artist. In Tomljenovic's (2015) article, "An Interactive Approach to Learning and Teaching in Visual Arts Education", a modern approach to teaching is examined. The research uses quantitative analysis of information taken from a pedagogical experiment. He

believes understanding and having knowledge of art terminology and skills at an elementary level is necessary to help students manage their own learning, in the art room and beyond. The interactive approach here, yet another student-centred methodology, focuses on teaching strategies such as active, experiential, independent, investigative, cooperative and problem solving early in a student's educational career. When students have the freedom to apply knowledge in different ways, they tend to have a better understanding and are more motivated. (2015 Tomljenovic). Furthermore, the efforts Snyder and Cooper (2015) had in engaging students produced promising results in learning and human development for youth. They started a storytelling and painting pilot program in 2011 in a school for students that did not succeed or complete their education. The article focuses on the development of a person's whole mind and being, and the engagement of art-based research that allows a person to invest wholeheartedly. They introduced a model for implementing dialogic art-based pedagogy in the school. Snyder and Cooper (2015) discussed ways in which educational institutions run and how they could run more smoothly if they considered students the customer and school was run more like a business. In business, they state, if the customer is unhappy, the business will change to accommodate and please the customer. Treating a student like a consumer does not support authentic learning—it risks reducing education to a transactional exchange, where satisfaction is valued over challenge, and efficiency over exploration. While we do want students to feel seen and supported, our greater responsibility is to nurture critical thinkers, not satisfied customers. If we prioritize constant approval or avoid discomfort, we risk spoon-feeding answers rather than fostering curiosity, resilience, and independence. Education must be a space of co-construction, where students are not passive recipients but active participants in shaping knowledge. Snyder and Cooper (2015) explain that the dominant model of education is left brain oriented with a fixation

on productivity and results, at the cost of creativity, innovation and human development. The authors often reference Linda Kreger Silverman, the founder and director of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development, who noted that underachieving students and those who drop out of school are often characterized as right-brain oriented, possessing traits such as creativity, strong spatial reasoning, advanced higher-order thinking abilities, and robust leadership qualities, among others. Rather than addressing the varied needs of children and adolescents comprehensively, educators frequently prioritize productivity, outcomes, and correct solutions, unintentionally causing disengagement among numerous students. Snyder and Cooper (2015) further reference Silverman's research to underscore that students who actively engage in creative pursuits, such as participating in the arts, hold the promise of breaking free from patterns of underachievement (Snyder et al, 2015). In her exploration of the transformative power of art education, Silverman emphasizes its pivotal role in guiding at-risk youth towards constructive and fulfilling paths. She asserts:

What enables young people at risk for delinquency to choose a more constructive path?

Most likely it is finding something they are good at, that they enjoy doing, and that is seen as valuable by others. Art is often the answer. Art begins with imagery, a function of the right hemisphere. When right-hemispheric gifts are honored and developed, they serve as a protective shield and channel energy in a positive direction. When they are ignored or neglected, children and youth seek other outlets that may be detrimental to themselves and society (Silverman, L. K., 2004, p1).

This perspective underscores the importance of recognizing and nurturing the creative talents of young individuals, suggesting that engagement in the arts can serve as a meaningful alternative to negative behaviors.

A key question that many educators may grapple with is for whom is art intended? The preceding paragraphs may imply that it serves students disengaged from traditional schooling or those inclined towards right-brain thinking or visual learning styles. However, if our aim is holistic education for overall well-being, art-based research emerges as a potent learning instrument applicable to all in pedagogical spaces: students, artists and educators. I often find it challenging to explain to students, parents, and colleagues that art is not simply about paint and pencils, nor is it limited to painting or drawing. These are just tools, materials we use for hands-on learning. Through them, and through a variety of other media, we use our hands to express ideas and explore possibilities. Art is fundamentally about thinking, communicating, questioning, and creating meaning, not just about the materials or aesthetics themselves. In essence, art education transcends traditional notions of creativity, serving as a vital conduit for holistic learning—an educational approach that nurtures the intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and creative development of learners—thereby fostering personal growth and the cultivation of meaning within educational spaces.

BLENDED INGREDIENTS

The following section, I will share my experiences with collaborative research, focusing on transdisciplinary approaches; how they work together and have shaped my work and learning. This focus sets the stage for discussing how such collaboration enriches both educational practices and personal growth. Research can be conducted individually or collaboratively. Transdisciplinary research is a collaborative process that brings together researchers from different disciplines—as well as community members, practitioners, or non-academic participants—to address complex, real-world problems. It moves beyond disciplinary boundaries to blend theoretical and practical knowledge in order to generate insights that could not be

achieved in isolation. Collaborative learning, while different in purpose, echoes some of these principles. It is similar to activity-based or participatory research in that it values inquiry, shared responsibility, and co-construction of knowledge. However, collaborative learning functions primarily as a pedagogical method—an approach that invites students to work together, question, and create meaning collectively, rather than as a formal research methodology. Patricia Leavy describes transdisciplinary research as transformative and effective because it moves beyond the boundaries of individual disciplines. Rather than keeping knowledge compartmentalized, it integrates knowledge from multiple fields to create new understandings. My work and research integrate knowledge from my past, current surroundings, those cultures and knowledges around me. Transdisciplinary methodologies inform my research as well as my practice.

Transdisciplinary research practices are issue or problem-centered and prioritize the problem at the center of research over discipline-specific concerns, theories or methods.

Transdisciplinary research is responsive to (public) needs. Methodologically, transdisciplinary research requires innovation, creativity, flexibility in order to follow responsive or iterative methodologies or participatory research design strategies.

Transdisciplinarity has the potential to greatly enhance public scholarship. (Leavy, 2011, p 9).

Transdisciplinarity then is an approach or research that involves collaboration across many disciplines, but it extends beyond multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approaches.

Interdisciplinary research is a group of experts from different fields working together within their respective areas of expertise and multidisciplinary research includes different disciplines focusing on a shared topic, but both approaches do not blend their perspectives. In contrast, transdisciplinary research crosses invisible boundaries, merging knowledge, experiences, and

cultures to generate new ways of understanding and inquiry. Unlike traditional research or conventional disciplinary research, transdisciplinary research thrives on community involvement and recognizes that the environment significantly shapes outcomes. This approach emphasizes the importance of context and collaboration in achieving meaningful results. When engaging in collaborative research, we must consider more than just the specific knowledge and skill base of the individual collaborators; Cultural knowledges, histories, and the lived experiences of all those involved must be integrated. While studio-based learning is student-centered, it does not require students to share personal experiences or cultural knowledge. Instead, it fosters an environment where learners feel comfortable choosing if and how to engage. All learning is built on both prior and current knowledge; however, ethical teaching practices acknowledge that this process must be rooted in consent and respect for individual autonomy. In a studio setting, educators are responsible for creating a space where exploration is encouraged but never imposed. Students should never feel obligated to reveal aspects of their identity or culture unless they choose to do so. This approach supports a safe and inclusive learning environment, one where students can engage authentically in creative processes and art-based inquiry on their own terms, according to what feels meaningful and appropriate within the social context of the classroom. If educators consider their students researchers, they can collaborate to create a space where diverse perspectives can contribute to deeper insights and help to shape meaningful solutions. Educators also collaborate daily in their institutions. Many recognize the benefit in this, while others maintain a strong hold on their authoritative style of instruction where their knowledge is shared monodirectional rather than multidirectional. Transdisciplinary research embraces collaboration by actively combining the collective knowledges of everyone involved, which leads to new ways of seeing, understanding, and problem-solving. Educators who engage

with their students, and/or colleagues in discussions and critical thinking exercises are in fact participating in transdisciplinary research; They are working together to develop ideas and solve problems within their learning environment. Patricia Leavy emphasizes that transdisciplinary research is a collaborative approach aimed at addressing public needs, which aligns closely with the role of educators, who engage with the public through learning. As an educator, you interact with the public daily—your students. They carry the experiences and knowledges from the classroom forward into their communities. This interconnectedness highlights the importance of understanding and responding to public needs within educational practices. Leavy stresses the importance of transdisciplinary research by stating that:

All disciplines offer unique but limited perspectives onto the social reality they study. By cultivating these perspectives in academic training and then liberating researchers from working exclusively within their confines, the research community is able to go further than ever before in our quest to understand and intervene in our rapidly changing world. The implications are both theoretical and methodological. It is an exciting time. (Leavy, 2011, p15).

Recognizing and incorporating diverse experiences and opportunities in research is essential today to ensure that studies are inclusive and reflective of the communities they aim to serve. When researchers engage in transdisciplinary, practice based and art-based approaches there is more opportunity to focus on a wide range of details that focus on a problem, given all of the backgrounds of the participants. This approach incorporates multiple disciplines, as well as cultural and historical perspectives; it leads to more comprehensive and effective solutions. This approach acknowledges the complexity of issues and works toward holistic, innovative outcomes. Educators who collaborate with the student body to plan and prepare a classroom that

reflect the interests and cultural perspectives of the students, and in turn create more inclusive, relevant, and engaging learning environments. Transdisciplinary approach to research and learning grew out of efforts to bridge the gaps between traditional academic disciplines. It was first introduced by Swiss philosopher and psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980), best known for his influential work on cognitive development. Piaget saw the need for deeper collaboration between disciplines to tackle complex problems that couldn't be fully addressed within the limits of any single field. The term "transdisciplinary" came into wider use in 1970 during an international workshop on interdisciplinary where Piaget, Austrian systems theorist Erich Jantsch, and French mathematician André Lichnerowicz each presented their ideas. Jantsch later expanded on the concept, promoting a holistic, systems-based approach to knowledge that moves beyond traditional academic boundaries (Nicolescu, 2005). In practice, educators engage in transdisciplinary work daily, often without realizing it. Art educators have a deep understanding of transdisciplinary approaches because the arts are not just an intersection of disciplines, they are the foundation upon which all other disciplines have developed. Art is the original mode of inquiry, expression, and communication, preceding and informing fields such as science, mathematics, and philosophy. Despite this, students often struggle to see the value or the interconnections, largely because many educators themselves are not trained to integrate subjects seamlessly. Artists/Educators, however, are uniquely positioned to embrace transdisciplinary methods, as the arts inherently generate and sustain knowledge across multiple fields, shaping the way we perceive and engage with the world. Understanding transdisciplinary research and its role in education has deepened my appreciation for how knowledge, culture, and experience intertwine. Nowhere is this more evident than in the arts, which serve as the very foundation for inquiry and discovery. By embracing transdisciplinary methods, educators (especially those in

the arts) can create learning environments that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration across disciplines. Building on this idea, exploring opportunities with students through a transdisciplinary and art-based research approach has significantly shaped my understanding of both. Like transdisciplinary research, art-based research uses artistic expression as a means of engaging with knowledge, experience, and culture. However, art-based research goes beyond facts and intellectual understanding—it taps into emotional intelligence, personal history, and subconscious influences. This approach opens new layers of exploration, allowing students and educators alike to interact with knowledge in deeply personal and transformative ways.

Figure 1 is an image, a record, a paint-stained paper used during a demonstration while instructing. It was not disposed of but rather kept in a booklet and returned to and seen as an object of study. This then became a transdisciplinary artifact, a convergence of teaching,

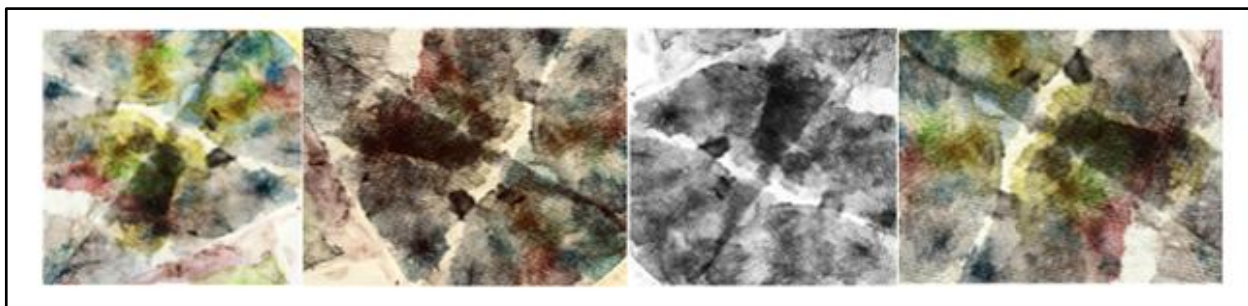


Figure 1: paper study

artmaking, and inquiry. It holds knowledge that resists verbal explanation and instead communicates through its material presence. As such, I include it as a legitimate form of research within my practice.

In art education, methodologies such as action research, transdisciplinary inquiry, and art-based research are essential tools for fostering creativity and engagement. Yet, their value is sometimes questioned or misunderstood. My research focuses on the planning and preparation of

learning, how past experiences shape our attention and interest and how as artists/educators, we can develop new ways of thinking and planning for a diverse group of learners. Perhaps, for some learners, this is a new opportunity — a space to explore, experiment, and embrace failure as a vital part of growth. These behaviors, essential to artistic discovery, are equally important in education, fostering a sense of curiosity, resilience, and creative problem-solving. Leavy (2025) stresses that while the arts are intrinsically concerned with aesthetics, their role in research extends far beyond beauty:

ABR (art-based research) is based on aesthetic knowing or, as Nielsen (2004) suggests, “aesthetic work.” With respect to the aesthetics or “beauty” of the research product itself, the beauty elicited by ABR is explicitly linked to how it fosters reflexivity and empathy in the consumer (and researcher) (Dunlop, 2001). Aesthetics are linked to advancing care and compassion (McIntyre, 2004). ABR is grounded in a philosophy that Gerber and colleagues (2012, p. 41) suggest: Recognizes that art has been able to convey truth(s) or bring about awareness (both knowledge of the self and of others). Recognizes that the use of the arts is critical in achieving self–other knowledge. Values preverbal ways of knowing. Includes multiple ways of knowing, such as sensory, kinesthetic, and imaginary knowing (Leavy, 2025, p. 5)

Art-based research offers a wealth of resources, encouraging both reflexivity and reflective practice. Through this process, artists share their insights and truths, contributing to a deeper understanding. Despite its significance and value, artists/educators are scarce in public school settings. Given the increasing demands placed on students today, it may be time to reinvest in these essential educators. Marshall, like Leavy et al. also states that:

An art inquiry, however, while it may involve illustration, also invites learners to detach from the impasse of "accuracy" to open information up to exploration and scrutiny. In an art inquiry, personal experience and interpretation begin the unlocking of content. From there, learners can stretch, expand, and connect content by playing with it. (Marshall, 2019, p. 93)

As Marshall (2019) and Leavy et al. note, an art inquiry goes beyond simple illustration; it encourages students to move past the constraints of accuracy and opens up space for exploration and interpretation. Personal experience becomes the starting point for unlocking content, allowing learners to stretch, expand, and connect their ideas through creative play. This process not only enriches students' understanding of art but also shapes educators' own growth as learners. In my experience, embracing this approach has deepened my understanding of teaching, encouraging me to question my methods, engage more deeply with my students, and continue to evolve as both an artist and an educator.

LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

This literature review focused on scholarship that examines the significance of art education in relation to my practice as an artist and educator, exploring how it informs my teaching philosophy, shapes my approach to student engagement, and deepens my understanding of the role of creativity in learning. The researchers I have selected engage with critical questions about who is involved in these creative processes and why they matter, offering insights that align with and challenge my own pedagogical values. Scholars in the field of art education offer valuable insights that provide evidence for the importance of my research and its focus on examining who is engaged in art education and why. Through their work, they underscore the critical role of inclusivity, participation, and diverse perspectives in creating a rich and dynamic

learning environment. For example, by considering who is involved in the educational process, scholars highlight how students, educators, and communities each bring their own unique insights, experiences, and cultural contexts that influence teaching and learning. This broader understanding of engagement informs more equitable practices and strengthens the relevance of art education. Additionally, these scholars advocate for the significance of meaningful participation, which aligns with my own interest in fostering a collaborative and reflective approach to learning that empowers both students and educators. By emphasizing these values, their research supports my argument that art education can be a transformative tool for personal and collective growth, a bridge between diverse voices, and an essential key to building a more inclusive, thoughtful, and effective educational practice. Furthermore, while scholars such as Marshall, Sullivan, Leavy, discuss how art-based learning and the transdisciplinary approach are legitimate and impactful forms of inquiry, one aspect that is rarely addressed is the role and expertise of the educator. From this foundational discussion of some aspects of transdisciplinary, arts-based research, and pedagogical models I continue to consider the question I posed earlier in this thesis: Can any teacher effectively integrate art into their lesson planning, or does a background in the arts significantly enhance the potential of art-based learning? This question highlights the need for further discussion about how art educators and their methodologies are valued within educational systems.

In conclusion, the intersections of multiple research methodologies, including arts-based research and transdisciplinary approaches, underscores the vital role of social connectivity in art education. Through these dynamic methodologies, art educators can advocate for the arts as a powerful tool for fostering creativity, critical thinking, and experiential learning. By recognizing the expertise of art educators and the transformative potential of art-based, transdisciplinary

learning, we can create a more inclusive and dynamic educational environment, one that nurtures creativity while also addressing broader societal challenges and promoting holistic student development.

The following section outlines the multiple methodologies that informed and guided the design and implementation of this research.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, mixed methods approach. An arts-based research (ABR) reflexive practice examines the evolving experiences of an artist-educator engaged in a studio-based, student-centered learning environment. By incorporating a transdisciplinary lens, the research explores how artistic practice and pedagogy intersect, evolve, and influence one another within the classroom setting. The mixed method design lends well to a reflexive and reflective qualitative approach used to analyze the transformation of teaching philosophy, instructional decision-making, and artistic growth. The study included the researcher, as both an artist and an educator, engaged in the ongoing practice of realizing and documenting the shifts in their teaching practice, environmental dynamics, and artistic evolution.

The original purpose of this research, as stated previously, was to understand how middle school students perceived their own creative abilities and potential, and how these perceptions of art education influence their attitudes and behaviours in an art classroom. Additionally, research was to explore whether their attitudes toward art activities affected their engagement and participation. And finally, it was an inquiry into whether student-centered art activities enhanced students' attitudes toward art education and increased their overall engagement. These inquiries led to far deeper research questions and inquiries into the evolution of studio-based learning for

the artist/educator. Studio based learning supports the use of students' prior knowledge and it also provides a space for exploration, valuable to an art education. Art based learners in a studio space do not solely rely on literature for information but it includes the aesthetics as research as well. This focus on teaching pedagogy spoke little about the depth and importance of the role of the educator. From here my research prompted me to ask the following questions: If educators are responsible for providing all of this for their students, what kind of educator is needed, and what preparation is needed for the educator to support such a space?

This section explores the importance and impact of lessons delivered by the educator, with attention to planning, preparation, and delivery. Artists/educators hold dual roles in the classroom; they create, and they share. To further refine my questions and better understand both my individual role and the broader role of the artist-educator, I have drawn on art-based inquiry. This approach allows creation and reflection to occur simultaneously, making space for both artistic practice and pedagogical insight to inform one another. Being involved in art making informs what you learn, how you learn, and what and how you share. This practice-based research coexists as planning and preparation for instruction as well as art-based inquiry data. This data was analyzed and utilized to show how studio learning influences pedagogical strategies and how pedagogical strategies can influence studio practice. Marshall and D'Adamo (2018) describe art classrooms as dynamic environments where educators can experiment with innovative teaching strategies. These spaces encourage creative pedagogical approaches, including arts-based research projects and activities that promote critical thinking and self-awareness. When considering lesson planning and activities for learners an educator must consider more than just the curriculum outcomes; They must focus on the interest and experiences of their students. Educators come to their classrooms with their own interest and

experiences and those are usually the driving forces for the lessons delivered. While curriculum outcomes hope to guide learners to discover specific knowledge, instructors develop the way (how and why) the outcomes are delivered and learned. Most middle school students in my classes enjoy discussing current trends and popular topics. At times, they are fully aware of these interests and initiate conversations; other times, I observe these discussions unfolding naturally during informal moments. Common themes include language, sports, fashion, food, movies, anime, and personal relationships, such as crushes. While educators may hesitate to engage with these interests—particularly when they do not align with their own—there is significant value in allowing students to explore topics that matter to them. Empowering students to choose their own topics can lead to deeper engagement and uncover meaningful messages and lessons that might otherwise be overlooked. Do all instructors reflect on how and why they chose the route they did when lesson planning and preparation?

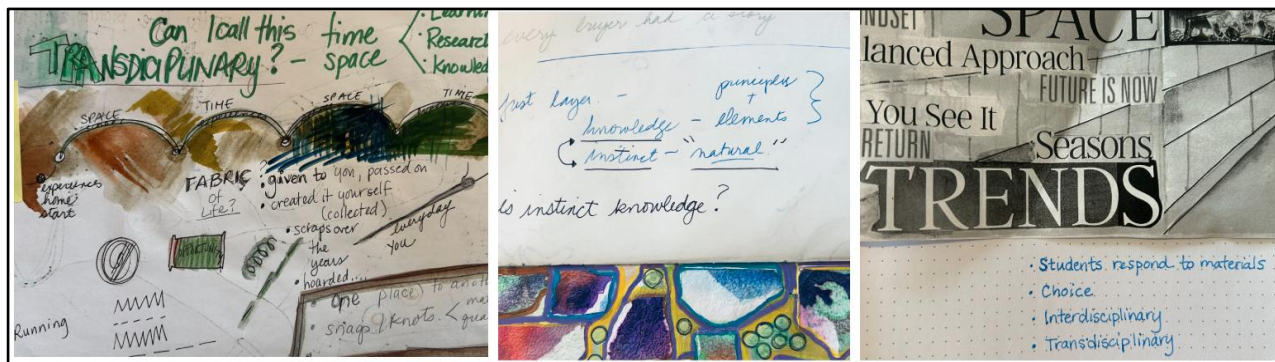


Figure 2: Excerpts from booklets

My planning is shaped by my experiences. When I plan for my classes, I make notes that describe the energy in the room. Figure 2 are illustrations and words included in booklets for future review. In my classroom I include all learners in the planning. We begin each unit by writing down ideas based on both shared and individual interests. I connect these ideas to curriculum outcomes, the materials available to us, and possible opportunities for exploration.

These planning discussions create meaningful connections—between educators and students, between students and their own ideas, and among the students themselves. I want students to create and be creative in the classroom.

Constantly providing direction became exhausting, and I began to feel more like a authoritarian than an educator. Contemporary frameworks such as Reggio Emilia, Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB), and Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM) offer powerful alternatives that activate students' imagination, foster creativity, and prioritize student agency. I wanted my students not just to create, but to be creative - taking ownership of their learning while engaging deeply with artistic processes. TAB mirrors the practices of working artists, recognizing every student as an artist and emphasizing self-directed inquiry, exploration, and the creative journey over the final product. SHoM provides a theoretical structure that encourages habits like observation, reflection, and persistence, helping students engage consciously with their own creative processes. Reggio Emilia highlights the importance of relationships, environment, and community knowledge, recognizing that learning emerges through dialogue, play, and exploration. Collectively, these approaches promote classroom cultures rooted in curiosity, choice, and meaningful connection cultivating lifelong skills in creative problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaborative learning that extend well beyond the art room.

This methodology frames my research within a qualitative, arts-based, and reflexive approach, emphasizing the interplay between artistic practice, pedagogy, and the broader value of arts education. The study's direction evolved from an initial focus on student perceptions of creativity and engagement to a deeper examination of the educator's role in shaping a dynamic studio environment. By questioning how artist-educators might integrate their own creative practices into instruction, the research highlights the significance of reflective teaching,

instructional decision-making, and the design of a student-centered learning space. It also underscores the vital role of arts education in fostering creative thinking, problem-solving, and self-expression: skills essential for lifelong learning. The study considers the impact of Teaching for Artistic Behavior (TAB) and Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM) with educators actively participating in the learning process alongside their students. Through an inquiry-based lens, the research explores how studio learning informs pedagogical strategies and, in turn, how teaching influences artistic growth, reinforcing the transformative potential of arts education in both student and educator development.

WHY A STUDIO?

Educators can prompt students to focus in on an idea. I believe that each time I offer a theme or prompt, we collaborate with one another because we share a space and a time together. One activity that illustrates this beautifully is the *Exquisite Corpse*, a collaborative drawing exercise where three participants contribute to a single sketch without seeing each other's work until the end. The instructor provides each group with a sheet of paper and asks students to fold it into thirds. The first student draws the top section—perhaps the head of a figure or the top of a landscape—then folds it over to conceal their work. The next student continues the drawing, guided only by a few connecting lines, and folds it again. The third student completes the final section, unaware of what came before. When the paper is unfolded, the full, unexpected creation is revealed, often sparking laughter, surprise, and reflection.

In a studio learning environment, the role of the educator transforms from an instructor to an active participant in the creative process, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas between teachers and students. Rather than solely directing learning, educators engage alongside

students—questioning, experimenting, and adapting in response to emerging artistic inquiries. This transdisciplinary collaborative approach cultivates a more responsive teaching practice, where educators refine their ability to listen, observe, and guide without imposing rigid structures. Through this model, educators deepen their understanding of how students think, create, and interpret the world around them and as students explore art-based projects that delve into their personal experiences, community connections, and perspectives. Educators also expand their perspectives, challenge their assumptions, embrace new artistic approaches, and discover unexpected directions in their teaching. The unpredictability of providing an environment that supports open-ended inquiry encourages educators to develop flexibility, problem-solving skills, and a willingness to learn from their students. Some educators may initially feel discomfort with the open-ended nature of studio practice, but embracing student autonomy can expand an instructor's capacity to facilitate learning rather than control it. This approach invites educators to step back, listen more attentively, and intervene with care and intention. As a result, the classroom becomes a more dynamic and reciprocal space.

At the same time, this shift involves a process of unlearning for both educators and students. Many enter the classroom shaped by rigid systems that emphasize discipline, control, and predetermined outcomes. These structures often leave little room for ambiguity, experimentation, or reflection. Letting go of such ingrained habits can be unsettling. Educators may question a process that does not offer immediate clarity, while students, unsure of expectations, might resist the freedom they are given. This resistance is often rooted in insecurity rather than disinterest. Over time, as trust grows and the classroom adjusts, the deeper value of student-centered, studio-based learning begins to emerge. Parents and administrators start to recognize the development of student agency, engagement, and creative confidence that takes

shape within this evolving space. Through note-taking, sketching, and material archiving, I began to create little booklets that housed ideas, (see Figure 3) that I could draw on for inspiration, motivation and direction. The studio became a place of excitement and unpredictability, where my students and I explored together.

My collections of ideas became more than just pages in a sketchbook, or small booklets filled with daily reflections, doodles, inspiring conversations, and moments of revelation. They held inquiries and research material that deepened my thinking and practice. The motivation that filled these booklets was fueled by observations they made, conversations we had, positive and negative feedback on activities, I also wrote about what frustrated me when teaching; the lesson plans that do not capture interest or why students became frustrated during an activity.

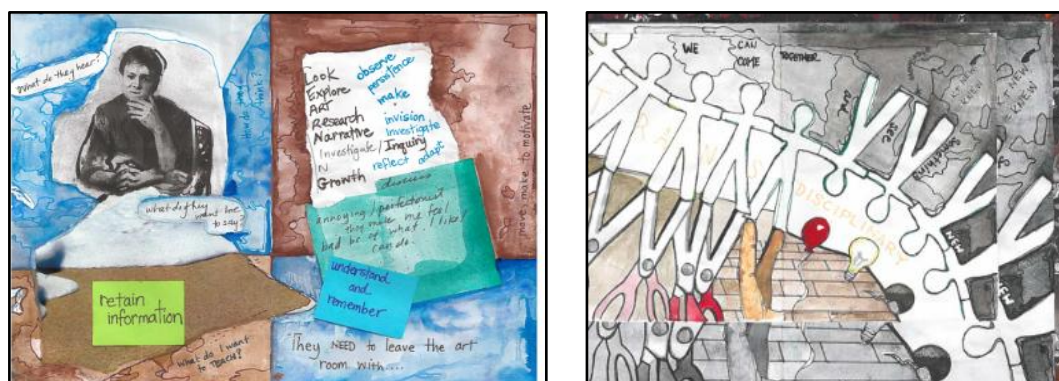


Figure 3: Details from booklet and zines- From There to Here and Time & Space

Experienced studio practitioners are often more comfortable guiding students through open-ended exploration, understanding that meaningful learning emerges from experimentation and self-directed discovery. However, educators who feel uneasy providing independent student work may attempt to impose a different structure or limit choices, unintentionally restricting both

student and teacher growth. Recognizing and addressing this instinct allows educators to embrace a more flexible, responsive approach to instruction.

Art based research nurtures risk-taking for both students and educators. By fostering a culture where mistakes are reframed as valuable steps in the creative process, educators become more comfortable with experimentation and ambiguity in their own practice. This is a great shift for most educators; realizing that exploring not only enriches student learning but also reinvigorates the educator's connection to their own artistic identity by bridging the gap between teaching and personal creative exploration. Ultimately, an art-based inquiry approach supports mutual growth. Educators refine their ability to scaffold learning without limiting student autonomy and develop teaching practice that is adaptive, inquiry-driven, and deeply connected to the evolving nature of artistic expression. In this space, learning is no longer unidirectional—both students and educators grow together, shaping an environment where curiosity, discovery, and artistic development thrive.

Figure 4 is a detail of a larger piece of paper that stayed on my table for an entire day. Throughout the day, I added and removed textures using paint, glue, tissue, and scraps of paper.



Figure 4: Detail from Zine- Behaviours & Habits

The intention was to work instinctively without explanation or planning. I turned the paper in multiple directions, viewing it from different perspectives, adding and subtracting until I felt it complete. This paper eventually became a zine titled *Behaviours and Habits*, documenting a day in the studio spent experimenting with my instincts and the materials available to me in a teaching environment. This activity encapsulates art-based research; it contains information supplied by time and space spent in the studio and evidence of the influences around me.

WHO AND WHAT

This section introduces the foundational ideas behind my four-week focused study of how, within the broader context of my teaching space, I used studio-informed approaches to guide my lesson plans for middle school students (many of whom had no prior art education experience). By contextualizing this study, I aim to reflect on how the limitations of time and experience shaped my approach to prioritizing meaningful arts education.

Teaching middle school students with little to no prior art education makes the significance of an arts education even more apparent. With limited instruction time, I questioned: What could they truly learn in such a limited amount of time? And what should be prioritized? While concepts like color theory, perspective and elements and principles of art and design are valuable tools for skill building, the ability to problem-solve, innovate, adapt, experiment, and explore ideas and materials beyond their experience, creativity and imagination, were the essential skills I hoped for them to take away from an arts education. With little time allotted, art education had to be both impactful and meaningful. The learning process in the studio is reciprocal- together we actively discover new perspectives, and methods that inform and expand our artistic and pedagogical understanding. Supported by this studio framework, I was able to model exploration

and experimentation. The classroom was set up with readily available materials, procedure lists for support, and clearly defined work areas for all learners. After gauging their interests and discovering what they already knew about art, I introduced them to the studio. I pointed out each of the stations in the room and then encouraged them to make time to explore all of the materials that were available to them and possibly create. Collaborative idea generation and material exploration were consistently encouraged throughout the class time. My presence in the room was supportive and curious; I was there to provide more materials, to answer questions and, when necessary, facilitate technical demonstrations. During this time, I observed freedom, carefreeness, and more individualism than I had seen in my classroom prior to the studio unit. I attribute this to understanding that we, as learners, have choice and we, as learners, are curious to try. Each time the students entered the studio, their focus sharpened on what to explore, and collectively our research practices became more targeted and intentional.

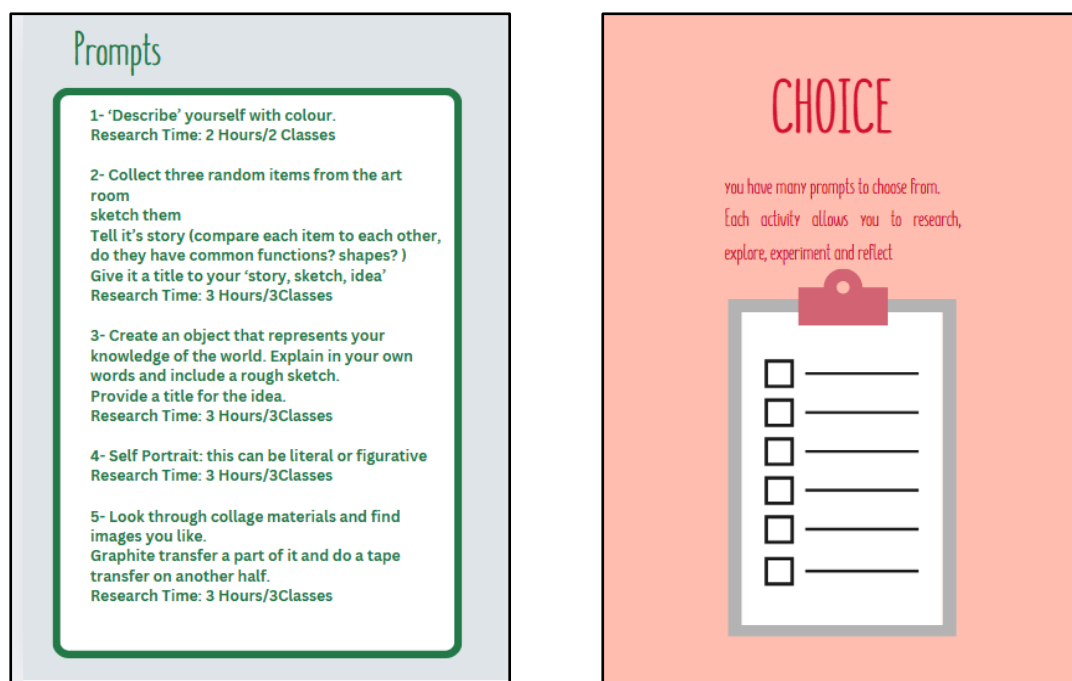


Figure 5: Details of prompt booklet

In preparing the studio and hoping to spark interest, I compiled a prompt booklet (see Figure 5) filled with creative prompts - ideas that had worked well in the past. Other prompts not shown in Figure 5 but often utilized in the studio included blind contour drawings and portraits, imaginative scenarios like traveling to the future and bringing something back, and more personal reflections such as “What do you resist?” or “What are the latest trends?” I also added playful design challenges like inventing new sports uniforms or musical instruments. The intent was to ignite curiosity and give students a starting point for choice and exploration but to my surprise, very few consulted the booklets. Instead, the classroom took on a life of its own. The hour-long sessions flew by as students immersed themselves in the materials, shared stories, swapped techniques, and most meaningfully exchanged ideas. Many gravitated toward personal projects, often making things for family members or inspired by their own experiences. One notable moment was their excitement over finger painting, an activity they often request but rarely get to do. One notable moment was their initial excitement over finger painting, an activity they often request but rarely have the opportunity to revisit. Finger painting was familiar and comforting, a connection to an earlier time where they recall being more uninhibited and experimental with art. Few of them continued with it but pivoted naturally and with confidence, using that sense of freedom as a springboard into new territory. The same materials that once represented simple joy became a starting point for more thoughtful, imaginative experimentation. They moved fluidly between mediums, unafraid to try unfamiliar techniques or pursue emerging ideas. This willingness to explore signaled a shift—not just in what they were making, but in how they were thinking as artists. These unexpected directions were rich with insight. I documented many of these moments as field notes in my journal, and over time, these observations evolved into reflective memos that sparked new inquiries—leading me deeper into

both material and conceptual research. Figure 6 is a detail from the zine *Time & Space* where I collected notes and ideas demonstrating the transdisciplinary approach with my layered interpretations and understandings for later study. This page consists of collaged works, gelli plate explorations and photocopies of images exploring value.



Figure 6: Detail of page in zine: *Time & Space*

A studio environment uniquely invites engagement and continuous experimentation with materials, concepts, and pedagogical strategies. In this context, learners observed firsthand how their peers approached creative challenges, and often gained new insights that shaped and influenced their own studio practice. This process cultivates adaptability and reinforces the understanding that both teaching and making art are cyclical: they involve ongoing trials, revisions, and a deepening of understanding. Helping students understand the value of arts education has been a complex and, at times, challenging process. The creation of a classroom studio space helped bridge the gap between these difficulties and the everyday relevance of art and artistic practice. Having a dedicated art studio within the classroom established a space where the cultural perspectives, knowledges, and personal interests of all learners could be observed and honoured. Fostered within this open studio environment meaningful learning was

being practiced and profound connections were being formed by students, educators and artists. What initially began as an effort to engage students in the value of arts education evolved into a valuable site of inquiry, offering deep insights into my own experiences and development as an educator.

DUAL IDENTITY

Implementing a studio-based learning environment reignited my own art practice. As an educator, I needed to experience and understand what I was providing for my students. As an educator, it was vital for me to acknowledge my positionality and to develop a pedagogical practice that mirrors the values that have shaped me as an artist and as a teacher. Figure 7 details my research practice and provides a snapshot of my journey towards understanding and developing my visual literacy. During this studio unit I was able to create a learning space that mirrored my own artistic journey, fostered an environment where, alongside of my students, I could engage deeply in the processes of experimentation, creation, and reflection. One of the greatest advantages of being an artist/educator is the ability to nurture both the creative and instructional selves simultaneously, with each informing and enriching the other. For artist-educators, maintaining a career in education alongside a creative practice offers a unique and symbiotic relationship that fosters both professional and personal growth. The intersection of teaching and artistic practice creates an ongoing dialogue where inspiration, inquiry, and reflection move fluidly between the studio and the classroom. Educators who actively make art engage with students not just as instructors but as fellow creators, modeling the creative process in real time. This dual identity enriches both roles by deepening artistic engagement and reinforcing pedagogical approaches that prioritize exploration and meaning making over rigid instruction. The practice-based approach provided me with an opportunity to use multiple

perspectives and ultimately transform my teaching philosophy. Although the learners had autonomy over their own research, the studio environment allowed me to reflect on my teaching philosophy, pedagogy, as well as my own artistic practice. In order model curiosity, risk-taking, and the confidence to experiment, I had to embody those qualities. As a result, my need and desire to create flourished. My sketchbook quickly filled with studies and material explorations. Play and experimentation was reconsidered as essential to my growth—not just as an educator, but as an artist. Field notes, demos and trials became recorded memories and archives for

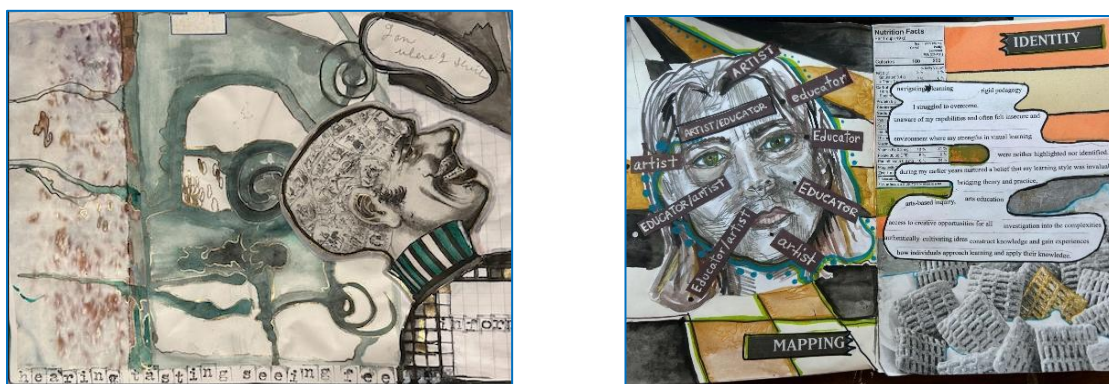


Figure 7: Details from Zines: *From There to Here* and *See My Words*

experiences. I freely handled materials and demonstrated error and inquiry.

The details in Figure 7 reveal how doodles and collage create layered juxtapositions that reflect the confusion, discomfort, and sometimes chaotic nature of my thoughts as I navigate both the learning process and my evolving identity as an artist/educator. These two details emerged in response to a prompt exploring how to visually represent this dual role. Participatory and arts-based research became a kind of shelter—a space to gather and make sense of my fragmented ideas and creative impulses. Over the course of my full-time teaching career, my personal art practice gradually moved into the background. It wasn't just a matter of limited time; the constant pressure to create work that was intentional, brilliant, and purposeful began to

overshadow the joy of making for its own sake. At times, I found myself resenting my role as an educator because it no longer fully nurtured my creative self. Teaching art met only the most basic needs of that identity. Before implementing a studio-centred learning approach in the classroom, I viewed my art practice as a separate entity. Implementing my own practice with my pedagogy, the studio space helped absorb these aspects of me, providing the title as artist/educator. In this process I came to this transformative self-reflexive question, how could influence my everyday not inspire and inform my art making in some way? I began to listen to my own dialogue with my students. I emphasized approaching their learning experiences with the following pedagogical principles: making has no 'right' time, making can be random, making can be therapeutic, and making can be unconscious. I returned to the booklets of notes, the sketches, and the collages and began to see them as important collections, as meaningful, reflective, and self-reflexive records of thought, process, and inquiry. These collections became collaged reflections that held ideas and moments of significance. They are works of research: pages of gathered data, sketchbooks containing potential learning models, reflective and self-reflexive insights, and approaches to investigation and communication. In this way, I understand these collections and the resulting zines, which form the second component of this thesis, as acts of research creation. Turning these ideas into works that embodied my thoughts not only gave voice to my artistic expression, they sparked a new found curiosity within me. Engaging with my inquiry through art-based practice allowed me to understand the importance of making, both in art education and art practice. This realization made clear how the creative process could be shared and applied to my teaching methodology.

COLLECTING MATTERS

This study incorporates several data collection methods. Reflective journals serve as a key component, allowing for written reflections that document instructional choices, classroom experiences, and shifts in perspectives on student autonomy. These reflections provide insight into the thought processes and the ongoing development of my teaching philosophy. Notes, sketches, doodles and collages became research day after day, available to study, analyze and observe. These markings were reflexive as well, and embodied inspiration and motivation. With these collections, classroom observations are also integral to the study. By watching and supporting learners as they engage, we tend to the field where growth and opportunity can take root. Furthermore, visual and artistic analysis was integral to the examination of artwork, critique of lesson plans, and consideration of classroom dynamics throughout the study. This analysis seeks to identify emerging themes in teaching philosophy and artistic development, providing a deeper understanding of how creative practices influence educational outcomes. Lesson documentation offers detailed records of how studio-based learning impacts instructional approaches, material choices, and assessment strategies. These records help to track the evolution of teaching methods and provide a comprehensive view of the pedagogical shifts that occur when implementing a studio-based, student-centered approach.

As an artist/educator, I move through the world looking/observing. When things catch my attention, and without always knowing why, I record it, with words, a sketch or taking a picture. These images become part of an ongoing collection—not as collectibles, but as seeds of ideas, buds not yet formed or fully bloomed. This form of documentation serves as both personal reflection and research, integral to my teaching practice. Notes and materials become visual responses to my own artistic development and pedagogical thinking. Together, they trace the

evolution of ideas and reveal how my interactions with students, the classroom, and myself shape the work and are, in turn, shaped by the studio environment. Figure 8 is a record of a few pictures I took from my studio classroom for later inquiry or additions to current research.



Figure 8: Image collection

These images, which emerged through my research, became zines. As a parallel text, they offer insight into how I gathered materials, made sense of the data, and engaged with the analysis throughout this study. The zines became records of inspiration and possibility—booklets of ideas emerging from my own reflective practice within a studio-based pedagogy. These parallel texts captured the layered processes of thinking, observing, and responding that shaped my teaching and artistic inquiry. Through them, I documented materials, themes, and questions that informed the prompts, inquiries, and studio environments I crafted for my students. The zines embody the values of studio-based learning: openness, experimentation, and a focus on process. By collecting moments of curiosity, uncertainty, and inspiration, they function as a form of research that continually fuels my creative and pedagogical decisions in the art classroom.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section explores the data generated through my dual role as artist and educator working within a studio-based learning environment. The analysis is rooted in reflective and

practice-led methodologies, drawing from visual documentation, written reflections, classroom observations, and interactions with students. Rather than isolating data as objective findings, I approach each artifact; photographs, notes, materials, and student dialogue, as active participants in an ongoing process of meaning-making. Through this lens, analysis becomes a form of inquiry that acknowledges the entanglement of teaching, learning, and artistic practice. The following themes emerged not as fixed categories, but as fluid, overlapping currents shaped by my experiences in the studio and my evolving pedagogical values. The outcomes of this practice-based research carry endless layers of meaning. In this context, meaning is inherently subjective, dependent on who is viewing the work and how they interpret it. Imagery is constantly being critiqued. Visual imagery is constantly subjected to critique, whether solicited or not. My work has frequently received feedback, even when not requested. This tendency likely stems from the fact that most people are surrounded by some form of art in their daily lives, whether it is images in their homes, products, or media. As a result, visual art feels familiar and accessible to many, even if they lack formal training. This widespread exposure to art and that art is seen as something “open” to interpretation, so people often feel free to comment on it, regardless of their background. This research has enabled me to be less analytic towards my own work. With training in an art school, I am open to interpretations and read works very differently to those with no training. Symbols, line, colour are aspects of language and communication, and I remind myself continually of my positionality; my learning and lived experiences and bias when reading them. This awareness encouraged me to explore and be free with materials, to explore freely, without clinging to familiarity or control. Whenever I felt myself leaning into recognizable styles or comfortable techniques, I made a conscious effort to disrupt that pattern. This could be as simple as turning or ripping the page, switching tools, or even closing my eyes.

These strategies helped me generate new data and avoid producing work that felt safe or repetitive. I was driven by a desire to push boundaries, discover the unfamiliar, and open up space for new conversations, interpretations and possibilities.

BETWEEN THE PAGES

This section discusses the ways in which I shifted my practice and began to analyze the materials I had generated through a more intentional and reflective lens. The process of engaging with these materials; notes, sketches, lesson ideas, visual prompts, allowed me to merge my desire to create with my efforts to organize and make sense of my pedagogical thinking. Over time, this naturally evolved into a series of small vignettes or booklets, brief visual and textual interpretations that revealed emerging patterns in my practice and pedagogy. I begin to share and analyze the research documented in my sketchbook, field notes and booklets. These groupings of thoughts formed layered, collaged and nonlinear data that reflected my experiences with studio-based teaching and learning. As I spent time reflecting on this process, I noticed that the daily fragments I interacted with; memos, magazine cutouts, bold text, doodles, and reflective questions, began to take on the format and feel of a zine. This realization led me to create a series of zines as part of my research output. These zines serve as a creative and analytical extension of my text-based thesis. The structure and form of each zine are illustrative of my studio-based pedagogical practice, offering visual and material language for the themes emerging through my research. It is my intention that this component of the study mirrors my everyday experiences in the classroom, which are layered, fluid, and generative, where teaching and artmaking are always in conversation.

Zines are self-published and independently circulated works that serve as a powerful medium for arts-based research and transdisciplinary learning. By blending text, image, and personal narrative, they amplify individual voice, encourage self-reflection, and make publishing more accessible (Baker & Cantillon, 2022). Their emphasis on process, personal expression, and social critique aligns closely with the goals of my research. I see a strong connection between lesson planning and the creation of zines. Both are constructed from the positionality of the maker and are designed with an audience in mind, whether that audience is a classroom of students or a broader community of readers. Zines have a long history of providing information and challenging dominant narratives, much like lesson plans that adapt content and pedagogy to specific learning contexts. Both are reproducible, distributable, and often in flux, constantly evolving based on reflection and feedback. Increasingly, zines are being recognized as legitimate forms of research and documentation. They contribute not only to the design and reflection embedded in lesson planning but also to personal and pedagogical inquiry. This process of recording experiences; visually, materially, and reflectively, has become part of my classroom practice and has been shared with students as a meaningful way to document their own learning. As Baker and Cantillon (2022) emphasize, zines are not just informal publications, they are increasingly recognized as intentional and impactful forms of cultural documentation. They write:

Zines are an intentional heritage practice being created with the very clean purpose of contributing to public history via being circulated in the community and online as well as being lodged in local repositories and state and national archives. Specifically, the zines we are creating with participants capture multiple understandings of cultural identity, local heritage and sense of place (Baker and Cantillon, 2022, pg543).

Unlike many academic journals, zines are accessible, tactile, and intended for wide engagement. Rooted in DIY and activist traditions, they disrupt conventional academic publishing by foregrounding personal voice, immediacy, and collective knowledge-making. As Brown, Hurley, Perry, and Roche (2021) note, zines function as a democratic and relational form of scholarship—one that values embodied experience, storytelling, and reflection as valid forms of knowledge. In this way, zines challenge hierarchies of expertise and open space for alternative, community-driven research practices. Zines allow a new kind of dialogue to take place between learners, educators, and institutions. Reflexive zines encourage their makers to remix, re-present, and reimagine, fostering an evolving exchange of ideas that bridges the gap between art and education. This dynamic communicative potential made zines the most fitting vehicle to capture my research journey. They serve as a tangible, evolving resource that reflects my experiences as an artist-educator during a multi-week, studio-based unit centered on student-led, arts-based inquiry. In this context, the zines I created do not simply report research findings—they are the research. They embody the layered, reflective, and iterative nature of my pedagogical thinking, offering a visual and narrative record of how knowledge was formed through the studio process.

My thesis is a construction, a collection of research made accessible to invite discussion and critique. The zines are research in themselves, containing the thoughts and motivations that emerged during the studio practice unit. They were generated through creative processes such as sketching, planning, documenting, and reflecting. These practices, encouraged in the classroom, were designed to support both student autonomy and my own growth as an educator. This dual process not only documents my journey as an artist but also strengthens the connection between my personal artistic practice and my teaching, enriching the learning experience for both me and my students. As I analyzed journal reflections, classroom observations, and visual documentation

I noticed clear shifts in my beliefs and practices as an artist-educator. My ideas around planning and what students *need* to learn to practice meaningfully began to shift. The demands of a studio-based learning environment prompted me to rethink the conventional order of formative and summative assessments and move toward a more flexible, student-led approach. These changes did not happen all at once, but emerged gradually through patterns in the data, revealing a growing comfort with uncertainty and a deeper trust in students' creative agency.

A recurring theme in the analysis was the role of transdisciplinary thinking. I observed how my own artistic processes began to inform my instructional strategies more directly, blurring the lines between making and teaching. I grew increasingly confident in identifying a creative role in each class, with the environment and the day feeding our collective motivation for learning. This integration supported a more holistic approach in the classroom, where creativity was not confined to specific outcomes but became embedded in my planning, facilitation, and reflection processes. As my planning and material selection evolved, I found myself navigating a shift

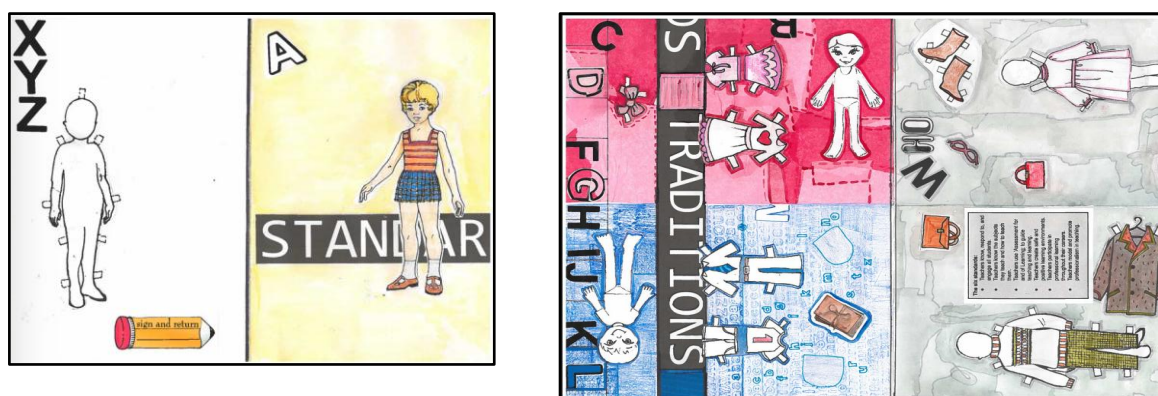


Figure 9: Details from Zine *Standards and Traditions*

toward a more dynamic and responsive approach. While I continue to explore this process to ensure it remains beneficial, I am increasingly focused on developing a space where we create

together, giving voice to all involved. With participation comes interest. My decisions moved away from control and toward responsiveness—tuning in to student needs, interests, and the energy of the studio space. This evolution reflects a deliberate move away from rigid structures, towards a model that embraces adaptability and the co-construction of learning.

In exploring this shift further, I created a zine titled *Traditions and Standards* (Figure 9), which served as an early exploration of these themes that would later become central to my pedagogical approach. The frustrations and critiques expressed in the zine, particularly around the limitations of traditional education, led me to seek alternative methods that value student voice and individuality. Through the creative process, I began to question the constraints of conventional systems and imagine a more dynamic, student-centered classroom where learning is fluid, collaborative, and reflective of diverse identities. One of the most compelling findings to emerge was the reciprocal relationship between my personal artistic growth and my teaching identity. As my own creative practice deepened, I gained confidence and clarity in my pedagogical choices. The data suggest that this personal-professional connection significantly influenced how I came to understand and enact my role as an educator within a studio-based framework. As Brown, Hurley, Perry, and Roche (2021) explain, creative expression often brings with it a sense of vulnerability. Facing a blank page can feel intimidating, and there is pressure to make something that is neat, polished, or good. Zines push back against this mindset by emphasizing process over product. They capture time rather than measure it and invite revision, reflection, and ongoing experimentation. Embracing this open-ended process helped me navigate challenges in my own teaching, particularly around designing tasks that were exploratory rather than outcome driven. Zines are inclusive and generative forms of research and communication that promote tinkering, transdisciplinary thinking, and the testing of ideas. As

Brown et al. (2021) suggest, zines can act as a model for public participation across a range of subjects, making them a valuable tool for education and research alike. Figure 10 from my image collection invites deeper reflection and reflexivity and it prompts me to consider how I might use it meaningfully in my teaching, and how other learners might respond to it



Figure 10: Image collection in sketchbook

CRITIQUE AS ASSESSMENT

Through my experiences and understanding, critique plays a vital role in both the artistic process and assessment in the studio. To begin this discussion, I looked at common definitions of the words critique and assessment:

Evaluate

Check out

Gauge

Make up one's mind about

Estimate

Get the measure of

While these words provide a general sense of what assessment and critique can mean, they fall short in describing what critique means to me as an artist and educator. In my experience both through formal arts education and personal practice I have come to understand critique not as a tool for judgment or measurement, but as an opportunity for meaningful engagement. It invites reflection, dialogue, and deeper understanding. Critique supports the maker by creating a space where ideas can be tested, challenged, and developed. In the classroom, I have seen how students respond to sharing their work with others. When a piece is shared, it becomes open to multiple perspectives and conversations. This sharing transforms the work into something more than a finished product. It becomes a form of data that holds traces of process, intent, and growth. Through this lens, critique is not just a moment of evaluation. It becomes a living part of the learning environment, where knowledge is co-constructed and constantly evolving. Critique in the studio environment fostered not only freedom and safety but also a sense of support for work that engaged the subconscious mind, offering a temporary escape from external judgments. All learners face insecurities at some point in their practice, but by pushing through these moments of self-doubt and discomfort they enter a realm of exploration. It is here, in this space of vulnerability that deep conversations between intuition and knowledge can occur. At the same time, I am aware that critique does not exist in a vacuum. Systems of power—such as racism, gender bias, and cultural assumptions—can shape who feels safe to speak and whose ideas are affirmed or questioned. Traditional forms of critique have often favored dominant voices and excluded others, consciously or not. In developing a studio environment where all students feel seen and valued, I work to acknowledge these imbalances and foster inclusive practices. This means listening closely, encouraging multiple forms of expression, and challenging assumptions about what counts as “good” or “finished” work. By recognizing the social context of critique

alongside its creative potential, I aim to build a space where learning is both personal and collective, open and equitable.

Assessment is an expected part of teaching. Educators draw on their experiences and expertise to measure a student's success, ability, and knowledge. In many classrooms, rubrics are used to break down expectations and limit subjectivity, but in art education, this approach can feel at odds with the complexity of creative expression. When teaching art, feedback must do more than assess performance—it must invite further inquiry, practice, and exploration. Artists comment on culture so that culture can comment back on art. A trained art educator brings this dialogue into the classroom, offering students meaningful feedback while challenging them to engage with materials, tools, and ideas in ways that deepen their individual voice and perspective. When educators lack this training or the ability to look, listen, critique, and provide alternative viewpoints, students miss out on the full potential of an arts education. During this studio unit, I found myself immersed in the same kind of open-ended exploration I encourage in my students. I made an intentional effort to affirm their individuality, highlighting what each had tried or expressed—separate from the work of their peers. I encouraged students to let their own experiences speak for them, rather than rely on comparison or external validation. Working alongside them without the pressure of judgment allowed me to create more freely, tapping into something authentic that reflected my own questions and concerns. These moments taught me that artist/educators need space to explore, to make without certainty, and to reflect without conclusion. As I assessed studio practice during this unit, I came to recognize the essential role of formative learning, not only for students, but also for artist-educators. Artistic research is raw, deeply personal, and often unresolved. If every stage of an artist's process were subject to judgment, many of us would hesitate to create at all. It is precisely in these early, vulnerable

stages that meaningful insights begin to take shape. This kind of experimental and reflexive engagement with artmaking is not separate from teaching but actively informs it. The insights that emerge from our own creative processes are essential. They shape how we listen, respond, and guide students in ways that are empathetic, responsive, and grounded in lived experience. By embracing the unfinished and intuitive aspects of our own studio work, we model the kind of learning we hope to cultivate: honest, evolving, and deeply connected to the world around us

SOME AS A WHOLE

A studio unit was introduced to students as a way to transform the classroom into a personal studio space, emphasizing individuality, independence, and creative exploration. Art-based research served as a foundation for highlighting these principles, allowing students to take ownership of their work and process. The rationale for this research lies in addressing the critical gap in middle school visual arts education and understanding how this gap represents a pivotal stage where students are forming their self-identities and exploring their potential. Many students enter middle school with limited exposure to formal art instruction, often shaped by elementary experiences that lack consistency, depth and specialization. By introducing a studio-based, student-centered approach, this research aimed to create a meaningful and transformative learning environment where not only students could feel empowered to take ownership of their artistic process, but educators could take notice of their influences when planning and preparing student centred activities. Ultimately, this study not only was able to enhance students' attitudes toward art education but also highlighted an educator's passion and dedication to learning. These methods do more than include and collaborate, they advocate the value of visual arts as a critical component of holistic education, highlighting its potential to foster creativity, independence, and

lifelong engagement with the arts. Studio-based learning incorporates and adapts to any learner. Individual interests and abilities are celebrated and supported.

As an artist/educator the engagement with practice-based research prioritizes transparency, reflexivity, and critical examination of biases and assumptions. Strategies such as triangulation of written reflections, visual artifacts, and observational data will ensure rigor and depth in the findings. The art-based model positions educators as co-learners, reinforcing the idea that teaching is an evolving practice rather than a fixed role. Through this approach, instructors cultivate greater flexibility, curiosity, and confidence in allowing artistic inquiry to unfold naturally. By embracing the unpredictable nature of the creative process, educators not only strengthen their teaching but also reconnect with their own artistic identity, making learning a shared and transformative experience.

SYNTHESIS

The purpose of this section is to reflect on how the values of arts education and student-centered learning, explored through literature and studio practice, have influenced and engaged with my personal teaching pedagogy and art practice. I consider how my identity as an artist-educator has evolved, particularly in the context of adopting a studio-based, student-centered approach. Creating and exploring with materials remains at the heart of how I learn. While this has always been an intuitive part of my practice, this research journey has allowed me to recognize, analyze, and validate it as a meaningful pedagogical approach. Learning is shaped by many factors: our environments, our personal histories, and the learning modes we have developed over time. Even as these factors shift, we often return to familiar practices to make sense of new experiences. This research has deepened my understanding of the intersections between being an educator and being an artist. Both roles offer continuous opportunities for

learning and connection with diverse perspectives. In a studio-based, student-centered classroom, the role of the educator shifts from instructor to facilitator and co-learner. Educators support and model creative processes, while observing and responding to the abundance of ideas generated by students. Rather than positioning themselves as the sole authority, educators engage in shared exploration, fostering an environment of curiosity and respect. Looking ahead, I am drawn to the possibilities of a transdisciplinary approach, one that embraces collaboration not only with others but also within oneself. Studio-based practice opens space for intuitive play, where the subconscious mind can surface and the conscious ego can step back. In these moments, we connect deeply with our inner knowledge, as well as with the beliefs, values, and practices of our communities and environments. Key concepts shaping this thesis include the artist/educator philosophy, student-centered learning, studio-based pedagogy, and the potential for transformative education. This written component and the zine series reflect on how these ideas have meaningfully shaped my own practice and perspective, and how they continue to guide my evolving role as an educator and artist.

CAN YOU SEE MY VOICE?

The dual identity I hold as both artist and educator has propelled my practice forward and outward, expanding the way I view both teaching and artmaking. Embracing my artist voice within my teaching practice helped dismantle internal barriers such as the pressure to follow rigid curriculum structures, prioritize outcomes over process, or suppress intuitive, creative responses in favor of measurable results. These barriers had previously restricted my art practice and clouded the genuine, reflective way I approach learning. By breaking them down, I developed a deeper appreciation for the diverse styles, interests, and choices of the learners who share the classroom space with me.

Pedagogical theories such as metacognition (Marshall, 2009), student-centered learning (Wood 2015), and studio-based education (Leavy 2009) have been pivotal in revealing the significance of holding a dual identity as an artist/educator. These frameworks encourage reflective, participatory, and practice-based approaches to learning; methods that align naturally with artistic inquiry. The experience that an artist brings to teaching is broad, open, and layered with complexity. The training of an artist and that of an educator converge to create a unique kind of facilitator, a facilitator who fosters a classroom environment where experiences, vulnerability, and experimentation are noticed, appreciated, celebrated, and honoured. The work of educational theorists such as John Dewey and Jean Piaget provides a useful lens for understanding this approach. Both emphasized the importance of learning through experience and active engagement, but with differing focuses: Dewey highlights the social and practical dimensions of learning, seeing education as deeply connected to community and lived experience, while Piaget explores the internal cognitive development of the learner, viewing knowledge construction as an individual, staged process (Winner, 1982). My experiences as an artist/educator align with both perspectives. In the studio classroom, students navigate personal inquiry while also engaging with the collective learning community. This dual engagement mirrors my own practice, where internal reflection and community connection are equally essential. I understand that not all artists are drawn to teaching, and not all educators are drawn to the arts. However, when an individual is trained in both fields, they are equipped to see, hear, guide, and support learners with diverse abilities. They approach classroom situations with curiosity and objectivity, responding with a sensitivity informed by both artistic and pedagogical perspectives. This synthesis of training empowers artist-educators to confidently advocate for the

value of their subject, standing alongside other core disciplines as equally vital to the educational experience.

Throughout this study, my art-based field notes and reflections on classroom challenges naturally evolved into artistic research. This process offered me new perspectives and deepened my understanding in ways I had not anticipated. What initially seemed like insignificant marks and fragmented comments transformed into powerful catalysts for new ideas. They became tools for dialogue and collaboration with colleagues and students, enriching our collective learning experience within the school community. While my personal artmaking and the ideas shaped through my everyday experiences as an educator continually informed one another, I found that my creative freedom extended well beyond the boundaries of the classroom. As educators, we often aspire for our thinking and practices to live beyond the institutional setting, becoming part of a broader, evolving journey. I hold the same hope for my students, that their learning and creative explorations do not remain confined to school but continue to flourish in their lives outside of it. My own artistic practice became a welcome counterbalance to the structured demands of lesson planning and preparation, offering moments of genuine escape and reconnection with the essence of creativity. In observing my students with a sense of objectivity, I began to recognize their work with the same sense of freedom and personal engagement that I experienced in my own practice. This reflection deepened my understanding of the importance of fostering spaces where creativity is not limited to educational frameworks but is embraced as a lifelong, personal pursuit. My research is presented alongside my writing, through a series of collaged zines that act both as records of collected information and visual reflections of how I process learning. These zines are not artworks in the traditional sense, but they are forms of art-based research. By making them, I give shape to my insights, allowing my understanding to

emerge through the act of creation. For my learning to be fully realized, it must be made tangible. The zines capture that process: messy, layered, intuitive, and evolving.

SUSTAINABLE KNOWLEDGE AND INSTINCT

Art-based research emphasizes the dynamic relationship between knowledge and intuition, which is fundamental to both artistic and educational growth. As an artist, I thrive on intuitive exploration, yet as an educator, I understand the importance of scaffolding learning experiences with structured guidance. My research aims to balance these two forces, allowing for an investigation into interpretation, questioning, and the manipulation of concepts through my work. Teaching, in this context, becomes another form of research, one that is deeply collaborative and reflective. I believe that intuition plays a significant role in driving creativity. Art-based research underscores the interplay between knowledge and intuition, which is essential for both artistic and educational growth. As an artist, I thrive on intuitive exploration, but as an educator, I also recognize the importance of providing structured guidance to scaffold learning experiences. The analysis of my research finds a balance between two forces: our intuition and structure, both allowing me to investigate interpretation, questioning, and manipulation of concepts through my work. In this sense, teaching itself becomes a form of research, deeply collaborative and reflective. Creativity, I believe, is driven by intuition, but it also relies on our ability to adapt and innovate based on our past knowledge. Adaptation and innovation stem from trusting both our intuition and past knowledge. It is when we doubt the validity or value of our intuition and experiences that we become hesitant to move forward or take risks. Winner (1986) states that when a playwright works, they channel their creativity into the special role of the unconscious during creative episodes. Artists insist that ideas are born from their unconscious mind, and I believe this idea extends to artmaking and teaching alike.

A range of factors thus may make the creative artist unique. Some theorists emphasize the motivation and the personality of the artist. Some point to the external factors in the artist's life. Others focus on the intellect of the artist. And still others posit something special about the way in which the creative mind works during the actual process of creating (Willow, 1986, pg. 16). Creativity involves both internal and external influences. It's not just about conscious thought or structured learning. Instead, it comes from an artist's ability to combine personal and professional experiences. Innovation happens when the artist embraces uncertainty and trusts both their intuition and knowledge. The enjoyment of being an artist-educator is a significant advantage, as it contributes to the sustainability of an artist/educator's career, allowing them to remain engaged and passionate in both their creative and teaching practices. While many artists struggle with maintaining a consistent practice due to financial constraints or isolation, teaching offers a structured environment that keeps them actively engaged with art. Additionally, the continuous interaction with student creativity can reignite passion and curiosity, preventing artistic stagnation. Teaching also provides opportunities for interdisciplinary connections, collaborations, and exposure to diverse perspectives.

All learners who work together to inform practice and collaborate with multiple methods allow for engagement with the facets of ourselves in an extraordinary time and space. This phenomenon has parallels with the a/r/tography methodology. Through my inquiry I can see an intersection between a/r/tography and the transdisciplinary approach. Both methods conduct discourse and practice with personal histories, the surroundings, our external and embedded influences, experiences, and our everyday to create newfound ideas. These two approaches are intertwined; they are methods/methodologies that I have come to understand and defined as spending unmeasurable time in a space, or in 'the place you go' with the unconscious mind or

when you become engaged with instinct rather than with conscious intent. I have engaged with a/r/tography during my research, but I am not prepared to call myself an A/r/tographer. Defining the process as practice-based research performed by an artist, researcher and teacher who engages with practice to develop pedagogy seems limited although it has many correlations with my research. In Irwin's article, *Becoming A/R/Tography* it is stated that when referring to rich connections between arts and curriculum:

Most compelling to us was the role A/R/Tography played in setting up the conditions for making these connections: a/r/tography was seen as research inquiry, a pedagogical strategy, and creative activity. Knowing that all three forms of knowing were valued became the focus of the inquiry. Surprisingly, a/r/tography became an unanticipated integrative strategy for student and teacher learning. (Irwin et al (2013 p 201)

In my experience, both students and educators bring their personal and collective histories, surroundings, influences, and daily experiences into the process of generating new and building on existing ideas. Pedagogical strategies are flexible, shaped by those of us who are ready to recreate and adapt them. This research has helped me build multiple relationships between the approaches I've explored and the practice I've reignited. My art practice and teaching philosophy have entered a space of deep engagement, both individually and together. In this space, my intuition and unconscious mind play a key role, guiding me beyond just conscious, structured thinking.

SHARED SPACE & PEDAGOGY

This section focuses on the space we work in and how the space can inform your work.

“When asked why they create, artists often reply that they do so because they have to...

Creative endeavors in the arts, much like those in the sciences, often involve a deep, passionate attachment to one's work" (Winner, 1982, p. 16).

This quote underscores the intrinsic motivation that many artists feel toward their craft, a passion that we as educators aim to ignite in our students. The challenge for educators is to foster a level of investment. How do we engage students who might not initially be motivated or passionate about the subject matter? What can we offer them that will be memorable, meaningful, and mutually beneficial?

Like artists, educators also have a need to practice and refine their craft. However, teaching differs from artmaking in that it exists within a social context, influenced by the relationship we share with society and our students. This dynamic shapes how we teach and what we teach within our subject area. As artist-educators, the challenge is to cultivate an environment where students can feel ownership and investment in their learning. This is where the shift from traditional, teacher-centered pedagogies to contemporary, student-centered approaches becomes crucial. In student-centered models, the emphasis is on fostering student autonomy, creativity, and critical thinking, principles that align with the intrinsic motivation discussed by Winner, where passionate engagement is key. When educators engage in acts of playful inquiry themselves, they create an atmosphere that naturally invites students to wonder, question, and explore alongside them (Wood, Thall, & Caruso Parnell, 2015). This shared sense of curiosity helps position the classroom as a living studio; one driven by dialogue, responsiveness, and mutual discovery. Studio-based learning is an approach that centers on the value of experiential learning. In these environments, students actively engage in creating, allowing their intellectual, emotional, and physical environments to inform and shape their learning experiences. The studio becomes more than just a space for artistic practice; it is a dynamic environment that influences

students' cognitive and emotional development. In a studio, students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in their own learning process. This approach nurtures autonomy, critical thinking, and the development of a personal artistic voice, making the creative process deeply connected to the students' identities and intellectual growth. Teaching art presents its own set of challenges and opportunities. The hands-on nature of artistic creation requires a pedagogy that encourages risk-taking, independent thought, and personal expression. Traditional, teacher-centered approaches often focus on rigid structures and outcomes, which can stifle creativity. In contrast, student-centered studio-based approaches create space for students to explore and experiment, allowing them to take ownership of their work. This shift not only fosters creativity but also helps students develop critical thinking skills.

As an artist-educator, the challenge is real. Balancing the need to teach technical skills with the goal of fostering creative independence requires careful consideration. How can we create an environment where students feel as passionately engaged with their work as artists do in their practice? This question developed from the core of my inquiry and the evolving pedagogical approaches within studio-based education.

CONCLUSION

Setting up a studio in my art classroom transformed my teaching practice. Students were motivated and felt responsible for their own learning and investigations with materials. With this freedom to explore, an unexpected respect for our space developed. Students were engaged, and I was able to talk to them individually about their interests and approach small groups about ideas and possibilities. It was a very exciting time; as an artist-educator, I was practicing with and alongside other learners, prompting students to dig deeper into their connections and interests. Although the space was shared, it became personal to each student. The teaching

approach shifted to modeling risk-taking and idea exploration, while also incorporating more critiques to encourage deeper thinking. During this studio unit, my own notes, sketches, and ideas became part of the research process. My inquiries were reflected in my practice. Practice and pedagogy fused in action; art-based research was grounded in my personal marks and materials, while my role as an educator was shaped by interactions, observations, and the realization of emerging needs. The focus remained on engaging students' interests and creativity, but the research became both practice-based and qualitative.

A significant part of this practice was also my exploration of collecting materials and collage-making as a form of research. Collage, as a method for field notes, allowed ideas to be randomly added to a page, each highlighted by the day's topic of inquiry.

In essence, the creator works by reviewing different images and then selecting ones or pieces of some that resonate with or "feel like" the particular focus. It is useful to work conceptually rather than literally, choosing images that stand metaphorically for an idea (James, 2000, as cited in Butler-Kisber, 2007, p. 270), and to experiment with size, color, texture, overlap, and spaces to portray the nuances of the focus. Frequently, the outcome reveals an important new idea that helps to refine the focus of the research and move the analytic process further (Butler-Kisber, 2007, p. 270).

Parallel with this, much of my lesson planning emerged directly from my own practice research. Using prompts to spark ideas became a central strategy, as prompts promote free thinking and encourage movement within and around concepts. They support students in generating their own pathways through inquiry, rather than following prescriptive steps. An engaging studio experience occurred when I surprised students by ripping up completed works to push the evolution of an idea or to start again, prompting new inquiries. Some students were hesitant, so I

offered them a free photocopy of their original work to provide comfort that the original still existed. After working more on a piece, they realized their work had more to share through other materials, avenues, or added ideas. Sometimes the work was expanded, and sometimes it evolved into something entirely different. Additionally, I embraced and taught learners that distractions in the creative process could be unexpectedly productive. Rather than viewing them as interruptions, I modeled how these moments could open new directions in their work. Distractions provided a pause in the critical mind, setting aside judgment and allowing curiosity to take the lead. By welcoming these diversions, students often uncovered surprising connections or resolved challenges in ways that linear thinking might not have allowed. This approach further deepened our studio ethos of exploration and risk-taking, where unpredictability was recognized as an essential part of creative growth.

The thesis has evolved into two parts. It has illuminated the profound transformation experienced through the integration of studio-based, practice-led inquiry in my role as an artist/educator. Stepping into the studio alongside my students not only reshaped my teaching philosophy but reawakened my own creative and intellectual engagement. Engaging in practice-based research validated the essential role of making, doing, and reflecting in real time; a methodology that is too often under-acknowledged in educational research. In this space, studio practice was not supplementary to inquiry; it *was* the inquiry. The materials, experiments and even the distractions became generative tools for both understanding and growth. Throughout this process, my thinking shifted from seeing planning as a linear task to embracing a fluid, responsive engagement with ideas. The studio became a place of emergence rather than delivery. Prompting, both in my own work and in the classroom, revealed itself as a method that fosters openness, where ideas unfold organically and judgment is suspended. Distractions, once

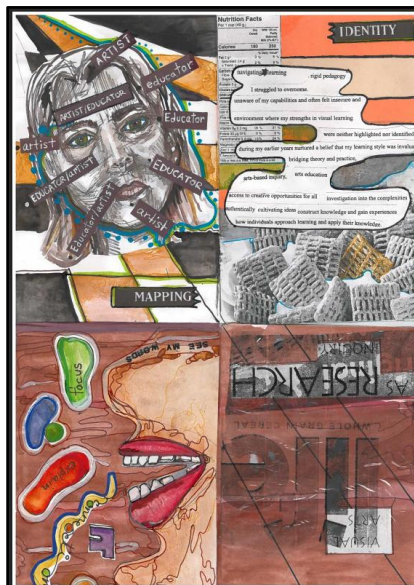
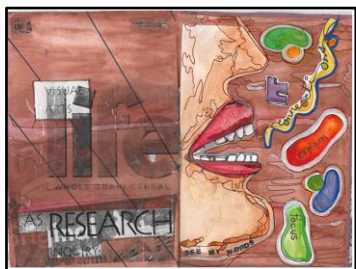
considered interruptions, became productive diversions that expanded my thinking and revealed new connections between practice and pedagogy.

This research confirms the critical importance of valuing practice as research. Art-based, practice-based methodologies do not simply illustrate findings, they produce them. They allow for discoveries that cannot be accessed through traditional research alone. My inquiries were made visible through collage, notes, sketches, and the very acts of making and responding. These forms of research honour the intuitive, the unexpected, and the deeply personal aspects of the educator's journey. Notably, the collection of Zines produced during this research offers a unique documentation of my process, blending creative exploration with reflective inquiry and providing a concrete record of my evolving pedagogical practices. Most significantly, this work reinforces that the ongoing development of the artist/educator is vital to sustaining meaningful education. Educators are not static; we require stimulation, curiosity, and risk-taking to remain connected to our practice and our purpose. This research advocates for revaluing a visual arts education, where the wellbeing and growth of all learners are seen as essential to the vitality of the learning environment. Practice must not be secondary to theory, it is, itself, a profound source of knowledge. To value visual arts education fully, we must value the artist/educator. Practice-based research reveals not only the depth of the work but also the necessity of having educators who live the practice they teach. This study stands as a call to recognize that generalist approaches cannot replace the richness brought by art-trained educators. The future of visual arts education depends on embracing the expertise, insight, and creative courage of the artist/educator.

ZINE REFERENCE GUIDE:

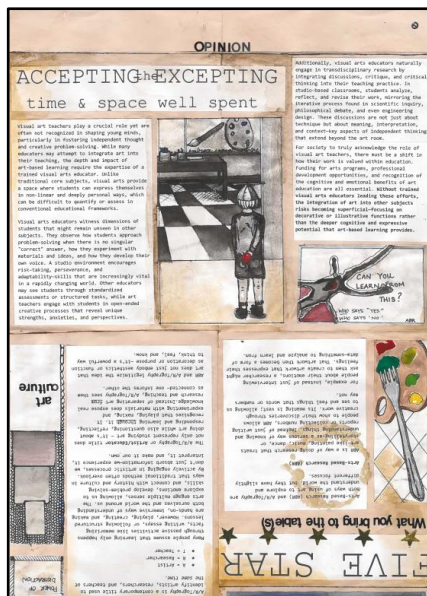
(cover/back and detail)

See My Words



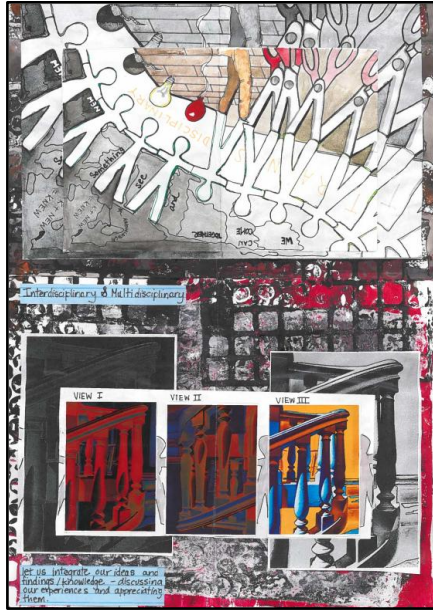
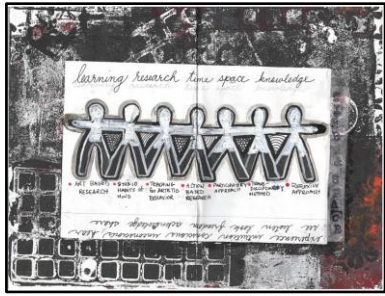
This zine gathers fragments from my thesis, shaped by the methods and mindset of arts-based research. It begins with a personal “label”—borrowing the familiar format of a Life Cereal nutrition panel—to playfully and critically frame how identity, knowledge, and process are often packaged. What follows is a visual inquiry: a series of collaged reflections that explore not just what I’m learning, but how I come to know, express, and transform those ideas through making. It is research that resists resolution; it is curious, messy, and honest.

The Researcher



This piece is inspired by the layout and form of a newspaper, an everyday object designed to inform, but often quickly discarded. The articles included are excerpts from my thesis writing, reframed here to emphasize their relevance beyond academia. The paper itself was sun-dyed and bears coffee cup stains—not as decoration, but as quiet evidence of being kept, reread, and returned to. These marks signal care and attention, reinforcing the message that art education is not disposable, but an essential resource worth revisiting.

Time & Space



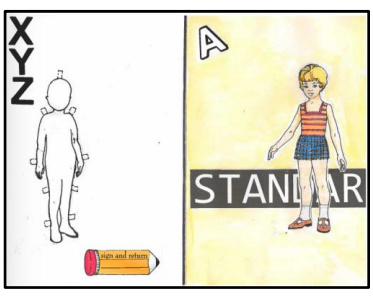
A collection of images and text exploring the time and space made possible through a transdisciplinary approach. This methodology isn't limited by place or expertise—it can be practiced by anyone, anywhere, together or apart. It holds space for connection: with ourselves, to each other, and to knowledge that is new, current, remembered, and passed on.

From There to Here



This collection of work reflects how information and inquiry are gathered—through movement, questioning, and mark-making. Notes reflect challenges I have or felt in the classroom. The title plays with the idea that thoughts and work move fluidly—from here to there and back again—never quite arriving at a fixed destination. In art and learning, we often hear phrases like “look how far you have come,” or “look where you have taken this idea,” celebrating the journey of an idea as it evolves through process.

Standards and Traditions



This zine was inspired by punch-out paper dolls.

In education, there are established standards and traditions meant to support student success—but who creates these standards, and who works within them every day?

We know that the teaching workforce is underrepresented in many ways, so can we say the same about the standards themselves? It can be interpreted as a commentary on the lack of a holistic approach in classrooms.

Conversations



Floating through these pages are words from scholars who accompanied me during my research journey. Their insights legitimize and uplift the role of learning, research, and collaboration in art-based practice.

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