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# Visual Displays in Elementary Schools: More than just a pretty picture

by

Sherry Lee Martens

A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a hermeneutic inquiry into the meaning of visual displays in elementary schools. Specifically, I address the question of how visual displays have come to appear in our schools. I explore, through my conversations with three elementary teacher participants, the topic of visual displays. The inquiry explores historical, pedagogical, cultural and personal narratives through teacher identity that open up an understanding of the topic of visual displays in elementary schools. The inquiry also investigates the intersubjectivity of visual culture in education and how this relates to a tradition of images in schools. This dissertation draws upon the philosophical writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer and nineteenth-century social theorist John Ruskin to understand how the appearance of tradition, joy, beauty, and labor came to be associated with the existence of visual displays. I critically trace the historic threads of "object-study," "nature study," the school-decoration movement and picture-study as they speak to the current practices of visual displays in today's schools. Understanding that "images speak" is an important notion for the twenty-first century educator yet is rarely discussed or taken up critically. Thus, my exploration into the meaning and significance of the topic of visual displays in elementary schools opens up the possibility for new understandings of visuality in education.

## PREFACE

Without stories, our universe is merely rocks and clouds and lava and blackness…
a village scraped raw by warm waters leaving not a trace of what existed before.
(Douglas Copeland)[1]

I am a lover of words and the writer of stories. I have been capturing bits and pieces of my life and the lives of those around me for as long as I can remember. I cannot pinpoint the exact date that this love affair began but I can trace it to Mrs. Bousquet's grade three writing enrichment class. It was there I discovered or perhaps was led to believe that I had a gift for portraying the world through words. I was enthralled by the possibilities contained in the freshly sharpened yellow pencils and loved the smoothness and smell of a new piece of foolscap. I could always write when I could not speak or draw or throw a ball; the words would effortlessly slip through my hand to the page, until now.

The writing of this dissertation unfolded over the course of a difficult year. It began on a warm sandy beach in Maui where I began to slowly unwind after three hectic years of full time coursework as well as a demanding full time professional career. I looked forward to spending the next several months researching, writing and enveloping myself in the hermeneutic process. A month after my husband and I returned from our trip, he was diagnosed with cancer. The world stopped.

Over those next four months, we made the daily journey to the Tom Baker Cancer Centre where I learned the languages of chemotherapy and radiation therapy. I became schooled in the treatment plan and how to best support the most important person in my life as the cells in his body were blasted daily with poison. We made the trip each day, and with each day, I would meet someone that I knew undergoing similar experiences,

personally or with a loved one; thirty-seven people in total whose paths had crossed mine in the past forty some years, including a childhood friend named Sherrill who, in spite of her resolve and an aggressive treatment plan, would not make it to her daughter's high school graduation the following month. We sat together in the chemo ward, my husband, Sherrill and her daughter Danielle. We did not speak of what we all knew was happening; my husband would survive and she would not. I recalled a poem, "Caroline" by Linda Pastan,[2]

She wore
her coming death
as gracefully
as if it were a coat
she'd learned to sew.
When it grew cold enough
she'd simply button it
and go.

Shortly after my husband's full recovery, a close friend, Dianne, disclosed that she had breast cancer. Another journey began; but this time it was Dianne I accompanied to chemotherapy. While there, my path crossed with a man who had mentored me as a young teacher and who I called a friend. Retired a mere six months before he had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer; he had had only a few months left to live. We managed several dinners together and a memorable late-night pajama party at the hospice before he left us on Mother's Day, 2011.

Something happened to me in the passageways of that building that has taken me months to process and be able to articulate. I met humanity, grace, and death face- to-face and it has changed me in ways that still catch me unaware. In the midst of all of this, I wanted to continue to write. I needed to write. I needed there to be a space that I could go that was untouched, or so I thought, by the pain and suffering of cancer. There were

days when no words would come and my thoughts would only appear as jumbled incoherent phrases strung together. I tried to find the threads of clarity that teased and dangled; often I would write for hours only to set it aside or eventually delete the text entirely.

My plans to have completed most of the work by the time I returned to life as an Assistant Principal did not transpire. By the end of August, I had a strong introduction and several chapters that lingered and hung with more questions than I could address. I gratefully returned to the life of my primary school, surrounded by the possibility of renewal along side young children. I carved out times to write only to be met by walls of silence. My writing was stilted, cold and clinical. I could not walk the decorated hallways of my own school without being reminded of my questions and yet, I still felt like I had nothing to say. I kept returning to the thing itself; the existence of visual displays in elementary schools. What was it I was supposed to notice? What was I missing? I picked up my texts and scribbled madly in the margins, wrote notes, and tried to find the threads that pulled and tugged at my questions. Then, the lives of two more friends ended much too soon. Each time I thought that I found my voice; a path appeared through my dissertation and I would want once again to hide away. It is obvious now that I was trying to do the opposite of what hermeneutic writing asks of us. I had tried to remove myself from the work and behave as an innocent bystander, separating the different parts of my life. I had to return to the thing itself.

This dissertation is about noticing what appears on the walls of elementary schools. To notice is to recognize as Gadamer would say, “the joy [of] knowing more than is already familiar. In recognition what we know emerges, as if illuminated, from all

the contingent and variable circumstances that condition is; it is known as something."[3] It struck me recently that it has taken years for me to begin to unpack what visual displays on the walls of classrooms meant. Perhaps it began even before that, when I was a child in Mrs. Bousquet's class, or a student teacher, or a beginning teacher; as a child I noticed what was on the walls of my classrooms. I read the inspirational posters and stared at mine and other student's art work from the situated perspective of my desk. Later as a teacher, I would catch myself soaking up the walls from multiple vantage points in the room but I would never really *question* any of the work or visual displays before me nor would I ponder why I had created them in the first place.

Entering my first classroom in 1987 in a remote Metis community in Northern Alberta, the first thing that I did was hang up "stuff." I did not even consider leaving the walls blank. At the time, I don't know where this desire came from. My teacher education program did not offer insight or instruction on classroom displays except perhaps to note the importance of celebrating and displaying student work as an act of pedagogy. Those first walls were decorated with commercial store bought bulletin board displays that proclaimed "reading as the window to the world"—a statement meant to reinforce my philosophy of reading. Yet thinking back on it now, it seemed more an act of proclamation than inspiration. Even now as I search the Internet for what I might find on classroom displays, I am confronted with millions of sites, mostly dedicated to instructional "how to's"—formulaic strategies for teachers seeking guidance to classroom practice.

I have, through this work, found connections amongst my many interests; I love to write, mostly poetry and prose. I love teaching and I love history; particularly as it

pertains to buildings and artifacts. I have come to understand that I cannot name these places, people, and objects so innocently as I once might have. In thinking deeply about the topic of visual displays and its relation to dialogue, classroom walls have come alive; they are not merely part of the educational landscape but rather they signal meaning and experience, identity, pedagogy and the discourse of educational practice.

I have learned to slow down and listen between the lines for the stories that emerge. I have come to see the fragility of life and the richness that results from our connected experiences. I have discovered, through writing hermeneutically, that when the water recedes, you need to look down in the sand and notice what is there before the next wave hits and what is there is washed away again. I have come to glimpse the spaces that hermeneutics allows me to see; those that are barely visible between the past and the present and between life and death. I am glad for the invitation.

Overture

This is the way it begins; the small
sure voice of the woodwind
leads us down a path brocaded
with colored leaves, deep
into a forest we almost remember.
And thought the percussions
have no exact equivalent,
soon we will find ourselves
thinking of weather —
a cold front rumbling in—
or of applause, not for the self
but for someone we watch
bowing at the edge
of a pond whose waters,
like the cello's darkest waters, part
letting the melody
slip through. This theme
presents itself so shyly
that when it returns full grown,
though it plucks

the live nerve of recollection
we will hear it
as if for the first time.
Make no mistake, this is only
music, shading with evening
into a minor key.
Whole flocks of birds rush up
spreading their night wings
as the harpist, that angel
who guarded the gates
in strict black, sweeps
her arm from E to G to high C,
and the bowing stranger
lifts his wand, letting
the curtains part.[4]

**Notes**

[1] Douglas Copeland, *Generation A* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2009), 1.
[2] As accessed at http://justadream.tripod.com/pastan/14p.htm February 19, 2011
[3] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum Books, 2004), 113.
[4] Linda Pastan, *Carnival Evening* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), 167.

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To my Heavenly Father who made the path straight.

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In a deep sense our language contains the story
of who we are as a people.
It is reflective of our desires,
and our dreams;
In its silences it even tells us
of what we would forget.[1]

# CHAPTER ONE

## TRACING THE TOPIC: THE QUESTIONS SKETCHED OUT

I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep rooted: places that might be points of reference, of departure of origin... Such places do not exist, and it's because they don't exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, ceases to be incorporated, and ceases to be appropriated. Space is a doubt; I have to constantly mark it, to designate it, it's never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it… Space melts like sand running through one's fingers. Time bears it away and leaves me only shapeless shreds: To write: to try meticulously to retain something, to cause something to survive; to wrest a few precise scraps from the void as it grows, to leave somewhere a furrow, a trace, a mark, or a few signs.[2]

### Tracing the Topic: The Questions Sketched out…

I have walked hundreds of school hallways in my former role as the Fine Arts Specialist for a large urban school board. I engaged in rich curriculum and staff development work with teachers, assisting them to unfold and deepen learning for themselves and their students. Visiting schools over the last ten years, I have viewed countless hallways and classroom displays, finding myself wondering for the first time about the learning that took place in these educational spaces. Invited to schools, principals inevitably led me down hallways, pointing out class work on the classroom/school bulletin boards and walls. At first, I found myself nodding, smiling; acknowledging that something had been displayed. As time went on, I would ask my educational host about the work that we viewed. Their replies, uncertainties, and brief explanations never seemed to be enough to satisfy my curiosity. Why was I curious and what did this curiosity evoke in me? The etymology of "curiosity" as, "eager to know" derived from the Latin, "curiosus," meaning "careful," "diligent" and "akin to care,"[3] suggests attunement to knowing and attentiveness to the world. What did principals want

me to see, to attend to? What did they want to hear about their schools? What did they see/look at, if they did at all, when they passed those bulletin boards? How did such educational displays come to be? And how was I to understand what I was being shown?

Then, one wintry afternoon, I faced the thirty identical cotton ball snowmen on the wall to the entrance of a Kindergarten classroom. Each black circle of their bodies had been perfectly cut-out; each body held the exact same number of cotton balls and looked back at me with the same, perfectly cut black eyes. Their "perfection" and "sameness" was unnerving. Both the teacher and the principal had directed me to this particular display. They were smiling and obviously pleased with the result. The teacher proudly told me of how the children had assembled the pre-cut parts of the snowmen that past week, as an afternoon art activity. She thought they had turned out well and as such, found a prominent place for them on the hallway bulletin board outside the classroom door. I found myself mentally questioning this evidence of student learning and why it had been displayed in the first place. Wondering about the connection of these images to pedagogy, student voice, and aesthetic experience, I found myself dissatisfied and disappointed by the display. But why did I notice this one so pointedly? Why did I feel this way? I asked myself: What is this display about? What did it mean to say? What is it asking of me? How was it that I had never questioned my own displays—displays that mimicked the smiling snowmen? Why, as teachers, do we feel compelled to put up displays?

The snowmen would not leave me alone. As I walked other hallways, they were with me. With every prettily displayed picture, carefully bordered and held in place on the bulletin board, I felt more and more unsettled. To understand these questions, to open

up the possibility that there was another, perhaps multiple interpretations other than what has been proffered, I began to think deeply about the topic and the "nature" of visual displays in elementary schools. Visual displays and school bulletin boards have always beckoned to me—and likewise signal diverse ideologies, philosophies, and mandates to teachers, parents, administrators and students. Whose beliefs and values are engrained in these displays? To whom are they addressed and for what end(s)? How do we come to see and interpret them? I needed to know more.

In fall, 2006, I enrolled in an interpretive studies course entitled, "Visual Culture and Education" and began to consider how "visuals" go about representing a world. Although I have always "looked;" now I am sure that I have not always seen. I have examined, directed my eye, and exercised the physiological power of vision but now I realize that I may have only skimmed the surface in knowing and understanding what it might mean to critically "see." After Richard Leppert, I am not an "innocent" viewer, "what is 'there' for me to see, involves *me* : my own knowledge, beliefs, investments, interests, pleasures, and desires…the innocent eye is a myth—I come always already knowing, believing, and wanting."[4] I needed to hermeneutically study the topic of visual displays in elementary schools so that I might unfold the layers of multiple interpretations that situate them and me in relation to the broader educational world in which we are both embedded.

**Re/Envisioning the Educational World: Why Hermeneutics?**

Martin Heidegger noted, "[in] interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself."[5] The origin of the word, "hermeneutic" comes from the Greek, "hermeneutikos" meaning "interpreting", and from "hermeneutes"

meaning "interpreter." Hermeneutics derives from Hermes, the tutelary divinity of speech, writing, and eloquence.[6] Through a hermeneutic lens, I have been confronted by what the notions of "see," "think" and "act" might mean. I understand that until now I have taken up the world from one frame; believing that the world was fixed and as it appeared. I did not conceive that I might question or imagine that there were any other possibilities. I saw what I *expected* to see and what I *wanted* to see but I did not *understand* what they meant; that they were interpretable. According to the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, we speak to understand, and it is because we are oriented to the world as understanding beings that we are always in dialogue with it.[7] The dialogue for me began in a hallway with the snowmen.

David Smith writes, "[u]nderstanding is itself not a fixed category but rather it stands for a deep sense that something has been profoundly heard in our present circumstances. This means that hermeneutical consciousness is always and everywhere a historical consciousness, a way of thinking and acting that is acutely aware of the storied nature of human experience."[8] Hermeneutics is not a methodology but a living tradition of interpretation with a rich legacy of theory, philosophy and practice.[9] Although not a methodology,

> [h]ermeneutics…does give researchers, and teachers and students, an image of how human understanding operates in the world. It articulates how the world is a living world of living ancestry that perennially has to take up the task presented by the arrival of the new and the young into the living world…it provides a way to re-think what we experience in our day to day lives as teachers…what we understand knowledge and tradition and language and conversation and art and play and imagination and words and images and the methods of the sciences to be."[10]

Assuming an interpretive approach, I recognize that the world is relational and situates itself and me, as researcher, within a particular contextually lived experience. Max van Manen reminds me that, "Husserl showed [that] to see the meaning or essence of a phenomenon is something everyone does constantly in everyday life."[11] It is the essence or the "things themselves" of display that I consider. Hermeneutic phenomenology proposes not just a "methodology" as positivism might have it, but a way of taking up the lived experience of the classroom through language and image-making. As a teacher and a researcher, I am not removed from the snowmen on the walls nor am I alone with them. I am in the midst of them and as such I am not an, "aloof observer."[12]

I acknowledge the "ghost" of phenomenology.[13] For, "hermeneutics without phenomenology is interpretation without context, without situating it in the world. Hermeneutics adds something very different…in hermeneutics, objects are not fixed or given; they are interpreted, contingent things. Hermeneutics dispels the given-ness of things."[14] For example, the appearance of the phenomenon, in this case the act of display, also evokes the facet of concealment, of what it is or what has been forgotten in the act of display. This discovery may be recalled through phenomenological description. These life world existentials as referred to by van Manen guide the exploration of the lived world as experienced by teachers in classrooms and serve as categories for the posing of questions, reflection and writing.[15] I consider classroom spaces and walls and the veritable need teachers and administrators and I have to "fill" them with displays, which carry both a recollection of the past as well as a forgotten present. In that past and present, as in all hermeneutic phenomenological writing, there is also a need to take up the silence that situates itself between the knowing and the knowable of display.

As a researcher, I know that I am not alone in the world. I seek understanding through the voices of others through my interaction with the topic.[16] Engaging with others in these questions, I hope to uncover more about what continued to stare me in the face. Gadamer writes, "[t]o understand means to come to an understanding with each other...with respect to something.[17] Jean Grondin states, "[a] core concept in Gadamer's theory of understanding is that language always means more than we actually express, does not say all that we hope to express but it is the only means through which we can develop and express understanding."[18] The starting point of understanding is how we situate ourselves in the world or within our "particular horizon." As Smith notes, understanding between persons is possible only to the degree that people can initiate a conversation between them and bring about a "fusion" of their particular horizons into a new understanding which they hold in common.[19] The "fusing of new horizons" opens up understanding, not as the past repeating itself, but as revealing something new. Smith continues:

> This understanding of our temporal nature Gadamer called 'effective historical consciousness', and its character is revealed most pristinely in the structure and function of language. Inevitably I speak the language into which I was born, but my language already contains within itself in a sedimentary way the evidence of its own malleability and evolution, reflective of the political, economic, and social changes of my forebearers engaged through the course of their personal and collective lives. My language contains within it the evidence not just of the openness of my life, but in a deep and subtle way, its anticipation of being transformed in the face of new lived realities.[20]

Where did I begin? As part of my cursory investigation, I invited three teachers who were also interested in visual displays in elementary schools to engage in conversations with me about our understandings of images. The teachers who agreed to participate inhabited multiple worlds of teaching philosophy including Reggio Emilia,

arts integration, and inquiry-based teaching. Our relationship to language and to understanding is ontological and it was through our practices and engagement with each other within specific contexts that understanding and meaning took shape.[21] I met with each teacher twice. Our initial conversation was based on some of my initial questions about visual displays in regards to their own practice and what they noticed about the topic. It was through these first talks, that more questions arose; more of the topic revealed itself. Gadamer describes this "dialectic" as the art of questioning which leads to the seeking of truth or the art of thinking.[22] I was mindful that to conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter, so that openings of new understandings may present themselves; understanding appeared through the fusion of the horizons of the participants and me as a researcher.[23]

Gadamer's hermeneutic practice asks how understanding is possible. Understanding, Gadamer says, begins when something addresses us. This first condition of hermeneutics requires our own suspension of prejudices so that we may be open to possibilities through the constant asking and revisiting of questions.[24] Nancy Moules suggests that our prejudices are situated within our understandings. They open up the possibility of seeing and hearing what we might have otherwise missed in the world as our prejudices are so intricately woven into our very being. As a hermeneutic researcher, I have to be conscious of my prejudices as well as be open to ones that I may not even be aware of.[25] For Gadamer, the identification of our prejudices allows us to make sense of the world from a "particular horizon" which provides us with a place to begin.[26]

I also wanted to honor the intentionality of the meaning of the word, "listen" as the "hearing and honoring" of what was spoken by my participants and what was

revealed as a result of our conversations.[27] Because understanding is constantly evolving and as Gadamer comments, is dependant on the particular historic situation, I spoke with the participants over the period of several months and recorded our conversations on tape, transcribing them and sharing my understandings of previous conversation with each participant prior to our next session. I also chose to re-interpret the conversations through poetic transcription so that I might capture the historical moment and provide a text with which to further engage in on-going conversations.[28] Melissa Freeman, an interpretive researcher, uses poetic transcription as an artful way to bring forth key ideas and perceptions from lengthy transcripts. Her poetry spoke to some of my own experiences with my participants, and I was inspired to include her poems throughout this dissertation. Freeman notes that, "[w]hen a narrative was displayed in short units or lines of focused information it enabled a more direct access to its meaning and provoked a more direct response than if people were presented with a context narrative."[29] I have been using poetry for many years as a way to reflect upon and make sense of the world around me. As a researcher interested in aesthetics and the arts, poetic inquiry rooted in an arts-based inquiry tradition, may also allow access into the entanglement of the words that are spoken and not spoken. It might offer me different ways to hear the topic speaking; in a language that I am more readily able to hear and understand. As such, I wanted to use the poetic transcription as Freeman suggests, as a way to provoke further questions and open up new horizons by beginning the second conversation with the participants with a poem that was written from the transcriptions of our previous conversations. Monica Prendergast notes, that poetic inquiry (also commonly termed or labeled as poetic transcription), like narrative inquiry with which it shares many

characteristics, is interested in drawing on the literary arts in the attempt to more authentically express human experience.[30] It is through these dialogues that I may gain understanding with language. Again, I am cautioned by Smith that, "[t]he writing is by me, but not about me. I cannot remove my subjectivity from my work, but I can take it up with a responsibility in recognizing how it translates into the way I listen to the participant, what I hear, what stands out to me and how I interpret it. Hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting on it."[31] The analysis of text in hermeneutics is about interpretation. Moules writes:

> It involves careful and detailed reading and rereading of all the text, allowing for the bringing forth of general impressions, something that catches the regard of the reader and lingers, perturbing and distinctive resonances, familiarities, differences, newness, and echoes. Each re-reading of the text is an attempt to listen for echoes of something that might expand possibilities of understanding. Hermeneutics pays attention to the instance, the particular, the event of something that does not require repetition to authenticate its arrival.[32]

Gadamer stated, "[w]riting is 'self-alienation' and what interpretation does is overcome that alienation, to free the written text form its one-dimensional state."[33] Linda Binding and Diane Tapp explain,

> Writing as a kind of alienated speech, needs to be interpreted back into meaning. The hermeneutic task of awakening writing back into the spoken word occurs, [b]ecause each reader or interpreter will find different ways of using language to interpret the text, there is not a single interpretation that will be correct or definitive.[34]

I return to the images that addressed me so long ago as I begin to consider the prejudices that appear. The day I noticed the snowmen, I was interrupted by Gadamer's notion of an element of disguise in images; an act of concealment. He states, "an actor (photo, text) who is disguised does not want to be recognized, but instead to appear as someone else and be taken for him." This concealment is in opposition to the transformation where,

"something is suddenly as a whole, something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being, in comparison with which its earlier being is nil."[35] This is the act of *altheia*, "[t]he event of concealment and unconcealment."[36] Moules notes,

> *Altheia* can be represented by the metaphor of opening the lid of a well- the flipping the lid open and letting it rest allowing one to look into what lies beneath it. In this opening of one side, another side is closed, for with every opening there is closure and some things are necessarily left behind.[37]

The snowmen stayed with me; hidden in plain sight. I began to wonder: What was disguised in the images? What needed to be unmasked? How was I to open up the topic so that it could be unconcealed? In this process, I knew that I needed to understand how I was positioned as a viewer that I could have accepted visual displays in the past so uncritically. I was struck by Gustavo Fischman's description that, "[i]n the matrix of the visual are also inscribed what is there that cannot be seen, through what lenses the visible and invisible become intelligible, and the spatial and temporal location of the observable and the observer, all of which constrain what is possible to see and not to see."[38] Through what lens had I been viewing the world of schools/curriculum? From whose eyes had my understanding(s) been shaped?

**Situating the Tradition of Visual Displays**

There are many ways to consider the complexities of visual displays in schools, including multiple literatures in visual culture, visual studies, art history and art education. I wanted to think more critically and go beyond some common sense knowing. As I sought out these voices, I realized that I needed to decide who (and what field of study) would inform and assist me in opening up the topic. At first, I was overwhelmed and bogged down in the rhetoric of theories and language; each pointing a finger beckoning my attention to see the world of visual displays, through this lens or that. I felt

bombarded by the multitude of theories and theorists. I found myself pulled into each article or chapter; trying to continually remind myself that this was another call, another interpretation. The more that I read, the more I knew that I needed to take up the literature not as an absolute but as part of the interpretation of what could be revealed about the topic of visual displays. I needed to listen to how they could enlarge my understandings, knowing they were not the final truth about the topic. I discovered that because visual culture studies appear across disciplines, the intersecting voices that spoke within these traditions connected the snowmen, the teachers, and me.

I considered the traditions of education as a discipline and thought about how visual culture converged on the roads of my own professional journey. My experience with the visual in the classroom had somehow always been reduced to a technical exercise. The act of hanging a border, a picture, a piece of student work was something that I simply did but did not think about deeply. Returning to these fields of studies and their respective theories, I considered where the topic was asking me to go; and I was directed back to the snowmen. The teacher that day noted that the snowmen were an art project; a thing of beauty that she felt worthy of display. I began to look at the history of art education as a way to understand where we had come from to make the snowmen possible. What traditions invoked the arts in education? Turning to seminal educators such as John Dewey (1933); Elliot Eisner (1976); Maxine Greene (1975); Madeline Grumet (1978),[39] I sought to contemplate the relationship between the arts and aesthetics. Although they spoke powerfully, I felt that something was still missing—the topic was not opening up in the way I imagined. And yet, I wasn't altogether sure what I imagined.

**Returning to the Present Image as a Narrative: Other People's Stories**

I returned to the snowmen asking about the language that framed them. How do I understand the notions of "display" or "decorate" as they pertain to the images that I am seeking to understand? What does it mean to "display"? Is it more than mere decoration? Does "display" have a tradition, in and outside of educational contexts? Moules suggests that "although we may not like what tradition has done, we must account for it, we must take it all up and own it and we must then speak to these very influences of tradition".[40] I return to the words themselves to see what implications of the tradition of display may be drawn out and "…open… out into the future to engage what comes to meet it as new.[41] The Latin roots of "display" meaning "to unfold, spread out or reveal" enact an interesting connection to curriculum as being revealed or unfolded on school and classroom walls.[42] To unfold and reveal suggests that we meaningfully attend to what is shown and what it points to in relation to curriculum. Teachers as part of their work in the classroom create and co-create meaning within their contexts of teaching and learning with children and with the objects and images that unfold and reveal themselves, quietly or not.

Thomas Schwandt writes,

> In qualitative inquiry as a research pursuit, we are always engaged in trying to 'make something of that'. We are always trying to understand the meanings that actions and utterances have in the inhabited world, the world of everyday life, the world in which we go about living our lives. This is the ground that lies before us, the quest for the meanings of our actions as situated beings.[43]

What have today's classroom teachers 'made' of visual displays and decoration? I look again to the literature to show how visual displays have been spoken of aesthetically.

A current voice in visual displays in today's classrooms comes from the early childhood educators, namely those interested in an approach to teaching and learning that comes from Reggio Emilia, Italy. Classroom walls in this pedagogical method are known as the "third teacher."[44] The Reggio approach encourages teachers to see these pedagogical spaces and the activities that it incases as vital elements of children's learning and teachers' teaching. Caroline Parker, in her unpublished thesis speaks about her own classroom:

> I have tried to create a physical space that signifies a place different from the classrooms in the main building. I have hung dried flowers from the rafters and set out jars of dried peas and beans. There are special curio display cabinets where I have set out seashells and rocks and I have arranged baskets of pine cones and other items from nature artfully around the space. To block the afternoon sun and the traces of dried rotten eggs on the windows, I have covered the windows with diaphanous purple fabric. In keeping with the purple theme, all bulletin boards have been covered with textured purple paper bordered by blue. My husband and children have painted the doors and cabinets to match. My friend Yvonne calls my classroom, "The Purple Zen Room". The décor is a blend of Reggio Emilia and any number of Italian restaurants.[45]

Jennifer Batycky questions the reasons why teachers display what they display. She wonders if it was because it is useful to young learners or if it is how adults have been conditioned to see those spaces. She asks, "[a]re we acting as adults with the power to create a transformative space or simply reiterating the dominant norms without thought?"[46] Patricia Tarr also takes up spaces of early childhood classrooms and notes,

> Classroom environments are public statements about the educational values of the institution and the teacher. Arrangement of space-including desks, tables, materials available, and what is displayed on the walls-conveys messages about the relationship between teaching and learning, the image of the child held by the teacher, and the expectations for behavior and learning within that setting.[47]

In Reggio-inspired philosophy, visual photographic displays posted by teachers are seen as forms of documentation. Tarr also questions how teachers choose images to display in documentation panels noting an ethical dilemma that appears to have emerged for teachers as they create such displays.[48]

Contemporary studies have not unraveled the historical lineage of such displays. They seem to not speak of the history of images used in a classroom context long before notions of "documentation." Neither do they seem to acknowledge that origins of nature in the classroom date back to the practices of nature and object study that dominated the Canadian educational landscape decades before it appeared in the small Italian town, for which the educational philosophy is named. I am interested in delving deeper into how classroom spaces may or may not have been taken up specifically as "displayed" or "decorated" as an aesthetic way of knowing beyond the contexts of current philosophical approaches through a conscious attempt to understand how visual displays might uncover the cultures and places they speak of.

Reading the various literatures pertaining to arts education, I was cognizant that these disciplines have their own histories that are interpretable. Visual displays are part of a tradition that is no longer immediately situated in the world; estranged from its original meaning.[49] We are always in the midst of living out traditions that have been passed down to us. We may not experience them in the same manner but they inadvertently influence who we have been and who we will become, "We live in a world that recedes into the past and extends into the future, rather than pitting ourselves against history, we need to remember, recollect and recall it. The address of tradition is not just something arching from before, for we are in tradition."[50] Tradition is not something that has been

handed down to us and that we can fully understand and accept without confrontation or negotiation. Rather, as Gadamer suggests that in order to make an effort to understand is to recognize our own limitations. Our ability to make sense of tradition requires active questioning and self-questioning through language.[51] As a result, it's important to trace the tradition of visual displays as they have their own histories. This led me to history texts and articles about the topic. My initial findings came from several historic texts written in the early part of the twentieth century which showed how visual displays were used for the purpose of creating moral and upstanding citizens. Drawing from a variety of texts and narratives, including historical photographs and textual documents from the Calgary Board of Education archival records, I considered the historical lineages of such visual displays in local Calgary schools.[52] I was interested in how these "displays" lived in historical classrooms/schools and if teachers were "taught" to construct them in specific ways. I was curious if visual displays were part of a pedagogical act that has now been forgotten in our contemporary enactment.

I have been exposed to ideas and questions that deeply resonate with me, particularly the notion of what it means to "see" through an interpretive lens. Dewey differentiates the notion of seeing and recognizing; the first being an opportunity to explore what is before you and the other having a set of objectives that already are named.[53] So while we may recognize these visual texts in the classroom, we often don't stop and ponder them more critically, and certainly historically. Such understandings may have challenged me to re-think my earlier positivistic assumptions not only about visuality but also the historical context of our seeing. As Robin Usher has noted, educational researchers, must be consciously aware of the interpretations, values, and

understandings they bring to every viewing/reading of the past.[54] What are the "facts"? What is uncovered in the text? What vision and ideology of the past dominates?

Through this research, I also wanted to understand historically, how schools, their curriculum, their ideologies, values, and beliefs may have shaped our current work in Calgary schools. I wonder if my lack of knowing about the tradition of visual displays led me to the unsettling encounter with the snowmen on that winter's day. As historian, David Lowenthal has suggested, "The past is a foreign country."[55] One, according to Keith Jenkins, that "is always contingent upon our own views, our own 'present'. Just as we are ourselves products of the past so the known past (history) is an artifact of ours. Nobody, however, immersed in the past, can divest himself/herself of his/her own knowledge and assumption."[56]

**Taking up the Past in the Present: Not so Silent Images**

Inquiring into the topic of historical visual displays raised provocative questions about my knowing and understanding of the past. My access to the educational past—is mediated by historical images of visual displays, photography and the surviving archival record, housed in institutional archives. With the advancement of technology, such images are increasingly available on the Internet.[57] I considered the historical photographs of schools and classrooms taken from the online archives of the Glenbow Museum; each black and white image is a representation of schooling that has become iconic to the modern viewer and is "powerful and seductive in their own right."[58] These images appear familiar to us as we are "schooled" to regard them in a particular way.[59] Each posed and constructed photograph tells its own story about schooling and represents a fixed image of how the teacher took up schooling in those spaces, or at least what the

photographer wanted us to see. Such images beg a series of questions. Who is pictured? Who is not? Is the photograph considered the *vito memoriae* or "living memory" which suggests that the image is what it appears to be, an undisputed record of an event?[60]

Historians have examined formal class photographs to identify what kinds of people went to school, and as a way to reflect on the use of the posed class photograph as a form of ritual disciplining and control.[61] I ask, what narrative of schooling is being prescribed in the image? What aspects of display are visible? What is concealed? How can, as John Berger argued,

> A photograph… be liberated from a technical reading of its production to elicit personal and political responses in the viewer. The interesting use of photographs is not the way in which the photograph was constructed, but the connection it elicits between the 'real past' of the photograph and the viewer. The critical question is not the process of recording the image, but the experience of 'receiving it'.[62]

Images of the past live on in our present, and so, I considered the relationship between photography and visual culture as a way to more fully pursue my questions. Ian Grosvenor has noted,

> I take for granted that the camera produces representations-iconic signs-translating the actual into the pictorial. A photograph may capture 'truth' of a moment in the past, but in stopping time the photograph takes its subject out of history: every photograph has no time before or after it: it represents only the moment of its own making.[63]

That would also be true as present day classrooms and images on their walls are photographed. How do I see them when they stare back from the image? "If ways of seeing are historically, geographically, culturally, and socially specific, then how you or I

look is not “natural” or ‘innocent”. By thinking carefully about where I see from, I might become answerable for what I learn how to see.”[64]

As I write these words, I am drawn back into my own spaces of knowing to begin to consider my journey through this topic. I thought back to my first classroom and the walls that at times, closed in on me in the isolated wilderness that was Loon Lake, Alberta. Three hundred kilometers of gravel road separated me from Slave Lake, the end of which was Clarence Jaycox School. Remembering those first classroom walls, I recalled one display that I painstakingly created for a unit on unexplained phenomenon such as the Bermuda Triangle, Bigfoot, and the Abominable Snowman. I thought that the students in my class would be interested in the topic because of what I had created from magazine articles and pictures. Announcing with bold letters that I had cut by hand, it screamed, “That’s Phenomenal!” I remember being so excited about this particular display as I had I hoped that it might engage my somewhat uninterested junior high students. Interestingly, I don’t recall their impressions of it or the unit of study that took place. Recently, looking at old pictures of the school, I discovered aspects of my own classroom walls that I had not seen before. At the back of the room, by my desk, there was always was a bulletin board that was littered with my personal items- inspirational sayings, posters, personal photographs and reminders of home. But the walls that faced the students were nothing like this. They, like the snowmen, were orderly and carefully constructed; albeit cartoon-ish Christmas images of dancing Mrs. Claus and rosy-cheeked elves pronouncing seasonal, “love, peace and joy.” Another self-made wall in the classroom, poorly constructed, announced the color wheel; bright pieces of paper formed a wheel which met the title, “Color Wheel,” in the centre. At the front of the room,

facing the students were more cartoonish "punctuation characters" that would benefit the junior high writer, or so I thought. As I look at these images now, I am struck by how what I displayed really had nothing to do with the students. It occurs to me now that I placed more importance of displaying who *I* was, what *I* valued and what I wanted them to notice about me.

**Preface to the Portraits: Naming the Participant**

I don't know if you understand me: I hardly understand myself, and I'm afraid at every moment that I might become lost in my reflections.[65]

I pondered what to call the sections of writing that detailed the three teachers who conversed with me about visual displays. As we spoke together, it occurred to me that they were revealing parts of themselves, through the topic of visual displays. I began to see each of them as an artistic portrait. Gadamer defines a portrait as,

> [a]likeness [*Abbildung*], the image [*Bild*] of an individual that would enable us to recognize it, if we know it…A portrait is not just a random shot, such as today's camera take. Nor does it come about simply as a result of sitting for someone, as one says so quaintly…only thus, namely through becoming one's image in such a way, can a person have an image, and it is precisely this image which, in the portrait, has become valid for everyone.[66]

I thought about the purpose of the portrait in its original intent, as a way of capturing not only what someone looked like but how they portrayed a story of who they were, socially, economically, and politically. Art historian Shearer West writes that the portrait belies more than a simple definition of a likeness of an individual but rather it can be a representation of the subject's "inner life, probing the uniqueness of an individual that sets the sitter apart from his or her context."[67] I mused over the artistic metaphor that appeared to me in the classrooms that I had visited and reflected on the experiences of the

teachers that I spoke with. They met the topic with differing experiences and understandings not only because of who they were but how the number of years they had taught had revealed something else to them about the topic. I likened the honing of their abilities to those of the artist who creates a portrait and prepares for the work first as an apprentice, then a novice and finally a master. I ruminated over this decision and although I did not always feel comfortable with the implications of the power, gender and hierarchies embedded in these titles; namely that mastering a topic may lead one to believe that they have nothing new to discover and the apprentice nothing worthy to teach. But I left them there, lingering, as another aspect that needed to be revealed and in turn, add to the understanding of visual displays.

**Opening up the Journey: Where to from here?**

The snowmen have drawn my attention and they have asked me what to make of them. Do they articulate a dominant narrative of art in schooling? Do they appear as a mode of decoration or as a comfort to children? I cannot detach myself from what I saw on those walls. I cannot accept that they are innocent, or were simply put up to "fill up" space on a bulletin board. They peer down from their walls, their identical cotton ball bodies and perfectly cut out black-circled eyes implicate me in a 'tradition'; a practice that teachers have been caught by and caught up in.

I am back here, at the entrance of the school hallway. Before me stretch bulletin boards and beckoning open classroom doors. I can feel myself being pulled in, really looking at what is displayed before me and through me. I can no longer be blind to the watchful, perfectly symmetrical coal eyes of the snowmen. I have to consider that there is intentionality in their appearance on the wall. There is more to them than a nice craft on a

wintry afternoon. They and I have been implicated as part of a long-standing history of visual culture, educational spaces and display. What do they mean? What are they looking at? What is being re/presented by their frozen images? What is the political, social, and philosophical story of what it means to see/be seen and by whom? I look forward to facing them head on, confronting them, looking them in the eye, and considering all that they mean. In collaboration with my colleagues, I hope to think deeply about why the snowmen have appeared to us now, and consider who has noticed them in the past, whose voices have been silenced and whose have been heard.

I explore visual displays in elementary schools, as more than just pretty pictures, but thoughtful deliberation about what it means to think to see and to see to think. I cannot point to the bulletin board and say that "it is that way" or "it is another way." Rather, it is through the relational connections, the multiple voices of the visual, historic, and those who inhabit classroom spaces that may allow me to make sense of what is occurring. George Perec speaks to the nature of my questions, my desire to understand as something tangible and vital. But, "it melts like sand…" and like all phenomena, it can be gone in a blinding flash-never to appear the same way twice. As soon as I think I know what has been captured in the visual displays on the walls, it shifts, moves away, and I am drawn into another question to locate/relocate. As Vaughan states, "it is a space of doubt that I wrestle through as I move from place to place (from display to display). It is through practice that I endeavor to create or find meaning, I seek out the width and depth hoping to stop the sand as it melts through our fingers, and in doing so create some sense of the being in place, at least for a little while."[68]

**Notes**

[1] Note to reader: I am using Chicago B as the citation style because the topic of this thesis is situated within the Humanities (Art and History) domain. In this style, endnotes rather than footnotes are used and appear at the end of each chapter. Single spacing rather than double spacing after periods is the norm.
David Smith, *Pedagon: Meditations on Pedagogy and Culture* (Bragg Creek: Mayco, 1994), 122.
[2] George Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London, Penguin Books, 1997), 91.
[3] Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymologyonline.com
[4] Richard Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye: the Cultural Functions of Imagery* (University of Minnesota: Westview Press, 1996), 6.
[5]As quoted by Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale, 1994), 96.
[6]Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymologyonline.com
[7] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum Books, 2004).
[8] David Smith, *Pedagon (*New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 42.
[9]Nancy Moules, "Hermeneutic Inquiry: Paying Heed to History and Hermes," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 2.
[10] David Jardine, "On Hermeneutics: "Over and Above our Wanting and Doing," in *Doing Educational Research: A Handbook*, ed. J. Kincheloe and K. Tobin, 1 (Boston: Sense Publishers, 2006).
[11]Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience* (Winnipeg, Althouse Press, 1990), 77.
[12]Ted Aoki, "Towards Curriculum in a New Key," in *Curriculum in a New Key: the Collected Works of Ted Aoki,* eds., William Pinar and Rita Irwin (New Jersey: LE Associates, 2005), 104.
[13] Moules, "Hermeneutic Inquiry," 10.
[14] Ibid., 14.
[15] van Manen, *Researching*, 101.
[16] Melissa Freeman, "Performing the Event of Understanding in Hermeneutic Conversations with Narrative Texts," *Qualitative Inquiry,* 13, (2007): 926.
[17] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 180.
[18] Grondin, *Philosophy,* 120.
[19] Smith, *Pedagon,* 33
[20]Ibid., 33.
[21] Melissa Freeman, "Nurturing Dialogic Hermeneutics and the Deliberate Capacities of Communities in Focus Groups," *Qualitative Inquiry,* 12 (2006): 84.
[22] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 360.
[23] Ibid., 361.
[24] Ibid., 298.
[25] Moules, "Hermeneutic Inquiry," 25.
[26] Smith, *Pedagon,* 33.
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[29] Freeman, "Nurturing Dialogic," 88.
[30]Monica Prendergast, "Poetic Inquiry is…29 Ways of Looking at Poetry as Qualitative Research," *Educational Insights,* 13, no.1 (2009): 2
[31] Smith, *Pedagon,* 42.
[32] Moules, "Hermeneutic Inquiry," 30.
[33] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 390.
[34] Linda Binding and Dianne Tapp, "Human Understanding in Dialouge: Gadamer's Recovery of the Genuine," *Nursing Philosophy*, 9 (2008): 127.
[35] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 119.
[36] John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 115.
[37] Moules, "Hermeneutic Inquiry," 21.
[38] Gustavo E. Fischman, "Reflections about Images, Visual Culture and Educational Research," *American Educational Research Association,* 30, no. 8 (2001): 29.
[39]Anita Sinner, et al. "Arts-Based Educational Research Dissertations: Reviewing the Practices of New Scholars," in *Canadian Journal of Education* 29, no 4(2006):1226.
[40] Moules, "Hermeneutic Inquiry", 22.
[41]Smith, *Pedagon,* 193.
[42] Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymologyonline.com
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[44]Jennifer Batycky, "Early Childhood Voices: Who is Really Talking?" *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 9, no. 2 (2008): 173.
[45]Caroline Parker, " We Breathe Together: Thirty-two Short Pieces About Aesthetics In an Elementary Classroom" (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Calgary, 2000), 34.
[46] Batycky, "Early Childhood,"174.
[47] Patricia Tarr, "Consider the Walls," *Beyond the Journal, Young Children on the Web,* (May, 2004), 1.
[48] Patricia Tarr, "Reflections and Shadows: Ethical Issues in Pedagogical Documentation," *Canadian Children,* 36, no.2 (Fall, 2011): 14.
[49] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 157
[50] Moules, "Hermeneutic Inquiry", 2.
[51]Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* xvi.
[52] I located several texts that assisted in situating historic notions of visual studies in education. These included M.S. Emery, *How to Enjoy Classroom Pictures*, 1898, A.P. Laurie, *The Teachers Encyclopedia,* 1912, and C. Kendall, *Pictured Knowledge, volumes 1and 2,* 1916, K. Coplan, *Poster Boards and Bulletin Board Techniques*, 1962, and R. Phelps, *Displays in the Classroom,* 1969.
[53] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1934), 24.
[54] Robin Usher and D. Scott, *Understanding Educational Research* (London:

Routledge, 1996).
[55]David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985).
[56] Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 15.
[57] Eric Margolis, "Class Pictures: Representations of Race, Gender, and Ability, in a Century of School Photography," *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 8, no. 31 (2000): 3.
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[59]Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber, "Picture This! Class Line-ups, Vernacular Portraits and Lasting Impressions of School," in *Image-Based Research* ed. Jon Prosser (London: Routledge, 1998), 197.
[60] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 21.
[61] Kate Rousmaniere, "Questioning the Visual in the History of Education," *History of Education*, 30, no. 2 (2001), 108.
[62] Ibid., 111.
[63] Ian Grovesnor and others, *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom* (New York: Lang Publishers, 1999), 87.
[64] Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 16.
[65] Dominique Bouhours as quoted by James Elkins, *Why are our Pictures Puzzles?* (London: Routledge, 1999), 155.
[66] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 294.
[67] Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.
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# CHAPTER TWO

## VIGNETTES AS KNOWING

Vignette:
1751, "decorative design," originally a design in the form of vine tendrils around the borders of a book page, especially a picture page, from Fr. Vignette…Sense transferred from the border to the picture itself, then (1853) to a type of small photographic portrait with blurred edges very popular mid-19c. Meaning "literary sketch" is first recorded 1880, probably from the photographic sense.[1]

### Vignette: The "Art" Project

I remember walking down the hallway as a new member of the school administrative team and noticing pink and blue worksheets on the bulletin board just outside a classroom door. Moving closer, I saw girl's names on the top right corner of the pink sheets and boy's names on the top right corner of the blue sheets. The content of both colors was identical; childish scrawl outlined how they exhibited good character when they played together on the playground accompanied. A drawing was situated in the box on the opposite side of the page. The worksheets had been stapled carefully on the bulletin board, one pink and then one blue, in succession. The teacher appeared at the door and caught me reading one of the pieces. He smiled, looking pleased that I had stopped to look at them, "How do you like our art project?" He was very proud of the work of his young artists and indicated that the displayed work was an excellent exemplar of what he thought children's art should look like. I didn't know what to say. I wanted to be positive, knowing that anything that I would say as a new "supervisor" could be taken up in any number of ways but the display made me uncomfortable. To me, it didn't represent "excellence" and I was taken back to the images of the frozen snowmen. I told the teacher that his display had made me think. He smiled again and seemed to take my

remark positively. I could not share with him my thoughts and moved down the hallway again, waiting for another opportunity to present itself when perhaps I could share with him what I really thought.

**Images in the School: Locating Visual Culture in Education**

I can close my eyes and envision the elementary school where I currently spend my days in the company of burgeoning artists, scientists and writers. Entering through the blue doors, I am immediately confronted with bulletin boards depicting children's artwork, sticky handprints, and the muddle of colorful backpacks, misplaced clothing and leftover lunch bags hanging directly beneath them. The brown tiled hallway and subsequent blue and dark green bulletin boards are a visual assault as they line the length of the long, uninterrupted hallway. Winding through the corridor, I am welcomed into the first classroom with a tongue-in-cheek poster on the door that asks me to exercise caution as there is "learning going on here." I drink in the sight of twenty or so six year old bodies as they passionately attack the paints and paper on the desks before them; evidence of the last art project—a colorful representation of the garden just outside their classroom window adorns the adjacent wall. Photographs of the children, "decoratively" framed, are displayed on the old radiator; books fill the nooks and crannies of the tiny bookshelves. Everywhere I turn, there is something to look at, something visual to consider, reminding me that schools are visual places. Richard Leppert notes that such images are not *the* world of school, but *a* world of school,

> They are not the things shown but are representations thereof…Any image literally exists as an object within the world that it in one way or another engages. When we look at images, whether photographs, film, videos, or painting, what we see is the product of human consciousness, itself part of culture and history. That is, images are not mined like ore; they are constructed for the purpose of performing some function within a given socialcultural matrix.[2]

Yet, this is not a conceptual space that exists solely in my head; it is bodily and grounds me as a teacher who creates and views visual displays. Schools are visual places and are filled with "viewers" that are not just, "merely pairs of eyes—they have minds, bodies, genders, personalities and histories."[3] They are places where curriculum or "the work" as it is most often referred to, is displayed on the walls for others to contemplate the acts of teaching and learning. Viewed vicariously by children, teachers, parents, and administrators, such displays evoke interpretations, questions and judgments. The term, "curriculum" is a word that holds multiple meanings and is theorized in this thesis as an interdisciplinary space between "curriculum as planned" and "curriculum as lived." Ted Aoki distinguishes between these terms through the agency of those involved. Individuals who might write programs of study do so outside the context of those teachers and students who live the multiplicity of curriculum content in the classroom.[4] So what do the visual displays in the spaces as "planned" and "lived," mean? How might I understand the act of displaying visual images in classrooms more deeply?

Images have a history; culturally and politically. "Images are less visual translations of what might otherwise be *said* (in words) than they are visual transformations of a certain awareness of the world. Images do not so much *tell* us anything, as make available—by making visible *in a certain way*—a realm of possibilities and probabilities, some of which are difficult to state in words."[5] There exists a complex dialogic between our ability to see and our ability to use words to describe what we are visualizing. If this is the case, then the word, image, can "signify graphic, optical, perpetual, mental, or verbal phenomena."[6] The Greeks believed that, "the eye transmitted as well as received light rays (the theory of extramission), then there

was a certain participatory dimension in the visual process, a potential intertwining of the viewer and the viewed."[7] This theory persisted until the Middle Ages, when the metaphor of vision was replaced with the bombarding of images (especially those with religious meaning) upon a society, unable to read and write. Such images were meant to educate the illiterate masses. Stained glass windows, altar pieces, and wood carvings all added to envisioning of God through religious iconography. The Protestant Reformation denounced the symbolism of God in favor of listening/hearing the voice and word of God. Yet, images prevailed and continued to abound in the Renaissance, making way for the development of theory in visual arts. Martin Jay summarizes the path of visuality,

> The medieval metaphysics of light, in large measure a religious adaptation of Platonic residues, kept alive the assumption that vision was indeed the noblest of the senses, despite its potential for deception and the arousal of lascivious thoughts. Second, the lengthy dispute over the idolatrous implications of that metaphysics and the Church's visual practices led to a new awareness of the difference between representation and fetishism, the distinction Aquinas made between a venerating iconolatry and a worshipping idolatry. This in turn helped prepare the way for what might be called secular autonomization of the visual as a realm unto itself…What can be said with some assurance, however, is that vision, aided by new technologies became the dominant sense in the modern world, even as it came to serve new masters.[8]

E. Lisa Panayotidis quoting W.T.J. Mitchell and others suggests a more critical analysis of visuality,

> [O]ne that differentiates between 'unmediated vision as seeing the world' and 'mediated vision as seeing images.' Images…that may be read as texts as they function within a specific historical and cultural set of conflicting forces. These texts do not embody meaning but are informed by the interests and desires of the viewer…[9]

As I think about the walls of the schools that I attended as a child and later the ones that I lived within as a teacher and I wonder about the visual displays that populated these spaces. How were such images a part of a larger tradition of visuality? In my mind's eye, I am bombarded with colorful posters, maps, pictures of the Queen or reigning monarch of the day, the flag and the alphabet. I am not alone in these recollections. It occurred to me when I first began this research that although we as educators are surrounded by visual images, they are not the focus of our attention and we somehow remain relatively unaware of their presence and power. And even when we do attend to them, we are wholly unprepared for the complexity they represent.

In order to understand my topic more deeply, I went to the expansive literature on visual culture. A brief overview of the literature suggested a plethora of disciplines interested in images and also ways of interpreting them. These images are central to the work that teachers do every day, and perhaps unbeknownst to them they are part of a richer interdisciplinary tradition of visual culture. What is visual culture? A contested term it refers variably to studies in how culture is reproduced in visual ways. Interdisciplinary scholars practicing in the field of visual studies and visual culture take up images through a variety of methods and offer particular ways of looking at images, as both "art" and more broadly, popular culture. Margaret Dikovitskaya assisted me in positioning visual studies in a broader scholarly context. Dikovitskaya outlines that different schools employ visual studies in diverse ways.

> Some researchers use the term visual studies to denote new theoretical approaches in art history (Micheal Ann Holly, Paul Duro); some want to expand the professional territory of art studies to include artifacts from all historical periods and cultures (James Herbert); others emphasize the process of seeing (W.J.T. Mitchell) across epochs (David Rodowick); while still others think of the category of the visual as encompassing non-traditional media- the visual cultures of not

> only television and digital media (Nicholas Mirzoeff), but also of the institutional discourses of science, medicine and law (Lisa Cartwright).[10]

Despite this multiplicity, Dikovitskaya adds that visual culture sees visual images as, "the focal point in the processes through which meaning is made in a cultural context."[11] George Roeder suggests that, "visual culture is what is seen… [and] what is seen depends on what there is to see and how we look at it."[12] As such, images, Gillian Rose would say are interpretable; shaped through our own biography, historical, cultural contexts and contingencies.[13] Visual culture studies have replaced the more "strict" form of "art history"; with its emphasis on art, artists, and artistic production.

In order to understand where visual cultural studies had emerged from, I focused on its predecessor, art history. I asked two key questions as a way to embark upon this inquiry: What is art? And how has art been viewed over time in Western culture? I began my investigation in the fifteenth century in Renaissance Italy, and discussions around the separation of an object (such as painting or sculpture) as a distinct "work of art;" "created" by an "artist." The term "Fine Art" appeared in the latter half of the sixteenth century in Italy and France through the institutionalizing of art into the work of schools or "academies."[14] Deemed necessary in the development of the artist's skills, these academies offered courses of study that included anatomy, geometry, and art theory. "Works of art" produced within the academies were examined according to the fixed categories of invention, proportion, color, expression and composition. The goal of the artist in this period known as the classical tradition was to achieve perfection; not maintain the imperfect world that was perceived by the eye alone. These ideas were underpinned by Plato's concept of absolute forms conceived in the mind thereby producing a true rendition.[15] Although the study of art history exists within a particular

context and time, it is more concerned with the image itself with those who view the image. In this way, artistic intent supersedes social-cultural interpretation. The study of images has traditionally been dominated by art history departments who controlled not only how the image would be taken up but who would take them up. In the early twentieth century, particular art historians perpetuated the practice of seeing an image, particularly a painting, within a certain frame of rules. The development of knowing what the image means has a tradition of alienating those who don't possess what Irit Rogoff terms, "the good eye", not methodologically explicit but which produces a specific way of describing paintings, particularly, "high art."[16] While art historical analysis may involve the study of semiotics, iconography, and social-cultural interpretation, the discipline, for the most part has focused on more aesthetic and experiential practices. That is, formal analysis and sensual experience has come to stand for an adequate explanation of visual images.

I have not been comfortable speaking about "art" before; having not developed a vast knowledge about artists who produced the art not the craft ("low art") nor an understanding what the images were; being unfamiliar and apprehensive of the rules that would lead me to understand what a piece of art was supposed to mean or at least how we might make it meaningful. I may have been drawn to a particular image but being unschooled in this process; I only watched and listened to those around me. I took in the technical language describing the brush strokes, color, intention of line, perspective and what was known about the artist as the road into a piece of art but was left unsatisfied with such cold explanations. I sensed that images could "do something" in the world, particularly through their display. Could I take apart the snowmen in such a fashion and

come to an understanding as to their appearance and purpose? I could not accept that there were simply steps that I should apply in the analysis of images as my own interpretations and the emotions it evoked relegated to the margins. I understand that art history, like literature, has a place historically, that has followed rules; creating a safe haven for those who understand and as gatekeepers of knowledge, have dismissed as simpletons those who offered different explanations about works of art. Yet, I was caught up by the interpretation of the images as they appeared on the walls; having a higher purpose and perhaps more closely tied to the same political power structures of the Renaissance academies than I first realized.

In this thesis, I take up aesthetics through the practice of "art making," situated within a historical frame that changes contextually and contingently over time. I wondered if the histories of the study of images and their meaning have also played a part in the way that pictures were taken up in schools, historically. Was the child also similarly controlled and directed to view a piece of art that was visually displayed in the classroom in particular ways? Mitchell argues that, "art history has always been necessarily more than the history of works of art; it has always had to rely more or less on well-theorized models of spectatorship, visual pleasure, and social, intersubjective relations in the scopic field."[17] This way of looking was interrupted by the convergence of art history, literary, media and cultural studies that Mitchell termed, "the pictorial turn"[18] becoming what is known to some as visual studies and others as "visual culture." Theorists within the field do not all agree that these terms are synonymous, opening up debate about what differentiates the two. Dikovitskaya situates the various perspectives through the shift in the study of culture from an objective, social scientific inquiry to, "a

representational, symbolic, and linguistic system- to be an instigator of social, economic, and political forces and processes rather than a mere reflection of them."[19] She indicates that this shift in how images were taken up introduced a concept of intertextuality and moved the focus of art from one of autonomy, separated from aspects of power and knowing, to one centered on the sensuous and semiotic uniqueness of an image.

Another researcher, Michael Ann Holly, indicates that visual studies, or the study of representations, "call into question the role of images in culture, from oil paintings to television, paying attention to the image as well as theories developed in the humanities and social sciences to address the complex ways in which meanings are produced and circulated."[20] A third researcher, James Herbert sees visual studies as the name of a discipline that takes visual culture (defined as including all human produced work with a definite visual element) as its object of study.[21] Lastly, Mitchell insists that visual culture has moved from what is viewed to the process of seeing. Visual studies, he concludes, is not enough to address the ideas of the "constructedness of vision" which brings a focus to seeing rather than the images themselves and situates vision as a cultural construction.[22] In light of how visual studies and visual culture is defined, I may come to new understandings about visual displays by considering how others view them and have viewed them and more importantly remember that the visual display in made up of images. I can critically interpret the image because, " [it] may have its *own visual effects* and these effects, through *ways of seeing* mobilized by the image, are crucial in the production and reproduction of visions of *social difference*; but these effects always intersect with the *social context of its viewing* and *the visualities its spectators bring* to their viewing.[23] If, "discourse," is a way to understand, "a particular knowledge about the

world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it," [24] then what is the discourse of visual displays?

There is a history to the viewing of images and cultural implications for how and who takes them up. I need to take the images seriously, seeing them (and not seeing them) through a wider social and historical context. As the ancient Roman scholar Plinty wrote, "[t]he mind is the real instrument of sight and observation, the eyes act as a sort of vessel receiving and transmitting the visible portion of the 'consciousness."[25] My own biographical making will affect how I see and interpret such images. As a female, raised in Calgary in the nineteen-seventies by parents who were raised on depression-era rural farms, I was taught to respect my elders and the Church. Education was not only a means of expanding knowledge of the world but one which would ensure a comfortable economic future. Leppert notes, "by thinking carefully about where we see from, we might become answerable for what we learn how to see."[26] In the end, "what is "there" for me to see involves *me*: my own knowledge, beliefs, investments, interests, desires, and pleasures…I come already knowing, believing, wanting…"[27]

**Vignette: "The work will be transparent, don't you see?"**

The teacher stood in the hallway with a metre stick in her hands and carefully laid out where the border would go so as to be completely symmetrical. She had cut with precision, the letters that would form the title of the bulletin board display so as not to confuse any viewer as to what the work below meant. The teacher had painstakingly photographed, organized, cut and culled the student work to be displayed, piece by piece; she stood back and took stock of how the display was "shaping up." Not quite satisfied with how it appeared, she rearranged the order of the children's work and then smiled

when she felt that it was now more "creative." Eyeing it one more time, she smiled and nodded. It met her criteria: clearly laid-out student work that would "speak to" the assessment that had appeared in each child's report card. In anticipation of parent/teacher interviews, the teacher was certain that no parent would question the marks that the child had earned, for her evaluations were clearly evidenced for all to see, outside the classroom door.

**Power and the Gaze: "Controlling" what and how to see**

> The eye exerts an influence over a distance; consequently powers for good and ill have been attributed to it… [including] visions of the eye that connect to the spiritual, the "social eye" of a popular magazine that supported progressive social policies…the superstitious belief in the "evil eye," microscopes, telescopes, and cameras which are especially powerful because they record what they "see" on film.[28]

There is power in an image because of how it might been seen, utilized, or looked at. If I am to take up displayed images hermeneutically, I think that it is important to understand the role of language in the meanings of "look" and "see", and importantly to understand the etymological origins of these words, to remember what may have been forgotten:

> Look: O.E. "see, gaze, look, spy," from W.Gmc "to look out"), of unknown origin, perhaps cognate with Bret. lagud "eye."[29]

> look\luk\vb [ME, fr.OE locain; akin to OS locon to look] 1: to make sure or take care that something is done 2: to ascertain by the use of one's eyes 3: to exercise the power of vision upon: EXAMINE b. archaic to search for… to direct the eyes… to gaze in wonder or surprise…to direct one's attention…

> See: O.E "to see," which is "probably" the same base that produced words for "say" in Greek and Latin, and also words for "follow"

> see\se\vb [ME, seen, fr. OE seon; akin to OHG sehan to see and perh. to L sequi to follow-at SUE] 1 a: to perceive by the eye b: to perceive or detect as if by sight 2 a: to have experience of b: to come to know: DISCOVER …3 a. to form a mental picture of:

VISUALIZE b: to perceive the meaning or importance of: UNDERSTAND c: to be aware of d: TO imagine as a possibility…

In considering the etymology and definitions of these terms, I am reminded that images have a way of "speaking." The snowmen invited me to see or perceive them in particular ways. Previously, when I had "looked" at visual displays, I merely exercised my vision without any desire to understand further. Nothing had called to me—appeared to me—that I might imagine new possibilities. Martin Jay suggests that the "gaze" is both a natural and a cultural act. There is something, he says, revealing in the ambiguities surrounding the word, "image," which can signal graphic, optical, perceptual, mental, or verbal phenomenon.[30] John Walker and Sarah Chapin further state that, "[g]azes are dependent upon the eyes but some theorists distinguish between the "eye" and "the gaze." The "eye" for them, refers to the viewer gazing upon the world, while "the gaze" refers to the fact that we are all subject to the gaze of others. Being gazed upon can be pleasurable or painful. There are times when we enjoy being watched or photographed, but there are also times when being watched or recorded makes us feel acutely embarrassed, persecuted even."[31] What does this mean for the student as their work forms some of the visual displays in a school? How will the images they have created be looked upon? How do they look upon images that are visually displayed in their classroom? How do their teachers "see" the images that are displayed as an extension of the gaze? Foucault did not restrict the gaze to merely the spectator but also included institutions which he believed were able to exact power relationships and affect those who dwelled within them. He spoke of the "inspecting" and "normalizing" gaze, both of which come into play in social and institutional contexts, such as school, as a form of power and authority.[32] Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright stress that,

> [i]t is important to note the ways that images are not only factors in interpersonal power relationships, such as the relation between those who look and those who are gazed upon, but also elements in the functioning of institutional power. Images can both exert power and act as instruments of power…and can be integral to systems of power and ideas about knowledge.[33]

Foucault believed power/knowledge relationships at work in modern society functioned through the production of the "good" citizen that would regulate their own behavior. "Power relations, he argued, establish the criteria for what gets to count as knowledge in a given society, and knowledge systems in turn produce power relations. In Foucault's terms, we can see how the structure of a classroom itself sets up a particular power dynamic between teachers and students, getting students to internalize the oversight of the teacher so that discipline is enacted in a passive, self-regulating manner."[34] Foucault also stated that power could also be enacted indirectly upon the body, "the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies and to emit signs."[35] In schools, children are not only photographed as a form of documentation but they are also exposed to images that "show" them how it is they are supposed to be in the world. Posters visually displayed in their classrooms and in the hallways that proclaim healthy eating, how to write a good sentence, even pastoral images in fine art "speak" to children and young people normative ways of being and the regulation of their behavior. This is central to Foucault's theory that these systems are there as a deterrent to punishment. We believe that we are being watched and because of this, we behave and conform, "the point of the panopticon is thus not that active surveillance can affect behavior, but more importantly that the structure of surveillance, whether it is active or not, produces conforming behavior. It thus acts as a powerful metaphor for the way that

the circulation of power produces particular kinds of behavior." [36] Is it possible that the images "speak" to students, parents, and administrators in particular ways, without any other form of explanation as a way to enforce normativity in children?

As I consider the question of display, I must consider how images are a form of text that may be read and in doing so I must also consider the notion of the gaze not only in the present tense but also the contextual meanings of the image as it existed in the past. I live in a world that is not only filled with images it is also shaped by them. I may physiologically "see" the image but for many, visuality or how I see, how I am able, allowed, or made to see, is seldom considered. Images offer viewpoints not only of a version of the past but daily re-inscribe and echo interpretations of the world in the present. The production and creation of an image is not left to chance in most instances and if the image is allowed to speak, the language of the visual text may reveal what the maker may not have intended. There is no such thing as a pure image, untouched either by the individual who took/made it or by the viewer who gazes upon it. Gillian Rose has noted that visual culture lays out aspects of the visual that can be used to think about the social impact of images, "An image may have its own visual effects (so it is important to look very carefully at images); these effects, through the ways of seeing immobilize the image, are crucial in the production and reproduction of visions of social difference, but these effects always intersect with the social context of its viewing and the visualities its spectators bring to their viewing."[37] Seldom does written text accompany an image, except for perhaps a date, a name of the individual/company that took the picture or perhaps a scribble on the back of the photo indicating the names of those imaged, the occasion, etc. Once produced, the image becomes "evidence" of a personal/public

memory framed and exhibited, they become part of a historical moment. This is the same case, I would argue, for many of the images that are displayed on classroom walls. The snowmen appear without explanation. Something has been documented but in a flash, it is gone.

**Vignette: No Wall left Untouched**

The school principal walked the halls of the school, somewhat agitated by the empty bulletin boards that faced him. He could not believe that with "Meet the Teacher" night rapidly approaching that none of the teaching staff had yet to "put up any work" on the bulletin boards. He quietly went back to his office and emailed a gentle reminder to the staff to prepare some work for the parents to see. "No one wants to see a bunch of empty walls," he said to me, "what would that say about us?"

**Re-imaging Visuals: Tugging at the roots of Visual Culture in Schools**

> Language is one means of expressing ideas. Pictures are another means. Each has its special advantages. We need them both, but pictures are the most direct aid to understanding…Pictures represent things much better than words alone and are a more accurate and vivid means of expressing ideas. It is for these reasons that pictures have come to be so largely used…in schools.[38]

While there is much written about the discipline of visual culture and in spite of the visual nature of schools; there is a sizable gap in the literature as it pertains to schools. Visual displays in hallways and classrooms abound. With the increasing use of Smart technology in classrooms, images have now become readily available and appear instantly at the touch of a button and an internet connection. Jon Prosser references a series of questions posed by Eric Margolis in a call for papers in the journal, *Visual Studies*. For Prosser and Margolis "encapsulated the multi-faceted nature of everyday visual schooling and insightfully reflects its complexity by posing an apparent

conundrum. He [Margolis] asked, 'what is visible? What is noticed?"[39] Prosser suggests that, "the visible but hidden curriculum is important because it reflects implicit powerful forces that shape everyday activities and also provides a methodological rationale for the study of overarching themes in education."[40] School culture can be embedded in the common practices such as the creation of visual displays and may be "unquestioned and unconscious… [school culture] forms a 'hidden curriculum' that is more powerful because it is visible but unseen.[41] Prosser states that there is just cause to combine the notions of visual culture and school culture, defining them together as:

> [t]he ready-made standardized visual scheme handed down by previous generations of teachers and authorities as an unquestioned [unwritten codes of habitual practice] and unquestionable guide to all observable events, rituals, situations, objects, materials, spaces and behaviours which normally occur within everyday schooling. It is the trace and markings of the past, present and the probably future hidden curriculum.[42]

Individuals within schools, with their own capacities to "re-interpret" the observable norms and common practices which are mostly "taken-for-granted," reflect what Prosser refers to as, "teacher folk-lore i.e.: all schools are the same but different."[43] Prosser specifically focused on school architecture, non-teaching space and teaching and learning as the significant aspects of visual culture pertaining to school culture.

School buildings, for the most part, are usually recognizable for what they are; a single place where learners gather, with adults who "teach" them in a setting that has some form of organized seating. Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor concur,

> Rather than viewing the school building—its various rooms, walls, windows, doors and furniture, together with outdoor 'nooks and crannies', gardens, and open spaces—as neutral or passive 'container', architects and educators have considered it to be an active agent, shaping the experience of schooling and promoting and even pioneering a particular understanding of education. Certain aspects of what makes a school, such as halls, corridors, playgrounds and classrooms, have taken different forms through time. Such factors as the design

> of the school furniture can be seen to reflect pervasive notions of pedagogy, but also promote ideas and theories about the relationship between pupil and teacher and between body and mind in learning. Design features that permit observation and surveillance—controlling, ordering and disciplining children within the school walls—have always been crucial and continue to be part of modern schooling…At different times, teachers, advisors, architects, and designers have realized their unity of purpose in designing schools that fit the needs of children and the wider society…Each school site is a compound of imagination, reaction, sedimentation or radical intervention in education… [school spaces] are the views to how teachers and learners…should be supported to act, and to what end.[44]

By the end of the nineteenth century, schooling in the Western world was compulsory and schools became places where students not only learned the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic but where they learned "their responsibilities, their duty and their sense of place."[45] Non-teaching spaces in the forms of beautified school buildings, gardens and pictures displayed in hallways and classrooms also added to the education of the masses as a way to refine their "tastes" and encourage moral behavior. Mary Ann Stankiewicz et al. suggest that the visual arts in both their teaching and display played a crucial role in the shaping of a democratic and ethical society including the arts and crafts, manual training, design and composition, picture study and school-room decoration.[46] North American schools through the influence of British social-theorists in the Arts and Crafts movement John Ruskin and William Morris, framed arts education through the notion that,

> [a] society's moral character was reflected in the quality of its art, both fine and applied [Ruskin] and that there should be joy and dignity in labor, rather than the fractured, demeaning character of toil in modern capitalist society. Ruskin's belief that people's social environment shaped their taste and character became a rationale for placing reproductions of art in schoolrooms. The movement to decorate school, which became a popular cause in the United States in the 1890's [and continued in Canada into the early part of the twentieth century] soon expanded to include a systematic study of pictures as part of the art education program in schools… and focused on appreciation of masterpieces to develop students' character and taste.[47]

Non-teaching spaces, such as hallways in schools, have not only been "decorated" for the purposes of beautification and character modeling in the past, but I suggest the practice is still happening in schools today. These visual displays often "constitute elements of hidden curricula and how organizations work when no one is 'looking."[48] I would also suggest the same has occurred and is occurring within contemporary classroom spaces.

Prosser identifies several researchers over the last decade with an interest in the culture of classrooms linked through visual culture and history. Grovesnor, Lawn, and Rousmaniere (1999), Margolis (1999), Grosvenor (1999), Lawn and Grosvenor (2005) and Burke (2005) have conducted studies of the social history of schooling through visual methods demonstrating that, "historians can draw on a wider methodological palette…including literary criticism, social theory, socio-linguistics, and utilized the ideas of Barthes, Benjamin, and Foucault."[49] Prosser suggests the best way to understand classrooms today is to look at them without any teachers or students. As a hermeneutic researcher, I am not interested in the ethnographic approach of naming or analyzing what may appear but rather I would like to focus on the topic itself.

What is the tradition of these displays? Gunther Kress et al. suggest that visual displays in classrooms have been transformed over time.

> Photographs of elementary and primary-school classrooms walls and books documenting education in the early part of the twentieth century…depict a classroom world of dense visual display, including landscapes and portraits, scientific images and posters about language. It is difficult to reconstruct the purposes of such display…In the English [language] classrooms of the 1970's, English was modeled as the product of an interaction with teacher and student and text, with visual display not taking a significant pedagogic part. The most common practice was for the walls to be used to display students 'best work' and in others…there would be some teacher-supplied posters. In the 1980's, images related to 'self-esteem' and often examples of student's work-in-progress was

> on display and the teachers used the walls of the classroom as a working tool, a visual space…used as a reflexive tool for thinking and discussion. Pedagogically, display emphasizes to what is, historically, an unusual extent of the influence of official policies for the teaching of the subject…We must be careful, though, not to overestimate the extent of current change; it is not as if each historical period breaks completely from those that preceded it.[50]

Kress reminds me that visual displays in schools are often spoken of in regards to the beautification of the learning environment and should reflect the student's interests and needs and contribute, as it did historically, to the recognition of work ethic and achievement.[51] However, the students are often not involved in the creation of such displays, rather, it is the labor of the teacher that produce them,

> The displays and arrangements of the classroom do not remain 'inert', pre-created background to the work of a class: they are activated, or reactivated, by classroom pedagogy…the teacher's role is central; the teacher mediates what is displayed and what is enacted in the classroom; it is the teacher who connects what the spatial material display to other aspects of the subject's realization…displays provide pedagogic resources; they are part of the technology of teaching and serve to transmit to students the pedagogic practices…that govern a school. Displays activated by a teacher, relay the regulatory framework of the curriculum, and the criteria that are taken to signify appropriate learning within a school, and they socialize students through their activity into the expected competencies of a classroom and the teachers' desired models of good practice. Visual displays…are thus a pedagogic tool…a medium to communicate the qualities and expectations of a school in a language that is to be lived as an identity-building and identity-confirming experience.[52]

**Vignette: Silent Pictures**

The two of them stood with their backs to me, intently looking at the cartoon storyboard that was displayed on the school bulletin board for "Meet the Teacher" night. As I got closer, I noticed the father held a video camera in his hands and was recording the static image of his son's work, now displayed. The small grade one child reached up to tug on his father's sleeve and opened his mouth as if to speak but then quietly closed it again and turned back to face the board, silent… What would the child have said about

"his work"? What was the father "noticing" about his son's learning that he deemed "worthy" to capture on video? What was I to make of what I had seen?

**Beginnings…**

Confronted by the historical lineage of visual images and how they have been taken up from the Greeks to Foucault has opened up spaces in the topic of visual displays in elementary schools. The topic has also opened up hidden ways that it is connected to the teacher and the implications of constructing and presenting visual images. It is a sometimes voiced/unvoiced expectation held by teachers, parents, and administrators that visual displays will be constructed but rarely, if ever, is there a deep philosophical conversation held amongst these individuals about why visual displays look a particular way. We, as teachers, construct visual displays in particular ways and we may get caught up in *how* we go about this work but do we understand *why* we do this work? Do we understand the implicit messages that might be given to students *through* this work? We do know that in elementary schools, it must be done. If it is the expectation that parents and administrators want to "see" something on the walls of an elementary school, do they know what it is they want to see? Do they know why they want to see it? Do they know what the work on the walls means? How do they speak of it with the teacher? Their child?

Unpacking what appears in the literature about visual studies, I know there are multiple and often contested ways of coming to know about visual displays. The parts of visual culture that I have unearthed act as placeholders and are not fixed. They mark a point of reference that is fluid and add to what will appear as the topic unfolds in the conversations with three classroom teachers and leads to new horizons of understanding.

**Notes**

[1] Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymologyonline.com
[2] Richard Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye: The Cultural Functions of Imagery* (University of Minnesota: Westview Press, 1996), 3.
[3] John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin, *Visual Culture: An Introduction* (UK: Manchester University Press, 197), 22.
[4] Ted Aoki, "Towards Curriculum in a New Key," in *Curriculum in a New Key: the Collected Works of Ted Aoki,* eds., William Pinar and Rita Irwin, (New Jersey: LE Associates, 2005), 199.
[5] Ron Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye: The Cultural Functions of Imagery,* 6.
[6] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes* (University of California: Berkeley, 1994), 9.
[7] Ibid., 30.
[8] Ibid., 44-45.
[9] E. Lisa Panayotidis, "Social Reconstruction, Visuality, and the Exhibition of Democratic ideals in Canadian Schools, 1930-1950, ed., Harold Pearse, *From Drawing to Visual Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 149.
[10] James Elkin, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), 5.
[11] Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 1.
[12] George Roeder, "Filling in the Picture: Visual Culture," *Reviews in American History,* 26, no. 1 (March, 1998): 275.
[13] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (London: Sage, 2001), 2.
[14] Christopher L.C.E. Whitcombe, "What is Art? What is an Artist? An exhibition exploring the perception of art and identity of the artist through history in contemporary society." Sweet Briar College, http://www.arthistory.sbc.edu/artartists/academies.html
[15] Ibid., 11.
[16] Rose, *Visual Methodologies,* 33.
[17]W. J. T. Mitchell, "Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture," *Art Bulletin,* 77, no. 4 (December, 1995): 542.
[18] Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture*, 47.
[19] Ibid., 48.
[20] Ibid., 53
[21] Ibid., 53
[22] Ibid., 57.
[23] Rose, *Visual Methodologies,* 15. The emphasis of certain words in the quote are Rose's.
[24] Ibid., 136.
[25] Ron Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye,* 6.
[26] Ibid., 16.
[27] Ibid., 6.
[28] John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin, *Visual Culture: An Introduction, 97.*
[29] Etymological references are taken from www.onlinetymology.com and definitions from the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, eleventh edition.
[30] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes, 4.*

[31] John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin, *Visual Culture: An Introduction*, 97.
[32] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed., Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 155-156.
[33] Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 93.
[34] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 25.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 155.
[37] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 10.
[38] Calvin Kendall and others. *Pictured Knowledge: Visual Instruction Practically Applied for the Home and School*, Volume II (Chicago: Compton-Johnson, 1916), 490.
[39] Jon Prosser, "Visual methods and the visual culture of schools," *Visual Studies*, 22 no. 1 (April, 2007): 13.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 14.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor, *School* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 10-11.
[45] Ibid., 16.
[46] Mary Ann Stankiewicz and others, "Questioning the Past: Contexts, Functions, and Stakeholders in 19-Century Art Education," eds., Elliot Eisner and Michael Day *Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education* (*USA*: Taylor and Francis, 2004,) 35.
[47] Ibid., 43.
[48] Gareth Morgan, *Images of Organizations* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006), 145.
[49] Prosser, "Visual methods and the visual culture of schools," 22.
[50] Gunther Kress et al., *English in Urban Classrooms: A Multi-Modal Perspective on Teaching and Learning* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2005), 40-41.
[51] Ibid., 39.
[52] Ibid.

A conversation is not merely a human interaction,
it is also a display of something,
and the success and failure of the conversation,
is a success or failure in the manifestation
of the thing in question.[1]

It is not really a conversation
Over coffee
Or the sampling
Of individual opinions

Nor is it the careful brush strokes
Or a looking glass
Affirming who is there

Concealed within each story
Is more than a life
Waiting to be told
It is living itself
Lived out
Striving for expression

It is a transformative event
Engaging
Who we are
With who we might become

Forcing a turn upon ourselves
As we stretch forward into space
A circular journey
A painful journey
Eyes everywhere[2]

# CHAPTER THREE

# PORTRAIT OF AIMEE[3]

Surprisingly, some [apprentices] were not even allowed to ask questions. Even more surprisingly, they were taught to disdain the information provided by books. The apprentice was to learn by seeing and absorbing. The ideal apprentice was all eyes-mute.[4]

## Be/coming

During the course of writing my thesis, I have revisited the photographs of my classroom spaces trying to ascertain if who I was in the process of becoming as a teacher was displayed on my bulletin boards and classroom walls. As a new teacher, I was "all eyes;" silently taking my cues by watching more experienced mentors craft their visual displays. I did not ask questions; like the "ideal apprentice," I mimicked the walls of those that I had deemed 'knew what they were doing' and yet I never questioned what it might mean to "know" something. I recall wanting my visual displays to look similar, perhaps because of an innate desire to please those around me or perhaps to be recognized as someone who knew what they were doing. So I hung the commercially purchased borders, posters, art prints, and student work as I had seen on the walls of other classrooms. I wanted to be "seen" as the teacher who valued student work by creating multiple displays that showcased not only the end product but the process that students had engaged in as they completed their work. I enjoyed poetry and quotations and filled my own classroom walls with "inspirational" posters that I hoped, in turn, would inspire my own students to love words in the same way. Many years later, I have come to see that the walls were a representation—a portrait—of me; how I saw myself and what I wanted others to notice about my learning and "expertise" as a teacher.

This notion of portraiture calls to me and it is worth considering at a deeper level before discussing my conversation with Aimee. Portraits appear frequently in the works of Jane Austen, one of my favorite authors. In her books, Austen used portraits to signal a complex set of social and cultural relations. They marked a coming of age, such as the portrait gallery of the Darcy family in *Pride and Prejudice*; or as an intimate gift to a loved one, as is the case of the portrait of a friend painted by the heroine, Emma in *Emma*; or the resetting of the portrait for a new betrothed in *Persuasion.* In all three instances, the portrait is used as a symbolic marker to acknowledge, recognize and remember. In all cases, the portrait represents more than a mere image or static representation of the person. Frozen in time, the subject of the portrait is carefully posed, according to their gender and class, functioning as documentary evidence of a moment, calling the viewer to evoke and enact forms of remembrance and recognition. Etymologically, the word "portray" means to "draw forth." Remembering the snowmen, I wonder what was being drawn forth that I needed to notice. What was being called into remembrance? The Oxford dictionary defines portraiture as a noun, indicating the act of portrayal as well as the notion of the image or as a representation and an idea.[5]

Exploring the literatures of art history and its more contemporary manifestation, visual culture, I considered how portraiture figured within the tradition of visual displays in schools. Early Latin roots of "tradition" reveal that it is about surrendering to what is handed down. West refers to the Italian origins of the word, *portraiture* to encompass the idea of "likeness" and "reproduction." For Shearer West, portraiture is more complex than simple likenesses as, "works of art… engage with ideas of identity as they are perceived, represented, and understood in different times and places. These identities are

not fixed but are expressive of the expectations and circumstances of the time when the portrait was made. Aspects of identity cannot be reproduced, only suggested or evoked."[6] The photos of my own visual classroom displays also captured and portrayed a moment that evoked a sense of "me as teacher" in the making. While staying close to my topic of visual displays in schools, I came to wonder why my participants "portrayed" themselves through their own attention to the topic in various contexts of subjectively "knowing" and "experiencing" as a teacher. What role does identity play on what appears on classroom walls?

**So, now you are a teacher…**

I was five years old when I knew without a doubt that I wanted to be just like Mrs. Schwartz, my first grade teacher. In my young mind, I did not separate her from her role as teacher; they were one and the same. There were several other former teachers who also influenced my future career path. I took them with me when I entered the four year education program; albeit not acknowledging until years later, that they played a part in how I came to see myself as a teacher. Unlike other professions, those of us choosing a career as a teacher have been observing teachers and visual displays for about sixteen thousand hours.[7] We have been exposed to a variety of teachers, philosophies and school experiences that have helped shape not only who we are as individuals but who we may be as teachers.

A review of the educational literature on teacher preparation highlights the significance of identity within teacher professional development specifically noting the difficulties in "defining the concept; the place of self and related issues of agency, emotion, narrative and discourse; the role of reflection; and the influence of contextual

factors."[8] Although researchers have explored the transition of student to teacher, there is no one single story of learning to teach. As Britzman notes,

> The story of learning to teach begins much earlier than the time that one first decides to become a teacher. The mass experience of public education has made teaching one of the most familiar professions in this culture. Implicitly, schooling fashions the meanings, realities, and experiences of students: thus those learning to teach draw from their subjective experiences constructed from actually being there. They bring to teacher education their educational biography and some well-worn and commonsensical images of the teachers work. In part, this accounts for the persistency of particular worldviews, orientations, dispositions, and cultural myths that dominate our thinking and in unintended ways, select the practices that are available in educational life. Students have learned the formal and hidden curriculums.[9]

What does the narrative of teaching also say of visual displays in schools? In the early 1990's, teacher preparation programs focused instrumentally on the skills of teaching rather than the teacher as a holder of "personal, practical knowledge."[10] This term, coined by researchers Connelly and Clandinin, reflects their epistemological curiosity connecting the experiences of an individual becoming a teacher to the practices of teaching, pinpointing a crucial gap that was missing in teacher education. Alternatively, Connelly and Clandinin located personal, practical knowledge, "in the teacher's past experience, the teacher's present mind and body and in future actions and plans. Namely, the teacher's practice is situated within a professional landscape that is narratively constructed; having a history with moral, emotional and aesthetic dimensions. We see it as storied. To enter a professional knowledge landscape is to enter a place of story." [11] They situate this narrative in the context of "in" and "out" of classroom places.

> Classrooms are, for the most part, safe places, generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice. These lived stories are essentially secret ones. Furthermore, when these secret lived stories are told, they are, for the most part, told to other teachers in other secret places. When teachers move out of their classrooms onto the out-of-classroom place on the landscape, they often live

> and tell cover stories, stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school. Cover stories enable teachers whose teachers' stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and sustain their teacher stories.[12]

Teachers continually move between the complex and sometimes contradictory places, often portraying themselves to match the story being told because they want to be seen as "good teachers."[13] The transition of student to teacher is convoluted and has been taken up in the literature mainly through narrative approaches. Much about the experience of students becoming teachers, according to researcher, Britzman, has been negative; casting teaching as a set of rules of what to do and not do as well as what not to become. For Britzman, the act of becoming a teacher is a personal one and suggests that for the individual, it may even be one of crisis as they navigate between the personal role of teaching and the function of a teacher as an authority.[14] However Jo Towers, in her research on transition of student teachers to beginning teachers suggests that those new educators ascribing to a philosophical approach grounded in phronesis, such as an inquiry-based program, were able to enact their beliefs in spite of colleagues who did not always support them.[15] Towers also found that teachers who came from inquiry-based programs were able to "walk the walk" of inquiry-based teaching, embodying their sense of self in classroom discourse, before they were able to "talk the talk," suggesting that their practice was intuitive.[16]

Although my research question is not about Aimee, I think about her story of teaching and how she has learned to navigate the role of teacher and how in the process she came to understand visual displays in and outside of her classroom. Aimee has just begun her fourth year as an elementary teacher. She is passionate about literacy and

English Language acquisition because of her own positive early school experiences. She was determined to become a teacher because of the many teachers who inspired her love of reading and the arts. Having grown up in Calgary and attended public schools, Aimee jumped at the opportunity to return to her childhood neighborhood as a first year teacher. Aimee was excited to incorporate what she had learned as a student teacher at a, "Fine Arts-Focused," school.[17] As she planned for her first year in the classroom it was not long before Aimee realized that she would not have much leeway in her teaching practice. She was instructed to set aside two hours every morning for "intense" literacy work with students followed by math instruction, leaving her with little opportunity to utilize the arts as a meaningful way to explore reading and writing. She struggled with the mandates of the school administration that demanded a "common practice" from all its teachers. Aimee began to feel that the teacher she wanted to become was slipping away. Obliged to a three year contract, Aimee found herself increasingly disillusioned. While she questioned whether she should remain in the classroom or pursue her interests in graduate work, an opportunity to move to a fine arts-focused school presented itself. She found her passions for teaching re-invigorated as she made the decision to change schools, finding a new sense of freedom and purpose in her teaching.

**Early Stages: Growing into the profession**

I arrived at Aimee's school just as the last bell of the day was ringing. Having been on sabbatical leave and away from my own school setting for several months, I was excited to be in a school again at the close of day, watching the anticipated smiles on the children's faces as they ran out to meet their parents. I navigated amongst the numerous mini vans and SUV's that crowded the street and made my way to the front door.

Walking in, I was immersed in the familiar smells of damp shoes, paper, crayons, and those scents so viscerally associated with elementary schools. I took in the sights and sounds of the long hallway just outside the main office; 1950's chocolate brown and cream tiles stretched the width of the school. Turning away from the main hallway I followed a familiar ritual of signing in at the office. Once released, I wandered into the hallway adjacent to the office and glanced up on the walls. Photographs of child actors selected for the now-past school musical were proclaimed as the 'Stars of the Future' on the bulletin board; their roles carefully described below each picture. I pondered about this display as it seemed out of place amongst the other displays of student artwork that suggested the celebration of work of many rather than singling out a select few.

My reverie was interrupted by Aimee's cheerful voice. She smiled warmly at me and welcomed me enthusiastically to her school. As we walked down to her room at the end of the building, I noticed the artwork that adorned the corridors. One wall held paper mache animals that were colorfully painted and hung at different angles while across the hall, renderings of winter nature scenes were displayed in straight lines. On closer inspection, I saw that numerous media and styles were employed and the work was made meaningful by "artist statements" written by both children and teachers. Ushered into the last room on the left I was once again met with the winter aroma of children; damp wool from afternoon recess and indoor shoes. The classroom was awash in late afternoon February light seeping in from the full length of windows on the east side of the space. The familiar trappings of a classroom agenda, timetables, calendars and a word wall were contrasted by art projects and a vast art/word piece entitled "Compassion." Commercially produced inspirational posters were strewn throughout the space with one particular one

on self-esteem prominently located on its own small wall above a beautiful beveled mirror. I turned on the small recorder that I brought with me to capture our conversations and I asked Aimee to tell me about what she had displayed in her classroom. She thoughtfully contemplated the space that she occupied daily with twenty ten year old learners and she began cataloguing the objects and images that I had already noticed. Aimee began to paint a portrait of her and her classroom, speaking about children's learning of language and its relation to the visual.

Aimee[18]: *I like displaying things that children need to know. So, I have things like my no excuse word wall. I also like to display work that they are proud of…work that is a reminder of what we have created together that I would call a masterpiece.*

I was instantly captured by the word, "masterpiece." What does this word mean? "Masterpiece" suggests that the work is a creation of a master artist; or as from its meaning in the nineteen century, an absolute work.[19] Has Aimee been "schooled" to regard "displayed work" as the "best work"? Is this how school walls should "appear"? Do we expect to see the walls in a particular way because of our own cultural assumptions and traditions of schooling? And yet I wonder what we are not noticing; what is missing and how does it speak? What does it mean to have a "masterpiece" up on our wall and who gets to say?

Sherry: ***I notice that you have a variety of children's work as well as posters that you have made or that you have purchased. Tell me about how you might have decided what you were going to display.***

Aimee: …*We decided as a class…that we wanted to brighten up the walls. So, when we display things from children, obviously, I don't want to pick everything. I pick things that are big, that are meaningful.*

Sherry: ***I notice you use the word, "brighten" "to brighten up your classroom?"***

Aimee: *To me, it is about bringing joy. A classroom is essentially just four walls, much like a box, and I don't want my students to come in thinking it is just an empty hollow place. It is a place of learning, a place of reflecting. Generally, bringing bright colors into the room is a representation of their joy that they bring everyday.*

I am caught by her use of the word, "joy," as the reason why she creates visual displays in her classroom. How does she know this? Why is she associating "joy" with a classroom space? Is seeing the classroom space in this way influenced who she has become as a teacher? How might we understand "joy" in the classroom? I am reminded of nineteenth-century social theorist John Ruskin and his notion of "joy in labor"[20] and in his proposition that there was "joy" in ethically producing a work of good quality—aesthetic or otherwise. Ruskin, as I discovered, had an enormous influence on late nineteenth and early twentieth century education across the Anglo world.

Sherry: ***What role do you think the items displayed have in your day- to- day teaching practice?***

Aimee:*At first, I didn't notice all the things on my wall were literacy based. I just thought that it was something that I would normally put up, that I got used to [putting up] over the past three years. I didn't know what to put up on walls as a first year teacher. I looked at other classrooms and I thought there were expectations of every teacher to have a word wall…I noticed that every classroom needs to have this, this, this…it just*

*started becoming a part of me, that I needed to have certain things on the wall, in a certain way.*

Sherry**: *Who do you think decides that those certain things are displayed in a certain way?***

Aimee: *...I was told [by my mentor in my previous school] that I was expected to have them [literacy-focused items] there on the wall. As for the other walls in my classroom, my mentor told me that he really liked seeing a subject on each wall or at least a portion of the wall and that it should stay there for a month.*

Sherry: ***Whose beliefs and values are displayed when you see what is on your classroom walls?***

Aimee: *I think it is the values and beliefs of the people who taught me…I have followed the advice that I was given and it has just become a part of my own teaching practice.*

Sherry: ***Do you think that teachers learn to construct classroom displays in the same way that you have?***

Aimee: *I think about why I have put certain things up and I think it is either because I was used to seeing those things like the alphabet line in my own classroom as a child or because of my mentor. I think sometimes that the walls are a complete reflection of him and it makes me feel safe. I know that may sound weird, but it is a part of me and yes, [she begins to cry], it does make me feel safe.*

Sherry: ***Do you recall any guidance from your teacher education program in this area?***

Aimee: *It was not something we talked about but I do remember asking about what we could put up on the wall.*

Sherry: ***Do you mean asking for permission?***

Aimee: *Yes, I do, from the people in charge...partner teachers, my professors, my field people. I didn't feel that I could decide that on my own.*

Sherry: ***Do you think that you may still be seeking permission as a teacher?***

Aimee: *I think that I need to meet the expectations of the school which is that art should be displayed frequently and be changed several times…the expectations that you are constantly changing it, constantly demonstrating that you are 'doing' art in your room, because that is the school philosophy.*

Sherry: ***Are those expectations expressed in writing?***

Aimee: *No, at least I have never seen them. It is just something that we talk about as a school.*

Sherry: ***Do you talk about classroom displays as a school staff?***

Aimee: *Not really. I think that it was something that was established early on, before I came here…I am assuming that was happening.*

Sherry: ***Do you think it is a kind of tradition?***

Aimee: *Yes, something that continues even though we may not talk about it.*

Sherry: ***So, do you think other teachers notice the displays?***

Aimee: *Only if it looks new. If it has been up for awhile, nothing is mentioned.*

Sherry: ***Is there a sense of competition between the teachers or pressure to change the displays?***

Aimee: *It is sort of an unwritten rule that when you see Person A change the display outside their classroom, it rolls down the hallway and we all change them.*

Sherry: ***Why do you think that is?***

Aimee: *I think we change them for each other. I think we look at each other's walls and what they do as teachers more than why it is up there in the first place. For me, I like to think that I do it to show the children's work to the parents… but I don't know. I put it up but if Person A changes their walls, I follow suit. I do feel a sense of competition when it comes to the work in the hallway but not when the work is up inside my classroom. I didn't feel that way in my last school. I think the competition existed but it was enacted through other venues, not in the displays.*

Sherry: ***How much of the display is about the teacher showing the work and how much of the display is about showing student work?***

Aimee: *I would say that it is more about the teacher than the student. For example, if I change the hallway bulletin board when Person A does, then I think I am perceived as doing more art, as they seem to do. I think that my colleagues and my administration will think that I am meeting the school expectations. I don't always think that I am because there is so much more to art than just producing work and putting it up. If you are telling the students that you just need to keep producing something, it changes what the philosophy of this school is supposed to be. That is about a process and how do you display that?*

Sherry: ***Display the process?***

Aimee: *Yes, to me learning is more than just producing something. If you are in a school where everything has to be displayed at all times just to show that you are "doing your job"[emphasis hers] then you better be on board to find projects that will accomplish that goal. Where is the learning process in that? I don't know. I do think that it somehow ties to accountability.*

Sherry: ***Do you think your teachers displayed your work out of a sense of accountability?***

Aimee: *I remember a teacher who I think now was really student-centered, which is how I want to be seen as a teacher. It was not the walls of her classroom that indicated to me that she cared about me and my work and yet it is almost like to "show" [emphasis hers] you are a particular kind of teacher; you have to put it up on the walls. I wonder if my own students recognize me as being student-centered by how I address them everyday or by how I display their work.*

Sherry: ***Do you think it matters if that work is in the hallway or inside the classroom?***

Aimee: *I think that when the work is displayed inside the classroom, it's about me and a reflection of what I value as a teacher. When it is in the hallway, I think it is about accountability to parents and to administration.*

Sherry: ***Do you think that has changed since you first entered the profession?***

Aimee: *I think the younger and more inexperienced the teacher is, the more willing they might be to show more of themselves on the walls but the longer you stay in a school, the more the philosophy of the school seeps into you and what you might think or feel may not matter so much anymore…I felt dictated to, as to what [went] up on the walls.*

Sherry: ***Do you think that teachers may just go along with what others want them to do?***

Aimee: *I think you go along and follow what others tell you as much as you may want to do something else because you don't want to do anything that will impact your role in the school or how people view you because you are new and in my case, maybe a little unsure and scared.*

Sherry: ***So, do these walls resemble those of your earlier experiences?***

Aimee: *Maybe a little bit but I am always trying to develop. Wherever I go, I take my experiences and perhaps the expectations of others with me. Maybe I still see some meaning to what I learned that first year, so I can see evidence of it up on the walls today. But I don't put up other things because I might have been directed to do so in my last school but I don't feel compelled to do that here. I guess I am changing and growing.*

**Taking up the Portrait: A First Glimpse**

I think you should learn, of course, and some days you should learn a great deal. But you should also have days when you allow what is already in you to swell up inside of you until it touches everything. And you can feel it inside you. If you never take time out to let that happen, then you just accumulate facts, and they begin to rattle around inside of you. You can make noise with them, but never really feel anything with them. It's hollow.[21]

Although my topic is not about teacher education *per se*, the conversation with Aimee opened up how visual displays in schools may be connected to the very identity of the teacher. I came to see that I could not strictly discuss the pedagogical practice of creating visual displays without some consideration as to how Aimee and so many of us arrived at those decisions and how she saw them bound up in her life in school. Several things resonate for me in the discussion with Aimee. I was instantly struck by her declaration of the "expectations" she perceived surrounding visual displays. Aimee spoke of how in the first school she had worked in, visual displays and all that they were meant to evoke were very much directed by the school administration and fellow colleagues. She felt detached from what was expected of her perhaps because her identity as a teacher was marked by what Connelly and Clandinin call the "in" and "out" of classroom places.[22] As a beginning teacher, she was still transitioning between who she was a

student and who she was becoming as a teacher. She entered the classroom as a teacher who believed that she needed to create "joyful" spaces for learners but was met with a philosophy that was more strictly oriented to literacy than creativity. Aimee produced the visual displays as she had been guided, not because she was convinced that they were the ones she should construct. Her ideas were further supported through her relationship with a caring mentor whose words she carries with her in every classroom. It is difficult for a first year teacher not to adopt the story of school, as a place of teaching and learning, without realizing that those stories, as described by Connelly and Clandinin, also have a history with moral, emotional and aesthetic dimensions.[23] Are these narratives displayed visually on the school and classroom walls? How do teachers' stories and memories reverberate through these visual displays?

Aimee did not have the opportunity to "play" with the walls when she first became a teacher; to ask what they might mean or what they are asking of her. As Jardine explains,

> When threatened, animals tend, quite naturally, to revert to those kinds of activities that will aid them in gaining comparative control over their environment, activities that involve little or no risk. They revert, so to speak, to what is tried and true, what is most familiar… In the movement of withdrawal, reversion, and retreat, it is easy to lose the very recourse required…a recourse into a world of relations that has its own *Spiel*, its own life beyond the paranoid enclosures. There are moments when we know that 'something is going on', 'something is happening', 'something is at play here'…and it has something to ask of me beyond what I might imagine asking of it. A question presses itself upon us.[24]

In her previous school context, Aimee did as she was told to do; she constructed visual displays about literacy in a way that was "familiar" and "acceptable" to those around her. There was no opportunity to question or consider what the visual displays might mean

nor were there any specific explanations from school administrators. Her identity as a teacher was shaped by the values, mandates and mission of the school. This was in contrast to how she thought curriculum should be displayed visually.[25] Where is Aimee's voice within the narrative of her first school? "The surprise is that one's voice, whether we call it the voice of experience or the voice of the beginner, seems to come from the outside in, even if it is intimately felt from the inside out."[26]Are beginning teachers in danger of what Aoki warns of as "becoming the language we speak?"[27] Where does simply following the educational directives of others lead us? What is our understanding or ethical responsibility in these practices?

Is Aimee the "ideal apprentice- all eyes, mute"?[28] How has the "mentorship" that she eagerly entered into influenced who she has become? In her earlier school position, Aimee assigned herself the role of literacy teacher where she,

> [l]earn[ed] early on that whereas role can be assigned, the taking up of an identity is a constant and tricky social negotiation. Roles are flimsy and superficial, transitory and easily adopted or discarded. Identity is our understanding of who we are and of we think other people are. Reciprocally, it also encompasses other people's understanding of themselves and others which includes us. Identities are the ways we relate and distinguish in our social relations with other individuals and groups.[29]

Is Aimee a mimic? The etymology of the word "mimicked" derives from the Greek meaning, "to mime." It suggests to me that she was unable to challenge the practices of display in her school because she was silenced to conform to a standard representation. Perhaps Aimee was playing like a child playing a kind of dress up as Aristotle suggests and that in her imitation she was, "not trying to hide [herself], pretending to be something else in order to be discovered and recognized behind it; but, on the contrary, [she] intends a representation of such a kind that only what is represented exists. The child wants at

any cost to avoid being discovered behind his disguise. He intends that what he represents should exist, and if something is to be guessed, then this is it. We are supposed to recognize what it is."[30] Gadamer adds that recognition is not knowing something again but rather knowing "more than is already familiar…it is grasped in its essence and known as something."[31] Visual displays in schools may seem familiar to those of us who inhabit those spaces but I would suggest that they are more than familiar; the images inscribe the classroom as a constructed space. Gadamer continues, "imitation and representation are not merely a repetition, a copy, but knowledge of the essence. Because they are not merely repetition, but a 'bringing forth,' they imply a spectator as well. They contain in themselves an essential relation to everyone for whom the representation exists."[32] Aimee had not been asked to learn something new about why she was displaying something on the walls nor the tradition of displaying images that has been brought forward. Our conversation helped her to see that she did not address the essence of visual displays in schools and how they were a part of a long-standing tradition that teachers are caught in and caught by. I think about how to situate tradition within the complexities of the teacher trying to develop a sense of pedagogy and the preoccupation of today's schools within the accountability vortex and its measurable forms and reporting. Gadamer speaks of tradition as what is handed down from the past and which confronts us as a task. He calls on us to see that, "[u]nderstanding is not a method which the inquiring consciousness applies to an object that it chooses and so turns it into objective knowledge; rather, being situated within a event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding. Understanding proves to be an event."[33] I wonder if Aimee is somehow acknowledging this tradition by her emphatic use of the word "need"

when she speaks of the walls; the need to compete with others so that her walls look "right." Aimee's words also express the pressure that teachers feel to conform to the school's norms that are hidden in school culture and voiced through relationships of power and authority held by school administrators and perhaps more powerful colleagues.

I was struck by the raw emotion expressed in her tearful words when she spoke of her mentor. There is a recognition that she is apart of something else, a sense of ethical "rightness" that somehow honors an unwritten tradition of teaching. I wonder what she is afraid to forget in her act of remembrance? She carried those expectations with her to her second school and acted upon them without perhaps even realizing what was occurring or being reinforced. The "competition" and pressure to change visual displays in schools is part of this unspoken tradition. Aimee wonders about how she and her colleagues attend to those displays, not for the content alone, but more for how often they are altered in their appearance. As she brings this aspect of the topic to light, I have to consider why that occurs and for whom. For Maxine Greene, such acts are frame[s] of custom.[34] Greene calls for education to be a thoughtful interruption in the world so that students may be empowered to explore learning; however, I interpret it as a need for teachers to be transformative so that they may begin to consider the prescriptive authority as discussed by Foucault to what appears on the school and classroom walls, even if it is risky to contradict the authority of the school culture. Bulletin boards have always served as a form of visual accountability and regulation allowing others to survey, observe and control what is going on in a classroom from the outside.

Aimee distinguishes the outer and the inner walls, citing school and parental accountability and expectations. The outer walls are authorized images for colleagues, administration and parents while the inner walls are for her and her students. It suggests that visual displays may reproduce the accountability-driven education system; appearing seemingly innocent as children's work yet illustrating an eerie uniformity of practice. Going back to Aimee's observations about the inner walls of the classroom, she claims that they are more like home, meaningful because they are authentic reflection of who she is. She is claiming an essential, authentic/fixed identity associated with the visual displays; the walls an extension of who she is or perhaps how she wants to be viewed/seen by others, without room for interpretation.

As a beginning teacher, I was also trying not to look like I did not know what I was doing. It was not until these questions arose for me some twenty years later that I realized that I was unconsciously creating visual displays on the "outside" walls for others to see. I did not worry so much about what appeared inside the classroom. Our collective identity as "teacher" is portrayed upon the walls of the school. Visual displays may be according to Pinar, "conceived by others, by the expectations and fantasies of our students, by the demands of administration, parents and the policy makers."[35] Have teachers like Aimee and I surrendered to a preconceived notion of what should appear and should not appear on the classroom walls without fully understanding that they are interpretable? That they have a history? How then do we interrupt this practice and point to other ways of making them meaningful?

**Returning: Another Conversation**

Sherry: ***You spoke of using display as a way of showing what the children need to know as well as part of a celebration of what they come to know. What is the difference between "needing to know" and "coming to know"?***

Aimee: *I think "needing to know" is very teacher-driven and allows me to demonstrate to others that I am following the curriculum and perhaps "coming to know" is more about sharing the student's pride in their work.*

Sherry: ***Is that why you think all the walls have something on them?***

Aimee: *I think that people, like parents and administration, would wonder why there is a blank wall in the room. I wonder if they would think less of me as a teacher. I think I feel pressure to fill up all the empty spaces. I spoke to a colleague about that early on in the year; he thought it was fine to have those spaces as it allowed the students to fill them up. It is something that I have been thinking about since our last conversation, how I could make this a "growing space."*

Sherry: ***You also spoke of "needing" to have certain things up on the wall. Have you thought any more about that?***

Aimee: *I think that I have definitely brought the voice of other people with me to this school. I still feel there is a need that I cannot explain, to display certain things.*

Sherry: ***I wondered about the process you might have gone through as you have considered the walls. I wrote this poem in response[36]:***

***The walls, once empty, now speak***
***with the voice of one***
***who responded with care and nurture***
***when a young teacher needed just that.***
***Now, surrounded by different walls,***
***his voice still echoes***

***reverberates from the word wall***
***and she catches her reflection***
***of him in the mirror***
***recognition of rightness***
***honoring of what has come before***
***and she feels safe.***

Aimee is silent at first and then she smiles. I wonder if the poem has taken her back to the hours of conversation that she and her mentor have shared.

Aimee: *... I look around the room and I wonder how much of it is still him and how much of it is me. I have wondered over the last while how much of it will change as I don't speak as often with him. Will my classroom change? Will how I teach change as a result of that? There is some fear there. Will his voice still be in my head as it is now?*

Sherry: ***Perhaps you look to others now as well, here in this school, when you spoke of the changing of hallway displays. Competing with them? Consider the origins of the word, compete which means to "strive together" as well as the roots of "display" which means to "unfold" or "reveal****."*

Aimee: *I think that a lot of time, we put work up for each other. They notice something new and they may compliment me on it, and it encourages me to just keep doing something a certain way. Maybe that is how we are "striving together."*

Sherry: ***What about the work that we don't display? Are we concealing something by not revealing it to others?***

Aimee: *I think that we are okay with work that has "met expectations" but not with the work that may not look that good. I think that people would wonder why it was there. I think that I would maybe even feel uncomfortable with it because I was displaying something that might not be deemed, "beautiful" enough.*

Sherry: ***I have been thinking about how you considered the outside walls looking a certain way.***

Aimee: *I liken it to a stage. Being on a stage and being someone else because you have to meet the ideals of the audience watching you. I think that is kind of the way that I view education; you always have to show "something, something, something." [her emphasis] You have to be accountable and you have to show it to somebody. Inside, I feel free to make it about something else, but I better do a good job of what others see.*

Sherry: ***Do you think there is "rightness" to what is displayed?***

Aimee: *I think there is definitely something in each school that a teacher has to follow no matter what, that is defined by the school culture.*

**Re/Framing the Portrait: A Second Perspective**

How can you know what is missing if you've never met it? You must know of something's existence before you can notice its absence.[37]

How is it that school hallways have become places where only the "best" and the "beautiful" are displayed? What does this mean? Lawn notes that classrooms, as any physically constructed space, are designed with built-in values which mold the work and behaviors of those who inhabit it.[38] Kress et al, in their work on the English classroom as a multi-modal sign, argue that visual displays in classrooms serve to create a sense of place that reflects students. Adopting a normative explanation we could say that the classroom environment authorizes and centralizes the role of the teacher. Kress et al note that much of the wall space in classrooms in used as a place to display students "best work" but because of its usual placement, which is usually a wall in front of which students sit, the work is only visible to the teacher. This practice continues today.[39] Who then is this work for? What is the purpose of displaying the "beautiful" or "best work"?

How are we to look at such work? Rose speaks of looking at images carefully and considering how they offer a particular vision of category such as class, gender, able-ness, etc.[40] John Berger adds, "we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves."[41] Teachers are clearly "positioned" by the images they display as the visual displays often confirm, through their appearance, an image of "correctness" or "rightness" in their pedagogic practices.

The uniformity of the snowmen on the hallway that day returns to my mind's eye. I recall the teacher's joy in their "beauty" as she described it. Perhaps she too, like Aimee, was under the spell of the display as evidence of good pedagogic practice because of its prominence and location. It also signaled something deeper; related to a consideration of how we as teachers need to perform and enact the "right" pedagogy on the walls so that we can let others know that we are doing what we are directed to do culturally, educationally and socially.

**Notes**

[1] R.Sokolowski, "Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutics," in ed., L.E. Hahn *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 231.
[2] Melissa Freeman, "Between Eye and Eye Stretches an Interminable Landscape": The Challenge of Philosophical Hermeneutics," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7. (2001): 649.
[3] This is a pseudonym selected by the participant.
[4] Robert Genn, "Master-Apprentice Dynamics," *The Painter's Keys,* July 16, 2010, http://clicks.robertgenn.com/master-apprentice.php
[5] *Oxford English Dictionary, sixth edition* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 2293.
[6] Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 11.
[7] I arrived at this number based on an average six hour day over the course of twelve years of schooling and an estimated two thousand hours for an undergraduate degree.
[8] As reviewed by Catherine Beauchamp and Lynn Thomas, "Understanding Teacher Identity: An Overview of Issues in the Literature and Implications for Teacher Education," *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39, no. 2, (2009):181.
[9] Deborah Britzman, *Practice Makes Practice* (Albany: New York Press, 2003), 26.
[10] F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, *Shaping a Professional Identity: Stories of Educational Practice* (Columbia University: Teachers College Press, 1999), 1.
[11] Ibid.,2
[12] Ibid., 3.
[13] Jane Danielewicz, *Teaching Selves: Identity, Pedagogy, and Teacher Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 3.
[14] Ibid.,4.
[15] Jo Towers, "Learning to Teach Mathematics Through Inquiry: A Focus on the Relationship Between Describing and Enacting Inquiry-Oriented Teaching," *Journal of Mathematics Teacher Education*, 13, no. 3, (2010), 260.
[16] Ibid., 244.
[17] This is a term used in the Calgary Board of Education to describe schools that make deliberate pedagogical choices in teaching in and through the arts although the school is not recognized as a district alternative program.
[18] While stylistically, italicizing speech is not consistent with Chicago B citation style, I have chosen to italicize the participant's words and bold my own for greater readability.
[19] Hans Belting and Helen Atkins, *The Invisible Masterpiece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 12.
[20] Helen Sheumaker and Shirley Teresa Wajada, *Material Culture in America: Understanding Everyday Life* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 47.
[21] E.L. Konigsburg, *The Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (New York: Bantam Press, 1967), 150.
[22] F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, *Shaping a Professional Identity*, 3.
[23] Ibid., 2.
[24] David Jardine et al, *Curriculum in Abundance* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, 2006), 66.
[25] F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, *Shaping a Professional Identity,* 85.
[26] Britzman, *Practice Makes Practice,* 21.

[27] William Pinar, *What is Curriculum Theory?* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates 2004), 23.
[28] Robert Genn, "Master-Apprentice Dynamics," *The Painter's Keys,* July 16, 2010, http://clicks.robertgenn.com/master-apprentice.php
[29] Jane Danielewicz, *Teaching Selves*, 10.
[30] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum Books, 2004), 113.
[31] Ibid., 113
[32] Ibid., 114.
[33] Ibid., 308.
[34] Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1995), 56.
[35] Pinar, *What is Curriculum Theory?* 30.
[36] Following the work of Melissa Freeman, I sent the participants a copy of the poems that I had written in our first session prior to our second conversation.
[37] E.L. Koningsburg, *The View From Saturday*, (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1996), 157.
[38] Ian Grovesnor et al. *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom* (New York: Lang Publishers, 1999), 73.
[39]Gunter Kress et al, *English in Urban Classrooms: A Multimodal Perspective on Teaching and Learning* (London: Routledge, 2005), 42.
[40] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (London: Sage, 2001), 12.
[41] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 9.

## LEARNING TO LISTEN

Understanding is not an act of subjectivity but a mode of being.[1]

I listen
The stories of people
Open to me
Unfold
Rippling Outward
Experiences I know nothing of
And have never had

I think that I listen

Absorbed and well-meaning
I travel these landscapes
Extracting scraps and segments
Reshaping their form
Seeking out words
Not even spoken

I have not learned to listen

A fusion of horizons
Is not the engulfment
of a valley
Or the taking of a soul
When we hear only a fragment
Of the possible[2]

# CHAPTER FOUR

# PORTRAIT OF ERIKA[3]

## Coming Along: "I am who I am not yet"[4]

Echoes of Aimee's words reverberated in my mind. Shielding myself from a bitter northern February day, I headed for my first meeting with Erika. Entering the school, I found myself taking in the initial bulletin boards differently than I had when at Aimee's school. I wondered if I might find similar acts of competition, repetition and expectation occurring here. Strains of Latin music reached my ears from the open gym door and I could not help but follow the sounds of the complex rhythms. I appreciated the contrast of the uniformed young children dancing the mamba, their giggles climbing above the marimba as they finished with a flourish of waving arms and laughter. Reluctantly, I went back to the main hallway to wait for Erika while she dismissed her students for the day. As I stood there, I noted that the building was of the same architectural design as Aimee's, in fact, my participants and I all occupy school sites of the same construction and era. The "familiar" hallway gleamed with freshly applied wax, the sheen highlighting a clay display that was housed on the large wall outside of the gymnasium. Clay imprints of hands and the names of the children and teachers who occupied the school in recent years were prominently mounted on the large bulletin board.

My thoughts were interrupted by a member of the administrative team who knew me from my previous position as the Fine Arts Specialist of the school district. She observed my contemplation of the school space. "Not an attractive piece, is it?" she

asked, “This went up before I got here and I am actually glad to see you here looking at it. I would love to know what you think we could do with this space.” She paused and I found myself once again caught by a display. Aimee’s words of duplication and consistency echoed in my head and I wondered what vision of visual displays this administrator sought to enact. Simply taking in the display of the clay hands was not enough for me to make any reasonable observation unless I was merely being asked about its aesthetic or if perhaps I thought it was “pretty.” How are such displays interpreted or labeled? Are teachers, administrators as well as parents comfortable with something that might be labeled as, “failure,” or “misunderstanding” or “imperfection” or “process” or do they want something to be seen as “pretty” “or competent”? How do school stakeholders want visual displays to be “seen”?

Is the word, “pretty,” being used to describe not only how the display is interpreted by those who see it but also voicing the intentionality of the display by the teachers who created it? This question places the viewer in two positions; one as making sense of what is seen as well as being seen through a variety of contexts that may be included in what is meant by visual culture. Critically important is what is not seen or in this case, absent in visual displays. How much of what is displayed in elementary schools represents a pedagogy of learning and how much is constructed to engage the viewer and what they might expect to see? Is this the case with the clay hands? Perhaps the administrator is troubled by the learning process underpinning the work or concerned about how it will be taken up by those who see it.

I asked her what it is about the display that troubles her. She replied that it seems ordinary, “crafty”, not a strong example of an aesthetic or artistic merit, and

certainly not deserving of such a prominence in the school. Done as part of a fifty year celebration/legacy of the school five years before, the clay pieces were made by parents and teachers who are still on staff and hence, there are some delicate political concerns over their removal. We talked about what she thinks she might like to see there instead and she pondered: "something worthy of the children in this school and the parents who are proud of their accomplishments." I am reminded of Aimee's remarks about the art portrayed in the hallway and how it functions critically. Are those walls for the enactment of curriculum for teachers and their students or for something planned and posed for others?

Months later, I came across another story as told by researcher Annie Davies of a school administrator's decision to remove a legacy project from his school. I shared this story with Erika's administrator. Davies notes that the visual display in question consisted of twenty large multicolored banners hung within the two-story glass entrance to a school. It was an art piece that she felt that spoke of an environment that honored the work of learners. Just a few weeks later, the banners were removed and she enquired where they had gone. None of the teachers seemed to know and the banners became a topic of heated discussion amongst the staff, who also noted that a similar visual display in the library had also disappeared. The staff immediately decided that it was the new principal who had made the decision without their input and lamented the 'history' of their school being taken down. She recorded some of the conversations that ensued,

> Jeff suggested, "So, how the school looks is important to Paul (the Principal) and it's important to all of us too but what I am seeing is Paul's unilateral decision making when it comes to the entrance hall, the office, the staff room and hallways. These spaces are quite different from our classrooms, aren't they? I can see why he asked the librarian if the felt banners could come down. They were in

> her space. The entrance hall is nobody's space. That is probably why Paul didn't think to ask us."
>
> "But Jeff, these are important spaces. They speak volumes about this school. Shouldn't we have been consulted?" Ellen wondered. "The problem now is that we're silenced."
>
> "It doesn't seem to make sense, does it?" said Jeff with a sigh. "These spaces connect us. They link us together as a school. Perhaps I feel this way because I was on staff, 7 years ago, when the banners in the foyer were made. To me, they're a symbol of what this school is all about. The banners symbolize our commitment to children. Maybe this is a wake-up call? Maybe we're about something different now? But what is it?[5]

Paul's actions were perceived by the teachers as changing the "out of classroom places"[6] signaling to them that their work and participation in collegial governance was perhaps not valued. Rather than speaking with the principal, they retreated to their "in classroom places" and told stories of how the school is changing, one visual display at a time. Davies' discovered that Paul's removal of the banners was more about the aesthetic of the building rather than a particular educational philosophy. Indeed Paul was known as a principal with an interest in "redecorating" schools. Paul's desire to alter the aesthetics of the school, which was not intentionally linked to the school philosophy, also shifted the narrative of the identity and the attachment the teachers had in the school. Teachers felt betrayed because they did not realize that, "identities have histories and narratively, continue to take shape as life unfolds. The identities we have, the stories we live by, tend to show different facets depending on the situations in which we find ourselves."[7] Teacher's remembrance of the original displays is worthy of our consideration, as the banners may have signified accomplishment not only in the details of their creation but in finished work, as well as in the emotion of the teachers who were involved in it. To remember is a narrative act which is subject to its own narrativity.[8] I wonder how often

such “legacy” visual displays become subject contested and political ways of seeing and serve to encourage diverse narratives and meanings. At the end of her time at the school, Davies was still troubled by the loss experienced by the teachers and asked, “Do we know who it is we are and what story we are constructing for ourselves if we have no place? What do places have to do with our stories? And what about the children who come to our classrooms? Do they want to have a sense of place? We tell ourselves they do.”[9] My thoughts were interrupted by Erika who had appeared at my side.

**Meeting Erika**

Erika is a warm and friendly young woman who has been teaching for nine years. Teaching was not her first vocational choice; she had wanted to be a veterinarian as a child but was discouraged by parents and teachers. She was told that she wasn’t smart enough and that she would have to kill animals. So she became focused on being a teacher and spent the majority of her high school years working towards that goal. She began her career in a fine arts focused elementary school because of her academic background in fine arts as well as an interest in a pedagogical philosophy of teaching curriculum through the arts. It was here that I first met Erika in my previous role as the Fine Arts Specialist. She was mentored by several experienced teachers over her seven years at the school including the school administrator who had definite ideas about how visual displays in both the “in and out of classroom places” should be constructed. Erika enjoyed the challenges and learning opportunities that being at the school provided but felt after seven years, she needed to pursue other educational opportunities and accepted a position at one of thirteen schools that were part of an alternative program within the Calgary Board of Education known as the Traditional Learning Centre. Our paths crossed

again two years later when Erika and members of her staff visited my school as part of a professional learning opportunity to explore the role of the arts within a classical educational approach. Erika noted the strong presence of the visual arts within the curriculum of my school and was interested in my research. As a teacher, Erika is a consummate life-long learner and eagerly accepted the opportunity to explore the topic of visual displays in elementary schools.

**First Explorations**

As we moved down the hallway and stood outside the classroom, Erika pointed out work that her students had done. We spoke about how she decided what would go in the classroom and what would go in the hallway. Erika was quiet for a moment as she considered the places that she had displayed items, not just in her current location but other schools that she had taught in. She wondered about the "best work" that seemed to stand out in the hall, away from the daily gaze of the children who created it. Erika's understanding of "best work" was shaped though her past school experience and she carried its legacy with her in her present teaching post.

Sherry: ***What does "best work" mean? Do the students define that or do you help define that with them?***

Erika: *Well, that's a work in progress. I had a principal at my last school who challenged me to think about how I looked at children's work and I used to honor everything that they gave to me, "Oh, this is so beautiful. You have done such a great job coloring your dragon." And you know it wouldn't be completely colored, or something would be missing in the background…, we talk about, "That is great. How can we enhance this though? What could you do to add some more detail? Or does that dragon [you have*

*drawn] look completely colored to you? It looks like there is still some white space showing, how can you color in a way that it actually really presents it as you are trying to achieve?" We need to color in one direction because one direction looks a lot neater and looks a lot nicer when we are trying to present what we are doing.*

Our conversation reminded me of something that has lingered for me for many years. Why is it that teachers only want to display what they or someone else perceives as the "best" work? Why can't they display the work in progress? Is it because they are uncomfortable with how the child will be perceived or how they might be perceived because of what is traditionally displayed in schools? Erika's word, "nicer" stands out. Is a child's work akin to their character? Do "nice" children produce noteworthy "nice" pieces of art? Historically, artwork, particularly lithography, displayed on school walls was meant to evoke children's essential morality. John Ruskin's influential theory of "environmental determinism" suggests that we become determined by the social and cultural worlds we inhabit. To be in the presence of the "good," was to become, "good."[10] Ethics and aesthetics were inextricably linked.

Sherry: ***Do you hang up the final product or do you hang any pieces that are representational of the process a long the way?***

Erika: *I have, I haven't this year… I have a book, with my samples in it… sketches, rough sketches that we have done. In the past, I have had students look at the growth that they have made from the rough sketch to the completed work but I haven't done with these kids here.*

Sherry: ***Do you discuss the work on the walls as a class?***

Erika: *We do. We take a look at the work that not only we have done but what other classes have displayed around the school*.

Sherry: ***Is all the students' work displayed in the hallway?***

Erika: *Everything that we do is displayed at some point in time, but it is hard to choose what goes up in the hallway.*

Sherry: ***Harder to choose than what goes up in your classroom?***

Erika: *Yes.*

Sherry: ***How come?***

Erika: *I have to consider what other teachers have displayed in the hallway, especially within the same grade. We may have chosen to do the same art project and I don't want to put up my students' work if another teacher has chosen to do the same.*

Sherry: ***Why not?***

Erika: *I have never really thought about it. I mean, it still honors their work, it is still their work. It is no different. It doesn't take away from what they are doing as a class. Apparently, I am competitive.*

Erika had expressed what many teachers may privately feel but rarely disclose, "the more private aspects of pedagogy: coping with competing definitions of success and failure, and one's own sense of credibility and vulnerability."[11] Teaching can sometimes be seen as a singular, private act because the teacher may be the only educator in the room with the children. One of the ways that teachers "see" what their colleagues are doing is through the work that is displayed on the walls in the hallway. Perhaps Erika's reluctance to "mimic" her colleague's display may be about the ways in which power and

authority are experienced in the school. Erika may want the work that is displayed to represent her pedagogical beliefs, even if the work is the same.

Sherry: ***What makes you say that?***

Erika: *I think at my last school, we were so structured in the fine arts and everything we did and I think there was a wing in the school that I begged to get out of and I did. I was placed in another classroom because it was called "competition hallway." We had to change our bulletin boards every six weeks minimum.*

Sherry: ***Who decided that?***

Erika: *Whether that came from administration or who that came from, I don't know. I actually had this conversation with a new teacher that I was mentoring at the time. We talked about a specific structure that we had to accomplish within the year and then there were the unwritten rules. So, I never actually saw that in print, but it was something that was done by everyone.*

Sherry: ***Do you remember some of those unwritten rules?***

Erika: *Everything had to be centered on the wall; everything had to be aesthetically pleasing, etc.*

Sherry: ***What does that mean, aesthetically pleasing?***

Erika: *I found out the first time that I used oil pastels with the students and I was told by an administrator that I should take them down from the hallway display because they were clearly more of a "inside classroom activity" because she felt that it was unclear how I had used the medium appropriately. She told me it looked like the students had just used wax crayons. But that said, it wasn't said in a way that was derogatory or hurtful. I was a little shocked because I had never had anyone ever say that to me before and that it*

*really challenged me to think about why I was choosing to use any form of medium. I didn't know how to use oil pastels; I just used them the same way as I would use crayons. I thought they looked pretty!*

I think about Erika's identity as a teacher and how this narrative has added to how she understands herself as a teacher. Connelly and Clandinin refer to a similar, identity-framing narrative,

> Her situation, her place on the landscape is clearly taking hold and shaping identity as a teacher. It is not only that she is likely to create an identity associated with happy and pleasant circumstances and not just with sad and tiring ones but also that the tension between the two creates a force for re-thinking and extending her story with respect to the unsatisfactory experience.[12]

Sherry: ***You changed the displays every six weeks?***

Erika: *Yes, that is how you knew you were continuously meeting the school wide expectations.*

Sherry: ***Have you ever thought about why it was okay to display the oil pastel pieces inside the classroom, if they were not done appropriately?***

Erika: *I think that I could argue that it was a way to honor the students.*

'Honor' is a word that continues to appear when teachers speak of student work. As I unpack it, I find its French origins mean, "glory, renown, fame and later, a woman's chastity (purity)." Who or what is being glorified through this honoring? The student? The teacher? Is this about the glorification of aesthetic philosophies of goodness and beauty? What is the place of the "messy" work that unfolds daily in a classroom? How is that pedagogical practice, honored? I honor the poetic voice in my own reading of the work because poetry, "invites us to experiment with language, to create, to know, to engage creatively and imaginatively with experience."[13] After my conversation with

Erika, I explored my questions further through a poem that I wrote in an attempt to understand what was being revealed:

I only like to put up the good work, she said.
Good work from good children
who sit with their hands quietly folded;
their feet flat on the floor.
They ask only appropriate questions and
give the teacher what she wants.
Flora Thompson's[14] good girls:
affectionate, helpful, unselfish.
They were good daughters, good sisters and were prepared to be
good wives.
They prided themselves on their goodness.
I only like to put up the good work, she said.
What would happen if she didn't?
Would it cause the children to become erratic, immoral, and impossible?
Would it be good?

Erika: *…until I had gone to that school, I accepted everything a child did as beautiful. But I believe that the administrator at the time really wanted to showcase and honor what the students were doing. It has been a long time since I first learned that from her and it has become a part of how I now see visual displays in hallways. For example, when I see a display and the children's work has obviously been 'slapped up' and is slowly falling down, I want to fix it. But it is not my place to fix that. It is not my display. I don't feel comfortable to approach the person who created the display because I don't want to sound critical. I think back to conversations that I had in my previous school about whether the work was inside or outside classroom work. It became really hard because we became really critical. Thankfully, I have let that go. Where we were starting to become critical of what we were teaching, and what it was we were expecting of our*

*students. It became to the point that it was so strict that I could not have imagined how it was enjoyable for the students.*

Sherry: ***How have your comments about displays been received by your colleagues?***

Erika: *As hard as I tried not to bring up past practices at my last school, I found myself using what I did there in my comments with colleagues. I started to realize that no one wanted to know what I did at my last school. I think that there is some fear as well because when I spoke of the expectations there, they would remark that they thought it was too much to expect as they "just wanted to be able to teach." They didn't realize that this was part of teaching and they would shut me down if I pursued it. I learned to be more cautious.*

Sherry: ***Do you talk about visual displays with current administration? Are they more directive to teachers as to what you display in this school?***

Erika: *No, they are not direct about what we display. I know that I had conversations with one administrator about what we might do with the clay display. I know that it bothers her the way that it bothers others as well but I am afraid to take that on with my colleagues.*

**Portraying the Visual: Breaking from past experience**

As I sift through Erika's observations about visual displays, I once again hear Aimee's words. Teachers that display work that is expected (and thus accepted) by administrators, colleagues or parents, appear competent, and seem "as if" they know what they are doing.[15] Visual displays serve to "locate" a teacher's practice and express how they take up the curriculum. Visual displays enact complex relationships amongst curriculum, learning, and notions of visuality and seeing in elementary classrooms and

schools. Can visual displays thoughtfully allow the work of curriculum as envisioned by those who have planned it to be enacted as lived experiences, unfolding in productive and rich ways? Visual displays might be akin to the scattering of seeds, the Greek origins of which is the word, "diaspora." Displaced from their original meaning, visual displays reappear in the gap between the layered possibilities of what curriculum can point to in the world. Aoki drawing on the work of Aldous Huxley suggests that when inquiring into curriculum we need to, "intensify our ability to look at the world directly, not through the half-opaque medium of concepts which distort every given fact into the all too familiar likeness of…some explanatory abstraction."[16] Is the work appearing on the hallways of Erika's school merely there to highlight technical perfection or do these visual displays signal a phenomenological recognition? As Madeline Grumet asks is it a "hybrid of objectivity and subjectivity whose very birth modifies, extends and finally transcends its inheritance?"[17] Is something about curriculum enacted as visual displays being called into significance? How do visual displays speak about the journey of teaching and learning? I sense through Erika and Aimee's words that what is displayed is more about production and display of constructed projects than any procedural pedagogical process of coming to know as "inhabitants of a world more abundant than [we] can make of it."[18] How did this happen? Perhaps as David Jardine suggests children (and I would suggest teachers) don't really have time anymore to "while"—to dwell deeply in our place in the world or in their classrooms. He adds, "you get so overwhelmed by all the bits and after all, you don't want to leave them out now that people have offered them, so, that all you can do is present them one after another."[19]

Searching the term “visual displays” online and I am confronted by thousands of websites; all offering technical answers to the construction of displays. None seem to offer a deeper consideration of “what” displays might mean or to their connection to curriculum. In this absence, how do teachers come to know about visual displays in school? If the production of visual displays in schools can be likened to the relentless streams of activities that Jardine suggests, then teachers plan for children’s short attention spans. Such pedagogical practices, “inundated within schools is not worthy of attention, because they have been stripped of their imaginal topographies”[20]

**Curriculum and Identity: Who are we in the midst of what we teach?**

borderlands
do you wander
the borderlands
while we stand sentinel
the Greek chorus aligned
and despairing
reciting our mute plea
“Come back. Come back.”

perhaps you converse
with shadows
of consciousness
you dream of swallows
and messengers
and wild places of youth
before the crows came
and took your sight
pecked and worried at you
til you retreated to
the borderland
where time flows
a lugubrious stream
until the final heartbeat
And it stops.

the swallows flee
crying, “Come back, Come back.”
as we, robed in our crow’s garb,

worry at fallen petals
that garland you now
heavy burden of soul's husk
lies rigid, motionless,
Durer's figure carved out
in wax
this mask is still
but the air shimmers
alive with whispered tendrils
and there is no room for tears
"I am here. I am here."[21]

Sherry: ***Whose beliefs and values about teaching and learning do you think are displayed in the classroom?***

Erika: *I am working towards displaying the students' beliefs and values about learning. For example, the students created the number line. I am hoping that process is representing to others and to them that even though I am driving that curriculum bus they are part of that voyage, that journey. I am hoping that it is allowing them to see themselves.*

Sherry: ***How do you think teachers learn to construct these displays in the classroom? Do you think that they are directed to do them a certain way and that becomes their practice?***

Erika: *I think it becomes a part of your own conceptual baggage. I think about all the little pieces of breadcrumbs that helped build who I am. I know that when I first came out of university, I took little pieces of everything and put it together, like sewing a patchwork quilt. I think about the teacher that I am mentoring this year and I have told her that her many questions are mutually beneficial because she challenges me to remember what I may have forgotten; mostly because we become so used to routine. I really believe that I learned from my administration the ways in which I could promote what I do and still*

*honor the students work. Those first years were tough. I would go home every night and cry because of how much stress I was under, but I know now that it was a gift. I really feel that that experience was a gift that I have carried with me. She [my former principal] retired but I saw her not long ago and I said to her, "I am trying to take a little piece of what you gave me and share it with others." I am going to cry just thinking about it. I realize now that having that experience with her allowed me to develop who I have become as a teacher.*

Sherry: ***In what ways do you think those experiences have influenced you?***

Erika: *I notice displays more now than I ever did before. I am reminded of one that appeared in our hallway last year. One of my colleagues decided to put together a display that she thought would provide students with an incentive to master reading. She created a "mountain" and when the student "mastered" aspects of reading, they got their name higher up the mountain. When they had "mastered" all the objectives, they got to stand on the top. I was mortified and refused to participate. She felt that my students would be "missing out." She really didn't get it.*

Sherry: ***What didn't she get?***

Erika: *I told her about a similar activity that I was subjected to when I was in grade two. My teacher had the planet Mars on the wall and our names were on rocket ships. Every time we showed mastery of basic mathematical facts, we flew closer to the planet. When we mastered them all, we got a Mars chocolate bar. I was the only student in the class that never made it to the planet… Now as a teacher, all I can do is cringe that I did not make a louder declaration when she proposed this idea. I did not because I was new and I didn't want to rock the boat.*

Sherry: ***What did that mountain say to you?***

Erika: *It did not allow that child to learn in a respectful way; displaying it in such a way that is so public, it just…it was devastating and daunting to watch it happen. What was worse to me is that no parent questioned it and the other students seemed to like watching their names climb higher. I didn't understand what value others saw in it.*

Was there something in Erika's words that pointed to the hierarchy and competition of neo-liberal agendas and how visual displays become a potent way to "represent" this?

**A Second Look: Honoring the Work**

Sherry: ***You used the word, legacy, when you spoke of what is left up from year to year. The etymology tells of legacy as "a body of persons sent out on a mission." You also used the word, usual, which meant "ordinary; a habitual custom." What makes the work, a legacy piece rather than just something ordinary?***

Erika: *Yes…it was eye-opening… it made me question the generic uses that we have in education. How many times do we say legacy?*

Sherry: ***It is like the other word that you used, honor, whose original meaning included "dignity, a woman's chastity."***

Erika: *It really struck a chord in that you try to convey [to] others what you do, especially the children and be cognizant of the words that you use, and when you look at the original meanings you think, maybe I am not being as cognizant.*

Sherry: ***Perhaps we are using those words intentionally because something has been forgotten and in using that word, we are trying to get back to what it really means. It also means, "glory, renowned, fame earned." I wonder if it is about kids' fame when***

***we talk about kids work? Maybe we are trying to give them some kind of notoriety?***

Erika: *Absolutely. Especially when we look at how we are displaying work or how we have been modeled or molded to display their work.*

Sherry: ***Were you honoring the kids work? Were you honoring the work no matter where you hung it?***

Erika: *... what is the difference between out there and in here?...that is something subconsciously that is driving my intentions…when you look at any piece that a child does…that is their work. Does it really make a difference because really it is the evidence of learning? What is more significant? I had a really negative sensation that that was something that I was doing in not recognizing that regardless what we are doing with our children, it is about the children in the end. It is not what about what we are doing publicly and privately.*

It was the second time that day that I heard "value" placed on the work that was displayed on the walls of an elementary school. The first time from the administrator who spoke of the "worth" of the work and now "honor" came into view. Aimee had also used the word to describe how she felt she was respecting the work of the students by displaying it on the walls. I asked Erika about what she had displayed on the inside walls of the room. She focused on the space around her and spoke as her eyes swept across the walls, noting the number line that was created by the students and the store-bought alphabet that would be replaced with a student created one next year. She also referenced what she referred to as a "legacy" piece, a color collage, made by the students in the previous year as well as "the usual classroom things"—a calendar, books, and a mirror. She also pointed to a wallpaper border of apples that framed the entrance to her

classroom and laughed as she noticed them; the obvious cliché, the age-old symbol of the teacher. She had wanted to do something with the apples but for lack of time, they remained; left behind by the previous teacher who by leaving them up, may have felt that the display would be of worth to the next teacher occupying the space. I was curious about how the apple had become metaphorically and popularly associated with the teacher; was there a lost metaphor of the forbidden fruit from the Garden of Eden? What was tempting the teacher? Where was the curriculum in the midst of all of the displays?

Sherry: ***The word, "display," has an original meaning of deception and disguise. And, I wondered about what we display for the world outside what are trying to deceive or disguise?***

Erika: *...what is intriguing to me is that in my first few years, I didn't want to say anything; I felt voiceless. You don't want to rock the boat or anything like that and when I went to my new school, I started to see that this is what we were supposed to do and I wanted to comply. I wanted that approval just as much as the students want it. I didn't think to ask why.*

Sherry**: *I really wondered about how you found your voice with the display that really disturbed you. I had to write a poem about Mount Grapheme[22]:***

***Being able to decipher***
***letter and line***
***catalogued for all to see***
***on Mount Grapheme.***
***Standing on the mountain is fine***
***if they can play the game quicker than most.***
***But if they can't***
***there they sit***
***alone on the trek, silently ridiculed***
***oh, so publicly.***
***You know what it is like***
***as you found yourself once before***

***on the way to Mars***
***calculating basic facts without a sherpa to guide.***
***Trying to reach the stars***
***but not quite reaching them;***
***Falling hard to earth***
***where you don't want others to ever have to follow.***

Erika: *An eloquent representation of my most despised Mount Grapheme.*

Sherry: ***If we are really concerned, why don't we say something?***

Erika: *Exactly. Why? I think it is because of fear.*

Sherry: ***I want to return to something that we spoke of early on in our first visit which was the apple border around your door. Because I am interested in what may appear as a result of poetic transcription, I wrote a poem about your apples:***

***Apples framed in turquoise***
***brace the door.***
***Apologetic for the cliché images***
***that draw attention to the exit***
***too much attention?***
***But they remain.***
***Worried what's underneath***
***All those holes***
***filled by someone else's philosophy.***
***more consumed by the poor aesthetic***
***or those apples?***

Erika: *At first I thought I am obviously upset by the time it would take to replace it [the apples] but then I realized it is something else. Why am I so hung up on aesthetics? I have to figure out if it is a reflection of me as a professional? Is it a reflection, why is it that I have come so hung up on things that in the end, doesn't [don't] matter?*

**Radical Hope: Curriculum as a Culture**

It was at this juncture that I paused because in the midst of it, I began to feel inept as a teacher. I was suddenly perplexed by what/how curriculum was playing out on the

walls; it used to seem so concrete and now it appeared abstract and hidden behind the smiling faces of the snowmen that still called to me. I recognized that according to Gadamer, tradition is an effort of understanding what we feel ourselves doing as we face our own limitations, even though "what is handed down from the past confronts us, as a task, or we take over more or less automatically, even though no one compels us to do so. It precludes complacency, passivity and self-satisfaction with what we securely possess; instead it requires active questioning and self-questioning."[23]

I am drawn back to Jonathan Lear's book, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation,* as Lear takes up an ethical inquiry in relation to a profound statement made by Chief Plenty Coup of the Crow Nation. Chief Plenty Coup said, "[w]hen the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground and they could not lift them up again. After this, nothing happened."[24] Lear reminded me that I should try to interpret others as saying something true, in this case, of visual displays, guided by my own sense of what is true and of what can be reasonably believed.[25] I was pierced by Plenty Coup's words that at a certain point, nothing happened for his people. The way of life that they once knew no longer existed and they lost their purpose. I wonder if in the midst of the business of schooling we have silenced the voices of teaching that allowed us to understand the "whatness" of curriculum instead of being caught up/by the "how" and in doing so, we have become disconnected from the purpose of teaching and learning. Lear writes of Plenty Coup's witness to the breakdown of the "happenings" that ceased after the Crow people could not longer hunt buffalo. He wondered what he would be witnessing; what would it be to interpret him as something, "more than just an old

chief nostalgic for the past? …what would be if it were true that after a certain point nothing happened…it is concerned with ought rather than is."[26]

Plenty Coup told of the coup sticks that were planted in the ground as a warrior's signal that he would stand and protect his place to the death. There was no middle ground; they either succeeded or they did not but the cultural act of planting the stick remained. According to Lear, when "nothing happened" for the Crow, the very act of planting the coup stick seemed to be unintelligible. It followed that any other culturally embedded practice would also be enacted but now, without understanding its original purpose.[27] Like the Crow woman who cooked for her family so they could have the energy to hunt; now the act of cooking is only for sustenance. Returning to what Plenty Coup witnessed, Lear interpreted him as a witness to a "loss that is not itself a happening but is the breakdown of that in terms of which happenings occur. Circumstances are such that there is no practical possibility of our performing those acts or the very acts themselves have ceased to make sense."[28] Lear challenged the "inherent beingness" that "ought" implied "can" as the Crow people were confronted with either giving up their idea of what it meant to live courageously or alter what they thought of courage in the first place. I see a connection to visual displays in substituting "teaching" and "act of display" for courage.

> Might there be a certain plasticity deeply embedded in a culture's (teaching) thick conception of courage (act of display)? That is, are there ways in which is person is brought up in [the teachers' traditional understanding of the act of display] that might draw upon his own inner resources to broaden [his understanding of what the act of display might be]? In such a case, one would begin with a culture's thick understanding (of the act of display) but one would somehow find ways to thin it out [perhaps because of the demands of teaching and the forgetting of the original intent of displays]: find ways to face circumstances courageously that the older thick conception never envisaged.[29]

> The drums got louder, the dances faster, and the voices kept speaking.
>
> Challenges build up, there is ever more pressure to explain things in traditional ways, yet there is an inchoate sense that the old ways of explaining are leaving something unsaid. And yet one doesn't yet have the concepts with which to say it. The difference, though, is that while a scientific revolution is typically confined to an explanatory theory, the Crow faced a challenge to all aspects of their lives… the dream told them there was a storm coming… not like a blizzard; a place of devastation that they would only understand retrospectively.[30]

What are the "coup sticks" that are planted on classroom walls? Erika and Aimee continue to display work on walls, following rules set out for them and "keep dancing even though the point of the dance has been lost…the ritual continues though no one can any longer say what the dance is for."[31]

I wonder if the administrators that Aimee and Erika spoke of are somehow enmeshed in the onslaught of accountability and so they are unable to see what has been lost in the act of displaying children's work. It is difficult in the midst of change to understand how you have forgotten what "ought" to be important. For Aimee and Erika, to no longer question the act of display in their practice suggests its meaning has been lost. Are visual displays in "*vita memoriae*"? Have they become a tradition of schooling that continues without the purpose for which is long forgotten? Teachers continue to put up children's work and worry about what others might think, but in the end they miss why they have done this in the first place. If the buffalo return, will something happen again?

**Notes**

[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 125.
[2] Melissa Freeman, "Between Eye and Eye Stretches an Interminable Landscape": The Challenge of Philosophical Hermeneutics," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7. (2001): 652.
[3] This is a pseudonym chosen by the participant.
[4] Spoken by Maxine Greene in a speech at Louisiana State University as quoted by William Pinar, *Intellectual Advancement Through Disciplinarity: Verticality and Horizontality in Curriculum Studies* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2007), 151.
[5] F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, *Shaping a Professional Identity: Stories of Educational Practice* (Columbia University: Teachers College Press, 1999), 64.
[6] Ibid., 3.
[7] Ibid., 95.
[8] Ibid., 95.
[9] Ibid., 72.
[10] E. Lisa Panayotidis, "The Complexity of 'Seeing' and 'Doing' Good: A Canadian art education analysis of the 'Good Society,'" *Canadian Review of Art Education Research and Issues*, 29, no. 2 (2002): 3.
[11] Deborah Britzman, *Practice Makes Practice* (Albany: New York Press, 2003), 29.
[12] Ibid., 96.
[13] Carl Leggo, "Astonishing Silence: Knowing in Poetry," in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, eds., J.Gary Knowles and Andra Coles (London: Sage Publications, 2008), 165.
[14] Flora Thompson was a British novelist who was best known for her trilogy, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, which was based upon her rural childhood in England in the latter part of the 19th Century and early 20th. The references of "goodness" are found in a lost work of Thompson's entitled, *Heatherly*, which was published posthumously in 1979 by her estate and describe how the young women (circa 1898) see themselves.
[15] David Smith, *Pedagon* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 90.
[16] William Pinar and Rita Irwin, eds., *Curriculum in a New Key: The Collected Works of Ted T. Aoki* (New Jersey: LEA Publishers, 2005), 89.
[17] Madeline Grumet, "Existential and Phenomenological Foundations of Autobiographical Methods," in *Understanding Curriculum as Phenomenological and Deconstructed Text*, eds. William Pinar and William Reynolds (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 29.
[18] David Jardine, Sharon Friesen and Pat Clifford, *Curriculum in Abundance* (New Jersey: Lawrence Elrbaum, 2006), 147.
[19] David Jardine, Patricia Clifford and Sharon Friesen, *Back to the Basics of Teaching and Learning: "Thinking the World Together"* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 167.
[20] David Jardine, Sharon Friesen and Pat Clifford, *Curriculum in Abundance, 6.*

[21] Katrina Imison-Bowker as quoted by Janet Alsup, *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 2.
[22] Following the work of Melissa Freeman, I sent the participants a copy of the poems that I had written in our first session prior to our second conversation.
[23] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), xvi.
[24] Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.
[25] Ibid., 4.
[26] Ibid., 6.
[27] Ibid., 35.
[28] Ibid., 38.
[29] Ibid., 65.
[30] Ibid., 78.
[31] Ibid., 36.

**UNDERSTANDING**

Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing.
That is why we cannot understand the questionableness
of something without asking real questions,
though we can understand a meaning without meaning it.[1]

Our eyes meet
Mine stretch beyond hers
Trying to see behind her words
Hers pause
Acknowledging me

She speaks

I follow the trail of her words…

It doesn't mean that I know
Any better than she
What this all adds up to…[2]

# CHAPTER FIVE

# PORTRAIT OF LIZ[3]

## Arrival

A newspaper story had to be cased in lead, the words had to be bond and trussed, printed onto paper, folded and delivered to boys who'd stand on corners saying *Extra Extra*, the story held in a hand, the story bound. In radio, the story flew into the air, from lips to ear- like a secret finding its immediate spot in the dark lodges of the brain- the dome of the sky collapsing space, and the world become a great whispering gallery for us all.[4]

Procrastinating returning to my latest chapter, I had been absorbed in a new novel by Sarah Blake entitled, *The Postmistress.* I had hoped for a diversion, but as in all good works of literature and art, something in the pages of the text signaled me, and I found myself back in the thesis. When I read the section above, I could not help but make the connection of the "lips to the ear" to my own "wall to the eye." I thought about how the author, Sarah Blake, makes the spoken word appear more immediate, effortless but considered. I wondered if images can fly out at the viewer, eye to eye; nothing buffering the assault. While we may turn the page or close a book, a visual image on a wall confronts us in a visceral way—it imprints itself in our mind.

Aimee's and Erika's words and images were with me, as I entered Liz's school. To the right of the entrance, a large black and white photograph of a downtown alley dominated the wall while more black and white images of the cityscape were carefully framed and displayed to the left. Further down the hallway, backlit woven tapestries and glass collages reflected a myriad of colors onto the same red and white tile that I recognized from the other two school spaces. Another photograph and explanatory text outlined the story of the children whose learning was the premise of the visual display. Feathery masks of whimsical characters and jars of objects, used to create additional stories of learning appeared at the end of the last long hallway adjoined by a large three-

dimensional sculpture about Canadian identity. The sophisticated aesthetic of the displays and the art walk reminded me of an art gallery—a point I noted in my field notebook which I kept as part of my former role as a curriculum specialist. I had visited the school in April, 2008 as a guest at their art walk; an event the school held yearly to celebrate children's learning through visual representations. I later shared my reflections with the staff as part of a school-wide professional learning conversation. I wrote, "[i] stepped through the green wooden door into the entrance of the school- no peanuts on my person- I was transfixed by what I encountered. The lives and learning of children and teachers glittered before me. I did not catch the scent of wax crayons. I was not confronted by paper propaganda of upcoming meetings, contests, community information. I was met head on by a large white scroll- poem etched in black- juxtaposed by a black and white image of the Calgary that most of us never see or care to look for. The thoughtful questions, images, hauntingly considered, respectfully displayed…" Yet, in retrospect, these carefully constructed visual displays were no different than the snowmen that had beckoned to me so many years ago; they were asking me to notice something.

My conversations with Aimee and Erika had informed the topic of visual displays and how I might take up the outer and the inner walls of schools. I sensed there was a significant intention in these displays which spoke of a cultural and political context within a pedagogical practice. Carefully presented, the pieces were named "art" and were revered as such. And while I was struck by the "sameness" of the physical space, the smells of an elementary school, the rituals of how we moved in these places, I was drawn back to the familiarity of the displays themselves. I came to speak with Liz about what

she understood about visual displays and how they were related to her pedagogical practice.

**Who is Liz?**

In opening up my topic, I sought to distinguish between the three participants through notions of experience and identity to think more fully about how they may have come to "know" about the visual. They varied in years of experience and had grown and changed as a result of being exposed to the different ideas of others over a period of time; their identities pulled and melded, meshing with the emerging philosophies and a growing narrative of self. Over time, I came to recall the medieval apprenticeship system as a way to think about the preparation of each of the participants. Dating back to the Middle Ages, the apprentice or Guild system consisted of one "watching" the master and reproducing the same piece as the master.[5] This reminded me somewhat of Aimee who mimicked what she saw on the walls around her. In her case, the master was a mentor; someone in whom she placed her trust and her initial learning. In the times of the Guild and in present day, when the master felt the apprentice had successfully been able to complete simple tasks, they were permitted to try more advanced work and then graduated to that of journeyman. In moving from the position of apprentice, there is a "transference of a body of secret knowledge as viewed by outsiders but termed by insiders as the outcomes of long and industrious practice."[6] I heard echoes of this practice in the conversations that I had with Erika as she referred back to what she had learned from "masters." She told me that she was now serving as a mentor to a new teacher in her school; guiding her and answering her questions as they arose, however Erika was circumspect that she still had much to learn herself.

In contrast, Liz who had the most experience of all of the participants expressed her feeling that she had finally "arrived" as a teacher when she joined the staff at her current school. She was now in the position of master craftsperson and was recognized as such by those around her. She seemed to be highly cognizant of the work of understanding classroom spaces and had absorbed this "skill" into her bones.[7] She told me that when she was a teenager, she had a reoccurring summer position planning summer programs for young children through a recreation department in the small town where she lived. It was there that she realized that she found working with young children, rewarding. Liz moved to Edmonton where she attended the University of Alberta and received an Early Childhood diploma as well as a B.Ed. degree with a minor in Art and English. She had been teaching in elementary schools for the past twenty six years, mainly in division one. Liz had recently become interested in the Reggio Emilia philosophy of teaching. Currently, she was attending the University of Calgary on a part-time basis where she was taking graduate level courses and hoping to be accepted into the Masters program so that she could obtain a degree in Educational Research. She wanted to delve into the pedagogical philosophy of Reggio Emilia in a much deeper way.

Sherry: ***Let's begin by talking about what you display in your classroom.***

Liz: *I like to have lots of evidence of learning… I think it is really important to have images of the children engaged in learning experiences… I have a passion for literature, so I support the various parts of the curriculum with literature. I think it is really important that the children feel motivated and that they are really excited about the work that they do and so I put careful time and attention in deciding how I want to set up the class.*

Sherry: ***How do you show that children are engaged in learning?***

Liz: *I look at the several places in the room where there are photographs of children engaged in learning experiences and these are images of the children who represent the class… The children value these images. I know because I watch them go to several different places in the classroom where there are photographs and revisit those images, and talk about, "I remember when we did this activity. Oh, look! There I am with my big buddy! …I think it is important for onlookers who come into the class and get a sense of what is important to all of us in this space.*

I could hear the echoes of portraiture in her words. The children were captured for a moment in time and froze "photographically" on the classroom walls. Their images reminding them and perhaps the teacher of what had transpired; the photograph served to position them at a point in their learning that year. These were portraits of an "engaged child." After Dahlberg et al, I wondered how we construct childhood in classrooms. Were the portraits of the child as, "a co-constructor of knowledge rather than that of knowledge and cultural reproducer,"[8] as the Reggio-inspired philosophy maintained? Were they part of a representation of the discourse of meaning-making about how young children should take up the world?

Sherry: ***How do you decide what to display? Do you have input from the children?***

Liz: *Because we are a school that focuses on the fine arts, the children and I have many conversations around a piece of work that we want to display… More importantly, the conversation leads us to discussion about if it is going to stay up and for how long. The children have come to understand how important that work is and how much information*

*it shares about our learning and it tells onlookers about what we know; that is why it stays up for quite awhile.*

Sherry: ***How do the children talk about the work that is displayed? Do they interact with the displays as an aspect of their learning?***

Liz: *I have tried as much as possible to have a lot of materials at eye level for the children. You have such limited amounts of beautiful classroom spaces, lots of wall, but still limited amounts at eye level places. It is interesting for me to watch them run their hands over the work of art and talk about what they have done. It is almost a way for them to celebrate that accomplishment… They also use their creative journals to write and reflect about their learning. I wish I had more time to do more documentation.*

Sherry: ***What does documentation mean to you?***

Liz: *…Documenting learning for me is about the use of different tools to catch the learning process as it unfolds from beginning to end. I rely quite heavily on the camera but I also take my notepad, and write down the comments as children are looking at working on an experience or an activity. I think documentation for me is a very powerful and essential… part to the work that I do.*

Sherry: ***Will you have that information displayed in the hallways? Do the exterior walls resemble the interior walls?***

Liz: *The challenge for me is that there has been work done by last year's class left up on the walls outside the classroom. That work will remain up until closer to the art walk in the spring and then it will come down and will be replaced with this year's work. So, we only had one small bulletin board left.*

Sherry: ***Would you want more space in the hallway to create visual displays?***

Liz: *…my first impression [of this place] was so powerful because I saw so many different pieces of art work, images, and information about what was important to the adults who occupy this space. I have come to appreciate the importance of leaving that work up…we have that one bulletin board. And the other question for me, out of respect for the students and their work is about whether or not it is fair or right that we quickly take it down so we can showcase something else… Because the work really does stay up quite awhile, there isn't a lot of space in the hall. I do think that that work, those images, those examples, the documentation of the experiences is really very important.*

Liz's first impression of the visual displays was similar to my own; they lingered and stayed with us much like a good story. What was the story being told on the walls? Was it similar to the other "out of classroom" stories that had been told in Aimee's and Erika's school? Why was it important to the adults that the work stayed up?

Sherry: ***How do parents take up the work in the hallway, especially if it is the work of last year's children?***

Liz: *I have heard a couple of parents say that they are impressed that young children would be capable of providing so much information about their learning and so even if it is not specifically their own child's work displayed in the hall, they come to understand the kind of work that we value at this school.*

Sherry: ***Do you have those conversations with colleagues in terms of what will be displayed?***

Liz: *…I really value [those conversations] at this school. We are so comfortable with one another that we are often dropping by someone's classroom to look at the work that they have done. It is not uncommon for us to be in a meeting and someone will start to speak*

*about the work and someone else will say, "Let's go see it!" "Oh, my room is a mess, but okay…" But they are really open to hear, to take the time, to share and talk about what is going on. That is huge! You don't feel like you are working in isolation, you get other ideas, you see what older students are doing and you see the many different ways that children show how they are challenged in their learning. It is really a very important part of professional development…*

**Documentation and Representation: Display as an act of interpretation**

Listening to Liz, I noted the absence of competition which I heard in Aimee's and Erika's discussion of visual displays. As a teacher with many years of experience, Liz had come to appreciate critiquing/thinking about art work with colleagues without feeling that she was being judged. Perhaps she was in a different place than Aimee and Erika, and her understanding gleaned from years of experience and conversation propelled her own practice forward. For Liz, there was no clear dividing line between in and out of classroom places in this school; teachers at the school subscribed to the use of professional dialogue as a way to,

> [Seek] mutual understanding and recognition, and to understand how and why they have made their choices. This dialogic and interdependent relationship between theory and practice is embodied in pedagogical documentation, the 'alternative practice' which allows us to understand the way in which educators make and represent themselves, their theories and the children that they work with.[9]

Liz envisioned herself as a teacher whose practice was engrained in a Reggio Emilio philosophy. Her sense of identity as a teacher was shaped by this affiliation. The visual

displays in her classroom challenged the notion that the images stood objectively waiting to be discovered. The walls were socially constructed and all of the stakeholders were active participants in the process of making meaning. Gadamer notes the world is, "always *our* world, understood and constructed by ourselves, not in isolation but as a part of a community of human agents…knowledge and its construction is always value-laden, socially constructed, historically embedded and valuationally based."[10] In the Reggio-inspired pedagogy, documentation is central to how teachers make meaning of the learning process. Researchers Dahlberg et al, emphasize,

> Pedagogical documentation is not child observation. Child observation has at the centre of its interest not so much the learning processes of a given child but rather the aim of classifying and categorizing children rather than fundamentally attempting to see and to understand what happens during the pedagogical experience and seeks to do this without reference to a rigid framework or schema of pre-defined expectations. 'Pedagogical documentation' by contrast is mainly about trying to see and understand what is going on in the pedagogical work and what the child is capable of without any predetermined framework of expectations and norms. Pedagogical documentation is a process of visualization, but what we document does not represent a true reality—it is a social construction, where pedagogues, through what they select as valuable to document are also participative co-constructors. It is an act of interpretation. What we document represents a choice, a choice among many other choices, a choice in which pedagogues themselves are participating. Likewise, that which we do not choose is also a choice... In short, we co-construct and co-produce the documentation, as active subjects and participators. There is never a single true story.[11]

However, Dahlberg et al, caution that the act of documentation through photographs is never an innocent act. They stress, "processes of observation and documentation [are] never objective and hence not neutral. Instead, we have to realize and admit that documentation always holds our own subjective feelings, wishes and values."[12] As Liz spoke of "valuing" student work, I wondered what was valued. Was it "beauty,"

"quality," or "collaboration"? What might these things mean? What was Liz's education and aesthetic interpretation of these images and how did she choose what to show?

Again, another portrait was being painted; "the learning process" was digitally captured. Although my other participants had not photographed the children, I wondered how the work was displayed in Aimee's mural and Erika's legacy pieces might also be, portraits of the "engaged learner" or the "learning process." Had they too tried to contain what occurred, capturing in the blinding flash of the camera, a form of documentation that might be part of a visual display? In this act of interpretation comes the realization that documentation also, "has the potential to reveal the embodied character of knowledge construction, and as such functions as an emancipatory practice. The classifications and categories that we use also function as tools for inclusion and exclusion—they become productive. The pedagogue, through her influence on the process of the child's identity construction, exercises power and control. So, if we are not alert, documentation may become a practice for exercising, not resisting, control and power."[13]

Returning to Gadamer, I wondered if the visual displays in this school were like the children who, "enjoying dressing up, as Aristotle remarks, they are not trying to hide themselves, pretending to be something else in order to be discovered and recognized behind it; but on the contrary, they intend a representation of such a kind that only what is represented exists.[14] Although there may not be "one true story" as Dalhberg et al suggests, the topic of visual displays prominently represented in Liz's school context appeared to be the foundation of the dominant discourse or story about how curriculum was to be visually taken up in the school. Recognition is about familiarity; something

that once understood, is about knowing more than we thought we once did. Gadamer reminds me that representation is not,

> [m]erely a repetition, a copy, but knowledge of the essence. Because they are not merely repetition, but a "bringing forth," they imply a spectator as well. They contain in themselves an essential relation to everyone for whom the representation exists…the presentation of the essence, far from being a mere imitation, for in imitating one has to leave out and heighten. Because he is pointing to something, he has to exaggerate, whether he likes it or not…There exists an insuperable ontological difference between the one thing that is a likeness and the other that it seeks to resemble…The work of art cannot simply be isolated from the "contingency" of the chance conditions in which it appears, and where this kind of isolation occurs, the result is an abstraction that reduces the actual being of the work. It itself belongs to the world to which it represents itself…it is part of the event of being that occurs in presentation, and belongs essentially to play as play.[15]

What was the "something" about visual displays that was hidden within the fine arts narrative of this school? Was it about producing an aesthetic, gallery-like look? How could visual displays be understood?

Sherry: ***How do you think that the walls came to be that way?***

Liz: *I think that is something that we have talked about as a staff…We understand the importance of that work, but more importantly, I am just grateful that those people, who I am involved in sharing that work, are really comfortable and receptive to that process.*

Sherry: ***Did you experience that in other places that you have taught?***

Liz: *No, not necessarily to this degree. Although, it wasn't a school with a fine arts focus and we did not spend as much time exploring or talking about our work in that way.*

Sherry: ***Why do you think that was? Do you think you need a fine arts focus to think about what goes up on the walls?***

Liz: *I think for whatever reason, there wasn't the same value placed on art, images of children engaged in the learning, or what classroom walls should look like. We had*

*looked at articles specifically on the walls, and the information they speak and the environments we create for students. So, it was very purposeful work without that focus.*

Sherry: ***If you were to walk into this room pretending to be another teacher, what role would you think visual displays have in this teacher's practice?***

Liz: *…it looks to me like the work of the children is valued because there is some work up. It looks like through the photographs…the students do work with buddies…[and] science activities. ..I'd see curricular connections…[and] I would see the art work. I would see in that first little space, a safe place, and a cozy place for children. A place where they can rest, engage in conversation with each other, and a quiet place where they can look at a book, or take time throughout the day for those moments. There would be some space around the room, to move around the room and circulate, that it not be too busy, but yet some work that was up that was important that the children could revisit.*

I tried to see the room through Liz's eyes and I was drawn back to her words about the private work that went on; an interesting turn of phrase in a building where collaborative and public display was valued. Erika and I had also spoken of the private act of teaching that did not appear on the walls; the day- to-day work that we shared with our students that could not be captured in this documentary way.

Sherry: ***Do you utilize what is on the wall as part of your daily teaching?***

Liz: *…the dilemma for me is deciding what needs to be displayed. Do I really need to put a word wall up, for example? What is going to be important about that? Why is this going up? Is it of any use? I didn't do the birthday chart at the beginning of the year as I always did. I wanted the children to be involved and I wanted it to be something useful to*

*them. What was most interesting was to go back and visit it independently and because they did, it was useful. I think about our ESL children or children who may not truly understand what the prairies are and so I display those visual images… I can use text, share the stories, but for them, I really think that there is really powerful information in those visuals. We know that children learn in so many different ways.*

Sherry: ***I notice that you don't have any commercially produced images up on the walls and that the displayed alphabet line is made of pebbles.***

Liz: *The children made that alphabet in Kindergarten and it has followed them now to this room as grade one and two students. I wasn't sure what was going to happen with that work but I what I knew as we were working on literacy work in Kindergarten was that they were starting to recognize the letters in their surroundings. One day, in the art area that we set up, the children were invited to reproduce something visually. They put the pebbles in place to make the letter. I talked to colleagues and wondered if I should correct them if the letters they created were not perfect. Would I want to display them? I decided that it may not be exact but the representation was clearly evident. You have been very observant in noticing that we don't have any commercially prepared materials. When I had my classroom in Kindergarten, and I know this isn't relevant to the work that I do now, but I heard on many occasions from people who came into the space would comment of the sense of calmness in the room. I could not help but wonder if the fact that the walls were not plastered with, bombarded with bright colors and trims and commercially prepared materials that you could really enjoy the space and sort of savor or even notice even more quickly and carefully the work that students had done, rather*

*than feeling it was a distraction and that that the space created a busyness that was almost uncomfortable.*

I consider Liz's words, and I enact the Latin derivative of the word, "vision" by "watching" or the French root, "surveying," all of which form the roots of the word, "spectator," which may be how Liz sees me. How have I directed my gaze? Have I been trying to survey the room, as if in a panopticon? Watching in every direction, somehow hidden from view, able to gaze at the room before me without being seen?[16] I was not here to practice surveillance nor judge Liz for how she chose to display visuals in her space and yet, I took this comment as a reminder that I should focus on the topic, not on Liz's practice of it.

Sherry: ***Does it make a difference that it is made of pebbles or that you got it from the teachers' store?***

Liz: *Oh, it makes a difference for me because I allowed the children to make it. It is not a true representation but still, it is still recognizable as letters. I am so proud of those little hands that made that in Kindergarten.*

Sherry: ***Do you think it is somehow better because it is made by the children and not store bought?***

Liz: *Yes, to me, its worth is ten times what I would have paid at a store to buy commercially. I am not distracted by a lot of stuff around it, I love how neutral it is…I hope that visitors to this classroom [notice and say] Oh, it does look like the children made that, obviously that teacher really trusts those children with a huge responsibility and values their work.*

There was something contradictory in these words for me as I listened and tried to fathom their meaning. Although there were no commercially-produced items, the room was still a colorful place that was not lacking in images. The items that were displayed were "valued" by the teacher. I needed to understand why she thought there was a different energy in the room based on what was displayed. If the children had wanted to display items that they did not make and that were bright and colorful would it be "allowed"? Were the visual displays about the "valuing of children" or were they about aesthetics? What was contributing to the classroom "feeling" of "calmness" as Liz described it? Art Historian, Erwin Panofsky stated that it was possible to experience everything aesthetically, "we do this when we just look at it or listen to it without relating it, intellectually or emotionally, to anything outside itself…only he who simply abandons himself to the object of his perception will experience it aesthetically."[17] Julian Young notes, that prior to the twentieth century, art was always "representational" however; representation was the occasion rather than the point of the work.

> Its point, according to the theory Heidegger has in mind was to represent in a way that highlighted the formal qualities constitutive of beauty- harmony, balance, completeness, lack of superfluity, simplicity in perfect combination with complexity, and so on…Since objects, in such experience, are removed from all relation to our practical interests, they are removed too, from all relation, to care, to fear, and hope. When the mind is wholly-absorbed in aesthetic experience, we become free of pain, anxiety and stress. Instead of being harried here and there by our hopes, fears and anxieties, we achieve a moment of stillness, a unique kind of peace. We value it (aesthetics) because it is a form of stress relief, a moment of lyric stasis in the midst of busyness, a holiday from the anxious world of willing and working.[18]

The language that Liz used when describing the "calmness" of the room may also signal a kind of disciplinary power, as described by philosopher, Michel Foucault. For Foucault, disciplinary power is, "a way of shaping individuals to persuade them to

behave in a certain way without provoking them into thinking critically about what they are being asked to do."[19] It may also be argued that a "calm" learning environment where a child can focus is important in an elementary classroom and rather than suggesting the arrangement of the space as an act of power, it might be seen instead as an enabling act; allowing the child to embrace/claim their own power. Heidegger described two extremes of solicitude that I think may be applied in this instance,

> It can…take away 'care' from the Other and put itself in his position of concern; it can *leap in* for him. This kind of solicitude takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern himself. The Other is thrown out of his position; he steps back so that afterwards…he can either take it over as something finished and at his disposal, or disburden himself of it completely. In such solicitude the Other can become one who is dominated and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him… In contrast, there is a possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not so much leap in for the Other but *leap ahead* of him…not in order to take away his "care" but rather give it back to him authentically…it helps the Other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become free for it.[20]

Mahon O'Brien frames Heidegger's "leaping in" and "leaping ahead" in an educational context by likening the way a teacher directs a child to learn in a classroom. O'Brien suggests that only "leaping in" when a child is taught to solve a mathematical problem curtails the possibility that the child will ever determine their own way of understanding mathematics. But, nurturing the child's struggle to attempt multiple ways of understanding the problem, might allow them to realize their own potential. The latter method would be more in keeping with Heidegger's notion of "leaping ahead."[21] Returning to Liz's desire to create a "calm" learning environment, in the absence of store-bought alphabet lines and bright colors, I wrestled with the idea that she was still determining what a "calm" classroom meant; one that contained only those images that

she predetermined fit her ideas, suggesting a "leaping in" rather than a "leaping ahead." I would contend that, Reggio-inspired philosophies, like all discourses,

> [t]ransmit and produce power and as such are an important instrument of power. The importance of discourse comes from the decisive role of language in the process of constructing the world, rather than being simply a means of representing or copying reality. The language we use shapes and directs our way of looking at and understanding the world, and the way we name different phenomena and objects becomes a form of convention. Foucault calls such conventions- our way of naming things and talking about them-discourses, and those discourses…influence or govern our ideas, thoughts and actions in a specific direction. They also constitute boundaries, through processes of inclusion and exclusion, for what is seen in a specific culture (in this case, the culture of the classroom) as the 'right thing to do'. They exercise power over our thought by directing or governing what we see as the 'truth' and how we construct the world, and hence our acting and doing; as such discourse provides the mechanism for rendering reality amenable to certain kinds of actions. By doing so, they also exclude alternative ways of understanding and interpreting the world.[22]

Erika's grapheme mountain display came sharply into focus. While it held the opposite of aesthetic pleasure, its presence as a visual display enacted disciplinary power in the same way that Liz's classroom did. Visual displays in the classroom may be a way of rendering the world in a particular way for children.

Sherry: ***I noticed that you used the word, "perfect" when you were talking about the alphabet. Do you think that work should be "perfect" before we display it?***

Liz: *...I recognize the importance of helping to influence students as they do their printing around the correct formation of letters. When we looked at that work, and I decided to put it up, I asked what the work represented. It was important to me because the children are influenced by the images that they see around them. I feel that I do have a responsibility to ensure that the work that we do here reflects what is important to me in the learning process.*

Sherry: ***Whose beliefs and values are displayed in this room?***

Liz: *When I move into a classroom space at the beginning of the school year, I think that it is really important that the students are involved in deciding where the desks might go and what is put up. I saw the teacher's desk, and I thought, I really don't spend much time at a desk, and I could put a carpet down and make a work space for the children…I am being very honest, there are certainly a lot of ideas around that I have around what I think inspires children and excites them about children but I also think you could ask students and what I want to do is empower them into feeling as if they have a voice as well.*

Sherry: ***So, when you think about your own beliefs, things that are important to you, to whom are those beliefs addressed and to what end do you think that they are addressed? Why do you put up some of the things that are on the wall?***

Liz: *I think that they speak to what is important to me. I wonder if children would look at art in the same way if they didn't have the opportunity to see samples of prints. I am very curious about bringing different pieces of art and where they will go with it. For example, I brought in a little portrait of a small child. It was actually put up where we have our weaving now and it was at eye level. They had many opportunities to glance at when they lined up at this door. I asked them who they thought the little girl in the portrait was and what was she holding. They told me that they thought it was me and that I was holding an envelope. You can see that a story was unfolding and I asked them to use their ideas to begin some writing. For the next few days, we would share our writing about the little girl in the portrait. I just think there is such power in those prints, those images, and that work that then offers children the opportunity to think about what their*

*own work might look like. If ever a child is stuck for a story, I tell them to look around the room and write about images that might inspire them.*

Sherry: ***I am curious how you learned to construct these displays in the classroom. Think about your own experiences as a teacher and ask is this what your classroom always looked like? Let us look first at your own experience at how you might have learned to do this and then perhaps a little more general, in how other teachers learned to do this.***

Liz: *I think it takes time and it takes lots of exploration. It is also about having opportunities to look with a closer lens at other spaces in a very careful way.*

Sherry: ***Did your first classroom look like this?***

Liz: *No, not at all. When I started teaching twenty some years ago, it was a lot of those visuals that we would grab as new teachers when we were feeling overwhelmed. I looked at what a lot of people around me were doing and so it was the borders, and it was the posters, and it was far too much color and I really didn't have a background to guide me. You had opportunity to talk with more experienced teachers, but it was very different back then.*

Sherry: ***So do you think that teachers have that same feeling today? There is a sense that when they come into a classroom and follow what they see other teachers doing?***

Liz: *...I think it is very personal… it is about what really matters. I loved literature but I was just beginning my career and didn't know what was appropriate. I think that you start to build understanding of what is really important over time. For some teachers, what is displayed on the walls is not important to them and I have had other people ask me to come and help them set up their classroom because they think that I notice things*

*that are important. In this building, mirrors, for example, are really important. Over time, I have noticed how often the students will go and look at themselves. I think about the reflections and the pieces of art work that are up and the way that those mirrors often present different ways of looking at them. I am learning more about that but to me, I value putting that time into thinking where I will put something, what really needs to be up and I hope that when others come into this space, that they will think I am a teacher who really respects children and values their work and wants to know that they have a presence here.*

Aimee's, Erika's and Liz's acknowledgment of the presence of a mirror in their classrooms called to mind Jan van Eyck's painting, popularly known as, *The Arnolfini Marriage.* (Figure 1)[23]

Figure 1: Jan van Eyck (1395-1441) *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife*
Oil on oak, 1434.
82.2 cm x 60 cm

The painting, rich with symbolic imagery, features a mirror in the centre of it. In the mirror, the viewer can see the reflections of the married couple as well as two other individuals standing at the door who appear to be spectators to the event. Above the mirror, van Eyck wrote, in Latin, "Jan van Eyck was here, 1434." Arts Historians have long debated whether he was referring to the room, the painting, or the wedding.[24] What is reflected in the classroom mirrors? Is it the watchful eye of the teacher, in the room with the children or the symbolic imagery that might appear on the wall?

Sherry: ***At what point in your teaching practice did you look at a commercial produced posters and borders and feel that to display them wasn't working for you?***

Liz: *The shift for me really occurred when my good friend…had a conversation with me about the use of those commercially prepared materials. When I visited her school, I saw such beauty in their displays of student work and in the design of their classrooms. Those classrooms were not filled with all those commercial materials but instead spoke to the work, the meaningful work that was going on in those rooms.*

Sherry: ***Was it something that was addressed in our teacher preparation programs? Is it something that we talk about in our practice now? Why or why not?***

Liz: *I wonder if…teachers are really comfortable, talking about the visual displays they create. Maybe the administrators who lead, direct, and guide practice in those buildings don't really emphasize it. It has just come to be thought of something that is just done and there is just not a focus on the environment to the same degree… I wonder if teachers are even given the time to talk about visual displays. Maybe some teachers, be it if they are new or uncertain about their practice, or question the "rightness" of what they do, don't feel comfortable in opening those doors or having those conversations.*

Sherry: ***Did an administrator or someone else in your school ever tell you that you needed to create visual displays in a specific way?***

Liz: *I can't say that I can ever remember over the last twenty years that there was ever a real focus on how we put work up until I came to this school. I have said it to my administrator and many times to the staff that when I walked through the doors initially, I thought, I have arrived… it was just a powerful moment to see what I really truly valued, up around me.*

Sherry: ***Did you create classroom spaces like this one in your previous schools, regardless of what the overall school philosophy might have been?***

Liz: *No, because, I went along with. I shouldn't say that. I emphasized putting up the pieces of literature. I emphasized the images of the children. I cannot say that it was 100% focused on natural materials, 100% focused on the richness of purchasing draping and setting up spaces because it just wasn't emphasized. It was more about teaching a program in a particular way and then a consideration of how we were teaching. There were, of course, visual displays in the school, but they were not emphasized in the same way that they are here.*

How much of what appears on the walls are because we "go along with it"? Aimee and Erika also in their own ways went along with what they were expected or directed to do. I wonder if this has not always been the case in our classrooms. I know when I first began teaching, I thought I was doing "my own thing" but as I think about Liz's words, something else was shaping my practice and my attunement to visual displays; I was creating walls that I somehow knew I was expected to create. I wanted others to notice what was there; pointing outward, indicating that I was "teacher who

knew what she was doing." I wanted colleagues and administrators to notice me. Despite my "wanting and doing" as Gadamer would say, I forged self-portraits of myself as "teacher."

Sherry: ***Do you think we have always put things up as teachers?***

Liz: *I think so. But maybe it was more about slopping things up rather than considering what information was going to be shared by what we displayed.*

Sherry: ***This classroom is about fifty years old. If we could go back fifty years, could you picture what would be up on these walls?***

Liz: *I think there would be starkness to the room. I think that desks would be in rows and there would be very little up.*

Sherry: ***What makes you think that?***

Liz: *I don't know. On occasion when I go back to some of these places where I have worked, I see a different kind of classroom altogether and I still sense a starkness. The room doesn't seem to be as important to those teachers even though the children's art work may be up. Still, the work stays up for such a short amount of time that for me, it somehow loses its value.*

I wondered if Liz's words suggested the glorification of the present over the "past" or how she was perhaps remembering her own experiences as a child in a classroom.

Sherry: ***How about this classroom? What do you imagine was here?***

Liz: *... these strings that hang from the lights, they were most certainly here. I would love to take these down but I just haven't. Yes, they really have to come down. One of my university professors was in here… there are even paper clips on the bottom of*

*the tile I mean really…Well, before I came to this room, there were three desks in the quiet area that I have now turned into a place with chairs, soft lights, etc.*

The paperclips and strings interrupt the aesthetic in the space and Liz is uncomfortable with them being there; they create an unbalance in the room. They are out of place in a room that has been created in a particular way to promote an educational philosophy. Perhaps the paperclips are akin to the apple borders that Erika hangs in her classroom; vestiges from a previous occupant we accept them begrudgingly as familiar artifacts of the classroom. We might consider getting rid of them but for some reason, the fact that they remain, suggests that they also speak to the topic of visual displays in classrooms.

Sherry: ***I have a historical interest in schools… how we might imagine schools and because this is not a new building, having been built in about the late fifties. I like to imagine this room as a brand new classroom.***

Liz: *I don't think people placed the same interest or thought in how the classroom was set up or what was displayed.*

Liz's response suggests that only present day teachers, perhaps those interested in Reggio-Emilia inspired philosophies, were thoughtful about the creation of displays in a classroom. Her words suggest that something has been forgotten about an important historical tradition in relation to visual displays.

Sherry: ***How about an alphabet line?***

Liz: *Oh. I think we would see ready prepared materials. You bet, store bought number and alphabet lines. We would see what teachers back then would see as essential for students to have. Or maybe more importantly, we would see what was traditional.*

Sherry: ***Who do you think made that decision?***

Liz: *I don't know if staff had conversation about that. That is a very good question. I just think that you come to know that that is how it is. Perhaps the teachers felt that they needed them because to them, they were the basics.*

I am curious about Liz's statement, "that you come to know [that] that is how it is." Evoking a sense of tradition in the way words signal the historical lineage of visual displays.

Sherry: ***How did you decide what to visually display when you first became a teacher?***

Liz: *... my very first experience was working half time in a kindergarten that had an open doorway into an enjoining classroom and the teacher in the space had many years of experience and had been there for many years so I looked at that space with a critical eye and thought about the kinds of pieces of work she had up, how she had set up the classroom and I leaned on her wisdom to assist me in setting up my classroom space.*

Sherry: ***Do you think she got the same wisdom from someone else, years before, in the same way?***

Liz: *I think so. Maybe if it was a closed classroom, you would have to wander a little bit further. Talk to others. I have mentored new teachers and that has been interesting to listen to their questions and to have them ask me about the piece I put up or why I do this. I think for many teachers, it is talking about it with others, gathering that information as you look around.*

Sherry: ***Do you think the teacher one hundred years ago had a say in what went up in that classroom the way that you have a say in what goes up in the classroom?***

Liz: *No, I think that many years ago, they were given instructions as how they taught, what to display. I think that this is still true in some cases today, especially if you are in a school with a particular philosophy.*

Sherry: ***You mentioned at the beginning of our conversation that this was a Reggio-inspired school. Do you feel that within that mandate, there is a specific way to create visual displays?***

Liz: *Yes, absolutely. But, as you wander around the building, you still can see that not all teachers have the same understandings or the same beliefs about all of those pieces. We have to be very careful because what I have learned is there are no Reggio schools in Canada, only in Italy. Still, we can still be inspired by what they have done. We can learn about it, read about it, how those programs are set up, and what is important and use some of those guiding ideas to inform our work…what also affects [the work] how it gets taken up and makes it very different is when we get new people coming into the building or brand new teachers. Out of fairness to those teachers, they need the time to learn about what classrooms look like and how you set them up. Those classrooms look different.*

Sherry: ***How do they look different?***

Liz: *... I think it takes time, years of experience to learn to create visual displays. I don't want to be disrespectful to anyone who is new to the school or profession but I think it takes time to come to know why you put certain pieces of furniture where you put them, why you put a carpet where you do, even if you have a carpet, in a specific spot in the room.*

Liz's words echo what I have heard from teachers that I have worked with over the years. There is a commonly-held belief amongst more experienced teachers that newcomers to the profession seem to know "nothing" upon entering a first year contract, including how to "set up a classroom." The certainty expressed in this sentiment is unsettling. Teachers, regardless of their years of classroom experience, come "knowing" to the profession. They have been students in classrooms for many years and perhaps they adopt the practices of those classrooms as teachers themselves without even realizing it, including what they might visually display. As a school administrator, I attempt to engage teachers in many conversations about their visual displays, and it is difficult for them to move beyond the technical aspects of the creating these tasks. They don't speak about displays in the same way that they speak about curriculum; there is no mention of assessment, student learning or meeting outcomes. They don't seem to place the same importance on the visual displays and continue to create them, often without discussion. It is time to interrupt that practice, especially in how visual displays are created. Some of these discussions occur as a whole staff and no teacher that I have ever worked with has ever said they don't know why these displays exist. They only speak about the "whatness" of the displays; concerning themselves with which project will they choose to put up, which hallway bulletin board they will be responsible for "filling."

**Coming Back: Filling in the spaces**

I take the next few weeks to think about my conversation with Liz, against the background of my thinking and writing about Aimee and Erika understandings' about visual displays. Ideas about the "inner and outer hallways", commercial items in the space, and the number and "quality" of objects and images scattered about the room

resonate. In spite of a hectic report card schedule, Liz has made time for us to talk. Once again I appreciate that she, like Aimee and Erika, were open to my questions and ponderings.

Liz: *Sometimes I do wonder if there is so much stuff up on the walls because there is a notion that every space has to be filled with something. I was purposeful and I took down some weaving. I left it that way for a few days and to see how that feels for me and see if the children notice and see if something comes out of it for me. Now, I have two empty picture frames up on the wall and initially, I was a bit bothered that I had nothing to put in them and then I thought, no, I am going to wait to see if a child offers a piece of artwork, or if they wonder about that, a quote; especially that one frame which is very ornate with gild. I thought something very important could go in there one day…it sat there, empty and it was okay. It was empty but it was ok, it looks unusual, but it is okay. But I am not sure how long I will be able to go with that empty space where the weaving was…there are other empty spaces. I look around and see many spaces that I see and think they could still be filled with stuff.*

Sherry: ***I have been thinking about if the notion of "horror vacui", the fear of empty spaces, comes into play for the classroom teacher. Do we feel the need as teachers, [as you said the last time I was here] to "grab a lot of visuals as new teachers when we are feeling overwhelmed. I looked at what others around me were doing and so for me, I did display the borders, the posters, and it was far too much color and I really didn't have a background to guide me. You had the opportunity to talk with more experienced teachers but it was very different then." The other participants in this study voiced similar thoughts. They also talked about how they watched what others did or how they***

***were instructed and created visual displays accordingly. Interestingly, none of you chose to leave the space blank.***

Liz: *When I started in my second year in the kindergarten classroom, the space was quite empty in that the only thing that was put up on a bottom section of a back wall was a large area that held some portraits that children had drawn in June when they had come to an orientation. The portraits served as part of a "welcoming back" when they came to the classroom in the fall. The space above the board was empty and I made a purposeful attempt to leave more space open with the notion of empowering the children by welcoming them in on the conversation about what we put in this space. That was the closest that I have ever come to leaving a space quite bare. It was different this year coming into this room September fifteenth, when the room had to be quickly emptied out, as one teacher left and I was moving in. The challenge for me was to deal with the feelings of the children who had already occupied that space with someone else for more than two weeks. How would it feel for them? It was almost like grieving. I felt a responsibility to try to create a comfortable environment that the children could continue their learning in.*

Sherry: ***I wonder if students would feel comfortable in an empty space.***

Liz: *How is that experience for those teachers who must pack up a cart and move from one room to the next? And then, the other consideration is, depending on the teacher, what will a parent think? Are the parents going to be accepting of that space or will they become critical and say, there is nothing going on in that room, you don't have the evidence up? Would they comment on the lack of visuals for the students or would they think that their child may not be successful in such a space? I don't know.*

Sherry: ***We have this sense of time. When we met last time, you spoke about the time that a piece of work stays up as equating to value with the longer it stays up, the more value that it holds. I wonder who values this. What does this mean?***

Liz: *I don't equate a certain number of days to an increased value. It is much more about the value of recognizing the effort, the importance of the work and maybe that work is going to stay up for a number of days because I am honoring the time and effort that the students put into the project.*

Sherry: ***I am really interested in the etymology of the words that we use; I want to revisit the original meaning of the words. Gadamer talks about returning to what has been forgotten and one of those words that continues to surface in our conversations is "show." This is what I found on the online dictionary: "show, from the 1300's, an 'act of exhibiting to view,' from show the verb. Sense of 'appearance put on with intention to deceive' is recorded from c.1526. Meaning 'display, spectacle' is first recorded 1561; that of 'ostentatious display.'"[25] If the original etymology of "show" means to put on with an intention to deceive, do you think we are involved in a deception as teachers? Who are we deceiving? What is the deception?***

Liz: *..."deceive"... a very pessimistic way of describing visual displays. Why is this word, "deceive" there? I am not sure that I accept the notion that I am trying to deceive anyone and in what way? Deceiving, is too fool them. Why? This work is evidence about what the children have done. They can speak to it; they can verbalize the ideas of how they created it and what it is about. Why is that word there?*

Sherry: ***That is why I go back to the original meaning of show. Are we deceiving ourselves in what we display? Does it mean what we think it means or do our displays***

***mean something else? Are we caught by the act of display without realizing what they mean?***

Liz: *We have now been working on autobiographies that I eventually displayed as inspired by another teacher. However, she only did this project with her grade twos and yet she was in a grade one/two classroom. I thought if she was truly embracing the work around the fact that she had a combined classroom and the students all work together cooperatively, where was the representation that says grade ones are capable of this?... I wonder about the piece around deception because the grade one children needed more support, their responses may not have been as lengthy; they may only have part of a page, whereas some of the grade two's may have gone on and on. Nonetheless, have I deceived the parents? No, it was okay that some of the students needed more support but they have a voice and they want to celebrate who they are and what is important to them…*

Sherry: ***I wonder about the inside and the outside of the classroom. Based on what you and my other participants have talked about, it appears that the work that is displayed inside the classroom is about actively exhibiting work as a class; it is almost like our personal portrait. The work that is visually displayed out in the hallway is somehow for others to see. We want to show the parents and others like the school administration the story that we think they want to see versus what we want to do in our own classrooms. And I will trace this back for you historically where the trustees in the early 1900's dictated what hung in the hallway of schools and left the classroom to the teachers. They chose what would be displayed on the hallway walls and they were very specific around what was there.***

Liz: *What was displayed in the hallways?*

Sherry: ***They were all beautiful pieces of art that were purchased as postcards/prints from the national gallery which might be very similar to some of these images here in this photograph of the same time. This idea that we might deceive those who view the work on the outside of the classroom because somehow we think it is what they expect to see.***

Liz: *I think there is some truth to that. I have heard of cases where administration has walked down halls and have been very clear with their staff around what is appropriate, about what should be in the hall, or what doesn't look quite polished or what needs to be refined… these are about pieces of information that we access on a daily basis. Now, the other part is, I will look at a piece of artwork that I am thinking of putting up and I will think, this is so beautiful to me… I honestly believe… anything that I would put up, I would feel its value would be worthy of being in any space whether it is inside our class or out in the hall.*

Sherry: ***I have been thinking about what you said the last time we met, "When I arrived here, I thought, I have arrived. For me, it as a powerful moment to see what I truly valued, up around me." What do you value now? What did you value before? What changed? Do you remember what you valued in those days before you noticed that your classroom needed to look different?***

Liz: *I didn't realize the beauty of bringing the outside into the classroom. I didn't realize how adding the plants, for example, would also create a comfort for children. They would reorganize and put them in different places in the room that they thought they deserved to be. I wonder about how it if was something that they did in their house and how it helped*

*them in their daily work… maybe it was years ago, I wasn't noticing the plants, or there were not as many. I was not as aware of how the classroom environment could influence students and their learning. I mean I was aware of the essentials like the numbers and the alphabet but the other pieces of how the classroom was set up.*

Liz has only in recent years become more aware of how the classroom environment could influence children however her comment regarding "the essentials" resonated with me and it something that I had not yet heard referenced in regards to a Reggio-inspired philosophy. In nineteenth-century Ontario schools,

> Those who had developed the educational system made use of institutional analogies in nature, for these provided concrete and durable organizing principles for schools…the expanding pool of social knowledge encouraged educators to move toward a more scientifically based curriculum. Partly because of this shift; there was an increasing reliance upon the use of observation (particularly objects that existed in nature) as a pedagogical strategy. A claim was often made in this period of educational history that a relation of immanence existed between the engagement of an object by a person and the subsequent development of a moral self.[26]

The rigor surrounding the creation of visual displays within a Reggio-inspired philosophy appeared to have a family resemblance to the pedagogical practice of object and nature study in North America. Historian Robert Lanning linked nineteenth and twentieth century object lesson study in Ontario to Jean Jacques Rousseau's naturalistic system of education. Beginning in the nineteenth century, Johann Pestalozzi, inspired by Rousseau's, *Emile,* began to develop the notion of close observation and investigation of objects found in nature.[27] Pestalozzi's approach could be found in England around 1820 in the writing of Elizabeth Mayo's *Lessons on Objects.*"[28] Elizabeth Mayo and her brother Charles Mayo founded a school in Britain for young boys as well as a teachers' college. Together, their work connected ideas of nature and cultural observation.[29] In

1865, the *Journal of Education for Upper Canada,* published a section from Herbert Spencer's book *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* (1860), which, "dealt with a mother's use of her young child's natural inclination to learn the qualities of objects, distinctions in texture, color, polish etc. Spencer advocated the exploitation of children's interest in the outdoor world in order to form a genuine nature study component of the curriculum."[30] Drawing on this work, Egerton Ryerson, (1803-1882) Chief Superintendent of Education in Ontario, the first school system in Canada, utilized Spencer's ideas and instituted the kinds of lessons that Spencer was advocating. In 1872, teachers in Ontario, including Neil J. Campbell,

> [u]sed objects from inside and outside the school room to develop his pupils' faculties of observation and comparison. As a pedagogical form, observation was a tool with which pupils could gain knowledge of their environment; it could also be employed by teachers in promoting moral regulation, by knowing the characteristics, qualities and modes of development of objects and applying them by analogy to social sciences and situations. It is in these two senses that observation in schooling contained a critical element. In other words, this placed a degree of relative autonomy on pupils; they not only learned the facts of nature, but were subjected to corresponding social values based on conventional interpretations. Further, they became judges of the qualities of things and persons; they evaluated these qualities against cultural standards. Observation in this sense put the emphasis on critical understanding of interaction as a means of self-formation[31]

Researchers Dahlberg et al strongly suggest that the "quality" of early childhood learning must be rigorously taken up through making children's learning visible through documentation and dialogue.[32] And while Dahlberg et al do not neglect to note the historical remnants of Reggio-inspired philosophies based in the work of Europeans, Maria Montessori or Joseph Froebel, there appears to be a difficulty with acknowledging a Canadian (Anglo-phile) historical tradition in how those visual displays re/present childhood and learning particularly evident in the historical and cultural study of nature

and observation in Canadian schools as early as the nineteenth century.

Liz: *I really notice and pay attention to how people set up spaces. I support the idea that when you look at someone's classroom, you could [gain] insight about the teacher's interests, commitment, the time and thought they have put into it. You can see where the furniture is, what is on the walls and I think it speaks volumes about who occupies the space.*

Sherry: ***I think so too, perhaps a personal portrait of whom they are.***

Liz: *I think it if you were to apply for a position elsewhere, the principal who would be interviewing you would need to come into your classroom space whether the children were present or not, just look around and I would think there would be enough information there to tell you what you need. The principal always asks, "I were to walk into the classroom, what would I see?" Whether you chose to be honest or not, it is still there.*

Sherry: ***I wonder if that is part of that noticing. I wonder if even for yourself if there was a bit of deception for yourself, if you thought you were deceiving yourself in some of the older classrooms you were in; where you talked about putting up the borders and such and doing it because the other teacher beside you was putting it up but over time, it was not who you were? We do it because we somehow think we are supposed to; not like we are doing it to deceive others but we do it and we feel like we might be deceiving ourselves. It takes time to come to know why you don't want the borders there anymore or why after forty years someone still puts up borders up and never asks why.***

Liz: *It could be beautiful. The conversations I have had with others are that the borders can still look nice. It could be personal preference and I have experienced conversations with others where we specifically talked about colors in the classroom.*

Sherry: ***I wonder about those borders-it is almost like they are trying to contain something. Somehow if we took the border off, the learning would fly off the wall. Those borders contained the learning somehow, made it somehow, civilized or orderly. You mentioned the word, meaningful. We talked about commercially produced items and not commercially produced items in terms of being meaningful. What does it actually mean? "Inferior or poor, stingy, heavily offensive, as having a low-quality."*** [33] ***I am curious about this word. How come commercially produced items with student work is not meaningful? I wonder if it goes back to a notion of full of low quality. We talked about how you used to have a different alphabet and other pictures in your room, that wasn't kid produced.***

Liz: *The word, "meaningful" to me is having some worth. Teachers may still buy those commercially produced pieces and that is important to them. I don't want to de-value their interest in having that work in their classroom… I find that more times than there is hardly enough room in the classroom space. It almost seems like the more years that gather behind, you think more about putting up important work. I thought about putting up this kind of work- and I should look at this as being important*.

Sherry: ***Why do you think that putting stuff up on the walls is something that is just done? Are we going along with it?***

Liz: *Is it the new teachers who think they are wise and knowledgeable because they have so much stuff up?*

Sherry: ***Or they have to put it up because they have to show something? I wonder if it is the same for people who put up the drapes (as is done in a Reggio-inspired classroom) in the same way that we put up the borders. Do they really understand why they do that or are they simply doing it that is what you are supposed to do. I wonder if this is the next, thing that we will start doing, just like we put the borders up and it will become a part of a tradition of teaching that we entered a school, and that is what the teacher beside me did, so I did it. Maybe it will happen over a period of time***.

Liz: *You have to be drawn to it. I think there has to be a reason; I would hope that there would be a reason why you do it.*

Sherry: ***But we don't have a reason why those borders are there.***

Liz: *No, we don't seem to, do we?*

Sherry: ***I was really captured by the visual display that you created of the little girl in the gild frame. I wrote the following poem in response[34]:***

> ***She appears in the corner of the room;***
> ***A small girl framed in gild***
> ***curly blond hair***
> ***old fashioned dress.***
> ***She reaches out towards them,***
> ***an envelope in her hand.***
> ***The students wonder who she is.***
> ***Is it their teacher?***
> ***Why do they notice her?***
> ***What is she trying to tell/show them?***
> ***From her gild frame***
> ***looking out***
> ***from the classroom wall.***

Liz listened quietly to the poem and then responded, clapping her hands together and smiling,

Liz: *That was lovely!*

I was pleased that she seemed to like the poem but she did not comment further. I wondered how effective the transcription had been but I continued.

Sherry: ***Do you think that any of the work that you display is "highlighted" to stand out in any way? By how you display it, are you are asking the children to notice something?***

Liz: *I wonder if the boy who chose gold as his favorite color happen to notice some of the gold in the room and thought, gee, I really like that color.*

Sherry: ***Do you think you highlighted that without knowing it? Do you think you highlight certain things?***

Liz: *...absolutely I do. I am drawn to the ornate-ness of that mirror and the antique-feeling of it. I just think there is something beautiful in the innocence of the child in that picture.*

Sherry: ***I notice that you highlight a lot of art prints in the visual displays in the room.***

Liz: *I also believe that there is such beauty that we can take from them.*

Sherry: ***Even behind you. The work behind you stands out differently than the work on the window stands out, than their pictures, the alphabet, but really that alphabet disappears on the wall for me.***

Liz: *It is there because I thought I had to have it.*

Sherry: ***I know, something acting upon you that you have to have it and yet, what do you highlight? You highlight the art in this room.***

Liz: *I am glad to hear you say that because these children are artists. I say that to them, and they know, and I hope it comes through and they know it by the way that I have*

*chosen to put up their artwork. To make it look like it is in a gallery…there is a little girl who noticed those calendar pictures that I framed for the prairies. I had to justify this in my mind…[I thought]It is commercially produced, it is from a calendar. Why is it important that you bring this in and share it with the children?... I thought these are visuals but more importantly, it was, reinforced for me that this is okay because… a little girl who chose to do the hay field, [had that image of the hay bales] and she took that picture down and put it on her desk and [created] her piece of art work. She kept glancing at that and using it and you can see her piece of art and I thought, yes, this is okay.*

Sherry: ***I wonder about your caution around the commercially produced visuals. I wouldn't look at those pictures and say they were commercially produced. You didn't go and buy some cartoon version of a hayfield. This is an actual photograph even if it came from a calendar. Does it lend a certain authenticity to the display? I am thinking about that word a lot, "authentic" and wondering why it continues to surface in the topic of visual displays. Because for some people those borders are authentic and they create an authenticity for who they are, if they feel that.***

Liz: *You know I see that order when you ask children to line up in a line. A little boy wrote in his autobiography, "I like to be in control, I want to be a teacher when I grow up." I almost fell over and initially my gut was, "Liz, what are you modeling for this child?" Because to me, this word, control is very frightful…you [the boy] associate control with being a teacher.*

Sherry: ***But you know, I wonder if you are still directing them by what you highlight. You highlight, you are still in a way, visually, directing them.***

Liz: *When I look at that, I think…why did you have to have all of those pictures the same size? And maybe what is even more interesting for me to look. Why did I choose to give them all the same black background?*

Sherry: **Why do you think?**

Liz: *There is order and control there, but also I look at how else I have chosen to display some of the work. One of my professors's told me that when she looked at angled pieces of children's work or angled photos, she struggled with it because she has to turn her head and she found it distracting. But yet, when you go to the art galleries, what do you see? I thought I will just put it that way and it works because it reminds me of the art gallery.*

Sherry: ***What changes if you don't have it looking like that?***

Liz: *I don't know. That is a good question…the children helped hang that piece and it is giving ownership to them but they didn't ask why we didn't hang them differently.*

Sherry: ***What if they all look the same? Returning to the alphabet that you have on the wall, the letters, though represented in a different way, still have to be repeated the same.***

Liz: *They have to be recognizable.*

Sherry: ***Recognizable?***

Liz: *They can guide us… if [a child] need[s] those letters when [they] print those words, that would be like saying, for me, it is not that important whether we print or not in this room or it is not very important that you know those letters because you will learn them sometime. No, I am sorry. It is really important to me. It is an essential piece because we use it as we are printing words and learning to read those words.*

I wonder about the visual displays that appear on classroom walls. Do they signal the way that we are to be in the world? How do we come to "read" these displays, both through text and image? Have representational strategies for "reading" visual displays changed over time? Historical photographs often depict the way such spaces were decorated. A hundred years ago, singled-framed images of the Queen and later, a King, maps of the Empire, and a few, specifically chosen works of art dotted the classroom walls. The pedagogical intents, understandings, and meanings associated with those visual displays resonate in our present classrooms. And yet, they are a forgotten tradition not readily known to contemporary teachers.

**Notes**

[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum Press, 2004), 369.
[2] Melissa Freeman, "Between Eye and Eye Stretches an Interminable Landscape": The Challenge of Philosophical Hermeneutics," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7. (2001): 655.
[3] The pseudonym as selected by the participant.
[4] Sarah Blake, *The Postmistress* (New York: Amy Einhorn Books, 2010), 39.
[5] James Klingler and Francis W. Wolek, "Apprenticeship and the Transfer of Technical Know-How," *Journal of Technology Transfer*, 23, no. 3 (September, 1998): 52.
[6] Ibid., 52.
[7] Nicola Wood et al. "A Tacit Understanding: The Designer's Role in Capturing and Passing on the Skilled Knowledge of Master Craftsmen," *International Journal of Design*, 3, no. 3 (December, 2009): 72.
[8] Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss and Alan Pence, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Languages of Evaluation* (London: Routledge, 2008), 7.
[9] Ibid., xxv.
[10] Ibid., 23.
[11] Ibid., 146-147.
[12] Ibid., 154-155.
[13] Ibid., 156.
[14] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), 113.
[15] Ibid., 115.
[16] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley: University of California Press,) 382.
[17] Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 11.
[18] Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11.
[19] J. Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline* (North Carolina: Durham University, 1997), 38.
[20] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* ,trans., John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Perennial, 1962), 158-159.
[21] Mahon O'Brien, "The Future of Humanity: Heidegger, Personhood and Technology," *Comparative Philosophy*, 2, no. 2 (2011): 39-40.
[22] Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood*, 29.
[23] Jan van Eyck completed the oil on oak painting in 1434. The full title of the painting is *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife.* Its dimensions are 82.2 cm x 60 cm. It was acquired by the National Gallery in London in 1842 where it remains today.
[24] Ray Bolton, *A Brief History of Painting* (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2004, 72.
[25] As accessed at: http://www.etymonline.com/
[26] Robert Lanning, "On Developing 'Representations from Presentations': Observing the Laws of the Natural and Social Worlds," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 4, no. 4 (December, 1991): 361-362.
[27] Carl Von Raumer, *The Life and Educational System of Pestalozzi,"* in, *Pestalozzi and Pestalozziaianism: Life, Educational Principles, and Methods, of John Henry Pestalozzi; with Biographical Sketches of Several of His Assistants and Disciples*, eds., Henry Barnard (New York: F. C. Brownell, 1859), 52.
[28] Elizabeth Mayo, *Lessons on Objects* (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1874).

[29] Paul Munroe, *A Cyclopedia of Education* (New York: Macmillian and Company, 1913), 162.
[30]Robert Lanning, "On Developing 'Representations from Presentations," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 4, no. 4 (December, 1991): 367
[31] Ibid., 369.
[32] Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, *Beyond Quality in Childhood Education, 109.*
[33] http://www.etymonline.com/
[34] Following the work of Melissa Freeman, I sent the participants a copy of the poems that I had written in our first session prior to our second conversation.

**I, THOU, AND IT**

Understanding, like any understanding,
is not an acquaintance derived from knowledge about them
(Others),
but a primordially existential kind of Being,
which, more than anything else,
makes such knowledge and acquaintance possible.[1]

We are who we are
Historically
Possessed

We understand
Long before
We understand ourselves

Always we travel within
Understanding
It is not in
I and thou

It does not lie
In your oak-brown eyes
Your heavy restlessness
Or the in the stiffness of your neck

I do not hang
My prejudices at the door
Or lay them open on the rug
For all to see
Nor do you rehearse
What it is
You plan to say

We do not come to an understanding
By traversing similar landscapes
Nor do we leap over
The great chasm of difference
That lies always
Between I and thou

Understanding is

A swirling momentum
An impelling
That fights the limits
Of self-definition
Tugging
Stretching
The fabric of our tightly wrapped garb[2]

# CHAPTER SIX

## LISTENING TO THE ECHOES OF THE (not so) DISTANT PAST: REVISITING THE PAST

A story like a snapshot is caught, held for a moment and then delivered. But the people in them go on and on. And what happens next? What happens? The story knew. Didn't I say that long ago? An eyelid shutters open and shut, separating this moment from the next, inside from outside. What is remembered from what is seen? And some moments we are allowed to see it all, all at once. Our lives moving backward and forward- so we are one in a million- that phrase that annihilates or transcends.[3]

Months of revisiting and rewriting the teacher portraits passed and I continued to examine the ideas that appeared within the words that surfaced on the page. While all of the participants felt they needed to have visual displays that aligned with the theoretical curriculum practices as "planned" or "lived" of either school administration or colleagues, they did not express any historical notion about how visual displays might have come to appear in elementary schools. I returned to several photographs that I shared with the participants on our second meeting. I had opened our second conversation with the photographs because I had wondered how they envisioned past classrooms. Two of the photographs depicted two early nineteenth century classrooms in Britain. The classroom walls were far from bare; both were highly decorated with multiple works of art, lists of words, scientific charts and children's work. The children sat at long tables in groups of six to ten rather than the predicted rows of desks. Turning to the Canadian context, I also showed the participants a similar classroom in a school in Alberta. They were again, commonly surprised by how the classrooms looked, except now the desks were in rows. I included these conversations as they revealed another perspective in how some historic classrooms looked.

Figure 2: Archival Record- NA-748-41. Harvey School, Vulcan Area, Alberta. 1915. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Museum

Sherry: ***We are going to start tonight with some pictures. Last time we met we talked about what we thought classrooms looked like at different times in history. I am going to start off with this one from 1896.***

Aimee: *Wow.*

Sherry: ***What confirms what you might have thought and what do you find surprising?***

Aimee: *What surprises me that they are working at long tables, in a group, there are 10 students around in a group- I didn't expect to see kids like this, I expected rows. Quiet teacher at the front, stand and deliver sort of style.*

Sherry: ***I wanted to start with some photographs from1896.***

Erika: *Wow*

Sherry: ***Is it what you expected?***

Erika: *Not at all.*

Sherry: ***This is an urban school- as is the one that follows, in Britain.***

Erika: *1896, hmm.*

**Sherry:** ***We talked about that starkness and yet…***

Erika: *These are highly decorated. Is that Van Gogh? … that is a word wall up in 1896. Not what I would assume would be there. Why is it then as teachers when we think of the classrooms from even the 50-60's, we have this misconception of what they looked like?*

Sherry: ***I wonder if it is because the visual is somehow erased. It is like we talked about your own students, do we think that your students will remember what was on the classroom wall, and if you said to them, do you remember an alphabet line and in our memory, we say, I am sure that there was one there, but are we remembering because we actually remember it or we thinking about it because we are constructing a version of it that we think was on the wall.***

Liz: *1896! Wow, it is not what I imagined it to be! The walls are plastered with so much stuff! Wow! Is this a traditional one room school? [on the prairies?]*

Sherry: ***No, these first… photos are urban schools taken in Britain. The next is in Alberta.***

Liz: *…I just can't believe this first photograph. It almost looks like there is collaborative learning going on. Students working at tables, facing one another, Amazing! Just amazing!*

Sherry: ***… This [depicts] the notions of nature study, the bringing of the outside world, inside. That is 1896 – the second picture- the photographs are hanging quite high, but you will see some of the work- the pictures, the flowers, the teacher has pots. And this is from a notion of how schooling was taken up- from a British perspective; using the environment in the classroom as the way that kids can take up the world. In a historic text that I have been looking at… it [detailed] flowers, pictures, plants…I wonder if the Reggio school drew from what had come before and we continue to draw from what came before… I was surprised by the lace curtains on the walls of the Alberta classroom and the amount of "stuff" on the walls.***

The "past" seemed to reverberate in teachers' discussions about their own historical or professional knowledge of visual displays in their classrooms. They spoke of "joy", "beauty" and the "honoring of work," all of which were traditions seeped in the past. Sitting back and deepening my thinking, I continued to hear the historic traditions resonate in the conversations with my participants; traditions that dated back centuries before. Notions of the past "rattled" in my head and in order to understand the contemporary practice, I sought to examine the tradition of visual displays in elementary schools—as clearly they had an interpretable history of their own.

In exploring visual displays, I came to see/understand "history" and "past" very differently. Not that long ago, I understood "history" as the dates and facts that I was taught to accept as "truth"—what occurred in the past. History encompassed the old photos that I would see at my Grandmother's house as well as the places and artifacts at the museum or Heritage Park. To me, they did not just represent history—they were history; a factual account that I believed was as it appeared. As a child in school, I knew

that 1867 was the date of Confederation, but what did that mean to me? As a teacher today, I wonder about the act of remembering dates. Was it the goal of Alberta Education for me to remember the date or the significance of the date? If the goals of the 1970's social studies curriculum were about citizenship, did knowing the dates of historical events necessarily make me a "good citizen?" What did it mean to be a good citizen, then and now? Like many other children I readily accepted the narrative told to me—the "past" was fixed and true—it was not subject to debate or interpretation that might include multiple voices and perspectives. Jonathan Lear takes up the problematic notion that because historical narratives are usually shaped by the victor, the issue of power and truth needs to be taken into account when considering the examination and writing of the historical past.[4] I was reminded of this when I saw the Broadway musical, "Wicked," when the wizard noted, "…where I am from, we believe all sorts of things that aren't true. We call it—'history.' A man's called a traitor—or a liberator, a rich man's a thief—or philanthropist is one a crusader—or a ruthless invader? It's all in which label is able to persist."[5] Nevertheless, I have always been interested in history and, heritage. David Lowenthal differentiates between the notion of history and heritage suggesting that, "history tells all that will listen what has happened and how things came to be as they are. Heritage passes on exclusive myths of origin and endurance, endowing us alone with prestige and purpose."[6]

I shiver in old houses and smell the pages of antiquarian books. I am fascinated by what has come before and until recently I thought unproblematically I knew what that meant. As an undergraduate student, I had been taught to see history as a series of events in a progressive timeline that could be connected to larger notions of citizenship, political

theory and economics. I was not schooled to understand that the grand narrative of Canadian culture had been written by white, English-speaking men mostly of British descent, and that it was through primarily their perspective and agenda that shaped how I saw the past.[7] It did not occur to me to question this inheritance. I accepted what I was taught and shown as absolute objectives and truths.

Throughout this research I continually reflected on these earlier teachings and reminded myself that I could not tie up what I was reading in the participant transcripts or seeing in visual images on walls and photographs of historic classrooms in a neat, tidy package. In keeping with the interpretive nature of this thesis, I returned to Gadamer's notion of historical consciousness,

> Modern consciousness—precisely as historical consciousness—takes a reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by tradition. Historical consciousness no longer listens sanctimoniously to the voice that reaches out from the past but, in reflecting on it, replaces it within the context where it took root in order to see the significance and relative value proper to it. This reflexive posture towards tradition is called interpretation. We speak of interpretation when the meaning of the text is not understood at first sight. In other words, an explicit reflection is required on the conditions that enable the text to have one or another meaning…Interpretation, as we understand it today, is applied not only to texts and verbal tradition but to everything bequeathed to us by history.[8]

As an interpretive researcher, I situate myself within the history of visual displays, not to understand their origins *per se*, but rather to understand *how* they were taken up in a particular educational and socio-cultural context in the past. Historian Peter Lee cautions that, "there is not one true story of the past but a multiplicity of complementary, competing or clashing stories."[9] I was also reminded that, "traditional historical practice alerts us to the "methods" and "interpretations" we use to study the past. In the process it highlights how historians/students of the past knit —consciously and unconsciously— their own beliefs, perspectives and agendas into any writing/thinking about the past."[10]

Enmeshed in these multiple strands of history, I began to pull at the threads of visual displays, resisting the urge to forge a neat linear time-line. Events in history may be chronological but history is not as, "historia is a source of truth totally different from theoretical reason. This is what Cicero meant when he called it, "vita memoriae."[11] Simply stated, we engage in practices that are seemingly obvious, but the original intention of the practice is long forgotten. I considered the woven threads that had contributed and formed the practice of visual displays and how I might begin to unravel them. Wondering about the importance of visual displays in the first schools in Calgary, Alberta, I decided to consult the archival records of the local school board.

**The Dreams of Men: Growing the Calgary Board of Education**

Visiting the archives was a fascinating and riveting experience. Kept in a safe at the Education Centre, I eagerly watched the archivist turn the dial on the large steel door housing their records. Opening the door, I stepped into the vault that held the history of the now, second largest school district in Canada. My eyes scanned the interior, drinking in one hundred and twenty five years of trustee record books and boxes of catalogued artifacts. I paused and stopped to consider what I was seeing. The many items represented the hopes and dreams of a young frontier town that although founded in 1875, did not have an official school district until 1885.

I donned white gloves and reached for a tattered slim black volume; the dates 1885-1900 in faded lettering on the cracked spine. Laying it on the table inside the vault, I carefully turned back the cover to reveal the spidery handwriting of Sir J.A. Lougheed, one of Calgary's early boosters and prominent citizens. The pages were fragile and difficult to read due to their deteriorated condition and not wanting to cause any more

damage, I carefully returned the volume to the shelf. The next volume, dated January, 1901, was of a sturdier nature, and contained pages that were both larger and heavier weight than the earlier volume I had consulted. I began to carefully read the meeting notes of the Board of Trustees, precisely handwritten by Secretary-Treasurer, James Short. On some pages, his thumb or fingerprint could be seen in the margin because of an accidental spill of the inkwell. For someone deeply interested in the past, it was a mesmerizing experience. I was here in the room in the Calgary Board of Education archives; peering up from the historical trustees' record book, reading the past in the present and reflecting on the words of early Trustees, now considered "founding" fathers of the Calgary Protestant School Board No. 19, of the newly formed province of Alberta. A photograph (figure 3) from the Glenbow Archives depicts many of these trustees and superintendents at work during a board meeting. The entries over the next several pages contained similar information with no particular reference to visual displays until February 9, 1904, when a motion …[from trustees] Cushing and Walker noted that, "it was decided that the net proceeds of the patriotic concert given in December should be divided equally among the teachers to be used by them in decorating their schoolrooms."[12] Such endeavors were part of the vastly popular School-Decoration movement in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

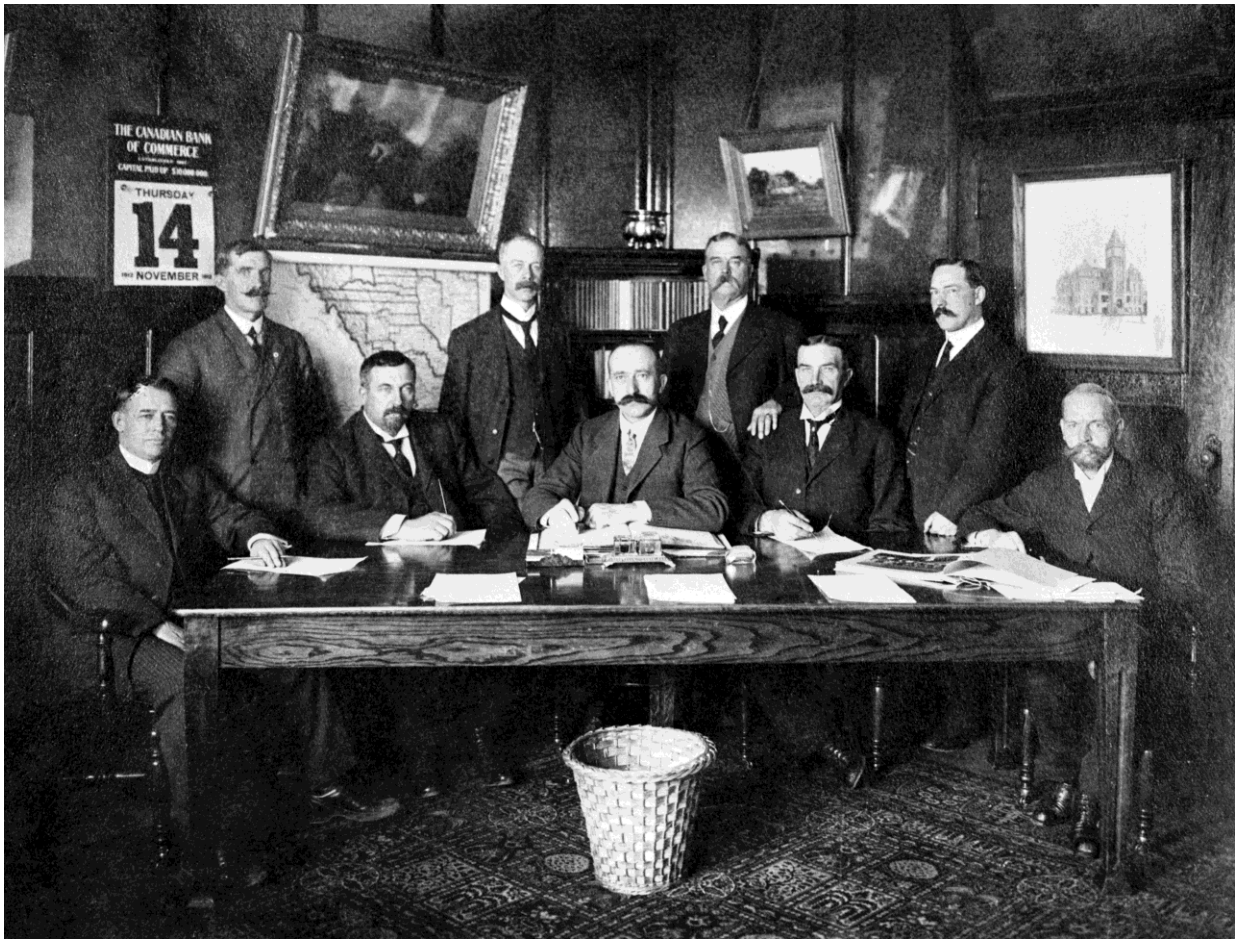


Figure 3: Archival Record NA-1075-23,.Trustee Board Meeting, 1912. Taken in board room, third floor of City Hall, Calgary, Alberta.
L-R back row: A. J. Jewitt, secretary treasurer; T. B. Kidner, technical director; N. McClelland, building superintendent; Doctor A. M. Scott, superintendent of schools.
L-R front row: A. H. Sinnot; R. J. Hutchins; F. W. Mopson; Colonel James Walker; James Short. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

At the forefront of this movement in Canada was J.George Hodgins, Former Deputy Minister of Education for Ontario. In 1900, Hodgins presented a paper to the Canadian Historical Society entitled, "School Room Decoration in Ontario- Historic and Patriotic," in which he alleged that young adults left their rural lives behind in favor of urban experiences due to the monotony of their country lives, a move perpetuated by the blank walls of their schoolrooms. He felt they had no enthusiasm for patriotism or a sense of national pride because,

> [r]arely is there anything in either rural schools or homes that would create an active desire for the beautiful or the artistic, or which would produce a refining and elevating influence upon the minds of the young…beyond the ordinary appliances for teaching, the schoolroom walls in most cases, are bare of everything that would excite any special interest in the young, or call forth either feeling or enthusiasm in our national affairs or even in our local Canadian history.[13]

Hodgins reiterated to his audience of his educational journeys to the New England states to learn more about the school-room Decoration movement which had been established by the Boston Public School Art League in 1892.[14] The Art League in Boston as well as other chapters which sprang up in the United States and Canada was based on the social aesthetic theory of John Ruskin, one of the most significant social theorists of the nineteenth century. The Boston Art League was part of a larger movement which originated in England in the 1880's. The English Art in Schools Association's first president was John Ruskin with Matthew Arnold as vice president.

> The association oversaw selection, distribution and exhibition of art in London's public schools. Although some original work was commissioned, many of the art work in the schools were copies, prints, photographs and lithographs. The League's mandate was to make schools "more artistic environments for the students if we wish to have people of taste who will create tasteful things.[15]

I first became acquainted with John Ruskin while taking a course in the Histories of Curriculum in Canada. His named appeared as part of an on-going discussion in the course about how citizenship and culture were historically linked through art education. I was intrigued by the Oxford-educated student and later professor who was a well-known writer connecting ideas of art, nature and society. While he wrote several essays on modern painters and architecture, it was his notion of "beauty," that called to me. He believed that "beautiful" surroundings,

> [r]eplete with hand-made aesthetic objects, were the source of familial and human happiness, and by extension, the well-being of the nation-state. The "beautiful," Ruskin held, permitted people to "see" and "do" good. Equating "bad" design with depravity and "good" design with morality, he symbolically charged interior environments…with the metaphoric capacity to transform and democratize the moral character of the individual maker and user.[16]

Public School Art Leagues, the predecessors of the home and school associations grasped onto Ruskin's, notion that, "[to] teach taste is to form character… we shall discover at last that the eye is a nobler organ than the ear; and that through the eye we must, in reality, obtain, or put into form, nearly all the useful information we are to have about this world."[17] His voice was far-reaching; being heard in the words of the Honorable Henry Sabine, a member of the Boston Public School Art League,

> [a] child's aesthetical nature cannot be separated from his emotions. A statue, a picture, a flower, rouses his feelings for the beautiful and the emotions, thus created, lead to the right impulses of the heart…the presence of that which is grand in nature leads often to loftiness of purpose. Nobleness of character, grand, unselfish deeds, as well as living examples can be made to stir the childish mind to efforts toward that which is noble and grand, even in the everyday, common life of man…pictures on the School-Room walls and works of art contribute to create a new sense almost unconsciously leading to the formation of correct impulses, which, in turn, induce right action.[18]

Drawing from John Ruskin's philosophy of "environmental determinism" that suggested the environment and materials in the environment were directly responsible for determining the moral character of those who inhabited it; the "beautiful" picture would inspire the child to undertake ethical action which was seen as "right" and "good." The ideal of the League was to make the schoolhouse, "a temple worthy to receive, and fitted to inspire, the children of all people to the dignity of free citizenship in the Republic. We would decorate the corridors, rooms, and halls, with reproductions of the masterpieces of art."[19]

The word, "masterpiece" took me back to Aimee's classroom. Although she was not speaking about Old Masters as the League may have been, I could not help but connect the advice of the League to the current practice in schools of displaying children's art work or their "masterpieces" in the school corridors, rooms and halls. Were modern day displays being enacted, unknowingly, for the same purpose?

The League's ideas were in-keeping with Ruskin's philosophies shared at a public address in Manchester in 1857 where he advocated for school-decoration as a natural progression for a child's moral development,

> … I believe the notion of fixing the attention by keeping the room empty, is a wholly mistaken one: I think it is just in the emptiest room that the mind wanders most; for it gets restless, like a bird, for want of a perch, and casts about for any possible means of getting out and away. And even if it be fixed, by an effort, on the business in hand, that business becomes itself repulsive, more than it need be, by the vileness of its associations; and many a study appears dull or painful to a boy, when it is pursued on a blotted deal desk, under a wall with nothing on it but scratches and pegs, which would have been pursued pleasantly enough in a curtained corner of his father's library, or at the lattice window of his cottage. Now, my own belief is, that the best study of all is the most beautiful; and that a quiet glade of forest, or the nook of a lake shore, are worth all the schoolrooms in Christendom, when once you are past the multiplication table; but be that as it may, there is no question at all but that a time ought to come in the life of a well-trained youth, when he can sit at a writing-table without wanting to throw the inkstand at his neighbour; and when also he will feel more capable of certain efforts of mind with beautiful and refined forms about him than with ugly ones. When that time comes, he ought to be advanced into the decorated schools; and this advance ought to be one of the important and honourable epochs of his life.[20]

Hodgins was impressed with how American educators had acknowledged the value of school-room decoration; especially how the image provided an opportunity to present and instill object lesson study—a critical part of the Ontario curriculum since the mid-nineteenth century. Object lessons provided children with not only the building of skills for natural observation but also served to instill observation of, "principles of

living…referred to as moral and cultural observation."[21] Hodgins already acquainted with the work and theories of John Ruskin, wrote about the placement of a picture as an inspiration to schoolchildren. He noted,

> Schoolchildren become acquainted with pictures by seeing notable ones on the school-wall; a more or less permanent feature of their daily environment. In the special classroom, where the child does most of his daily work, a single picture, carefully chosen, may exert a deeper and more abiding influence on him that a number selected with less care. Only the best pictures-as Ruskin says-should be given a space on the home walls; for they are things to live with, and to carry permanently in heart and mind. The "practical" and "materialistic" side of education often excludes, or wholly ignores, the existence of a high and noble instinct, which, in so many cases, is simply dormant, because it has never been stimulated or called into life, or being…There is reflux influence of good School-Room pictures on the decoration of the home, which should not be overlooked…There is a chance to educate children and parents alike by decorating the School-Room and keeping them nice. It also leads children, as one writer so quaintly observes, into orderly manner…We must seek to surround them with refining influences and instill into their very souls the desire for culture and refinement that shall counteract an adverse influence at home, or will supplement a good and pleasant one there. It is this movement, now afoot, that will have a strong reflex influence for good on the homes and surroundings. It means a new and intelligent interest interpreting our history as a people. And the bringing, of such a spirit into public education is not a fanciful theory; it is a great and potent reality.[22]

Hodgins quoted several American educators including Dr. Harris, United States Commissioner on Education in Washington and Mr. Goodnough, Supervisor of Drawing in Brooklyn, New York, who echoed Hodgins's beliefs that great works of art should become familiar to children. As such, they would,

> [e]xert a silent but constant influence on those who see them, either in the formation of good taste on those who see them or inviting it…They should be good and appropriate pictures that will appeal to children and their latent childish instinct for the good and the beautiful. Such pictures should aid in the cultivation of a love for nature, for Country and for home.[23]

You know we have hitherto been in the habit of conveying all our historical knowledge, such as it is, by the ear only, never by the eye; all our notion of things being ostensibly derived from verbal description, not from sight. Now, I have no doubt that, as we grow

gradually wiser—and we are doing so every day—we shall discover at last that the eye is a nobler organ than the ear; and that through the eye we must, in reality, obtain, or put into form, nearly all the useful information we are to have about this world.[24]

The school decoration movement spawned many texts explaining, promoting and offering advice on how to enact such a display. One such example was a special chapter in M. S. Emery's book, *How to Enjoy Pictures*, (1898), written by New York Drawing Supervisor Stella Skinner. In Skinner's chapter entitled, "Pictures in the School-Room," she advocated for the single, beautifully framed picture that was hung low enough for every child in the room to see so that they might be continually inspired. If at all possible, she advised that the picture have something to do with the current course of study so as to further the child's understanding and appreciation. This was especially true in nature study. Skinner also insisted upon mutely-colored classrooms that would provide a suitable backdrop to highlight the work and advised against any bright colors that would only serve to distract the learner.[25] I was able to locate images from a 1901 educational circular (Figure 4) published by the State of Illinois Department of Education that exhibited what Skinner, Hodgins and other school decorating movement adherents wanted to see in the classroom.

PLATE XXV—OUTSIDE PLAIN AND UNATTRACTIVE, INSIDE CHARMING. TINTED WALLS.

Figure 4: An unattractive exterior[26]

Figure 5: A cozy interior in Cook County[27]

The first classroom (figure 4) was described as, "although having an unattractive exterior, [it] is made more charming [inside] by tinted walls, pictures, and the good taste of an artist teacher."[28] The second classroom (figure 5), "so pleased a Chicago gentleman who happened to look in out of curiosity, as he was driving by, that he sent the school the fine picture seen above the blackboard."[29] These descriptions support the ideals of how Skinner and others "saw" and "authorized" the classroom and its pictures noting the "good" taste of the teacher and the "fine" picture that appeared in the room.

Ruskin's collaborator, Matthew Arnold influenced Canadian educational and cultural practices. He argued, "that unless the working classes were provided to access to culture there would be anarchy and even worse, socialist revolution. Common cultural values, Arnold presupposed, produced a consensual morality."[30] I could hear Liz's words echoing back as I read/viewed these historical sources. While Liz referenced her teaching practices in visual display to a philosophy that came into existence after World War II in

a small city in Italy, I wondered how much of what she was doing had even deeper historical roots. Much of what Skinner and others had said nearly fifty years before seemed to be "familiar" in the Reggio-inspired practice in a twenty-first century classroom in Calgary and yet Liz seemed unaware of these historical connections to her adopted philosophies on aesthetics and what was displayed on her classroom walls.

Back at the Calgary Board of Education in 1915, Trustee Dr. G.W. Kerby asked for a report to consider purchasing, "pictures of historic value, or reproductions from some of the old masters, with possibility of few works of Canadian artists. This, I believe, can be secured for a comparatively small cost and would, in my judgment, be up in estimable educational value to the young people attending our public and high schools."[31]A report on the matter was submitted in December, 1917 by C.W.Fairn, Director of Technical Education. Considering the issues of "pictures for schools," Fairn consulted other educational jurisdictions across the "continent." He noted that,

> [t]he first question of making a selection of pictures suitable for educational purposes is a very difficult one, owing to the great difference of opinion, even among experts, but as a general rule pictures should be simple and yet have real artistic merit. The corridors of the larger schools should be made more attractive by the hanging of suitable pictures and I would suggest that the boards confine their expenditure to the decoration of corridors leaving the school rooms to the individual teachers…I would respectively direct the attention of the board to the unattractive appearance of the interior of many of the schools, no attempt having been made to decorate the plastered walls and the effect of gray plastered walls is very depressing. In view of the large number of hours spent in the classrooms by the young it seems to me that any reasonable expenditure which leads to be a static development of the pupil is justifiable. Sufficient money should be included in the estimates this year to have all unfinished walls tinted in an artistic manner. An appropriation from the school board for pictures would indicate the board's appreciation and approval for this work and be an encouragement to all teachers interested in art…[32]

I combed carefully through the next several volumes of the trustee reports, reading with interest about the population boom of Calgary and the Trustees inability to

successfully build enough schools to meet the growing demands. I read firsthand how they wrestled with the technical issues of the physical plants such as ventilation and water quality, as well as the necessity for addressing the vocational needs of "newcomers" by creating programs in Manual and Technical Arts by the end of the 1912 school year at the urging of Superintendent A.M. Scott.[33] In August, 1912, the Trustees hired Charles H. Scott to serve as Art Supervisor and give $75.00 per annum to be spent on pictures to be placed in the various schools under the Board.[34] In October, 1912, Scott, now referred to as the "Supervisor of Drawing," reported that, "he began holding a series of meetings with teachers of the different grades in order to try to get the teaching of the subject of drawing on a proper working basis."[35] Scott was to oversee new curriculum expectations which made drawing mandatory for all students in grades one through eight.[36] In March 1913, A. M. Scott indicated that, "adequate provision for teaching art has been achieved through the opening of new schools as well as work done with teachers and now a provision must be made for carrying on the manual arts and handicrafts work in new classes."[37] In 1914, Scott, the Supervisor of Drawing was given the responsibility for the Manual and Technical Arts curriculum.[38] Superintendent Scott's actions were in-keeping to other Canadian school districts including those in Nova Scotia where Alexander MacKay, Supervisor for the Board of School Commissioners in Halifax who saw great value in the inclusion of drawing in a child's education. He noted,

> Drawing is another subject deserving of more attention than it receives…There is no study which approaches drawing as a means for training the eye and for the developing the powers of observation…For some kinds of ideas, drawing forms the only adequate means of expression. Drawing fosters the pupil's inherent love of the beautiful in form and color, and assists him to appreciate some of the grandest conceptions of human genius which are embedded in art. Drawing then, on account of its practical value to the industrial classes, its value as an educational instrument of great effectiveness, and its power in developing the

> higher forms of enjoyment and culture should be particularly emphasized… Aristotle said that "children should be taught to draw well, that their perceptions of beauty might be quickened." All children may not be able to learn to draw well, but nearly every child can learn to recognize and appreciate the merit of good pictures…if…art is to permeate the city and the country, it must operate through the school teacher, exhibit works of art to the pupils, send them out art loan collections and within these walls prepare good art teachers. When art is thus introduced through the schools, its refining influence will extend to homes and elevate them in all that relates to good taste and morals.[39]

Pearse surmises that although MacKay put great emphasis on drawing, his vision for arts education included the aesthetics of drawing as well which included "picture study."[40]

In the 1912 volume of *The Teachers' Encyclopaedia of the Theory, Method and Practice of Education,* teachers are instructed by James Riddell, Lecturer on Art at the University of Edinburgh to teach drawing because,

> [f]irst, because the habits which are formed, and the training which the child receives, when learning to draw, are particularly useful to those who are to be engaged in the pursuit of the Fine Arts, or of any craft or trade in which work with "hand and eye" plays a part; second, what is studied trains a side of the intelligence which no other subject touches, thus forming a distinct and important branch of general education; and third, it trains the children in the appreciation of what is beautiful—in popular language, it trains their taste. The drawing lessons have thus two purposes: a practical usefulness, and a general educational value.[41]

The words reverberated in my head and I could hear the voices of my three teacher participants rising up from the page. Almost one hundred years before, there were expectations about what was displayed on interior and exterior classroom walls. Fairn's response to the Trustee's request for the purchasing of pictures echoed the school-room decoration advocates such as Hodgins and Skinner. What was the purpose of visual displays in these early Calgary classrooms? Was it more than "mere decoration"?

To understand the early twentieth century classroom, it is important to examine Calgary's early sandstone schools (1894-1914).[42] The early trustees who built the early school system borrowed money from the Dominion Bank of Canada in $5,000 dollar increments to create the sandstone jewels that rose up from the dusty landscape of the prairies.[43] There is an air of mystery that lingers in old places that call to me and I am not alone. Panayotidis has noted that,

> [a]s a historian who writes interpretatively about the past, I am drawn to examine worlds not of my making and to consider critically the ways in which such structures shaped the lives of people I have never met. Mine is not a scientific exercise but one of social imagination, a "poetic act," according to Hayden White (1973), whose traces are organized around interpretive understandings, deliberations, and social relations that take shape on the *page*. It is here I meet *myself* and work out the past according to my own situated positioning in the present and relative to the partial outline left behind.[44]

I need to know more about these schools, who inhabited them, and what adorned their walls. They may be defined geographically by the physical spaces they inhabited or the economic, socio-cultural and political contexts and conditions of their making in the early part of the twentieth century.

Figure 6: Archival Record-NA-3685-14. Sandstone school under construction in nearby town of Castor in 1910, an identical structure to those in Calgary. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

Sandstone was a necessity on the prairie as the great fire of 1886 destroyed most of the roughly-hewn log and milled lumber buildings that made up the bulk of early Calgary's structures. A more permanent and significant material was found in sandstone which was plentiful, cheap, and provided a "solid and substantial appearance to Calgary architecture."[45] It is interesting to note that inadvertently, the policy of constructing buildings that would last for seventy-five years ignores the possibility that any changes in curriculum practice would alter in the same time period and might require a different kind of structure. Despite its longevity, historian Tom Ward notes the sandstone structures gave Calgary, "an air of success and confidence."[46]Architectural historian Thomas

Markus has outlined a critical connection between the materials and their ultimate form and effect. As cost-effective as the building materials were, it was the physical structure of the school that reflected its cultural presence in the community.[47] Ironically, sandstone schools were classical-styled structures made from a modest and plentiful local commodity. These structures, right down to the names, aspired to grand perceptions of significance and worth as they reflected the architectural standards found across the British Empire.

Figure 7: Archival Record- NA-1009-5. Central School, 1908. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

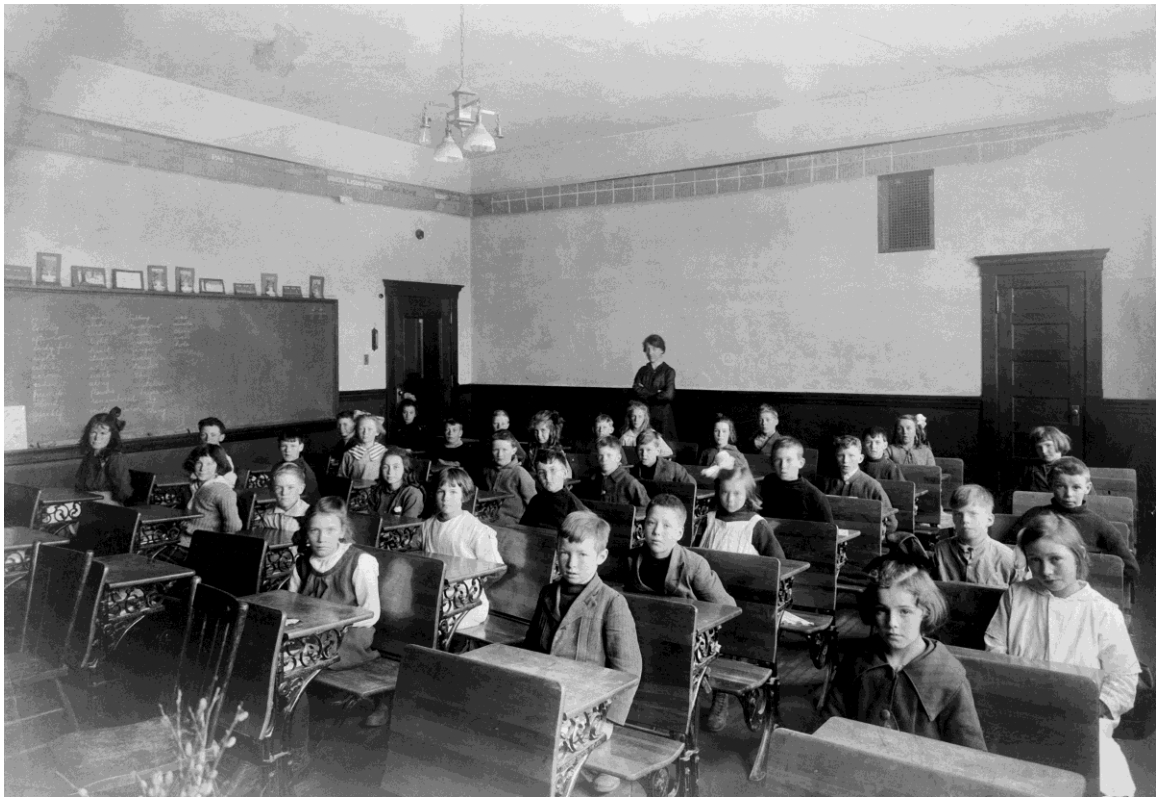

Figure 8: Archival Record NA-2517-3. Grade 6 Class at King Edward School, 1916. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

A photograph of a grade six class from 1916, showing a group of learners and their teacher in a classroom that is restrained albeit, shows the small framed images at the top of the blackboard. Perhaps there are other pictures facing the children at the front of the room, but they do not appear in the photograph. This class picture—taken for some unknown reason—depicts the stoic surroundings, the dark wooden door frames that silhouette the square spaces that comfortably house the rows of identical iron and wooden desks. The students look dutifully at the camera while the teacher surveys her charges from the back of the classroom. Keeping control was of critical importance in these early years. I am cognizant that historical images such as these are difficult to analyze. Fram and Margolis, quoting Sekula, ask, "how is historical and social memory preserved, transformed, restricted, and obliterated by photographs?"[48]What presumptions do we

make when we view these historical images? What do they ask of the viewer? What are they true of? How might teaching and learning make itself visible to the viewer? Kate Rousmaniere asks, "what different types of questions might we ask of an image to complicate our way of thinking about history and the present? Why do we see the woman with many young children and we 'know' it is a teacher? What cultural assumptions and understandings support our almost instantaneous recognition of this image as a 'teacher'?[49] Similarly, when my participants and I spoke about what they imagined what might be on the wall of a classroom a hundred years ago, they all mentioned the same items including a flag, a picture of a monarch, perhaps an alphabet line, but no other artwork or children's work. How would they "know" this? Rousmaniere asks: "Are the common structures the result of colonialism and the dominance of Western practices? Or are we, as products of those same practices, merely seeing what we have been taught to see?"[50]Such images cannot be viewed in isolation nor can they be accepted without question as evidence of some representational "real past."[51] Images of classrooms in this period were almost always posed, carefully crafted to effect one particular meaning.

What am I, a teacher and researcher in the twenty-first century supposed to make of such images? How do I interpret the image? I recall, as an undergraduate, looking at the images of historic classrooms and I romanticized what it would be like to teach in those places. I imagined orderly children who listened and eagerly embraced all that the teacher would have to offer much like those in my favorite *Little House on the Prairie* books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. The photograph may be a recording of everyday experiences in historic schools, but at the same time, "it decontextualizes that moment…the image stands alone, apart from its context. The photograph thus makes the

familiar strange; the obvious, questioned."[52] Like any other viewer, I bring my own experiences, understandings, beliefs, values, and host of educational predispositions to the image.

I cannot randomly decide that I know what is revealed in the images simply by looking at them. They need to be contextualized within broader historical and socio-cultural discourses. There is a need to unravel the past not as it may appear but how it might not have appeared. The profession of teaching is "seen" in the photograph as its own text, a story in itself, just as the visual displays spoken of by the three teacher participants were also a story. Teaching does not exist in a vacuum. The "text of teaching" is becoming; it is, as Gadamer claimed to be an unfinished event, "Our concern is to view the *erlibnesse* (experience) of Art (the art of teaching?) as *erhfarung* (journey). All encounters with the language (photographic image) of art are an encounter with an unfinished event."[53] How then can the *erlibnesse* or experience of teaching show itself? What is at play or "*spieling*" in the image?[54] Have we been "played" by the image? Is teaching as orderly a pursuit as it appears, exemplified by the neat rows, blank walls, and students as blank slates to write upon? Where are the "decorative" visual displays mentioned in the Trustee minutes? What might these displays mean? Reflexively, how do these images speak to my interest in visual displays? These questions are complicated by the fact that the viewer is seeing the image one hundred years later, "an age should be understood in terms of itself and not according to the criterion of some alien present,"[55] as well as, "the past we 'know' is always contingent upon our own views, our own 'present.' Just as we ourselves are products of the past so the known past (history) is an artifact of ours. Nobody, however immersed in the past, can divest himself/herself of

his/her own knowledge and assumptions."[56] What meanings did these images hold culturally, socially, and philosophically for their original audiences? What was their purpose? How did they intend to structure and shape our viewing and our historical understandings of this period?

Figure 9: Archival Record-NA-1855-1. King Edward School, 1913. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Museum

Historical "images" of schools, teachers and their students are ubiquitous. Photographs such as this 1913 class picture from King Edward School with Principal William Aberhart (who later became Premier of the province) exemplify the notion of progress and prosperity through education. Girls adorned in angelic white and the boys in dark suits; their "dress" echoing the world and roles they were destined to reproduce, seemed to swell from the space. A year later photographs depicting students in school and military uniform reminded viewers then and now of the sacrifice of the war and their essential allegiance to the British Empire.

Figure 10: Archival Record-NA-2517-1. King Edward School, 1914. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.

The desire for order and the visual demonstration of good citizenship is clearly evident. Were they also influenced by the visual displays that were erected in their classrooms? The images of the Queen and Union Jack flags that George Hodgins indicated would replicate, endorse and normalize ways of being in the world.[57] The school-room decoration movement and its emphasis on picture study was crucial in linking aesthetics and ethics and promoting notions of the "good," the "beautiful," and the future "orderly" citizen (Figure 11).

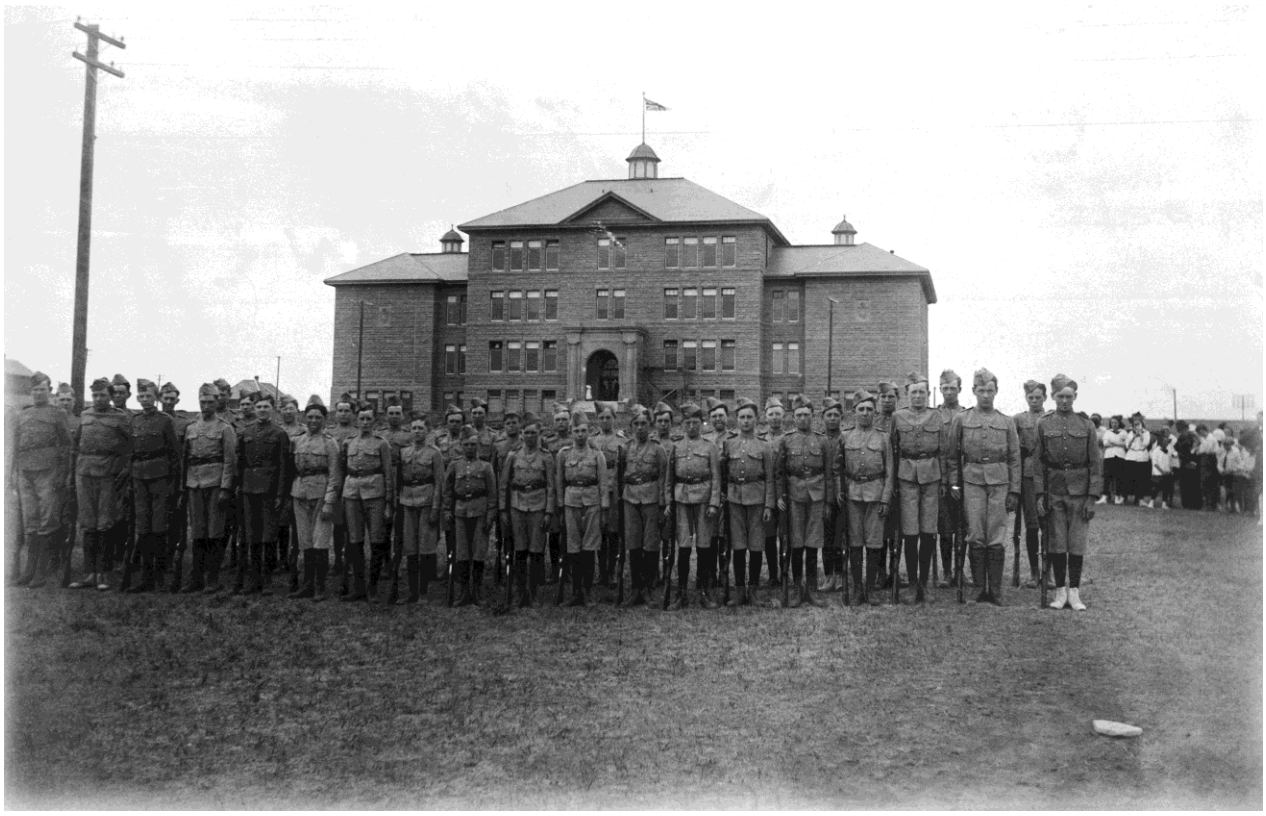

Figure 11: Archival Record-NA-2517-2. King Edward School, Another Perspective, 1914. Photo courtesy of the Glenbow Museum

**Finding Pictures in the Past: More Than Meets the Eye**

Do you think Linoardo's [sic] wonderful power of delineation grievous to see, because so wonderful, and so hopeless of attainment? No, it is delightful and full of hope, if your hope is the right one, of being one day able to rejoice more in what others, than in what you are yourself, and more in the strength that is forever above you, than in that you can ever attain. (John Ruskin)[58]

In establishing a program in manual and technical arts, The Calgary Public School District appeared to following the trend of other school districts across North America. A curriculum in elementary manual arts was introduced in Ontario by James L. Hughes, Inspector of Schools and a noted follower of John Ruskin. Hughes, "A well-known advocate of the kindergarten, manual training, nature study and art in the schools…[he] argued that 'the true aim of manual training is not to teach how to make a living, but how

to live; not to make articles, but to make men and women."[59] The formation of the Manual Arts in Ontario in 1905, based in part on William Morris's views, "on aesthetics, design, and especially the 'arts' relationship to craftsmanship, the worker and society; became dynamic discourses aimed at bolstering moral character and producing respectable citizens: prosperous, happy, and 'useful' workers."[60] Highlighting John Keats' quote that, "A thing of Beauty is a joy forever," Ruskin wrote about the importance of experiencing the "joy in labor" that was possible in the creation of art as well as the political economy of the nation. I think about the "labor" that occurs in our classrooms today expressed in the over-used phrase, "the work."[61]

I was struck by the connection of "work" and wondered about Morris' notion in connection to my principal's reference to the "work" on the walls of the school. Is this how the phrase becomes part of the vernacular of education and why it appeared to be associated with visual displays? "Art work" suggested that it was made by a maker not "created" by a Master. It did away with the idea that there was an elite notion of a "masterpiece." "Work" is more of a contemporary term—the use of work coming from a socialist discussion of labor. While Morris (1834-1896) social-aesthetic theories and ideas dominated the many lectures given at the Ontario Educational Association, Panayotidis points out that any discussions of the arts and crafts movement could not be considered without the theories of John Ruskin, whose preceding work greatly influenced Morris.[62] Harold Pearse echoes his noting,

> [t]he practical and manipulative arts and active learning for children and youth were receiving attention. The idea that it was 'not natural for a child to learn only from books' and that valuable learning occurred through the senses and physical activity. The surge of interest in manual training courses and schools served to confuse the role in schools of drawing and art, which shared common roots and

> justifications, in particular to those of the British Arts and Crafts movement and William Morris and John Ruskin's aesthetic and social philosophies.[63]

I was reminded of Scott's description of "adequate provision" and wondered what steps had been taken to see that the teaching of art had been achieved and what "work" had been done with teachers. Were there other documents and provincial resources that were included in the furthering of teacher knowledge in this area?

Digging into the historical collection at the Doucette Library at the University of Calgary, I found several "Programme of Studies" manuals published by the Department of Education, including one 1914 document entitled, "Public School Manual for Primary Work [Grades I-III]" Picking up the volume and turning it over in my hands, I imagined the teacher who might have used this very text; seeking guidance after a few months of normal school. How would their skills and knowledge base be imagined by those who wrote the directive? What were children to understand? The volume suggested that,

> [w]hether rural or urban school teachers; let us avoid the error of looking for perfection in execution comparable to that of the adult. For, thus erring, we tend to keep forever interfering with the child in our over-zealous efforts to eliminate little crudeness of immaturity. Habits of posture, manipulation and order of procedure must be firmly insisted on but rigid uniformity in detail of result is not only undesirable, but positively vicious.[64]

The first section of the manual was dedicated to the instruction of language and the techniques a teacher might employ to spark a child's natural curiosity and interestingly it advocated for the use of large colored pictures as a way to attract the child's attention. The "choice" of pictures with some preliminary instruction, would be left to the discretion of teachers with a caution that,

> [t]he teacher's own carefully cultured taste for the fine engraving or print may well lead her into difficulties at this point. As is entirely natural, children delight in color. The beauty of color is a much simpler and more obvious beauty than that

> of sound, which is, in turn more attractive than the beauty of line, form, and composition which attracts the adult mind in a print. Of course, good colored pictures are difficult to obtain… the teacher… cannot hope to educate the child in taste in one lesson. Let her chose for her lesson, then, the best bit of bright color that she can find, if it only be a calendar. Objects and pictures may by and by, be replaced by materials from memory, experience and imagination.[65]

There appears to be an assumption that all female teachers have "carefully cultured taste," "good taste," and their perspective of "attractive," taking into account "line, form and composition," is the only way to perceive what appears to be worthy of an adult's attention and not of a child's. What is "good" taste? What did "taste" mean in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century? "Taste" was connected to morality and suggests something about how the teacher might envision teaching these children. The child's love of color, deemed a "natural" characteristic, may be an aspect of their "little crudeness of immaturity" that the teacher may endeavor to correct, over time and eventually lead them to appreciate what all adults did. Although rigid uniformity was discouraged, consistency in how art was taken up and instructed was indeed, uniform in its purpose:

> The school work in the manual arts in the primary grades aims to foster and give direction to these dominant tendencies (a child's desire to be active, handle, manipulate, change and experiment with material things) in such a way as to result on the one hand, in a gradual emergence of a feeling for the beautiful, a sense of proportion, and the elements of good taste…the aim of representation should be to have the child acquire the elements of graphic language which may be used to express ideas. The small child is naturally inclined to do this. If left to his own intuition, he will give symbolic forms strikingly similar to those of primitive man…he tries to draw what he knows about the object rather that what he sees at the time of making the drawing. The first problem is to gradually strengthen and make more exact the child's ability to see. Gradually, the children may be led to select and arrange for themselves and to experience more and more the genuine pleasure of creating something beautiful as a result of one's own efforts. The same idea of simplicity, harmony, appropriateness and pleasing effects should play a part in all of the children's work.[66]

In the 1929 Alberta Programme of Studies in Art, teachers were instructed to secure the "best" pictures so that, "children could secure cultural training which enriches the mind

and deepens the emotions. The mere presence of a great work of art in a school room exerts a real influence. We cannot live with a great picture, or a great personality, without being influenced for good."[67]Once again, Ruskin's philosophies surfaced. In this curriculum, the teacher's judgement of "beauty" or inherent ability to know what was tasteful and refined was not left up to chance. Not only were the children instructed in such a way as to encourage their own productions of "beautiful drawing" but they were also instructed in the other aspect of the art curriculum known as "Picture Study." In this section of the manual, the expectations of a teacher and child are explicit:

> Among the aims of picture study in the primary grades the most important are: 1st, to enable the children to recognize and appreciate the beautiful whether it be a beautiful thought, a beautiful action, a beautiful relationship or a beautiful scene. 2nd, to cultivate a taste for the beautiful and to develop the power to choose between that which is and that which is not beautiful. 3rd, to acquaint the children with the best pictures (those which successive generations of people of good taste have agreed upon as beautiful).[68]

Many of the texts utilized in schools in Ontario and North America more broadly were published by the Prang Educational Company of Boston. The Prang books, "emphasized drawing and form study with chapters devoted to painting, crafts, colour theory, and design. Other texts included ones by Casselman (1894), McFaul (1892), and Augsburg (1901). Their [McFaul and Casselman] texts consisted of drawings for students to copy, following a sequence from straight lines, curves, and combinations…"[69] While it appeared that children were learning these skills as a way to produce their own work, Soucy indicates that teachers treated the practice of drawing much the same way as penmanship; with the common thought that both activities utilized the same physical and mental skillset as well as kept students silently occupied so the teacher could work with other students. [70] I located similar texts, including Flora Carpenter's, *Stories Pictures*

*Tell*, published in 1918, that supported the same explanatory methods and outlined scripted lessons, complete with pictures that a teacher could use for an entire year.[71] The Alberta Programme of Studies from 1905-1929 clearly laid out the specific goals as well as specific questions that a teacher could pose to meet the objectives using the photograph, *Two Mothers*, by Debat-Ponson:

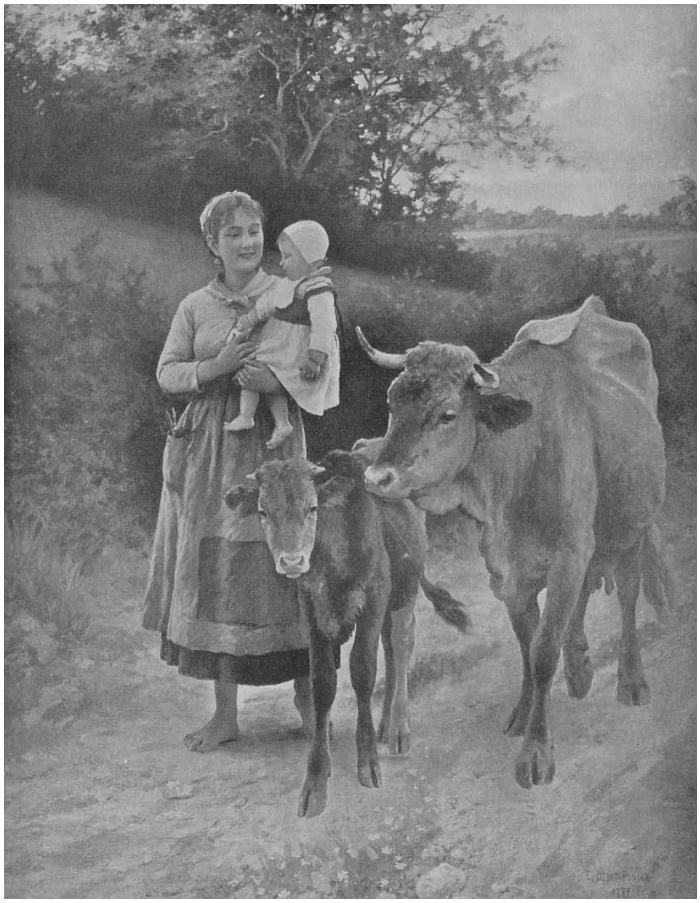

Figure 12: Photograph of *Motherhood* or *Two Mothers* as it is refered to in the Alberta Programme of Studies. There is no other information about the painting except found at, http://gardenofpraise.com/child26.htm

> Arrangement of the Class—the best plan is for the teacher to have a large picture and each child a small one. When this is impossible the large picture will do, if the children are grouped within good seeing distance.

Aim of Lesson—1. To teach the children to appreciate beauty in the picture
2. To help them understand the central feeling of the picture

The Method—First the picture is show, and the children are given a short time to look at it. Then the questions are asked by the teacher, and information given about the habits of the people whose life is depicted in the picture.

The Lesson Outline—Show the picture. What do you see in the picture? Notice how the mother is dressed. What is the difference between her manner of dressing and your mother's?

This picture was drawn by a French artist who lives in a country called France, which is miles and miles from here—far across the sea. It shows how a woman in his country dresses. She wears a short full skirt and goes with her feet bare.

How is the baby dressed? This jacket is made in the color the mother likes best. Don't you think the baby would look pretty in its white dress and bonnet, and a jacket of red, blue, or pink? What time of year is it? How does the picture tell you? What time of day is it? Where are they walking? Where is the mother taking the cow and calf? What have they been doing? When they reach home, what will the mother do with the cow? Who will get some of the milk? Who can tell me the name which might suit this picture?

The real name is "The Two Mothers". Who will come and point out the two mothers? Does the mother love her baby? Does the cow love her calf? What is the mother doing to show that she loves her baby? What is the cow doing to show she loves her calf? Who would like to hold the picture and tell about it?

Review—When the lesson is finished, the picture may be put into the "Picture Gallery" (a place at the back of the room, where all the pictures are kept), and on review day each child can select the one he likes best and tell its story.[72]

A suggested list of images followed the aims of picture study, allowing me to view what successive generations agreed upon as "beautiful" which always referred to what was good or moral; connecting aesthetics to ethics:

Figure 13 : [George Augustus Holmes], *Can't You Talk?* Chromolithograph published by George Stinson, Portland, Maine, 1879.[73]

Figure 14: Charles Burton Barber (1845-1894), *In Disgrace*
Oil on canvas, 37¾ x 24 7/8 inches.[74]

Figure 15: Jean Francois Millet (1814-1875), *Shepherdess with Her Flock*
Oil on canvas, 32 x 39.75 inches.

I found the term, "beautiful" highly problematic as I continued to read the text through my own eyes and wondered how the teacher of the early twentieth century took up the same word. Etymologically, the word beauty can be traced back to classical Latin to refer to a feminine term linking to women and children meaning, "good or well." What notion of beauty was prevalent in Alberta classrooms in the early decades of the twentieth century? Certainly, there would have also been multiple and diverse ways of understanding beauty. Were there any other philosophical frameworks contributing to the appearance of "beauty" in the classrooms of early Alberta? How did the Calgary Board of Education trustees—mostly professional, British-educated men understand "beauty" and its relation to "taste" and "goodness'?

Honoring the hermeneutic process, I returned once again to the transcripts of my conversations with my participants. Their common words of "joy," "masterpiece," "the work," and "beauty" continued to resonate. I could hear Ruskin, Morris, and Arnold in their practice as well as something else. While all of the participants had added greatly to

my understanding of visual displays and their appearance in modern day classrooms, it was Liz's Reggio-inspired teaching philosophy that continued to tug at the threads of the topic. I recalled the importance she placed on the child's opportunity to create their own work as well as the significance of the environment. These ideas were not new but in fact, similar to those views expressed by Jessie Semple, Supervisor of Art in Toronto at the turn of the twentieth century. She introduced,

> [m]odern educational ideas in art …de-emphasizing copybooks, introducing free drawing of objects, drawing from nature, and teaching design, decoration and color work. These ideas and methods…derived from the American arts and crafts movement under the influence of William Morris and John Ruskin…the language that Semple uses in her report indicates a new aesthetic sensitivity: "In all classes good taste has been developed by the judicious selection and artistic arrangement of objects…The aim of the work has been to develop in the pupils habits of observation, to foster good taste in the selection and arrangement of objects for the work…and to cultivate creative imagination in pictorial and decorative work.[75]

Semple's work was considered "progressive" and through her influence, she introduced the *School Arts Book,* which was published by American Henry Turner Bailey and, "emphasized drawing form nature, lettering and the design of objects in metal, leather and wood, revealing a moderate influence of Morris.[76] Toronto schools, under the influence of American educators, exhibited their art work in public exhibitions but Semple was clear that the work was not produced strictly for the exhibition but "culled from the ordinary work done in the classes during the year."[77] It was clear that the nature study movement was also contributing to the educational landscape of art education at the turn of the century. Looking closer, I discovered, "nature study pedagogy focused on the nature that students encountered in their every-day lives...Nature, may be studied with either two objects: to discover new truth for the purpose of increasing the sum of human knowledge; or to put the pupil in a sympathetic attitude towards nature for the purpose of

increasing the joy of living."[78] Armitage explains that "sympathy" in the nature study context described a symbiotic relationship between the natural world and the human. He traces this understanding from,

> …Scottish commonsense philosophers who believed that ethics were grounded in the possibility of imagining the feeling of others. John Ruskin, explained that "sympathy" is the 'imaginative understanding of the natures of others, and the power of putting ourselves in their place, [it] is the faculty on which virtues depend. Sympathy could increase happiness and move people to broaden their moral concern to include nonhuman nature….Nature study combated [the destruction of the natural world] by educating the child that he "owes something of the world around him… the key to living with nature rather than destroying it was the development of sympathy.[79]

Henry Bailey, the Editor of, *The School Arts Book* magazine, contributed greatly to the development of the school arts movement. He used his influence to, "champion the aesthetic lessons derived from the close observation of nature. He insisted that children encounter directly the objects they represented in art. Thus, he encouraged teachers to bring nature into the classroom… "the day cannot be far", wrote Bailey, "when every school-room shall have beautiful pictures upon its walls, sculpture in its halls, and, as material for constant reference and inspiration, photographs of the master pieces…"[80]

I could not help but hear the current day practices of Reggio-inspired philosophy in Bailey's directions to turn of the century teachers and yet, no nod to this lineage had been made by Liz. Sally Gregory Kohlstedt also speaks about the insurgence and popularity of nature study onto the North American educational landscape. He notes,

> [i]t was the successful combination of broad cultural enthusiasm, changing educational theory, and a well-articulated program that catalyzed the surprisingly rapid introduction of nature study into public schools in 1890's. The introduction of "Nature Study" as a new curriculum proved both a challenge and an opportunity for individual teachers. It required more initiative and extra effort, but nature study also allowed then to be innovative, particularly attracting those who

> found perfunctory lessons on entomology and other specialized subjects ineffective.[81]

I wondered what direction teachers were given as to how to best teach this new curriculum. Was there a prescribed set of steps as I had found for picture study for nature study? One 1912 British text, *The Teachers' Encyclopaedia of Theory, Method and Practice of Education* suggested,

> Advice as to Method—Avoid attempting to do too much at once—let each lesson have a definite central point. Think out beforehand the kind of materials that will most effectively illustrate it from different sides, but avoid falling into the common mistake of overdoing the illustrations. And, above all, refrain as far as possible from giving direct verbal information. Let the objects themselves provide the material for *information*…nothing is less conducive to real education than the sort of teaching which will save a person the trouble of finding and thinking things out for himself. Doubtless the pupil may appear to have covered more ground by being "taught" in this manner, but all the same he will not really have been spending his money for that which is not bread, and his labor for that which satisfieth not. The only kind of education worthy of the name is that which will train the faculties of the pupil so that he may learn not only now to help himself to knowledge, but also how to use it when acquired. And in capable hands there are few educational instruments that can surpass or even equal Nature Study for this purpose.[82]

Again, I found myself connecting the popularity of the Reggio-inspired philosophy and its appearance in Calgary schools in little over a decade ago. The "child-centered" approach that Reggio-inspired practice is focused on appeared as well in nature study over one hundred years before, "reforming educators emphasized the importance of activating each child's intrinsic powers of observation and reason, capacities that they felt were stifled in a traditional classroom that required memorization of knowledge provided by others…A child-centered approach that stressed the importance of self-expression, using writing, drawing, modeling, and oral presentations.[83] While Reggio-inspired philosophy may acknowledge a historical lineage of the dominant discourse of

Montessori, Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky, there is still an absence of the educators beyond those named by Dahlberg and others. What does it mean not to name the dominant practices in Canada, specifically nature and object study? How might pedagogues change if we had a deeper historical understanding of the practices we engage in?

Marcus Boon recently commented on the practice of copying in our present-day context. He notes, "copying is a matter of presenting and producing something in a manner which is typical of something else. All copies are made—they are produced—and the making involves an attempt to turn something into something else, so that that which is produced is now "like" something else…Heidegger responds: "Making and manufacturing… mean to bring the outward appearance to show itself in something else"… Outward appearance is crucial here, for "in outward appearance, whatever it is that something which encounters us 'is,' shows itself." It is outward appearance that makes something "like" something else; but more profoundly, it is in outward appearance that the idea, the essence of something, shows itself."[84] Although contemporary practices of documentation and natural objects in the classroom seem to point to recent explorations, I wonder if the Reggio-inspired philosophy appears to be a "copy" of practice located in school arts movements in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ruskin's interwoven terms of "labor" and "work" makes me think of the way my participants described the contents of the visual displays in their classrooms and hallways. Perhaps it was 'joy in labor" that was being celebrated in the visual displays—both from the perspective of students and teachers—a representational manifestation of their work ethic and that of the children. The founder of the Reggio-

Emilio schools, Loris Malaguzzi declared, "Nothing, without joy," as the precept of the philosophy.[85] Liz's reference to "joy" from Malaguzzi finds its historical evocation in Ruskin and Morris.

Picture-Study seems to fade from view with the on-slaught of the Enterprise curriculum of the 1930's. In its place, I found books that explicitly illustrate for the teacher how to create interesting visual displays and exhibits in the classroom. I found one 1962 text authored by Kate Coplan entitled, *Poster Ideas and Bulletin Board Techniques: For Libraries and School,* found when I was called to assist a young teacher cleaning out an old art storage room in an older school. Part of the original collection of the school from its inception in 1963, the worn cover and tagged pages indicated a great deal of use over its forty year residence in the building. As I read the Preface, written by Robert Iglehart, a professor of art and chairman of the Department of Art at the University of Michigan, I saw the name Prang; the company who created prints for the earlier Picture-Study movement. Coplan noted the value of visual and audio materials in the classrooms however she added,

> An area of visual education… is the teacher's own. Professionally prepared materials can help present information and stimulation, but the work of a particular group of children—their responses and expressions—often needs to be organized as a display for the benefits of the class or school. And there are the many interests and concerns of the class for which no professional materials exist, and where the teacher is the best available expert. We have all come to expect that the competent teacher will be able to prepare a display, hang an exhibition, decorate a room…teachers should be able to do these things; they are in the reach of anyone, but we do not typically offer much help or practice developing such skills. As a result, teachers feel insecure in relation to this area of the teaching job, and neglect it altogether although it is educationally important that we use them adequately. We are still, as Whitehead wrote almost a quarter of a century ago, 'too exclusively bookish in our routine.' The good classroom should have its own quality and its own life; it's the child's immediate world. That is why it should be made not only comfortable and healthful, but vivid and stimulating. That part of a

> child's life which is lived in school should be no less real and should develop values no less real, than his life after the school day is over.[86]

Coplan's words direct the teacher back to the place where my participants found themselves, fifty years later. The teacher is "expected" to "know" how to instinctually create a visual display but as my own participants voiced, they may feel "insecure." She references the "good" classroom but Coplan too does not acknowledge why a "good" classroom should have "its own life." The historic traditions of Ruskin and Morris are forgotten to her yet she advocates for a place that will add to a child's life and assist them in developing values that will serve them well as they leave the schoolroom. Once again, there is importance placed in the appearances of visual displays without the understanding that they are enmeshed in a long tradition that teachers have been implicated by and in.

**Notes**

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[4] Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 31.
[5] Stephen Schwartz, "Wonderful," In, *Wicked* (New York: Universal Pictures, 2003).
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[7] Timothy J. Stanley, "Nationalist Histories and Multiethnic Classrooms," *Education Canada* 42, no. 3 (2002): 3.
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[14] Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "The Eye is a Nobler Organ: Ruskin and American Art Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education,* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 1984,): 60.
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[18] J. George Hodgins, *School Room Decoration,*14.
[19] Boston Public School Art League, *Notes and Suggestions on School-Room Decoration* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1898), 5.
[20] John Ruskin, *"A Joy for Ever"; (and its price in the market) Being The Substance (With Additions) of Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art. Delivered at Manchester, July 10 and 13, 1857,* 125-128.
[21] Robert Lanning, "On Developing 'Representations from Presentations'; Observing the Laws of the Natural and Social Worlds," *Journal of Historical Sociology,* 4, no. 4 (December, 1991):365.
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[23] Ibid., 9.
[24] Ibid., 9.
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[27] Ibid., 81.
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[29] Ibid., 81
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[32] Board Minutes, CBE, CBE Archival Records, 11 December, 1917, p.54.
[33] Board Minutes, CBE, CBE Archival Records, 14 May, 1912, p. 27B
[34] Ibid., p. 29.
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[41] James Riddel, "On the Teaching of Drawing," vol 1 of *The Teachers Encyclopaedia of the Theory, Method and Practice of Education,* ed., A.P. Laurie (London: Caxton Publishing, 1912), 207.
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[57] J. George Hodgins, *School Room Decoration: An Address to Canadian Historical Societies*, Toronto, 1901, 6.
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[61] John Ruskin, *"A Joy for Ever"; (and its price in the market) Being The Substance (With Additions) of Two Lectures on the Political Economy of Art. Delivered at Manchester, July 10 and 13, 1857* (London: Ballantyne Press, 1904), 125-128.
[62] Ibid., 170.
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[70] D. Soucy, *Waves: Approaches to Art Education 1887-1987*, Exhibition Catalouge. Halifax, NS: Anna Leonowens Gallery.
[71] Flora Carpenter, *Stories Pictures Tell* (Chicago: Rand and McNally, 1918).
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[73] Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (USA: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 173. Grier notes that at the time this print was published, copyright laws were so weak that Stinson could publish *Can't you Talk?* without credit to the painter. He was a long-lived but obscure artist named George Augustus Holmes, who was active in Britain between 1852-1911. It is uncertain how the print ended up in the United States. The original painting was sold by the Lady Laver Gallery in Liverpool, England in 1944 to an unknown buyer. The present whereabouts of the original work is unknown.
[74] The image of the Victorian portrait was accessed at www.christies.com as the painting was going to auction from a private collector.

[75] Harold Pearse, "The Dawn of the Twentieth Century: Art Education in Nova Scotia, Ontario, and British Columbia," *From Drawing to Visual Culture,* 114.
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[77] Ibid.
[78] Kevin Armitage, *The Nature Study Movement: the Forgotten Popularizer of America's Conservation Ethic* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 1-3.
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[85] Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini, and George Forman, *The Hundred Languages of Children* (US: Ablex Publishing, 1998).
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# CHAPTER SEVEN

# DRAWING TO A CLOSE: ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

## So, What am I to Make of This?

Figure 16: *Bee a Good Citizen*, Photo courtesy of the author.

I arrived as a new school administrator in May, 2008. The visual display shown above [figure 16] had been constructed on the wall just across the hall from the office. It greeted every visitor who entered the front door of the building and was the last thing one saw as they exited the front office. It was different from other displays in the schools in that no student work was displayed nor was there any explanation as to its intent. In those first few months, no one mentioned the visual display at all. Teachers, children, and parents all walked past the bulletin board on a daily basis but no one seemed to notice it or if they did, didn't mention or talk about it. By October of the following school year, I

knew that I would have to ask about how this visual display came to be. I spoke with my colleagues who dismissed my query with muffled, "I don't know, 'Bee a good citizen,' seems obvious enough," to "isn't it great! It really speaks to our commitment to character education." Someone noted, "I think the parent council put it up a few years ago, but who really knows." Like the snowmen, I wondered about this particular display. Why was it here? What was it signaling? Why did I wonder about it? I left up the display for a few more months to see if anyone would engage in conversation with me about it, but in spite of my initial attempts, nothing else was said, nor did they ask where the "bees" had gone once I dismantled the piece to free up the bulletin board for the art club. I have come to understand that prior to this research; I would have most likely not noticed anything in particular about the visual display. In not noticing, I would be as many are in schools; oblivious to the messages that such displays portray. Returning to my topic of visual displays in elementary schools I ask whose beliefs and values are displayed? To whom are they addressed and for what end? How do we come to see them? What do they mean?

I have pursued this topic down many paths and it has unfolded in particular ways, bumping up against pedagogy, teacher identity, curriculum theory, history of curriculum, art history, and visual culture. In part, I wanted to understand how the ideologies, values and beliefs attached to visual displays had shaped our current work in Calgary elementary schools. It appeared to me and the participants that something has been interrupted and for moments, there has been a glimpse into the topic of visual displays. All teachers share a similar experience in having to create visual displays and it is as David Jardine suggests something that we as teachers understand, "her tale is familiar, familial, something with

which we already have deep, unvoiced kinship. In the face of this undeniable sense of kinship and understanding…how are we to do justice to this particular time and place?"[1] The familiarity in the story is not one that needs to be repeated over and over for it to have merit, but rather, as Gadamer noted, "the 'fecundity' of the individual case…the individual case on which judgment works is ever simply a case; it is not exhausted by a particular example of a universal law or concept. Rather, it is always an 'individual case,' and it is significant that we call it a special case, because the rule does not comprehend it."[2] The "fecundity" of visual displays may be that,

> [o]ur historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist; this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have a part. Modern historical research itself is not only research, but the handing down of tradition. We do not see it in terms of progress and verified results; in it we have, as it were, a new experience of history whenever the past resounds in a new voice.[3]

Historians "may bring to the surface of historical knowledge aspects of the past previously deemed irrelevant and thus insignificant… [history] can offer the possibility of appreciating aspects of the past not only as filtered through contemporary eyes but also as signifying what these particular pasts now mean to contemporary actors."[4]

There appears to be a tradition of visual displays in elementary schools that includes images produced by children as well as "teacher displayed" images that are used to provoke certain qualities in children in viewing them. Are the images that are displayed, innocent, or do they have something to say? Because of the "kinship" that images that appear have to visual culture and art history, I might liken them to the "work of art" of which Gadamer speaks.

> Is it really the case that a work of art, which comes out of the past or alien life-world and is transferred into our historically educated world, becomes nothing more of what it originally had to say? 'To say something',' 'To have something to say'—Is the aesthetic quality of formation only the condition for the fact that the work bears its meaning within itself and has something to say to us? In any case, when we say that the work of art *says* something to us and that it thus belongs to the matrix of things we have to understand, our assertion is not a metaphor, but has a valid and demonstrable meaning…According to its original definition, hermeneutics is the art of clarifying and mediating our own effort of interpretation what is said by persons we encounter in tradition. Hermeneutics operates wherever what is said is not immediately intelligible. [5]

There is also a historic tradition of visual displays in elementary schools that has been "spoken" in this thesis that seems to be handed down to teachers for a variety of purposes. In our conversations, the teachers and I were engaged in a process of coming to an understanding about the topic. Their willingness to speak and ponder about their experience of visual displays allowed me to understand not, "the particular individual but what he says."[6] I was able to perhaps find out more about what was true of the subject.

> At any rate, 'it speaks' not only as the remnants of the past speak to the historical investigator or as do historical documents that render something permanent. What we are calling the language of the work of art, for the sake of which the work is preserved and handed on, is the language the work of art speaks, whether it is linguistic in nature or not. The work of art says something to the historian: it says something to each person as if it were said especially to him, as something present and contemporaneous. Thus our task is to understand the meaning of what it says and to make it clear to ourselves and others. Even the nonlinguistic work of art, therefore falls within the province understanding of each person of the proper task of hermeneutics. It must be integrated into the self-understanding of each person.[7]

How had our conversations allowed me and the participants to view the topic? What had happened to our "horizons of understandings" since we had spoken?

Aimee contacted me by email early that next fall. She had entered her classroom in August and remembering what she and I had talked about, she took everything down. Studying the blank canvas of the white walls, she shared with me that she resisted the

urge to “put stuff up” instead leaving the walls empty until her students and her could agree on what should appear on them. She wrote, “I am eagerly waiting the students arrival tomorrow and wonder what they will think of the blank walls. I can’t wait to see what we do with them.” Later, she shared with me that the students thought “she was new” because there was nothing on the walls. That was very interesting to me that they equated empty walls with a teacher new to the school, suggesting that the “not new” teacher would be expected to have something there? They decided to “do some art” so they could have “something to see.” She also wanted to see what would happen if she did not put the alphabet line back up on the wall, even though she was now teaching a grade one-two class. She noted that no one, including the students, colleagues or parents have missed the alphabet line or said anything about its absence. She and I wonder if perhaps the alphabet line was something that one expected to see in a primary classroom so they didn’t really think about looking for it. Aimee and I are also questioning the value of such images and if the students even used the alphabet line at all. Aimee also shared with me that because of our conversations, she was inspired to begin work on a Master’s degree in English Language Learning. She is often frustrated by the “leveling off” of a child’s language ability and is concerned how they do academically as they transition from elementary to secondary school to the “real world.” We continue to talk about her walls and her upcoming research on a regular basis.

I had the privilege of being asked to come to Erika’s classroom not long after our final conversations. She had been integrating the work of Leonardo DaVinci in her grade one classroom and knew of my fascination with the Mona Lisa. She invited me to come “in costume”—a performance I regularly enacted as the fine arts specialist.

Figure 17: Author as the Mona Lisa. Photo courtesy of Erika.

I arrived in full persona and enjoyed spending the afternoon reading, talking and drawing with the children, who were eager to share their sketchbooks with me. I noticed that there were many "artworks in process" up on the wall in Erika's classroom. Erika told me that she began thinking differently about what she displayed in her classroom, focusing not on what was there but why it was there. She recently emailed me to let me know that the apple border had finally come down; its original purpose now long forgotten.

Liz and I have also had several conversations since our last research conversation. She has shared with me that our conversations have really enlightened her perspective on her current Reggio-inspired philosophy and she has begun to question more deeply her practice in this area. Fueled by her own interest in graduate work and inspired by our conversations, Liz has decided to pursue a Master's in Education at the University of Calgary, hoping to learn more about the historical significance of nature study, object study and any other movements that may have informed her current practice.

I think for all of my participants, they have each benefited from an enhanced understanding of their own personal and professional reflections of visual displays in their classroom as a result of this work. I believe that they will not be able to "look" at a visual display without our questions coming to mind. I also believe that because of our conversations, they will ask, more consciously, about the visual displays in not only their own schools but perhaps be able to influence a wider audience through their own graduate work. Our conversations also opened up another horizon about how teachers are cast or seen in particular ways as archetypes of "caring teacher," and "survivor." These narratives appear to frame teacher practice in particular ways and suggest another topic of study that, although interesting, I only pursued as it enhanced the topic of visual displays.

How did the visual displays speak to my own shifting of horizon of understanding? As this topic has unfolded in the past many months, I have found it not only on the pages of this work but also appearing in the novels and books that I read. I saw the topic of visual displays in the novel, *Voyager,*

> Bree had it; the knack of objects… scarcely an inch of wall space showed between the posters, photographs, and other impediments on the walls. Some people have a way of arranging everything about them, so the object takes on not only their own meaning and a relationship to other things displayed with them, but something more besides—and indefinable aura that belongs as much to their invisible owner as to the object themselves.[8]

I wondered if this was something else that had been revealed about the topic that I had not seen before. Historically, it is clear that there was an intentionality by the mostly female teachers to arrange visual objects in such a way as to elicit a certain feeling and purpose; namely, the promotion of the qualities of good citizenship, taste and moral behavior. Unlike my "bees" in the cartoonish image of my own school, teachers of the past seemed to know that there was an intentionality and a purpose of what went on the

walls and yet those images did not proclaim the message as specifically of my own and yet, the reason for why they created them, was clear. Might there still linger a similar purpose for the displays that has been silenced or forgotten by today's teachers?

Madeline Grumet suggests that the function of art is to "reorganize the experience so it is perceived freshly. At the very least, the painting, the poem, or the play cleanses a familiar scene; washing away the film of habit and dust collected over time so that it seen anew. When it is most radical, the work of art draws the viewer to it, engaging expectations, memories, recognitions, and simultaneously interrupts the viewer's customary response, contradicting expectations with new possibilities, violating memories, displacing recognition with estrangement."[9] I heard the stories of visual displays as I had not before; I was pulled into them as they came alive with meaning. Their stories becoming clearer than before, "[a] story places something almost tangible before our eyes…something is suddenly there. What it is, that here is 'here', if of course, unsayable. But at the same time this means that everything that is here in such a way will represent itself differently in everyone, and yet will be the same."[10] I have considered the topic of visual displays and have been shown that something in historic images that I did not expect and then was suddenly there,

Figure 18: Morning in the Kindergarten, 1912. United Kingdom. Photo from, *The Teachers Encyclopedia,* (London: Caxton Publishing Company, 1912), 130.

Figure 19: Occupational Groups, 1912. United Kingdom. Photo from, *The Teachers Encyclopedia,* (London: Caxton Publishing Company, 1912), 150.

Classroom walls were not empty. The practice of "putting up" children's work along with beautiful pieces of art is not just a contemporary pedagogical act. Teachers were assumed to have "good taste," and then given some guidance as to what, how and why to create the visual displays that appeared in their classrooms. Others in authority, including School Board Trustees and administrators seem to claim the outer hallways and dictate what images would be displayed. What about current educators? Certainly, I heard the authority of school administrators to "control" to some degree what visual displays in the hallways should look like but I still did not hear why they wanted them to appear that way. I felt the need to answer that question more than ever before; it was no longer alright to simply accept the "bees" on the wall, passing by them and not thinking about the implications of what they might mean. Likewise, I heard the voices of today's teachers, watching each other to see what was displayed but again, not questioning the motives behind it. I have come to understand that teachers have no idea that when they create visual displays, they are enacting the notions of joy, beauty, and labor that cultural theorist John Ruskin embraced more than a century ago. They are unaware that they are in fact, critically tracing the historic threads of "object-study," "nature study," the school-decoration movement and picture-study as they speak to the current practices of visual displays in today's schools. Understanding that "images speak" is an important notion for the twenty-first century educator yet is rarely discussed or taken up critically. Thus, my exploration into the meaning and importance of the topic of visual displays in elementary schools opens up the possibility for new understandings of visuality in education. It was such conversations with my own staff in the fall, 2011 the inspired the following poem:

**The topic of the giant blue bulletin board that dominates the main hallway of the school was once again on the agenda at the staff meeting…fall, 2011.**

Obligation

Pretty Pictures

Decorate the hollow spaces

Disguise/cover the vagueness of the white wall

With something more important

Bright

Handy

Informative

Natural

Words go round and round in the staff meeting

So caught up/in the technical of just

wantingtofillthatboardandgetitoffourplatesarewestilltalkingaboutthiswhyarewestilltalkingaboutthis!

Why are we displaying in the first place?

What are we supposed to see once we are done?

Why is no one asking these questions?

My frustration was clearly evident in the never-ending attempts to have teachers see beyond "the technical" practice of visual displays. Perhaps, this advice from *The School Arts,* 1905, can shed some light on the tradition,

> Of course we all know that there are some who maintain good decorative arrangement to be all a matter of feeling. So it is, provided one knows how he ought to feel! Good taste is the result of guided experience. The guiding may come through an inherited tendency, through familiarity with fine things and through knowledge of principles. Happy is the man thus granted. As teachers, our only topic is that which can be taught, namely, the principles. If there are no

> principles to teach, there is nothing to teach. Nothing is left to us but to be lost in wonder, love and praise, and the dear children must be left to flounder on.[11]

And so, I am left to think about the many questions that have opened up as a result of this thesis and the stretching of my own horizon of understanding. Returning to the "whatness" of visual culture as Roeder, describes, "visual culture is what is seen… [she] observes that what changes over time is what is seen and what is seen results from how everybody's doing everything. What is seen depends on what there is to see and how we look at it."[12] What changed over time was how teachers have paid attention to the topic of visual displays and how they have looked at them. Greene writes,

> [w]e need to recognize that the events that make up aesthetic experiences are events that occur within and by means of the transactions with our environment that situate us in time and space…Breaking through the frames of presuppositions and conventions, we are enabled to recapture the processes of our becoming…Made aware of ourselves as questioners, as meaning makers, as persons engaged in constructing and reconstructing realities with those around us, we may communicate to students the notion that reality is multiple perspectives and that the construction of it is never complete, there is always more.[13]

I have enjoyed the reaction that I have received when colleagues have asked about my topic. They have been quick to tell me about "how" their own school walls appear and are somewhat puzzled when asked how the "how" came to be that way. As of yet, no one has asked "why" the walls look particular ways.

I cannot accept that the images that appear on the walls of today's classrooms are any different than those that have always appeared. The difference seems to be in how the images have been "seen" or in some cases, "not seen" by those who construct them. How do we interrupt the practice of simply "hanging things up" regardless of pedagogical reasoning, and ask the question how visual displays may speak to what we *value* culturally, socially, historically and politically?

My research has seeped into aspects of my work as a school administrator and I cannot leave the walls alone in silence any longer. I need to see the constructed world of visual displays to "orientate" myself as Stephen Hall describes, "orientating or crashing through the larger landscapes of memory and experience and knowledge, trying to get a fix on where we are in a multitude of landscapes that together compose the grander scheme of things. Orientating begins with geography, but it reflects a need of the conscious, self-aware organism for a kind of transcendent orientation that asks not just where am I, but where do I fit in this landscape? Where have I been? Where shall I go?"[14] As a current school administrator, I have come to understand that I am helping to shape the identity of a teacher by what I ask them or not ask them to display. This cannot be done without their voices in the midst of the questions. I need to do this by engaging in conversations with them about why a visual display should appear and together, peel back the layers of the multiple disciplines that speak within this topic. I need to understand with them why the walls in our school appear the way that they do and what is voiced about our pedagogical practices that are actually happening versus what we think others such as parents and colleagues want to see.

In my multiple interactions with school administrators, I know that they most of them embrace an interdisciplinary theory of curriculum that balances aspects of curriculum as "planned" or "lived" in the classrooms. Yet, when it comes to "showing" this philosophy in practice, there appears to be less blurring of the lines between these curriculum spaces and what emerges is a black and white answer to what is "right" or "wrong" to display. Understanding how curriculum is enacted as "planned" or "lived" is one that is often lost in the inertia of the technical demands of schooling. While I want to

be a school administrator that dwells in the lived possibility of curriculum, I understand the pressure that teachers feel, and that is difficult to ease for them, to be too caught up in and by the technical aspects of teaching. There needs to be a space between the construction of curriculum theory in schools that will allow all stakeholders to have their schools "look" a particular way because they understand and embrace a particular notion of visuality rather than simply "doing them" without questioning what these practices actually mean. I think that this is why teachers have been led to believe that hanging up commercial borders, for example, is not acceptable while draping fabric is. There are no black and white rules in constructing visual displays; only remnants of historical practices that have gone unnoticed for too long. I would caution school administrators to not dictate the ways the walls of schools should look without taking up particular philosophies through all lenses. Educators need to understand the intentionality of visual displays in that they play a key role in how a school's pedagogy is played out. Visual displays are value-laden and as such it is imperative that educators ask questions of philosophical practice rather than just subscribing to all aspects of that philosophy and dismissing any practice that appears to be in conflict as inappropriate.

What about the role of visual displays in the ever-increasing importance of accountability in schools? There needs to be a place in the rich conversation occurring between school administrators and teachers as they purposefully plan for learning opportunities that will maximize student success that includes visual displays. Too much of what is measured in schools is reduced to a number derived from a standardized test rather than looking deeply at the narrative of what is actually occurring in the classrooms. Where is the student voice in the work on the walls and who/how is it determined what

appears there? What is the opportunity to dialogue between learner-teacher-administrator? I think that student voice continues to be silenced in this discussion. I once asked students in my building what they believed should appear on the school walls and they overwhelming told me, "Anything about me… my work, my photos… I want to see myself on the walls." The opportunities to include the student voice in the work on the walls opens up the possibility that what is displayed may be more authentic and speak to what is worth measuring. I continue to ruminate over how students might be more authentically involved in this process. I ask questions of my staff that have surfaced from this work and together we are endeavoring to ask "why" of the walls rather than only asking "how" the walls should be decorated. As a recently appointed adjunct professor teaching curriculum theory courses in a graduate program at an American university, I have included visual culture as an integral part of my work with my students who are aspiring school administrators. In light of ever-increasing access of digital images in classrooms, it is imperative that we become more aware of the meanings evoked by these images, either hidden in plain sight or spoken of specifically, as ways of addressing the world around us. How has the viewer's eye, be it the child, the teacher, the parent, or the administrator been directed to "see" what appears on the walls in particular ways? I was interested in understanding what three elementary teachers "made" of visual displays and how their insights assisted me in opening up the meaning of the visual displays. Gillian Rose claims that the seeing of an image always intersects with the social context of its viewing and the visualities its spectators bring to their viewing.[15] In this regard, visual displays in elementary schools are critical tools in constructing, disseminating,

negotiating, and representing knowledge and cannot be dismissed as merely pretty pictures on the wall.

Henri Meschonnic once said, "Poetry turns everything into life… a listening, an awakening that passes through us, the rhythm that knows us and that we do not know… the movement that no word is supposed to be able to say." I will return to the beginning as a way to end with my poem,

**Beginning at the Beginning**

**With apologies to Robert Frost**[16]

Sitting in the parking lot melting in the June sun
Robert Frost's voice whispering
Not of apple blossoms
But of diverging roads.
The path of a high school assistant principal
or the one of a PhD Student.
I knew what to expect in taking the first
A quiet light that could burn, comfortably.
But did not want to think
Of how I would explain the empty barrels
To the 17 year girl
who recorded #37 on the list of 100 things to do
before she pointed her ladder through the branches up to heaven.
Two roads diverged
And I took the one less traveled by
And I know

It has made a difference.

I can feel the cold stare of the snowmen on the wall and see the edges of the display begin to crack open, peeling back the layers of visual displays in classroom; no longer content to merely look out, waiting to be noticed because I have been asked to consider the walls.

**Notes**

[1] David Jardine, "The Fecundity of the Individual Case: Considerations of the Pedagogic Heart of Interpretive Work," *Journal of Philosophy of Education,* 26, no. 1 (1992): 51.
[2]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum Press, 2004), 34.
[3] Ibid., 285.
[4] Stephane Levesque, "What is Important in the Past?—Historical Significance," in *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 51.
[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1976), 97-98
[6] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 387.
[7] Ibid., 100.
[8] Diane Gabaldon, *Voyager* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, e-version released December 17, 2010), 4908.
[9] Madeleine Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 81.
[10] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 319.
[11] Henry Turner Bailey, "Editorial," *The School Arts Book: A Monthly Magazine to those interested in Drawing and the Allied Arts,* 5, no. 2, (Oct, 1905): 138.
[12] George Roeder, "Filling in the Picture: Visual Culture," *Reviews in American History,* 26, no. 1 (March, 1998): 275.
[13] Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 131.
[14] Stephen Hall, "I, Mercator," in *You are Here, Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination,* (ed) Katherine Harmon (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004, 15.
[15] Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (London: Sage Publishers, 2001), 15.
[16] I have referenced two of Frost's most known works, "After Apple-Picking" (1915) and "The Road Not Taken" (1920).

# EPILOGUE

We think we speak
Our own words
and exist
In our bodies
But like the pawn
On a chess board
Or the queen
Or the bishop
Each move we take
Opens another[1]

[1] Melissa Freeman, "Between Eye and Eye Stretches an Interminable Landscape": The Challenge of Philosophical Hermeneutics," *Qualitative Inquiry,* 7, (2001): 657.

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