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Voices: Developing a Studio-based Pedagogy for Those Living in the Margins of Society Due to Poverty

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Voices: Developing a Studio-based Pedagogy for Those Living in the Margins of Society Due
to Poverty

By

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

In effort to find more effective ways for facilitators to help a marginalized population, I brought a studio into a traditional educational context at a community health and education centre. The studio offered space, time and materials for participants to reflect on and connect to the lessons presented in the program. The studio offered expression in any of the languages of learning, including the poetic, scientific, mathematical or verbal.

In co-researching this project, the participants and I assessed the effectiveness of the studio and its facilitators. We found the studio to be vital to learning and communication, creative and mental growth. The participants found their unique voice through the studio work, and then combined those voices to bring forward their expertise. We presented a strong argument for the inclusion of studio in an educational context. As I present their argument in this paper, encouraging the reader to listen, their voices are further validated. They have the opportunity to be included in society's conversations and take a responsible role.

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DEDICATION

sweet dreams Mom

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INTRODUCTION

I heard an Aboriginal man speak at the university the other day. His name was Isstoi'soowa, or Christopher Scout. He said, "We cannot remove ourselves from the world in order to find it" (Scout, 2013). He explained how the oral story was his people's tradition of teaching and learning. He began with his story and used this to impart his research ideas and philosophies about the importance of stories. I will follow Scout's example. I will tell a story within stories. These stories were initiated by my asking the question, how can facilitators more effectively help those living in the margins of society due to poverty and the repercussions of that condition. With that I brought a studio into an educational context at a local community health and education organization. The pivotal story told here is of how seven women and myself attended that studio and found our voice in a society by realizing and presenting our views on the effectiveness of the studio in that context. The concept of this particular studio presents a place and time that allows the individual to pursue the creative practice of self-instigative development of original thought and problem resolution. It further encourages the generation of these understandings through analytic development facilitated by collaborative research and experimentation (Kelly, 2012).

I will begin with my story. I will locate myself as an artist and facilitator to help the reader understand whom I am to do this project and how I came to work with these seven women. I will provide background of what I saw and why I did what I did. This story will be woven through the philosophical understandings gained through readings and discussions, and practices of the organizations, programs and exemplary people with which I worked. A

deeper discussion of methodologies will unfold as the story develops of who was involved and what happened.

The story central to the project, will then be told by the participants. These are the verbatim transcripts taken from our discussions of how effective the studio was in the educational context. These transcripts were edited by the participants on the final days of our meetings in order to more clearly and concisely present their argument. The participants present their own analysis and distinguish themselves. I present this story before my analysis in order to open the conversation up to the reader, allowing you to develop your own understandings of what happened, and engage in the dialogue with your own voice. The reader is asked to listen with a sensitive ear, mind and heart.

I, then, present the story of what I learned from the discussions. My analysis is supported by field notes, interviews taken with other facilitators, and studio work produced by the participants. These understandings are not comprehensive or complete. They can change with the day. They are only a part of the conversation. In the final chapter I continue with reflections to further engage the reader and the participants. This thesis is “closer in function to deep conversation and insightful dialogue than error-free conclusions” (Eisner, 2008, p.7).

I have presented these stories in a qualitative diacritical hermeneutic phenomenological manner (Kearney, 2011) for a wealth of intertwined reasons. Firstly, people are not objects or numbers. They cannot be produced to suit the project or slotted into quantified charts. This is supported by following the living movement of contemporary phenomenology which follows no system or school, but rather adapts to the work at hand to come closer to understanding, with intentionality, the meaning and being of beings in the world (Audi, 2009).

These stories shall be presented in a dia-critical conversation of unique and divergent views, with plural meanings accepted in their variance, recognizing the polysemy of language and life (Kearney, 2011). Opening a critical dialogue allows a more profound understanding of the importance of the studio for the women, myself, the reader and out to the rest of the life-world. The criticality allows the unique voice of the individual to be heard in its own right. It crosses social barriers as well as temporal barriers, inviting all to participate, including the works of scholars through the ages. These voices should not be assimilated and united as one, but recognize each person as “another self bearing universal rights and responsibilities” (Gilham, 2011, p.114). They shall be woven into a tapestry that in all its busy elaboration, may bring us closer to an understanding of us in the world. The more voices that are included in this study, the more depth, perspective, and complexity are brought to bear on how we view and understand the world (Jardine, 2013).

Contemporary hermeneutics, a philosophy of interpretation and explanation, embodies the understanding that the social world is a subjective construction of a group of people. It embraces the presentation of these stories, and incites us to gain a more complete understanding by encouraging us to listen and interpret the stories with all our senses. It readily supports the criteriological discrimination on which we chose to base our understandings and judgments, as it is not about being right but rather about finding an interpretation that is true about something (Moules, 2002). Ultimately, what matters is how we listen to what the participants had to say. The participants found their voice in studio, developed and strengthened that voice through participation in the discussions, but it is in the act of being heard that they will find their voice in society.

CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATIONAL STONES—BUILDING A RESEARCH PROJECT

The research approach I have chosen may appear to be autobiographical. “I” appears to be predominant in this work. Much of the information presented is filtered through the researcher that includes the biases I bring with me. However, by wrapping my stories around the verbatim transcripts of the participants, I am part of the many voices presented. I am a part of the diacritical conversation. The stories facilitate examining and understanding the experiences of the researcher and the people involved in the study (McNiff, 2008, p. 29). Differing from autobiography and auto-ethnography, engaging the subjective with strong reflexive elements, I am not the focus or subject of this study, but a part of the conversation.

Stories have a rich tradition of catching our attention. They draw us in to entertain different ideas. They allow us to play with different understandings that may ring true and ultimately be useful in another situation. We can imagine and re-imagine ourselves through stories. This use of words can transport us to a different place, an open space where time is elastic and new dreams can take shape. Words as an artistic rendering are evocative, “generating questions or raising awareness of complex subtleties that matter” (Eisner, 2008, p. 7). They engage us intellectually as well as emotionally. It is the meeting of mind and body, giving a more full understanding of the situation at hand. “The arts in research promote a form of understanding that is derived or evoked through empathic experiences” (Eisner, 2008, p. 7). Empathy can provide deep insight into what others are experiencing. “The ability to empathize with others is a way of understanding the character of their experience that in some ways, is the first avenue to compassion” (Eisner, 2008, p. 11).

Thomas King said we imagine ourselves and the world through stories; they are the cornerstones of culture. “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (King, 2008, p. 14).

The stories in this inquiry consequently reach out to a wider audience, “making scholarship accessible” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p.59) and advancing knowledge. They connect the participants to educators, policy makers, politicians, and other key decision makers. They invite the broader community to participate and help invent new ways to manage the problem at hand. This is significant given that the problems presented by marginalized populations ultimately end up in the hands of social work, law enforcement, and government. Thus the stories presented here support the purpose of this thesis to make a difference through research.

Here is the story that initiated this research study. I was sitting with friends at dinner one evening and they asked how things were going at the centre where I volunteer. I explained that a First Nations woman had voiced how she wanted more say in the bettering of herself and her children’s lives. This request made me question the established order and hierarchy of ideas. A rather charged conversation ensued about who was more capable of improving the lives of those on the margins of society, people who are deemed “successful” or those who are marginalized. I walked away with a strong desire to pursue this question further.

Locating Myself

I am an accomplished artist with postgraduate training and I have come to understand that often I am an outsider in the work I do. “We are not who we think we are,

but are as others see us” (P. Woodrow, personal communication, October 2013). I have realized the challenges of understanding how I appear to others.

In this chapter, I present stories of teaching experiences that formulated my views of how learners learn and how teachers might more effectively teach. Many of my teaching roles have been volunteer positions. Being in this position offered advantages including a rare flexibility. I was able “to do whatever it takes to get the job done - not bound by complex bureaucracies [giving me] the freedom to come up with innovative and creative solutions to make decisions and act” (executive director, April 3, 2013).

I have become conscious of how the environment contributes to our learning. Our classroom conduct, the words we use, how we arrange the room, even the building itself, all contribute to the lessons we teach. Being conscious of these particulars is vital in supporting our message (Dewey, 1938; Miranda, 2012). More importantly, “caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s” (Noddings, 2003, p.24). The facilitator supports the learner’s experiences, not one’s own (Dewey, 1938).

How it Began

Many years ago, a girl in my Anthropology 101 class suggested that she and I teach an art class at a juvenile court. We presented a drawing class to children and youth who varied from juvenile murderers to children apprehended from families of concern. This particular jail served as a holding facility until the children could be placed in proper homes, or in prison. The class was intended to promote the free expression of ideas. The only things I restricted in my class were small paintbrushes and the darkest colors. Thick brushes made it difficult to write words or draw thin lines, discouraging curse words and bars on the page. The light colors brightened the mood of the work, encouraging lighter

themes. Now, after listening to the participants, my co-researchers in this study, I believe my old rules were too restrictive and repressed free expression.

There was a boy in class who had been taken away from his abusive parents. He never spoke. He came to class, sat in the corner, and did nothing. One day I encouraged him to help mix batches of paint for the class. He worked slowly and carefully, completely absorbed in the process, combining colors that one would generally think would produce “mud.” Instead, he produced the most beautiful cerulean blues, deep crimsons, and more from the most basic dried schoolroom-quality watercolors.

I assigned him to prepare the paints for the class each week. He beamed with pride at being in charge of such an important task. One day, he spoke. I discovered then that I learn more from children than they learn from me (Lowenfeld, 1987). Shortly after, I came to the jail and he was gone, having been returned to his emotionally abusive father.

One might wonder about the importance of this brief, transient experience for the child and myself. Dewey wrote about an “experiential continuum,” saying: “We always live at the time we live and not some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing all the same thing in the future” (Dewey, 1938, p. 49). This incident presented an experience that might live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences for the boy and myself. It was a positive experience. In coming to know and collect positive moments in life, we might repeat these moments and build a resilience that helps us see past the toxic experiences, enabling us to better our lives.

After this experience, I worked on many short-term teaching projects from pre-school through post-secondary. I witnessed early childhood education at a Montessori

school, and later in Reggio Emilia, Italy, and was fascinated by their efforts towards self-directed studies. I brought these ideas to all the classes I facilitated for children. It was only when I taught continuing education classes at a university that I followed a formal structure more consistent with the dominant public model, developing a written schedule, and structuring the class with daily tasks. I presented figure drawing one day, portraiture the next, drawing with perspective the next, and so forth. The learners needed this guidance, so I complied. They also asked me for “the formula” to drawing well, and asked why I did not demonstrate techniques like the “fellow on television.” The difference between working with children (see Figure 1 below) and with adult learners, who are often afraid to splash out what they think and feel (Brown, 2008), laid the ground for this study. This loss of voice in adult learners is a significant problem. It is a problem that is further amplified in people who find themselves on the margins of society. The realization that community education deals with such diverse identities and experiences made me recognize the need for a considered inquiry through field exploration that could suggest fresh approaches in working with marginalized people. Due to the specificity and uniqueness of this population’s challenges, the formal structure of the public education model is insufficient.

Figure 1 Children at play in the studio



Traditional Education Practices

Ken Robinson (2001) wrote with his typical wit grounded in wisdom: “Education is a bad word to use socially” (p. 6). People in all walks of life, including those recognized as brilliant and successful, find difficulties in the predominant learning culture of public education. School plays such an important role in our early years. Anxieties and failures experienced in the school system can stamp deep and negative lifelong impressions on

one's self (Robinson, 2001). A main problem with this approach to learning lies in adherence to its 200-year-old roots (Vygotsky, 1978). Its principle models and metaphors of standardization and convention were established from "the industrial and corporate world and its factories" (Katz, 1998, p. 42), and follow, "market economy practices that engage heavily in the production, marketing and consumption of goods and services" (Kelly, 2012, p. 3). Freire (2011) called this approach to education the "banking concept" (p.74). Learners are "subjected to the same sequence of instructional treatments in lock-step fashion in the interests of creating a standard product" (Katz, 1998, p. 42).

Krishnamurti (1953) explained this as a technique by which one can eventually earn a livelihood to secure an economic position. It is similar to working on a factory assembly line, with very similar effects on the learner, where "workers feel isolated, dominated, detached, and discontent" (Lowenfeld, 1987, p. 14), with no personal attachment. Dewey (1938) described this traditional education as "formation without," where the learner's mind is viewed as an empty vessel to be filled. He wrote, it "is a process of overcoming natural inclination and substituting in its place habits acquired under pressure" (p. 17). This idea of mechanization of the education system and the learner goes deeper with the notion of corporate control, illuminated by Friere (2011):

The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better "fit" for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it. (p. 76)

Freire saw the domineering class in society as using this established form of education to maintain their elite position. With this established class system, one can create

both successful and marginalized groups. When people fail in this system, Friere (2011) wrote that they are seen,

as marginalized persons who deviate from the general configuration of a “good, organized, and just” society. The oppressed are regarded as a pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these “incompetent and lazy” folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be ‘integrated,’ ‘incorporated’ into the healthy society that they have “forsaken” (p. 74).

In being labeled so by successful, dominant members of society, and worse, by themselves, these people lose their voices in society. I undertook this study to discover pedagogies that help the marginalized re-find these voices.

Stretching Social Norms

I was educated early in the injustices of social norms. My eldest sister, Phyllis, had cerebral palsy, an underdeveloped cerebellum, along with a host of illnesses. When my sister was born, popular and professional consensus was to institutionalize such children. It was assumed life with her would be too difficult for my parents, not to mention for the rest of the family. My mother refused to send her away, instead she raised her an equal amongst us. Phyllie was part of everything. She learned the same table manners, was part of the conversation, part of the teasing, and the laughter and tears of everyday life. There were differences, but then we are all different. For my siblings and me, the definition of normal was expanded from the social norm.

My sister had a problem with our differences as we grew older, and I moved away, and bought a house. When she visited, she was extremely sensitive to the fact that I had to assist her in many ways she thought she could not reciprocate. I helped her walk, drove her places, fixed her meals, and helped her in the bathroom. Her sadness made me sad. If only

she knew how she helped me strip the facade of how things must be done to be accepted and “normal” in a world where you can't have a spastic gesture, drool, bang into a wall, or be difficult to understand, or wear the wrong clothes like a three year old dressing themselves. Phyllie could see past all that. She cared deeply and had empathy.

Similarly, years later when I volunteered at the children's hospital, I was given the special job of working in the oncology ward. People I knew and met couldn't understand how I could work there. It was so sad and so unfair. Yet I found it life affirming. Of course there were sad moments as someone would die or face life with deformed or reshaped bodies. I saw children who were staring mortality in its face embrace life completely, especially when the pain subsided, even if only briefly. The experience confirmed what I had once heard, that you can live a full life in a few moments or not live at all in a full lifetime.

While I was volunteering at the hospital, my dad died. I stopped working because I could not take care of anyone for a year or two. My dad was always someone I could go to for a clear answer. As a physician, professor and prominent figure in medical research, he had a scientific, positivist view of life—the very opposite of the approach that I took in life. This always fascinated him. My open-ended, reflexive view was often looked upon as frivolous or irrational, but my father encouraged it and validated my work in a meaningful way. He was a teacher who understood sensitive listening and how to embrace a different view, such as the child's (Vecchi, 2010). After he died, I often wanted to dig a hole in our backyard and just sit in it. When I got my breath back, I walked into “the Centre.” Since that day I have become deeply involved in many aspects of the Centre's offerings.

The Centre

This western Canadian, urban, evidence-based family centre is a not-for-profit organization working to empower and support those struggling from homelessness and poverty or, as Denny and Mestek (2010) wrote, “those who have been rejected and neglected by society” (p. 8). The Centre sprang from humble religious roots. In the final quarter of the last century, the people of its city felt the needs of the poor and homeless should be addressed. Several churches opened their doors to offer shelter and food for those in need. In one such setting, a few physicians and nurses set up a free triage health and referral service in the basement of a local church for “those arriving at their door in search of help” (Denny & Mestek, 2010, p. 12).

The executive director of the Centre explained:

Our roots evolved out of need. If I took anything from our history, its people took action out of need. It's what our premise was. Whether you call that Christian, Jewish or Buddhism, it really is the right philosophy. That is the philosophy we've maintained. And it's what makes us different from our [provincial health services], and necessary. It is not multi-disciplinary, or prescribed based on physicians, but is based on clients' needs. (executive director, April 3, 2013)

As the Centre evolved, it kept that core philosophy of basing its practice on the clients' needs. The executive director said: “We want the people to walk with us and be part of the solution” (executive director, April 3, 2013).

Several factors contribute to the exceptional success and growth the Centre has experienced. From the start, organizers realized the government takes a long time to process anything and cannot take the risks of the private sector, so they strategically matched government funding with private funding to maintain flexibility. A major

expansion involved only five percent government funding with the rest coming from the private sector—directly from the people. Further, with credibility gained through successful programs, meeting people’s needs and using private donations towards owning its buildings, the Centre has strengthened private support, allowing it to be more “innovative and ahead of the game” (executive director, personal communication, April 3, 2013).

Another factor in its effective success is the longevity of the executive directors’ terms in office. In 20 years, there have been only three executive directors. These leaders have maintained strong values and a sense of self, insisting on being part of the solution. The current director explained that being an innovative leader, and being here and now with the clients, she knows as much or more than the premier or prime minister about what is good for this city and what needs to be done. Coupling such strong leadership with a mandate to support and care for the staff has resulted in finding and nurturing some exceptional co-workers throughout the organization. Further, with the flexibility to adapt to the city’s needs, as other allied agencies bring in new programs, the Centre drops or creates programs to support and complement those other agencies. As the director stated: “It takes a community of caring” (executive director, April 3, 2013). All of these factors—listening, supporting, and focusing on supporting the long standing core philosophy of meeting the clients’ needs—gives the Centre exceptional credibility, making it truly effective in meeting community needs.

The Centre is structured around the results of its practice and around embedding that practice in the research of others. The Centre focuses on addressing the three core needs of health, housing, and education as critical in addressing the root causes of poverty

and achieving lasting solutions (executive director, April 3, 2013). Over the years, the Centre has grown to offer a main medical clinic, a women's health clinic, mental health services, and dental care. The main health clinic provides primary care and specialty care in infectious diseases. The women's clinic offers help for mothers and babies vulnerable to threats from abusers by providing services in psychiatry, pediatrics, and obstetrics. The mental health care offers counseling, psychiatric assessment, and referrals to other agencies and hospital programs. The Centre also works in conjunction with several provincial mental health services.

The Centre is built on the premise that it is crucial to provide a stable environment for people trying to overcome difficulties. In support of this the Centre is a key partner in the city's main housing foundation programs. The Centre offers three related programs: one secures housing for singles leaving shelters; a second is a graduated rent subsidy program supported by a local homelessness foundation; and a third builds life skills such as community interaction and social networking. Together with the local foundation, the Centre has been key to a 10-year plan to end homelessness. The Centre is committed to the idea that children need a real home in order to succeed in school (executive director, April 3, 2013).

In regards to education, the Centre has offered various occupational classes, such as computer literacy, as well as arts and crafts gatherings. A family development centre is also provided through the Centre, offering educational and recreational opportunities for the parents and their children, including programs such as the Nurturing Parent Program (NPP). This is the area in which I have become deeply involved. Significantly it also created an off-site child development centre. This centre offers early intervention education for the

client's children, ages of three to six years, exhibiting early educational challenges. With a better understanding the crucial effects of brain development in infants, the Centre has recently added a new child development centre for the early years (13-35 months), providing parents with more proactive training and support. Based on a Harvard study in which the executive director is presently participating, they are working towards a crucial expansion of the program to include a prenatal to three years Nurturing Parent Program (Lowry, 2013). As the study is revealing how devastating separation from the parents is for a child, this program works to find ways to keep that connection by providing redirection for people flagged by provincial child welfare services. The program will close gaps and provide a complete pro-active approach to the child's well being.

Volunteering at the main site

I have volunteered at the Centre since 2006. As an artist-in-residence, I have facilitated art classes and orchestrated and curated public art exhibitions of clients' works. When I started, the main site offered services primarily for adults. This was when many shelters were being established and the Centre was moving from a drop-in role to its current configuration of promoting clients' development towards autonomy and more independence in society (executive director, April 3, 2013).

Building an understanding of studio

Following a request from a good friend and respected teacher, I offered to hold drawing classes for the clients. These were to be held in the entrance hall. Initially, I felt unsafe and uncomfortable. The entrance hall was a rough place; the walls were dull grey and the lighting was low. Those in any state could find refuge here. They were often under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Occasionally fights would breakout. People were falling

off chairs and looked dirty. There was a washroom with a shower room but it was used for a multitude of other purposes. The people in my drawing class wandered in and out, defying any kind of structure. I found my best teaching method was to throw an assorted array of materials in the middle of each table, turn on music, and not expect much. I entitled the session, "Drawing with Music." To my surprise, it worked well. The music defined the class time and pulled people in, if only to enjoy the peace and sanctuary of the sound. I took from this that the true purpose of this situation was to simply offer peace and sanctuary; that producing art objects was secondary. It became a time of reflection and of finding self.

When people sat at the tables strewn with art materials, I invited them to draw. Many said they could not draw, so I began by demonstrating sweeping lines of colors over the paper, urging them to relax and let their hands and minds follow the music. Most gave it a try. Soon they were producing interesting images of homes of every shape and form: mountains, tribal symbols, places they had visited, and places they would like to see. As they worked, they relaxed; their faces became dreamy and thoughtful. Soon people began to appear regularly. Familiarity and trust began to develop between us. They respected me and demanded a similar respect from those who came to the Centre for other reasons. They felt embarrassed when a fight broke out in front of me and moved to quell it. When I exhibited their work on the walls, they started pointing out their pieces to others and would bring friends specifically to see their work. Even the staff responded well to the colorful walls and the occasional music.

Unconditional respect

The front desk clerk was a young man with a policeman's stature. He exhibited unconditional respect for everyone who came through the front doors. He emitted a

profound gentleness, except when forced to play the bouncer during fights or the challenge of someone coming off medication, alcohol, or drugs. His manner helped me develop the most important understandings about being one with all those that I would take with me into the work, which I am still doing. He viewed each person with love and respect and valued their individual gifts. He knew their stories and understood their circumstances. Once, he introduced me to a couple as though they were the most respected of citizens, informing me of their deep love and caring for each other. The man was a well-worn, often-beaten man, and she a hunched, portly woman with matted hair sitting in a wheel chair, reeking of urine. The clerk's lesson to the world was offered with sharp clarity, a biting lesson in humility from an intrinsically kind man who laid no blame.

The clerk also recognized a crucial step towards inclusiveness and self-sufficiency of the marginalized. When we began to recognize a certain proficiency in the work produced by some of the clients, he suggested they become tattoo artists, or join other similarly self-sustaining vocations. I appreciated his practical suggestions of grounding them in the world. I, not being so realistic, developed the idea into public art exhibitions where the money from all sales would go to the artist. We brought two of these shows to fruition. One was presented at the local university, the other at city hall. Both shows brought forth remarkable artists whose lives changed, if only for a moment.

Finding voice

One artist who took the lead in the university show was fighting schizophrenia. He was estranged from his family and society as a whole. He was quiet, but the more he painted, the stronger his determination and his mind became. He began to take ownership of his work. He produced over 30 paintings. By the first day of the show, when the press

flooded in, this previously shy man stood proudly and spoke about his work without hesitation. After the show, he reconnected with his family and displayed the transcendence of the learner's confidence in all aspects of life. A year or so later, his illness overtook him and he threw himself in front of a city transit train. I could only appreciate that once again, a moment of living life to its fullest proved better than not.

Passing the torch

A woman from the first exhibition began working prolifically for the second show held at city hall. She built large, painted sculptures of a spiritual nature. She showed up at all the sessions in the studio and soon volunteered to oversee the preparations for class. She made sure all the equipment was accounted for at the beginning and the end of the sessions. We began conducting sessions together, and she started speaking to me as an equal and not as her teacher. She would criticize the participants for being messy and not showing up on time. She was proud of this new responsibility. Eventually, I stepped back and let her lead.

Describing the Child Development Centre

While working at the main site, I also became involved at the off-site child development centre. This pre-school was inspired by the philosophies of the Reggio Emilia municipal schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. The building is an open space with a southern exposure where windows between classrooms and floors bring the sky and the outdoor elements in, making even the darkest snowy days feel special. The design, based on the Reggio approach of creating a nurturing environment, is critical. The kitchen and a grand entrance hall are central. The hearty smells from the kitchen greet you on entering the building. The hall provides a place for group gatherings, school photos, and an exhibition

venue for work done by the students. The proliferation of varied projects displayed on its walls and the kitchen's offerings stir an appetite for nourishment on every level. The classrooms feed off of these rooms, physically and otherwise. It is a building that catches the time, place, and purpose perfectly. It has become a healing ground for wounded children and provides a place for them to grow and flourish.

A kindergarten teacher

I worked with the kindergarten teacher at the child development centre. For the purposes of this study, she chose the pseudonym of "Heather." Heather was versed in the Reggio Emilia philosophies. She had also grown up on the Haida Gwaii, where raw nature is spectacular and the First Peoples embrace that nature in a strong ancient culture. She had learned great lessons from the Haida. She had a quiet and thoughtful demeanor. Her connection with the children at the development centre was always delicate but strong, her voice even-tempered but firm, restoring order to the room and the tumultuous lives of these children of the Centre's clients. She had a deep love for each child. She could find the spark of goodness and gentle humanity in the most disruptive of them, then work tirelessly to grow that child. She never kept me abreast of schedules or happenings at the school. I would show up to volunteer and the school would be closed for parent-teacher conferences or something similar. She would apologize profusely and feel quite abashed, but those things never mattered. What mattered was how we could help those children find peace of mind and a sense of belonging. We agreed on so many things. I would bring an idea and she would give me full license to proceed as I saw fit.

Bringing in the Nurturing Parent Program (NPP)

After almost 10 years in operation, organizers had realized the work with the children at the child development centre could only provide a bandage effect. Their five hours in school, four days a week, was enriching, but then they often returned to homes of stress and abuse. With this understanding, the organizers and teachers brought in the pilot Nurturing Parent Program (NPP) to target the parents in an attempt to sever the cycle of abuse as close as possible to its source.

The competency-based NPP developed by Stephan Bavolek from Asheville, North Carolina, draws on decades of research, theory, and practice in child development, family therapy, brain functioning, psychology, and social services. It is based on the emergence theory that nurturing is learned. “All individuals are born with a biological predisposition to form and sustain enduring, nurturing relationships” (Kaplan & Bavolek, 2007, p. 6). The creators believe learning occurs when people discover ideas for themselves, integrating their experience, feelings, and perceptions with the new material. They stated that learning consists of the integration of perceptions, knowledge, emotional value, and consensus from family, culture, and peer group. All of these conditions must be consistent over long periods for full comprehension. The program follows five core values and morals, which represent standards and practices of behaviour known to contribute to the health and functioning of society. These values are: positive self-worth, empathy, empowerment and strong will, structure and discipline, laughter, humor and play. Empathy is the cornerstone of the program. This program came to the Centre’s clients as “evidence-based learning,” in the shape of a manual supported by a series of lectures and short videos. The NPP included home visits to enforce the practices learned, and follow-up evaluations. As the kindergarten

teacher explained, these clients are particularly challenged in traditional education contexts due to a life of disempowerment and failure in the system. Given this, the format of the NPP presented a problem.

Understanding problems with the NPP

Most of the Centre's clients have dealt with extreme poverty and abusive relationships. To further aggravate these conditions, approximately one third are immigrants living in isolation with language and culture differences, and another third are indigenous people with language, cultural differences, and alternative ways of learning. They all have experienced problems that compromise learning and social behaviour. Science has described the effects of such stressors as neurotoxins affecting the brain and its development. Many clients are firmly caught in a cycle of abuse that often began in childhood. They have witnessed violence, or are indirectly victims of violence (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #9, 2010). These stresses can include child abuse or neglect, family turmoil, neighbourhood violence, extreme poverty, and other conditions that can interfere with developing brain circuits, undermine their emotional well-being and impair a wide range of developmental outcomes including early learning, exploration and curiosity, school readiness, and later school achievement (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #6, 2008). They have grown up in an environment of relationships that negatively shaped the architecture of their brain (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #5, 2007). "Experiences in early childhood are not forgotten - they are built into the architecture of the developing brain and can have a sustained impact that extends well into the adult years" (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #6, 2008, p. 5). In fact, it has been found that changes

occurring during pregnancy can be epigenetic, imprinting the genes passed on to later generations (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #10, 2010), and these can further prime neurobiological stress systems, resulting in mental illness. “Foundations of many mental health problems that endure through adulthood are established early in life through the interaction of genetic predispositions and sustained, stress-inducing experiences” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #6, 2008, p. 1). Most clients at the Centre suffer from some sort of mental illness. Depression and its symptoms are particularly common in disadvantaged populations. Data indicates that in households below the federal poverty threshold, one in four mothers of infants are experiencing moderate to severe levels of depressive symptoms (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #8, 2009). Such depressed women produce higher levels of stress chemicals during pregnancy that not only reduce fetal growth but also alter immune functioning in the infant. This can be linked to “silencing the gene that controls the over-production of stress chemicals” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #8, 2009, p. 4), aggravating the situation further. Evidence observed on electroencephalograms has revealed patterns of depressed brain activity in children similar to those of their depressed mothers (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #8, 2009). Social competence is linked to emotional wellbeing (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #2, 2004). Members of this population face challenges fitting into society before they are even born.

The damaging effects of toxic substances found in the environment also play a large role in the health and coping abilities of the brain. The misuse of recreational neurotoxins by the children or by their parents during their early development is prevalent. Nicotine,

cocaine, amphetamines such as speed or Ritalin, and alcohol, the most dangerous of these neurotoxins (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #4, 2006), are abused to self-soothe the traumas of an impoverished life. Beyond this there is exposure to environmental toxic substances which are frequently found in the living conditions of the poor such as mercury in fish, chemical wastes that accumulate in water and plants, synthetic materials, lead in paint, dust and soil, and manganese in unleaded gas. These heavy metals disrupt neural migration from one part of the brain to another, as well as the formation of synapses essential for building normal brain architecture (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #4, 2006, p. 3). They also interfere with neurotransmitters,

responsible for all brain functions, including learning, control of emotions, social interactions, and such fundamental processes as movement, vision, hearing and touch.... The most complex of these functions, which involve thinking and feeling, are the most susceptible to disruption by toxic exposures. (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, #4, 2006, p. 3)

Imagine the compromised position of a child, or adult, in school affected with any of these conditions.

Immigrants who have come to the Centre for help, are generally poor and without connections. Their language and cultural barriers place them at an even greater disadvantage. Indigenous people have their own cultures, languages, and spiritual teachings that are not recognized in their own country (K. Moore. personal communication, April, 2013). They are displaced in “white” schools while their traditional ways of teaching and learning are ignored or misunderstood. In the past, this culture’s teaching was carried out by grandparents and Elders with a curriculum centered on the tasks and

responsibilities of daily life. Lessons were “learned on the job” (Friesen & Freisen, 2005, p. 183), with an emphasis on observation, role-modeling, and individual experience. Our public school system, based on a European model, is diametrically opposed to their ways. Spirituality is the foundation for all Indigenous learning, “Every act, every behaviour was seen as having spiritual implications in that it reflected on the individual’s earthly journey” (Friesen & Friesen, 2005, p. 172). Spirituality has all but been erased from the public school system, and there is no interest in individual interpretation. On entering school, students accustomed to learning in their tribal manner are viewed as slow. They are told they are wrong (Friesen & Friesen, 2005). They are labeled as incompetent, stupid, not just by their teachers and peers, but also by themselves. This negative labeling results in apathy, low attendance, and eventual dropping out. The loss of self-worth in this population is epidemic, and the repercussions are further evident in the breakdown of family values leading to abuse, problems with addiction, and a tragically high suicide rate (Friesen & Friesen, 2005).

When we approach a teaching situation like the NPP with the standard competency format for learning, we fail to connect with the Centre’s populations. So it was that, in pursuit of finding pedagogies that empower the Centre’s learners and support them as they find their own voices, the kindergarten teacher and I arranged for me to bring the studio to the NPP.

A Hermeneutic Dialogue and Ideas of Social Justice

The ontological understanding I bring into this study is grounded in Dewey’s theories on education, art, and building strong societies, in Freire’s social justice pedagogies, and in the philosophy of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia. These ideas

are elaborated through Runco (2007) and Piirto's (2004) creativity theories, Brown (2010) and Gadamer's (2006) theories on play, and Lowenfeld's (1987) ideas of creative and mental growth. I will present a hermeneutic dialogue with references supporting experience in the context of the complex life world (Gilham, 2011).

With Dewey's (1938), Lowenfeld's (1987) and Kearney's (2005) idea that it is essential in a democratic society for each individual to be able to have and express an opinion and help remake the world, I see that it is essential to social justice that everyone has a voice in the making of society. Dewey (1938) wrote how each individual is part of a community. All human experience is ultimately social, involving contact and communication. He maintained that when given one's own voice one takes ownership of the project and gains personal validation. If people are given the opportunity to contribute to the community, they take on responsible roles in society and learn to work collaboratively. If we can listen to each member and positively engage people in the community, even those marginalized, we can ultimately build a more cohesive and productive society as a whole (Dewey, 1938). I am not so optimistic to believe we can ultimately reach an ideal state where all humanity will agree with each other and live in harmony and community. Time and events are too random and complicated. I believe conflicts and disparities will always exist. But, if we can, at some time and place, reach an ideal state, even for a moment, that state indeed has been met.

Each person is born with a gift. Dewey (1938), Brown (2010), Nodding (2003), and more recognized this, as did the front desk clerk at the Centre. These gifts should be recognized by the community and developed through a student-directed educational system where teachers and students are co-learners. In bringing their gifts to the table,

each member is recognized and included in the collaborative reshaping of our malleable society for the good of all. I am interested in the development of methodologies and pedagogies encouraging learners to tap into their gifts, discover or re-find their voices, whereby they gain a strong and responsible membership in the community. Supported by Lowenfeld's (1987) ideas that learning can only take place through the senses, and "art education is the only subject matter area that concentrates on developing the sensory experiences" (p. 14), I brought a variation of the art studio to the NPP educational context.

An Understanding of Studio

The studio is commonly thought of as a room for art, where artists, photographers, or sculptors work. It is a place where performers, like dancers, practice and exercise, where music or sound recordings are made, where films, television, and radio programs are produced and broadcast (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2012). I see the studio as going beyond these arts. I further see the studio as defined by Malaguzzi. The studio, or *atelier* as coined by Malaguzzi, is central to the educational theories of the Reggio Emilia schools. Reggio Emilia's philosophy is founded on the beliefs of empowering the learner by utilizing the innate skills with which we are born. We are born with a voice. This voice is our presence and contribution to the world. We use our voice to learn to live in the world. This voice develops as we grow. This development and learning is an ongoing process. Malaguzzi followed a creative perspective and theories of constructivism, including Piaget's Cognitive Constructivism, where knowledge is not a priori. The individual constructs their own knowledge through an interaction, interchange, between themselves and their surroundings, including everyone and everything with which they come into contact. He believed children are born with every learning capability. Infants learn and navigate their

survival in a multidisciplinary and multisensory manner, through body movement, sound, touch, and visual depictions (Brown, 2010). He called these infinite capabilities the “hundred languages” (Malaguzzi, 1996, p. 3). They are all the creative and communicative potentials necessary for the construction of knowledge (Rinaldi, 2006), specifically the “expressive, communicative, symbolic, cognitive, ethical, metaphorical, logical, imaginative and rational” (Filippini & Vecchi, 1996, p. 20). Schools often dismiss many of these languages, paring learning down to merely the use of words and numbers. Malaguzzi established the *atelier* and *mini-ateliers* in the schools as the studio or laboratory where all the hundred languages could be developed along with mathematical, scientific (Vecchi, 2010), and verbal languages (Malaguzzi, 1998). The *atelier* provided a place where the learner could experiment with different materials and express their ideas. It also evolved into a way of seeing into schools and the process of learning, establishing a space where teachers could understand how the learner learns and learn to teach more effectively. It enabled open communication between learner, the community of learners and facilitators, and from there out into the community at large. Malaguzzi (1998) saw the studio as a place of research that should be permanently established and ever expanding. He described the studio as subversive and impertinent (Vecchi, 2010), as it challenged traditional thought and presented facilitators with fresh ideas and different perspectives. Malaguzzi (1998) wrote that the studio is:

subversive—generating complexity and new tools for thought. It has allowed rich combinations and creative possibilities among the different (symbolic) languages of children. The *atelier* has protected us not only from long-winded speeches and didactic theories of our time (just about the only preparation received by young

teachers!), but also from the behavioristic beliefs of the surrounding culture, reducing the human mind to some kind of “container” to be filled. (p. 74)

The studio I proposed embraced Malaguzzi’s ideas and provided space, time and materials for creative and mental growth. With the understanding that there are different ways to be creative (Runco, 2007,p.37), and in viewing people’s lives as their own creative products where they construct their own reality and inner truths (Piirto, 2004), the aspect of creativity emphasized in this studio becomes the improvisational response to daily dilemmas or problems (Kelly, 2012). This idea of being creative opposes the common misunderstanding that it relates to or involves the imagination or original ideas in the production of an artistic work or works of “high creativity” (Runco, 2007, p.14), that radically change our culture in some respect, as with Picasso, Einstein, or Edison (Czikszentmihaly, 1996). “The ability to learn something new is based on the general state of mind of a human being. It does not depend on special talents, nor does it operate only in special fields, such as science, art, music, or architecture” (Bohm, 1996, p. 6). Anyone can be creative (Runco, 2007). Being creative is viewing things and circumstances in new and different ways of understanding. People who are more creative have been encouraged and have learned to see the world, or their own surroundings, with openness for the new, or new combinations of the old. They have learned to question, take risks, and value complexities that come with taking nothing for granted (Piirto, 2004). The studio is a place where anyone—and everyone—can engage in creative thought. A child’s creativity is spontaneous, playful, uninhibited, but mindful. Adults may lose these qualities of children’s play, but their large knowledge base and meta-cognitive capacities allow them to choose to

renew the playfulness, spontaneity of child-like creativity. Runco (2007) and Brown (2010) urged that intentional creativity in adults can help us construct a better world.

The studio offers Gadamer's idea of free space, rendering time elastic, where anyone can explore what could or should be and entertain the possibility of shaping or reshaping their lives (Jardine, 2013). The studio allows individuals time to have their own space to bring an understanding of their lives in the context of this environment and make sense of it through writing, expressing with numbers speaking, dancing, painting, beading, doodling, or even coloring in the lines of a pre-set drawing. It doesn't matter what language is used in their mental and physical engagement as they question and pursue a better understanding of themselves in the world. These materials can be mixed and invented at will, as by the boy from the juvenile court. It doesn't matter as long as it is their choice and their unique way of telling the story. The studio embraces the arts among the languages. Anyone can engage in the arts as a means of expression and not simply to produce beautiful commodities that are to be sold. The studio allows all people to communicate (Lowenfeld, 1987), even those on the margins. It presents time and space for unstructured thought. Miranda (2012) of the Puget Sound School elaborated:

Unencumbered, unhurried, time of a different quality, more time, time to find wrong answers and to find a few that are right; time for skills to be practiced to set higher limits, to settle and assimilate and become fully and completely yours, to organize and combine other skills comfortably and easily in some unique and personal way, then set loose, trusted, to find new instinctive directions to take, to create. (p. 120)

Play encourages creativity and play is key to studio. It is not thoughtless filling of time or idle rest (Laing, 2012), but the play of a child where thinking, feeling, and doing is a serious attempt at organizing their environment and displaying it in a meaningful way

(Lowenfeld, 1987). “Young children know the inextricable links between fun and learning. They spend years enjoying themselves in risk-taking exploration, tireless questioning, sensual encounters with their environments, insatiably seeking after wonder” (Kelly & Leggo, 2008, p. 257). These universal play activities promote whole brain growth, and an understanding of how the world works (Brown, 2010). “Play is a building block of learning” (Laing, 2012, p.6). It is a chance to make one’s own connections of personal relevance, instilling intrinsic motivation (Csikzentmihalyi, 1996; Kelly, 2012), restoring one’s desire to engage. “The heart of play is pleasure and a powerful desire to repeat such activities. It is through this repetition that mastery occurs, leading to accomplishment and self-confidence” (Laing, 2012, p. 6).

Lowenfeld (1987) wrote how self-presentation is the true nature of play. In doing studio work, the participants portray things in relation to themselves, things that are actively in their minds, things of importance. He wrote that expressing them selves in a tangible manner on a sheet of paper or in a performance means viewing that expression and gaining insight and a better understanding of self. It is being able to connect the random information we are bombarded with and connecting them in a way that creates one’s personal sense of the world. As Gadamer (2006) wrote, “We learn to understand ourselves in and through it, and this means that we sublimate (aufheben) the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence” (p. 83). In this, we are able to discover what we want and what we need to better our lives. Prinsloo (2012) wrote, “when we truly play we unearth possibility” (p. 89). Unstructured, creative “play can become a doorway to a new self, one is much more in tune with the world. Because play is all about trying out new behaviors and thoughts, it frees us from

established patterns” (Brown, 2010, p. 92). With play alternative possibilities can be considered without adverse repercussions. We imagine ourselves differently, we play with the idea, we try it, we like it, and in the next step we become it.

Studio time is also the group’s time to work together. It allows for participants and facilitator to communicate and learn together in a less structured environment and manner. In the context of the school, around the school’s structure, it allows us to interact at will. We learn from each other and hone our social skills in a playful way. “When you are in a state of play you are less conscious of yourself. You let go of the ego that is always judging and asking, ‘How am I doing and how do I rank compared to everyone else?’” (Post, 2012, p. 62). “It involves reckless involvement for its own sake and the removal of status.... Play is the leveller of humanity” (Prinsloo, 2012, p. 89). Taking one’s work to the community in presentation is easier in this playful, more humbled state.

An important final element of a day in studio is presentation. It is the act of bringing one’s voice to the community. It develops one’s ability to communicate and to dialogue with others. It develops one’s ability to be heard, be part of, and live cooperatively in society (Lowenfeld, 1987). When our ideas are shared with others, they grow and become stronger. Under the guidance of the facilitator, the community learns to listen to the presenter’s ideas in an open, accepting manner, and freely add their own thoughts. In this manner, all contribute in a positive and generative way.

An Understanding of How Learners Learn

I fully support Malaguzzi that the learner is the protagonist. As with the principles of the Nurturing Parent Program, I see that “it is necessary to become familiar first by using directly what you know and what you have learned in order to acquire further learning and

knowledge” (Gandini, 2005, p. 8). Noe (2012) wrote, “We can only expand our experiential repertoire piecemeal, by nudging forward holding hands with what is familiar” (p. 80). Dewey (1938) explained that it is the educator’s duty to build on the learners’ experiences, “presenting new problems which by stimulating new ways of observation and judgment will expand [their] experience”(p. 75). He noted to avoid new knowledge as a “fixed possession,” but to nurture “powers of observation and intelligent use of memory,” and above all, “connectedness” (p. 75). The learner must follow their own desires and develop their own projects, leading us in their education (Malaguzzi, 1996). The student and teacher learn together (New, 2007). The teacher’s first and most important role is to promote the intellectual life of the learner (Rinaldi, 2006), where the teacher must establish “sensitive listening” and embrace the learner’s point of view (Vecchi, 2010). Literature suggests that utilizing these techniques of teaching and learning with the adult population will be more effective in aiding their re-finding of voice (Brown, 2010).

An Understanding of the Facilitator of the Studio

In Reggio-based schools, the studio, or *atelier*, is facilitated by an artist with art school training. Malaguzzi and the philosophy of Reggio Emilia postulated that artists, through their training and the nature of their work, are most in tune with the child’s complete way of learning. Malaguzzi coined the term *atelierista* as the studio artist.

Malaguzzi described an “aesthetic vibration” that beats between the “rational and imaginative, between cognitive and expressive, giving passion to life and completeness to thinking (Vecchi, 2010, p. 6). Children understand this aesthetic vibration, this beat of life. They seek this aesthetic of expression and a way to live in the life world through using a balance of many languages that prove to be empathetic with each other, not separate or

sequential (Vecchi, 2010). Artists are sensitive to this aesthetic, knowing it is a powerful element for understanding and connecting with reality (Vecchi, 2010). They are encouraged in their training and tend to address things in the moment, without depending on routines and past experience. They engage in proactive creativity with its inherent reflexive nature. They understand the need for structure in learning, an agenda, but know there must be a chance to take the knowledge of the manual to one's own personal understanding and to apply it to life to make the learning be known. They understand that a secure, yet open, space and time are needed for exploration and play to allow this understanding to develop. We need to allow experimentation, to play with alternatives without adverse repercussions, to find new solutions. As with Malaguzzi's *atelierista*, artists teach knowledge paradoxically, questioning all. They may learn what matters in society but then challenge that knowledge by asking why it matters (Kumashiro, 2009).

In Reggio, the *atelierista* and the studio have two special roles in an educational context. In promoting the intellectual life of the student (Rinaldi, 1998), the *atelierista* assists the learners in all the symbolic languages and familiarizes them with the materials to make their thoughts, ideas and theories visible (Fraser, 2007). Also, in establishing sensitive listening (Vecchi, 2010) with the learner, the *atelierista* must defend the learners' point of view with the teachers, keeping communications open, supporting the students in finding their own voice.

The *atelierista* works face-to-face with the teachers to understand the process of how learners learn and how they invent. Malaguzzi encouraged "the *atelierista* as provocateur, and persevering defenders of the non-obedient processes" (Dahlberg & Moss,

2010, p. xix), bringing a different and exciting perspective to the school. The knowledge the *atelierista* brings to the school is an important contribution. It could be described as:

Not the state of having truer knowledge or better knowledge, rather different knowledge and in particular, knowledge that can question a dominant framing of students, not for the purposes of destroying that knowledge, but rather to push it into a new and ongoing frame of understanding as well as embrace that which helps others succeed, not as strict method, but as an ongoing questioning of what works that respects other, a socially just and pragmatic approach. (Gilham, 2011, p. 113)

I have assumed the role of the studio artist or Malaguzzi's *atelierista*, and brought studio time into the Nurturing Parent Program as a means to reflect on the morning lessons presented by the NPP facilitators.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Diacritical Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry

The qualitative research methodology of diacritical hermeneutic phenomenology (Kearney, 2007, 2011) lends itself to the nature of this study; indeed it is how the study can most effectively be presented. The complexity of this practical study demands innovative and creative understanding and interpretations. This is a phenomenological study as it is concerned with understanding the being of beings and the meaning of being in the world. It is about living and being in life. Specifically, it describes the lived experiences of individuals who have participated in and come to understand the phenomena of the studio in an educational context.

I have followed the living movement of contemporary phenomenology introduced by Edmund Husserl and developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which has no system or school, but means different things to different people and can only lend itself to the study at hand (Audi, 2009). In other words, this methodology has no set method. Those following this movement follow a common belief that people are not objects that can be produced to suit a project, nor are they numbers that can be slotted into quantified charts. People are understood to have diverse identities, with unique and divergent views. Through unique combinations of experiences we build our own realities and develop our own point of view of the world. As people are social beings, we have an inherent desire to live among and be active members of a community (Dewey, 1938; NPP participant class assessments, 2012-13).

Societies are a subjective construction of people who, through common language and interaction of daily life, create a social world of shared meaning (Heyman, 2013). Thus, the social world and its societies are in a constant state of flux and reconstruction. In this study I propose that each individual has the right to be part of that construction (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 2011; Kearney, 2005; Lowenfeld, 1987). This movement of phenomenology follows a philosophy of unremitting interrogation, with no closure or completion, which embraces and facilitates our accepting these changes. The flexibility of this movement lends itself to the fecundity of the studio and this study. It supports the positive opportunity of renewal the studio and this study proposes.

Nothing stands alone. We are all connected to a history (Moules, 2002), whether we agree with it or not, and we must recognize that history is part of how we see the world (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). This is a hermeneutic phenomenological study, for phenomenology without hermeneutics has a tendency to suggest something stands alone. Further, "Human life is not given to us as a phenomenon which requires our explication, but as a question, an address, as something which is revealing and concealing, coming and going, present and absent – and the work of hermeneutics is entering into the interpretation of these things" (Moules, 2002, p.15).

Traditionally, hermeneutics was the science of interpretation and explanation, with its roots in the interpretation of textual materials such as the Bible (Lichtman, 2013). Hermeneutics has developed beyond the postmodern scrutiny of language, questioning what is said, presenting contingent understandings that are situated in the lives of people, their relationships, contexts, and histories. Contemporary hermeneutics takes on the characteristics of its mythical namesake, the complicated jokester, Hermes. It boasts an

irreverent disdain for rules, embracing creativity and inventiveness, encouraging interpretations that see things anew or in a different light in order to change and manipulate solutions to fit the moment. These understandings may only be of use at a certain time or place (Moules, 2002). Hermeneutics requires openness to ongoing and often unanswerable questions. Hermeneutics further supports the understanding that the social world is a subjective construction of a group of people. It embraces the understanding that there are no right answers and the interpreters' understanding, as with the text itself, depends on each person's "lives, relationships, contexts, and histories" (Moules, 2002, p. 4).

With consideration of each individual voice coming into play with others, Richard Kearney took contemporary hermeneutics farther by finding a middle ground between Gadamer's Romantic Hermeneutic notion (Kearney, 2011) where the voices are united to a harmonious one, and the de-constructivist's, Caputo, et al, insistence that there can be no meeting of minds, as all voices are disparate. In Kearney's diacritical hermeneutic sense, each voice is recognized in the text, and in the interpretation of the text, by weaving all voices into the fabric of the conversation (Jardine, 2013). This presents complex, often contradictory, understandings that may never connect. But being open to more voices gives us more profound understanding and possible solutions. The more depth, perspectives and complexity is brought to bear on how we view and understand the world, the clearer, more nuanced, and ultimately freer one's thinking can become (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Further, Kearney believed we gain a deeper understanding through listening with all our senses, accessing tacit knowledge as well as explicit knowledge. This aligns with the

engagement of Malaguzzi's hundred languages. Kearney (2011) understood "the task of interpreting plural meanings in response to the polysemy of language and life" (p.1).

In this study, the participants engaged in critical dialogue on the definition of studio, the effectiveness of the studio, and how facilitators can be more effective. Readers are invited into this critical dialogue. I present a complex study by including all voices, with the pivotal speakers being those who have been excluded from society's conversation. They are pivotal, and most important to the study, as they have gained the expertise on the effectiveness of the studio. They have taken a responsible role in the discussion. There is not only a vast amount of understandings, but also layers; when some are uncovered and revealed, others become covered from view. It is important to listen to what is said as well as what is not said. The strength of this approach, and likewise the strength of the study, is in the inclusive nature of listening and recognizing each voice as a rightfully important part of the discussion and decision-making. This is "not a strict method, but an ongoing questioning of what works that respects others, a socially just and pragmatic approach" (Gilham, 2011, p. 113).

This study aims to "recognize the other as another self bearing universal rights and responsibilities" (Gilham, 2011, p. 114). I invite readers to speculate, respond, and intervene in these conversations, questioning dominant ways of thinking, questioning what we take for granted, and opening new possibilities of understanding (Gilham, 2011). I urge readers to listen and respond with a sensitive ear and heart. Ultimately, what matters is how we listen to what the participants had to say. The participants found their voices in the studio, developed and strengthened that voice through participation in the discussions, but it is in the act of being heard that they find their voices in society.

Presenting the Nurturing Parent Program

The NPP facilitators chose all the parents of a class of four-year-old students at the child development centre. Both fathers and mothers were invited to participate, ideally bringing the number of participants to a maximum of seven to 10 families. Having their children in the same class provided common ground for the parents, encouraging the participants to build friendships and community amongst themselves. As the children would then advance to the kindergarten class in the following year, the effects of the program on children and parents could be observed later. The NPP classroom was located on the top floor of the child resource centre. Locating the parents in the school instead of the main Centre, allowed them to be close to their children and encouraged them to become a part of that centre.

In light of my positionality of being a part-time volunteer with very different life experiences from those of the participants, I needed to gain the trust of the NPP facilitators and participants in order to be accepted in the group. I began by attending the program in its entirety, from the beginning of the pilot year. I attended all classes and participated in all planning meetings as the *atelierista* would in Reggio Emilia. I helped the NPP facilitators set up the classroom. We took out the central table and chairs and brought in couches and stuffed chairs, establishing a living room effect. We personalized the room with paintings, dishes for candies, and quilts for the couches. We placed a dining table in the hall leading to the room where we could share our meals together. We understood the important role that dining together traditionally plays in socialization. The table was adorned with a cloth and flowers, presenting a home-like atmosphere often unknown in the participants' experience.

For the first two sessions of the first year, I presented studio time in the NPP room. This proved to be extremely awkward. The materials were shelved in a corner of the room, and the one small worktable had to be moved to the center of the room to be functional. This set-up made it difficult for the participants to understand the concept of studio. It minimized studio's importance by the predominance of the NPP set-up. Studio lacked its own space. During the third session we took the studio to the large multi-purpose room on the ground floor. This gave us adequate space to work and accommodate the assorted materials of the hundred languages. The move made a noticeable difference in the impact of studio on the participants. As studio time became the favorite activity in the NPP program (as indicated by program participants in the Parent's Session Evaluation Form for 2011-12), this space became very important to participants. In an interview, the kindergarten teacher elaborated on how this space became "sacred" to participants in its permanence. She said that they could feel safe returning each week to the solid four walls they knew. She explained that these walls "don't move. They're here and they're solid ... a safe place ... to look inside and explore and reflect and all of those things that we all need to do" (kindergarten teacher interview, July 25, 2013).

The Research Year

The first year of the Nurturing Parent Program proved successful with three participants returning to high school. One pursued nursing, and two were interested in social work. Others began actively volunteering at the Centre and in their communities. We modeled our second year after the first. Again, the NPP facilitators chose the parents of the children in a four-year-old class at the child development centre. Seven mothers participated. The fathers were invited to join, but only one attended two classes and did not

return. These young women have experienced poverty and the exceptional challenges that often accompany this circumstance. Many have experienced drug and alcohol abuse and abusive relationships, including neglect, with the tendency to pass these abusive traditions on to their children. These women live in the margins of society. They are viewed as not conforming to the accepted rules of society, and their voices are not understood or recognized in societies' conversations. They came to the Centre seeking help for their children. They typically feel they are beyond help of improving their own life (kindergarten teacher interview, July 25, 2013).

The staff of the program consisted of two NPP facilitators, myself as the studio facilitator, the two teachers from the four-year-old classroom, daycare staff, and a chef who provided breakfast, lunch, and snacks. One of the NPP facilitators was a qualified social worker, and the other, a teacher and the director of the school. I again attended all aspects of the program. The NPP facilitators met for three hours on one afternoon each week to plan for the next session. Guest speakers were invited into this discussion on the week of their presentation. The staff would review the material to be covered and exchange information on methods and philosophies. The entire group of facilitators, including the classroom teachers and daycare attendants, met for an hour after each class to critique the day's events. I wonder now, given the participants' comments, if we should have included the guests for a follow-up discussion after their session to confirm what the participants found helpful.

As the studio facilitator, the *atelierista*, I shared my ideas with all the facilitators. I contributed freely to discussions on how to conduct the NPP lessons, the parent-child

sessions, and infant care, as well as studio time. Reciprocally, all facilitators were invited to question and make suggestions for studio time.

On the class day, we met in the NPP room for breakfast and check-in. At this time, each person, facilitators as well as participants, was given the chance to comment on events that had taken place in their lives since we last met. Open dialogue was welcome. We facilitators felt it important to include our stories. We agreed it was good for us to contribute honestly, but in a positive light to influence the group in that direction. We were developing an environment that supported the lessons to be learned. I explained I was an artist and a long time volunteer at the Centre. I said I had worked with their children on various projects. A few recognized the projects and told me their children had mentioned my name. From the beginning, I explained I was currently a university student doing a research project. I told them the study concerned how we facilitators could be more effective in helping learners such as the clients in the NPP. I said I wasn't sure how I would approach the project as I was still in classes and had a lot to learn. I told them I would be taking copious notes and that they were welcome to read these at any time.

The lessons were taught in the morning. They were loosely adapted from the NPP manual's 17 sessions. Guest specialists included the Centre's pediatrician speaking on the development of the child's brain, a psychologist with a session on attachment, bonding, and developing empathy, and a counselor from a woman's shelter speaking on domestic abuse. These presentations lasted an hour and then we had lunch. Everyone collected around the table in the hall, including their infants from the daycare and a few of the children from the classroom. After attending the Home Visit Program, the kindergarten teacher explained that, in their homes, many of the participants rarely sat together at meals and missed that

important time for communion. Our meals together presented a particularly special occasion for some parents to connect with their apprehended children. After lunch, the children were returned to the classroom and the participants gathered in the studio. It was only under rare circumstances that a child would come to the studio as it was reserved for the parents' self-care. Afterward, the parents and facilitators would gather in the children's classroom to share stories, songs, and activities under the guidance of the children's teachers. The parents would then return to the NPP room to complete the NPP competency forms and personal evaluations of the days' activities.

Presenting studio time

Studio time was again held in a large multi-purpose room on the ground floor. I presented it in a Reggio Emilia manner, laying out a colorful proliferation of materials on tables set in a wide oval configuration. The tables were spread with generous space between to allow easy movement and access to the music corner, the speaker's corner, and a more isolated writing table that also provided a certain amount of privacy for individual work. A large opening in the center of the room invited body movement performances. At one end, a small theatre with a box of costumes and a selection of scripts offered the possibility of theatrical performance. One table presented an assortment of painting supplies. Another table was spread with a large roll of paper that unfurled to the floor, suggesting an endless supply. There were materials for collage and three-dimensional work with different clays and large found objects. Needlework supplies with multi-colored yarns dripped off the table, with needles piercing the yarn's rich thickness. The room was bright and full, inviting exploration in a multitude of languages. It was set to offer open unrestrained opportunity, and was met by the participants in just that way.

As the year progressed, I backed away from this formal presentation of the materials to allow participants to create their own use of the materials as well as their own space. Tables were left empty and a cart full of supplies stood on the side available for use in any configuration and manner they chose. During the year, one woman set her canvas against a wall and discovered splatter painting. The act of the painting was as much of a performance for all of us as it was a private reflective act for herself. One of the morning lectures was on “actions and consequences.” This woman quickly learned the consequences of splattering paint on a relatively small canvas at a distance of six to seven feet. She scrubbed the walls after class and, from that time on, she laid large sheets of plastic on the walls and under her canvas.

I experimented with imposing structure on studio by using entire sessions to introduce an unexplored language. We had a meditation session, body movement to music, group drumming, and an opportunity to tell a story in any medium. A few participants chose not to participate, but instead observed the sessions.

At the end of each studio time, participants were given the opportunity to present, sharing the work they had done. The work did not have to be completed. They had the option of not sharing, but, by their choice, this rarely happened. With this presentation they brought their voice forward. I attempted to guide the listeners, the audience, to accept each contribution by offering my validating comments. I demonstrated “plus-ing” as defined by Kelly (2012, p. 321), where a speaker’s comments are fully accepted and then added to by the participants, building the conversation and ideas in a collective manner. I hoped that through the group’s acceptance, the presenter’s ideas would be honoured.

The first day I presented studio, I thought the participants might need encouragement in discovering the opportunities studio offered. To my surprise, as I noted in my NPP journal in November 2012, they came in as if entering a “candy shop.” They went straight to the tables and began work. In my journal entry, I described their enthusiasm and how they were “10 steps ahead of me.” Their enthusiasm set the mood for the rest of the year.

The participants and I often discussed the multitude of possible languages we might use in the studio, from writing a poem, building with blocks, dancing a jig, to baking a pie. I asked them to help me uncover new ones that we hadn’t thought of. One afternoon in the first year, one couple came into the studio, sat at the collage table, picked up the National Geographic and announced that they were just going to read. As they made themselves comfortable with their feet up, I had the unsettling feeling that they were backing out of the studio work. I reminded them of connecting the studio work with the morning’s lesson and their presentation of these understandings at the end of the class. That day’s lesson had been on bonding and building positive relationships with one’s children. They nodded and continued confidently.

At the end of the gathering, after all had presented, they came forward. The woman said she was reading an article on gorillas. She said the article she was reading spoke of the importance of family to the gorillas. She gave details of their close ties to their children and other members of their community. She equated their behavior to human behavior. She concluded that we humans could learn from the examples of the gorilla’s nurturing behavior. The fellow then presented the story he was reading about a father and son’s cross-country motorcycle trip. He explained how their relationship grew deeper as they

experienced different adventures together. With the couple's choice of the articles they read, and through the language of reading these articles, they reflected on the morning's lesson and their own parenting practices. Through translating the readings into the telling they communicated their understandings out to the community.

Practicing personal methodology to inform developing pedagogies

I had intentionally taken this study to the university for further learning, sharing with like minds, and validation. I worked out of graduate studies in art education, and education, while situating myself in the visual arts department. I crossed boundaries of different faculties, attending courses in educational research, theory and critical studies in art, and pedagogy and professional practice in art education. I then took those studies into my studio, situated in the art department, in order to more deeply understand the work I was asking of my NPP learners (Lloyd, & Smith, 2006). I engaged myself actively in the doing. I understood "phenomenology and pedagogy are interwoven" (Lloyd & Smith, 2006, p. 307).

I took large rolls of four-foot wide paper or canvas, a flexible material, tacked it up as high as I could on the wall and let it drop to the ground. I then began anywhere, painting, writing, and scratching out bits from the readings and conversations I heard in and out of class. I cited them because I would continually use them as references. The colours, lines, and words would take any direction to connect ideas. (See Figure 2 below.) The movement of these free connections opened my mind to a creative flow of ideas (Lloyd & Smith, 2006). It engaged my body as well as my mind, taking my learnings towards deeper understanding, as I would "explore new possibilities for making sense of and living in the world" (Kumashiro, 2009, p. 98).

Figure 2 Studio Exhibition: “Finding Voice,” Aug 28—Sept 20, 2014



I developed a personal methodology to inform pedagogies for a marginalized population. My personal methodology informed the development of the studio in the Centre’s NPP pedagogy. I then brought these understandings to pen on paper, words on the computer. In this linear format, I tried to preserve that flow of ideas, the blurring of definitions and redefining in the ambiguous nature of language, where the lack of measureable existence is fully accepted, and creativity with its constant redefining is nurtured.

Some friends saw my studio musings as art objects and shuddered when I stuck pins in them, moved them, and stepped on them without regard for their “preciousness.” To me, whatever happened to them in the life world only became part of their beauty. At first, I didn’t understand why I felt each of the pieces produced was complete, whole, and successful. When I stood back and looked, there were no failures to me. I realized that even in the most rough and unpredictable work they aided my learning and communicating with others. I questioned and practiced art as a child would, as a serious attempt to organize my environment and display it in a meaningful way (Lowenfeld, 1987). I carried this practice on throughout the study. See Appendix A for exhibition video information.

Ethical considerations

At first, as I engaged in the process of applying for clearance from the Conjoint Faculty Research Ethics Board, I did not know how I would proceed with the study. The more I read Freire, Kumashiro, Sensoy, and DiAngelo, the more I realized that no one could help people change their lives or their positions in society. Only the individual could make that change (Freire, 2011). When considering the different methods of research, the one that made sense was a participatory action research (PAR) study (McIntyre, 2008). This would give the participants a strong and total voice, as was the purpose of my study. The participants would not only contribute their ideas, but would create the study from beginning to end. They would construct the method of procedure, what questions would be asked, and where we would take the results of our work. I had complete faith that the participants would be capable of building and pursuing a solid and significant research study. However, at the time of submission to the Ethics Board, this method did not appear to offer enough control over the study.

I took control of the structure of the study. I decided on the time, the place, methods used (i.e., focus group, notes), and the general questions asked. Several colleagues at the university explained how video recording would provide the most informative coverage of the proceedings. The visuals of the body language and interactions of the group would provide a wealth of information on what each individual was thinking and how they related as a group. But this would not be possible due to anonymity restrictions for the participants. Instead, the conversations would be audio recorded. Beyond all these restraints, however, I would keep my questions general and allow the conversations to develop in any direction the group wanted to take. Hermeneutically, my questions would respond to the particular situations. In this way, participants would at least have some control over what was said. I told them I would transcribe the conversations verbatim and then bring them back for a full reading together, giving each participant the chance to edit the work at will. They could see what they said, omit anything they didn't want, and clarify or add anything they left out. I would then take their approved conversations directly to the report. I would build my thesis on that, presenting what they said. I promised to give each of them a copy of the thesis once it was done.

In early spring of the research year, my application to the Ethics Board was approved. Although I was working with at-risk parents, the purpose of the research was to more fully understand the usefulness of studio time as a component of an educational program. My conversations with participants would be about experiencing the studio, which put them at minimum or no risk. I did state in the application that the participants might explore the personal issues that brought them to the NPP, and these might cause discomfort. I assured the Ethics Board that accredited counseling was available within the

Centre, and I would refer participants to the appropriate counselors if I noticed signs of distress.

Informing participants of the research project

A month before the end of classes and the beginning of the formal research study, I informed participants again about my student status at the university and plans for doing the research study. I explained the study would focus on the effectiveness of studio time in the educational setting of the NPP. I said they had experienced studio, and thus were the experts, and I would like them to help me explore the questions of its effectiveness as my co-researchers. I then explained the study. I presented them with the complete copy of my Ethics Board application, including a copy of the verbal statement I presented, and a copy of the consent form. The proposal was met with enthusiasm. Some of the women spoke with an authority that they had never exhibited before. I wanted to audio record from that point in time. The participants exhibited more interest in the difference they could make than concerns about their identities being revealed.

One requested a copy of the “Benefits” entry in my Ethics Board application. It read:

The immediate purpose of this research is to more fully understand the role of the artist and the usefulness of studio time as a component of an education program, specifically the NPP. It also will further our understanding of how to make our education systems more effective. With a deeper understanding of self-directed learning, it investigates the ideas coming from the Reggio Emilia philosophies, of the artist contributing a unique and valuable approach to education. This study investigates the possibilities of each individual finding their own unique voice, bringing it forward to the community, gaining validation through presentation, to become responsible members of the community. In this we build a stronger, more cohesive society.

Another participant wanted to know about the possibilities of this study being published because, as she exclaimed, it is crucial that this information be “communicated to the world” (Izzy). She then explained her negative experiences with traditional education, and how important it was that the studio supported alternative, more effective ways to learn.

At their request, I posted the entire application, including the informed consent, on the classroom bulletin board for perusal at their leisure. Their confident capability was similar to the way they entered the first studio session. I informed them that I would audio-record our research discussion sessions for the primary purpose of compiling verbatim transcripts that they would then edit. They would have the opportunity to add anything they had left out and delete what they did not want. That transcript would then be what I brought to my report.

The NPP schedule and classes were always presented in a flexible manner. We often experienced last minute changes. I found this flexibility allowed for a more creative approach: thinking on our feet, working around constraints, opening the opportunity for input from the participants, and for their needs to be met. We completed the NPP manual and studio time by the end of April. The graduation ceremony was to be held at the end of May. This left several weeks open and unscheduled with the families still in attendance, and worked to my advantage as it allowed full days for the research gatherings instead of the planned hour-long sessions on several Thursdays. The full days afforded us time for deep discussions.

The morning of the first day of the research gatherings, all seven of the NPP participants showed up in dresses, high-heels, hair done, and lipstick on. I wondered if they

mistook the gatherings to be video-recorded rather than audio-recorded. They all sat a bit straighter and were charged with energy. I presented my position once more, as required, and meticulously explained the procedures and legalities of the study. When asked if they wanted to join, they again responded with enthusiasm. All seven participants signed the consent forms and were ready to begin.

The Research Gatherings

We held the research gatherings in the studio as it presented the natural setting for facilitating the investigation of studio time. I brought the tables together in the middle of the room to create a round table effect, seating us close together. The audio recorder was placed in the center of the configuration. Another semicircle of tables was set around the periphery of the room with refreshments and art materials.

The chief NPP facilitator had suggested I get coffee and snacks to make these gatherings more special and add to the camaraderie. Make this a more joyful and meaningful experience (Brittain, 1987). To emphasize the importance of their participation, I asked them what favorite foods they would like to have. I brought in at least one suggestion from each participant. When they arrived each day, I noted their pleasure when they saw their request among the spread on the table. They were recognized. As with our communal lunches, I included a vase of flowers.

I didn't detect any significant disappointment when I set the tiny recording device in the middle of the table. There was a brief mention of recording and video, but that was immediately drowned out by discussions on transcribing and turning cell phones off. I found it interesting how willing, even eager, everyone was to be recorded. They had no qualms about anyone from outside knowing whom they were and what they had to say.

They actually seemed to desire it. Nonetheless, we did use the pseudonyms throughout the discussions.

A Diacritical Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry

I began with general questions about the studio, asking for their likes, dislikes, and what improvements they might make. Nothing was polished; I did not have a script. I was intentionally unrehearsed. I often spoke awkwardly, and would have preferred to leave some things out at times, but I realized the content of what I said was less important than the way I said it, and the vulnerable stance I communicated to the group. This vulnerability was important to becoming a member (Dewey, 1938). I was embarrassed when I used a word that was not understood. I was always to be different because I came with different things to contribute to the study. I was the facilitator. Nevertheless, I did not want to be removed, but to sit among, listen, and contribute to the dialogue. I let myself be open and my mistakes, my awkwardness, were important to my working with my co-researchers in the questioning and trying to find new understandings.

The research group met once a week for a total of four days. We began at 10:00 a.m. and continued until 2:45 p.m. Lunch was served in the studio. Counseling and doctor appointments were carried on at the Centre as usual. The participants attended the gatherings when they could. I repeated questions and reviewed constantly so all would have a chance to contribute their ideas. The first two days were questions and open discussions, with the third day for editing those discussions. There was a lot of “fooling around,” which facilitated the group in developing strong positive relationships. When editing the transcripts, participants decided to omit the “ums” and “ahs,” repeats, gossip, and the majority of the “fooling around” moments. We also had a discussion on swear

words. One participant said it kept things more “real and authentic.” I asked if this supported the information they were trying to impart. This led to a conversation on who exactly was their audience. We agreed it would be professionals such as teachers, social workers, psychologists, and practicum students. I could see them sit up straighter when they realized they would be advising the people who had been, for all these years, advising them. They unanimously agreed that swear words would not be effective in their discussions of studio with these professionals.

Together we engaged in critical dialogue, sharing our experiences, telling our stories, bringing in our histories to this diacritical hermeneutic study. And in that sharing we defined studio, studio time, and effective facilitators. Through this story, this reporting, we pass these understandings on to others. Two days of open discussion produced 150 pages of raw transcripts. On the first day of editing, several of the participants read through and corrected the entire transcript. Others, due to low stamina or intermittent attendance, edited at least their own contributions. They worked diligently the entire day in order to complete the work. Lunch and snacks were eaten while reading, and they only laughed over things said in the transcripts. Upon completion, they requested an extra day for a final edit. They wanted to make sure they had not overlooked anything, and that I had recorded their changes correctly. We met two weeks later to peruse the edited transcript. That reading and discussion was short, and they agreed all was fine. The transcript was cut to a third of concise conversation. As all of this work was important to them, I have included this verbatim transcript in the following chapter on research results.

On the afternoon of our last edit we had a party in the studio. We had cake and gave each other facials, manicures, and pedicures. I told them I had been working in my own

studio at the university, practicing what I had asked of them. I used materials of choice to connect the information introduced to me in my university classes with my own knowledge to make sense of the world. I asked if they would like to see what I had produced. The prospect excited them. One participant asked to bring her paints and work there. I amended my ethics application and arranged to tour the university with them and to ask two questions. The first question would open a discussion on what they thought were the most important ideas they took away from attending studio. The second sought to hear how their views of me as the facilitator had changed during the year we had been together. I arranged a tour of the university, my studio, and the Native Centre. As we left the studio that last day, they repeatedly confirmed their excitement about the trip, and asked for my phone number. They wanted to connect with me.

Three participants and the director of the child development centre came to the university for the tour that Fall. The others participants had schedule conflicts or simply forgot. Despite the low number, the trip was a success. Even the quiet one of the group exhibited a new confidence. She and the others were fully engaged. This success would be passed on to others through the Centre's grapevine.

Without hesitation, they came into my studio and made themselves comfortable. They sat at my desk and worktables. They worked freely, drawing and writing on my paper and my hangings. I appreciated their familiarity and comfort with me. We had conversations about my work, their ideas, and anything else that came to mind. We toured the university and lunched at the student union. A prominent national political leader happened to be making a campaign tour at that time. The air was charged. He casually walked through the crowd, presenting himself to anyone in his path. One participant was

particularly impressed and asked if she could shake his hand. The opportunity presented itself for me to easily direct him to her and she had her picture taken with him. She commented later that I had set the whole thing up. I was happy that my guests could experience the university as a place of such exciting possibilities. The directors at the Native Centre gave us a personalized and in-depth tour. I asked my two questions several times during the day but received only a few mumbles about the studio being great and I, in the end, being friendly and nice. Ultimately, these words were not as important as how, in listening to the following conversations, their enthusiasm for the studio grew deeper and stronger over the year.

Amendment to Ethics Board Application to Include Interviews with Facilitators

During the summer, I decided to enrich our understanding of the studio by including comments from the NPP facilitators. I, again, amended my ethics application and extended the study by including one-on-one interviews with the NPP facilitators. They had not only witnessed studio but had also participated at times. I included the kindergarten teacher from the first year, as she was key to the development of studio time. The interviews were audio recorded for accuracy, allowing the facilitators to hear and edit the recordings upon request. I asked the same questions I had asked participants touching on such themes as positive or negative aspects of studio, and how it could be more effective. I have interjected the facilitators' reflections throughout this thesis.

CHAPTER 3: LISTEN—PRESENTING THE RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter presents the research group discussion transcripts so that readers may have the chance to listen to the participants before I present my analysis. As discussed in the previous chapter, the participants and I met over several days and topics were repeatedly addressed to give everyone the chance to contribute to all conversations. Participants actively edited the transcript of our research group discussions and then reviewed and approved the final transcript. They gave me permission to delete repeated words and words of hesitation, such as ums and ahs. “...” signifies inaudible words, or more often, sentences spoken in an incomplete manner. “===” signifies a significant amount of conversation was edited out. Pseudonyms chosen by participants are used throughout. I have included my own voice here, as I was a part of the conversations. I did not have a script. I was intentionally unrehearsed. We worked together. Listen to what we said.

2 May 2013 (AM session)

In attendance: Linda, Pam, George, Karisera, Harmony, Tiana, Izzy

LINDA: So, I want you guys to take off on this and say anything you want about the studio. I know you have some great things to say, so you're off and running. You can identify yourself if you want to for the transcriptions. Shall I ask a couple questions and you can take off any way you want? Likes, dislikes about studio? Did it help you understand the lessons?

IZZY: THERE ARE NO DISLIKES!

LINDA: Oh, you're on (laughs). But don't let me sway you. I want real honesty in this. You are the experts. You know it all better than anyone, and I want detailed descriptions of

what you liked about it, what you don't like about it. How you think we can improve it? How it helped you in the Nurturing Parent Program? As you came from class in the morning to studio in the afternoon, how did it help you deal with the material that you studied in the morning? And another thing that we can get into anytime is how you liked presenting to the group and how that made you feel. So, that's the territory I want to cover. So take off. Go ahead. We'll go around the table first, how about that? Just to start with.

LINDA: George.

GEORGE: When I first started studio time, the first couple classes I had a hard time cause you just said, "do what you want", and I'm used to.... You have to...

TIANA: You're used to being instructed.

GEORGE: Yeah. So it was hard at first, but then once I seen other people's stuff it kinda gave me ideas, so, then I was able to open up and do my art, whatever. Yeah. I can't think of anything right now.

PAM. I didn't really think much of it at first. I do a lot of crafts anyways at home. And mine are as you will have seen, very unique because they're literally abstract. And unless you've got me saying exactly what means what, everybody thinks of my art differently. The only thing I could say bad is some days, I just wasn't in an art mood, but it was time to do art. I don't know.

LINDA: So, when you weren't in an art mood, but you had to do it, or you felt you had to do it?

PAM: It was harder.

LINDA: But how about the result?

PAM: Not as creative. Not as much work or thought put into it.

LINDA: So, you saw it as an art class that you had to do a piece of art work.

PAM: Well, when I was talking, like one of the classes I was talking a lot, and I was asked like 10 times by about five different people, "Am I not doing something in studio time?" So yes, with that it did sound like I had to, yes.

LINDA: So, maybe, maybe it shouldn't have so much pressure on, on producing.

PAM: Yeah. But most days I did feel like it, and I did it, no problem.

KARISERA: I found there was never enough time. By the time you decided, what you wanted to do, what you wanted, how you wanted to express yourself, you couldn't. There wasn't enough time.

LINDA: Hmm. Yeah.

UNKNOWN: It needs to be longer.

KARISERA: I always felt rushed.

LINDA: Rushed.

KARISERA: It wasn't as nice or as fun cause you had to rush through it.

LINDA: I empathize and sympathize. When I facilitate studio times it's usually 3 hours long. Whenever I taught it was three-hour minimum. Because it takes time.

KARISERA: Three sessions to finish one project is not amusing.

LINDA: Yeah.

KARISERA: By the time you get to the third session you just don't want to do it anymore.

(group agrees)

LINDA. Yeah, yeah.

KARISERA: On one hand you want to complete it. On the other hand, I'm like this sucks.

LINDA: Yeah and your thoughts are gone.

(group agrees)

KARISERA: Too rushed. But I liked how we could do our own thing. We were allowed to tape things, glue things, whatever you wanted to do.

IZZY: Be unique.

KARISERA: Splatter paint across the walls and make everybody else clean it up. (laughs)

ALL: (laughter)

LINDA: Isn't that someone we know? (laughs)

KARISERA: dodeedodeedo....

(laughter)

IZZY: I don't know.

KARISERA: Hey look Izzy, I see splatter (laughs).

IZZY: It just added that touch to the room.

LINDA: I think it adds to the room.

TIANA: It does.

KARISERA: It looks very institutionalized. That's okay. Somebody else painted a table.

IZZY: That was me. I loved it. I actually ended up bringing it home with me. I ended up doing stuff at home. And, ah, I guess it's really ...(sigh). I don't know. I loved it. I didn't actually know how much I liked painting or doing, you know, until I actually was involved with it. I ended up painting my whole house, and my floor. (laughs)

LINDA: Wow.

LINDA and OTHERS: In splatter?

IZZY: No. My mom had like three cans of white paint, and I just made my own colours. I have my own colour of purple and my own colour of brown and my own colour of like this turquoise. It's awesome. I just kept on making it, making a different colour.

LINDA: So you found a medium you liked, and, and you were able to learn how to use it.

IZZY: Yeah, I got a colour wheel out and I, you know. Like blue you tame it down with orange, you know, yeah. I ended up bringing it home with me, and I guess for the last couple of weeks it's actually helped me express what I am feeling instead of holding it in. I have nothing to say bad about it, I guess. [pause] I even bought canvasses for my house.

LINDA: Wow.

IZZY: I got canvasses at home, and I got paint...

LINDA: We will get more canvasses, too, for this.

IZZY: I bought paint.

LINDA: You can, you can express. Next week we'll be able to do some work with the conversation, around that little machine, if it works (laughs).

KARISERA: I've got this urge to do just spray painting.

IZZY: ...more paint.

KARISERA: Yeah.

LINDA: That's fine.

KARISERA: Get more liquidy paint. Might just water it down a bit.

IZZY: Yeah. Well, it doesn't look the same. It doesn't look the same.

KARISERA: Yeah, we'll need some of that, more of that inky paint then.

LINDA: Oh, that was good. That was so light. But you know we could add water probably to this.

IZZY: I don't want it to cause water separates from paint.

LINDA: Really?

IZZY: It goes different directions. Yeah.

LINDA: Yeah.

IZZY: I even tell my cousin that too.

TIANA: What type of paint do you use? Acrylic won't blow, watercolour might.

IZZY: Hmmm. Maybe.

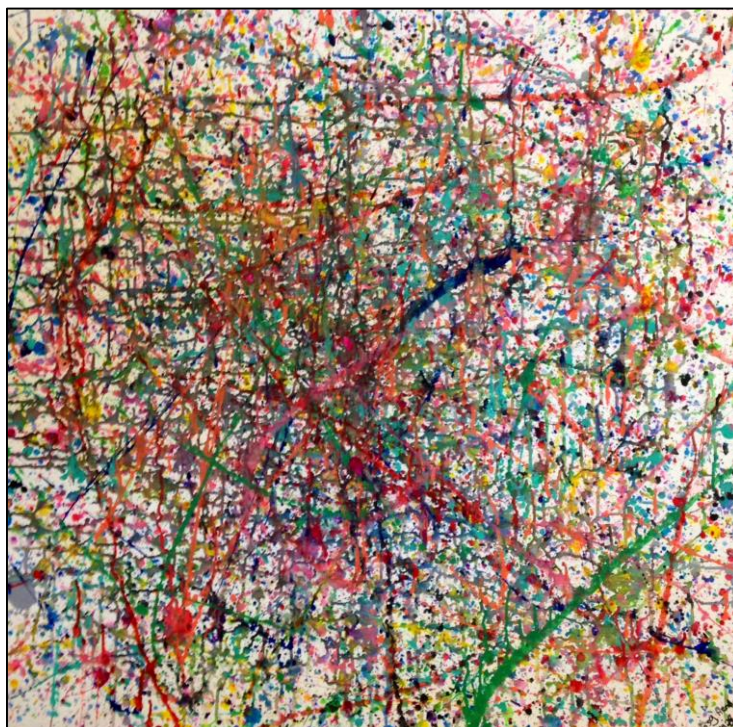
IZZY: Watercolour. That would work.

LINDA: Yeah, maybe we add that too. Get some little tubes of watercolour.

IZZY: Yeah, just get some light colours.

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Figure 3 One of Izzy's splatter paintings



HARMONY: Well studio time has been. I find it relaxing. Kind of like, after the sessions or whatever, as [Sally] called it sessions (laughter). It was just...You digest everything that you take in. And I know we were supposed to express how we were about that day, or what we learned that day, but it was like, just did its own thing. I've always been a doodler anyway, so it's just like I doodle on paper. But I got rid of, I had writer's block, so it was like writing just opened it up, that whole just to write and continue what I was doing. And I finished my songs and recorded them.

TIANA: Nice.

HARMONY: I don't know. It didn't really stop at studio time. It was too short here, but it just, it stayed with you to make the time to do it, and relax. And you're able to just include the kids into it.

IZZY: Yeah, the kids. You should really do this with kids. Studio time with the kids. I think it would...

LINDA: Well, one of the things was, that we discussed in the classes was that, self care is very important when you are caring for others. And just being able to have that time for you. And getting in touch with yourself. When your kids are there, you're, you're...

IZZY: Don't do this with the adults and kids. Do this with kids. Let 'em have free range of whatever they want to do.

LINDA: Oh, I see what you're saying.

PAM: Like kids in one room, adults in another. Not direct them on how to do it—just let them. Like we did here. Here's a pile of stuff: use it.

IZZY: Should have an art class.

LINDA: Yeah.

IZZY: Yeah.

GEORGE: Child led play.

HARMONY: It's more structured.

IZZY: Yeah, child led play.

GEORGE: That part there.

HARMONY: I just took that big roll of paper, and I like papered as high as my son could reach, and I said, "Have a good time."

TIANA: Way cheaper than having to wash walls.

UNKNOWN: Exactly.

UNKNOWN: That's what I've done ever since the kids were little, wee little.

HARMONY: Just go as high as they can reach.

TIANA: I enjoyed it. My major dislike was interruption continuously.

LINDA: What do you mean? During the time or...?

TIANA: Yeah

LINDA: Or just that it was short?

TIANA: Well, it was too short sometimes, but the continuous interruption, just period.

That's why I started wearing my music, then I couldn't get interrupted. Actually I found I got interrupted more when I had my music in.

GROUP: Hmm-hmm.

LINDA: Which is interesting because that comes into that, then you could have this private space, and then all of a sudden you're in this community and you're sharing your work with them. So I want to get into a good discussion on that sometime with you. So think about that. Any comments on that? Yeah, you found that...

TIANA: It made me not enjoy studio time.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm.

TIANA: I wasn't able to express anything that I wanted to express due to being interrupted.

KARISERA: Maybe an idea to, to work with that...

TIANA: Lost thought due to interruptions.

KARISERA: You can get those, those fake like five-foot tall like cardboard fold-up thingies.

TIANA: I don't want to be secluded.

LINDA: Yeah.

TIANA: Right.

LINDA: It was too much noise? Too much conversation, or, or pushy people, like instructors?

TIANA: Not even too much, you know like.... Well, yeah, some of the instructors were pretty pushy (laughs). It's that, it's, to me, when I see somebody doing something that it looks like they're into it, especially when it comes to painting and things like that, I'm not going to walk up to them and start talking to them. That's what I mean. It's not the conversation happening outside of and away from me. It's the, you know, I lost....

LINDA: Yeah. If you are going to have that time to yourself, you should be able to have it.

TIANA: Yeah.

LINDA: Maybe, maybe instead of having dividers put up, um, there could be more of a setup of private space.

IZZY: Or just have a sign that says, "do not disturb."

TIANA: Well, that's why I figured putting headphones in would have, would have totally....

But no, I got interrupted more with the music in than I did with the music out. So...

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LINDA: You want to get into more of that presenting and being as a group? How would you work that out? Like how do you do those?

HARMONY: It's hard to present.

IZZY: I don't have a hard time.

HARMONY: When it's not done.

LINDA: No?

IZZY: Yeah.

HARMONY: No, just when it's just not done. Like it's hard to present it. Cause it's not completed to be presented.

HARMONY: It's not really hard for me to stand up in front of a group of people.

IZZY: When you know them, it's easy.

HARMONY: No, not really, I'm a karaoke DJ on the side.

IZZY: No, can't do it. No.

PAM: For me, I just normally do something about how I'm feeling that day, and it's really hard to explain, so finding the words is extremely hard.

GEORGE: Maybe it changed my mood. The majority of the time I'm just thinking about the negative. [inaudible] Just in a bad mood, but then when I got to studio time, it was like, yeah, relaxing time. And it brought out other things, like positive. I did a lot of things for my kids because they weren't home with me. And then, when they were, I mean, yeah, I did a lot of things for my kids. And then it started, it helped me plan things I wanted to do with them, and how I wanted to be. And then I started switching, helping me switch from negative way of thinking to positive.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm.

GEORGE: And after studio time, I, well, at first it would go away like quickly, like that feeling. But after a while it stayed longer. So, it helped a lot with my mood.

LINDA: Yeah.

GEORGE: It switched my train of thought, for a while.

LINDA: Nice. How do you think you got into that positive space by being down here?

GEORGE: I think I was influenced, like, we were told that there was just a time to be open, creative, and relax if you need it. Or, you know, I don't know the way you guys explained it, kinda, you're supposed to be in a positive light. So that when I did think about what I wanted to do, I always wanted to be positive.

IZZY: Helped me get my frustrations out.

LINDA: Did the presentation of the materials offer anything to that effect or anything else? Other than what was said?

IZZY: Not really. Just cause, you know, I did it for me, not for everybody. Not so what everybody else could know what I'm feeling.

GEORGE: I also think that, when we presented, that it helped us get to know each other better and where we're at. Cause we're showing how we feel and what's going on with us right now.

HARMONY. And we didn't really know each other before this.

GEORGE: Yeah.

HARMONY: None of us did, really.

LINDA: So, you think, it helped with the class, like the check-ins and everything, just as a partner you think? Or would you do it alone?

HARMONY: Well, it helped us to talk to each other too, in studio time. Like, I wouldn't walk up to her and go "oh look at what I drew" or "what I wrote", or any of it. Like, If I didn't know her, I wouldn't have done that. But, having everything in the morning and then doing it here, like, we bonded. And not in a creepy way.

LINDA: Somebody else have any comments on that? On presenting?

IZZY: I agree with Harmony and George.

GEORGE: Having it in a group, when we present, it also gave us, me, personally, cause I'm not artistic in any way. It gave me ideas. And it gave me ideas for my kids. Because at home, I'm like here's a colouring book or here's a paintbrush and paint, whatever. So at home we started doing more things like different papers, gluing, and using stuff. And our whole art box has gotten bigger cause there's more stuff in there now. Before it was just colouring books, the paint tray thing, crayons, felts, pencil crayons. That was it. There's more in there now, glitter....

IZZY: Glue.

GEORGE: Glue.

PAM: Feathers.

IZZY: And we started doing dream catchers too.

GEORGE: Yeah.

LINDA: So, you got to know different materials.

GEORGE: Actually, it got me doing things that I used to like, like beading. I started beading again. And, I've been thinking about dancing for my kids. I've been thinking about it. And starting their outfits. Things that I let go of, it kind of brought it back, which is nice.

LINDA: So, it was good to have. The different materials around. Introducing a few that you

hadn't tried, like the drums and the...

IZZY: I love the drums.

LINDA: Yeah. So that's a good idea to impose that?

GEORGE: Yeah.

PAM: I would have loved the drums. I just wasn't here that day.

IZZY: Different art forms. Cause music is an art form. Dance is an art form. Yoga is an art form.

LINDA: Just trying something different. Like having that pushed on you.

IZZY: I liked yoga.

2 May 2013 (PM session)

In attendance: Linda, Izzy, Harmony, Pam, Tiana, George, Karisera

LINDA: Shall we talk about how Studio helped or not with understanding the morning material, in the Nurturing Parent class. Did it help? Did it hinder? Do you feel there is a better way to do it?

IZZY: I just couldn't wait to get studio time, honestly. But who knew? I had creativity in me.

LINDA: And you just became Jackson Pollock. Poom! (laughs)

IZZY: My mom always kept saying Pollock.

LINDA: That's it. He was famous for that. For the splatter paints, dripping paints.

KARISERA: I come from a very creative family. I know I'm creative. It's just finding the right outlet.

LINDA: So this whole thing about being creative. Do you think that everybody has the potential to be creative?

IZZY: Oh, yeah.

HARMONY: Yes.

ALL: Oh yeah.

KARISERA: Everybody has got a touch of artist in them. You just define what it is you're good at, crocheting, splatter paints, yata yata yata.... It's in you.

IZZY: Dreamcatchers.

LINDA: Nice.

KARISERA: Everybody's just gotta figure out what your thing is. If you don't know what your thing is, it's a waste of time.

IZZY: Waste of time?

GEORGE: Discovering what you're good at isn't a waste of time.

KARISERA: Doing what you're not good at constantly isn't. But, if you're going through and trying, you know, do a little bit of this and do a little bit of that to find out what you're good at.

HARMONY: It's trial and error.

IZZY: But if you're constantly doing something you're not good at, you're going to eventually get good at it.

KARISERA: Not necessarily. If you don't enjoy it, you'll never excel in it. Like if you, if you can't draw, but you are forced to draw all the time, and you [inaudible]...

IZZY: I can't draw...

KARISERA: Then you're not going to enjoy it and you're not going to be able to be creative, but if you know, hey I can't draw, but god, if I've got to line up, like you know, the design, I could paint out the world. Then you should paint, not draw.

IZZY: Hmm-hmm.

LINDA: Hmm. Interesting.

KARISERA: Trying a bunch of little things to find out what you're good at, yeah, okay, that's not a waste of time. But doing the same thing that you're not good at, again and again, it's a waste. You always find what you're good at.

LINDA: Do you think being good at something and liking to do it are the same things?

ALL: Nope. No.

KERISERA: No. If you like to do something, even if you're not good at it, you can, you know, you should do it.

IZZY: I'm a terrible painter. I'm a terrible painter,

KARISERA: You're great at splatter paint. Oh god!

IZZY: You should see me paint. I get drips everywhere. I'm all covered. I'm a terrible painter.

LINDA: Those are beautiful paintings and that's a painter.

KARISERA: You're an amazing splatter painter, just maybe not a....

LINDA: How do you say you are a terrible painter? How can you say that?

HARMONY: Well, that's what I'm saying.

IZZY: I'm horrible.

HARMONY: You know, I can go sing. But, the second I have to structure it, I'm not gonna do it.

LINDA: Hmm.

HARMONY: Cause then you feel like you're a puppet, and then it's do it their way only.

IZZY: Or it's a job.

HARMONY: Before studio time, a lot of it, everything you did art wise was structured. It's

structured in school, it's structured here, it's structured there.

IZZY: It's not really structured here.

HARMONY: It's not a form of therapy, whereas studio time allows you to do something that's not structured even though in a sense it should be. Or it is because you're trying to digest what you did in the morning and you're trying to expose it in a different form. That's what I got out of it, so...

PAM: Me. I had a hard time expressing what I learned in class, I just, more or less did what I was feeling that day, for the art.

LINDA: So what you were feeling that day—do you think it was affected by what you learned in the morning?

PAM: NO.

IZZY: Mmm.

KARISERA: Sometimes.

IZZY: Hmm. What you learned in the morning could really set your mood for the rest of the day. Like that day that woman came.

HARMONY: Oh, our first speaker,

IZZY: Okay, that put me in such a horrible mood. I want to say stupid, but that's not the right word and that's not the polite word. She was, no, she was stupid. (laughs).

UNKNOWN: Arrogant.

UNKNOWN: Arrogant.

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HARMONY: Like, there's some people that will get right into your face and, yeah, you're gonna be mad for a long time. And then in the studio time, a lot of us would reflect that.

Like if we were angry. We deal with pain in a different way. Like I bake for everybody. But usually when I'm baking that perfection, I'm pissed right off. Like I'm, I'm ready to hit somebody, I'm that mad. I'd rather just punch 'em, but it's more. What do I choose violence or art.

IZZY: Therapeutic.

HARMONY: Well, that's therapy. But hitting someone, I'd have to weigh out the odds.

LINDA: But baking for everyone, you get smiling faces.

HARMONY: Is it worth going to jail, or am I going to be a mom to my kid. So, yeah, studio time helps you zone that in too. Because you keep that in the back of your head.

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LINDA: Is the studio a deterrent to the lessons that are taught an educational context like the nurturing parent?

IZZY: No, I don't think so.

KARISERA: I find that I don't make something to reflect what the lesson is. I just do something that's relaxing because then I can let my brain think and process and absorb the lesson from earlier.

LINDA: Very interesting.

LINDA: Do you want to talk more about how it lends itself to the classes in the morning, or beyond?

PAM: In my opinion, because it was a parenting course that we were in, me time is just as important, and I used Studio Time as 'Me Time'. Because it was a parenting course that we were in, whatever expression and time for yourself is always good when thinking of parenting kids. Because if you don't take care of you, how can you take care of your kids. So

it did kind of work. Even if we went off topic, with our studio time, off of what we learnt in the morning, it was still good because we are doing time for us. Me time as a parent is always important. Studio time in my opinion is me time.

TIANA: Yeah. Oh, yeah, so you see it as we're in the morning doing our parenting stuff. And then your self-care part is studio time. Like you would at home look after your kids, do all that. Once they're in bed, then you have self-care time.

PAM: Hmm-hmm.

TIANA: That's how she sees it.

PAM: That's exactly how I see it.

IZZY: That's a very valid good point.

HARMONY: Well, it's because someone else is watching our kids for us, and it's just us.

LINDA: It is, yeah.

KARISERA: Dude, this is the only time that I get without a baby stuck to me. Seriously, and that's the place. I don't want it to end.

LINDA: Yeah, yeah.

IZZY: I, I get, you know, I would die if I had my baby stuck to me forever, but...

KARISERA: I love, I love.

IZZY: Honestly you guys, like...

UNKNOWN: ...want a break from all the craziness.

IZZY: I want the chaos back! I miss the chaos!

TIANA: I enjoyed studio more when Christopher was painting with me. We actually have done it a few times. Just him and I, so it's like a painting.

LINDA: Nice.

TIANA: Like I understand the whole you know, you need time away from your kids and all that kind of stuff, but personally for me, I enjoy myself more when I'm on the floor colouring or painting or building, than I do when I'm doing my own stuff. Maybe it's cause I don't know who I am and I don't know what I like.

LINDA: Maybe you like who you are with them.

TIANA: Maybe. I'm not an angry person when I'm with my kids. I'm not angry at all.

LINDA: Do you want to have the materials and be discussing and have your hands busy doing stuff?

ALL: Yeah.

KARISERA: I tend to not get so distracted so easily and off topic. I like to get my hands dirty.

LINDA: Yeah. It would be interesting for me to see what we've been talking about. When you have a class going on, and then you come down here and you have that free time to just put anything out on paper, and how much it relates to the class in the morning. If we're talking about this and you are doing a piece, how much goes into that piece of what we're talking about? So, if you want to do that, I think it would be great.

TIANA: It might keep our hands busy so we're not throwing things at people.

PAM: I think it might be good.

LINDA: Yes, we might save the almonds. (laughs) Except Izzy is going to throw paint at us.

Ha ha ha. Which is all right.

LINDA: This also goes to another idea of, would you like to see studio time in other programs?

IZZY: I would like to see studio time in the classroom with the children.

GEORGE: I think it would be an official tool. Groups sorta have to do, like, I don't know,

group [inaudible].

TIANA: I think studio time would be good therapy.

GEORGE: Yeah.

IZZY: And yes, in a classroom base, yes.

GEORGE: I could see this being positive in, like, anger management, or violence, or addictions counseling, this would be really...

LINDA: Therapeutic. Yeah.

GEORGE: I think it would be.

IZZY: Yeah, I guess, maybe if I was in that mind of space. And, you know what actually. Yeah, because when I was in...

LINDA: Why? Why do you think it's good?

IZZY: When I was in the addiction case program--there we go. We did actually have this parenting class that we did do crafts for half the day and you know, everybody was back to their, I guess (tish) self back. Your doing crafts, painting, you get to be young again and not feel judged. So, yes.

HARMONY: They have studio time in cancer therapies at Wellsprings.

TIANA: They have studio time in any kind of therapy really. Like I know the urgent care therapy program I did, half the day was spent doing studio time, whether it be yoga or drumming or painting or colouring or randomly sitting there creepily....Some did that too.

LINDA: Hmmm. So why, why do you think it, it's therapeutic?

TIANA: Self-expression.

IZZY: Cause you don't get a lot of chance in this, in this, what is it?

PAM: Busy world.

IZZY: ... busy world to self-express yourself, or to be self-exploring.

TIANA: Without being judged.

IZZY: Hmm-hmm. Cause everybody judges everybody in this world these days. Oh, sorry, you know what I mean, I'll rephrase that in, people judge people in these.... You're always judged. Someone is always judging you, but to be able to self-express without being judged in a group setting. In a group setting is nice, cause you're in a group, and this group is not judging you.

TIANA: Well that's one of the rules.

KARISERA: No, judgey!

IZZY: Lets get some marbles. I need to get a canvas. I want a long canvas so I can get my kids' handprints and my handprints all on a canvas so I can hang it up.

LINDA: Just a comment. I love to work really big too. I sprawl all the words all over that I'm reading. And then I take the paint and paint it all over, and I found it really can, to do it on those big rolls of paper, we have some here too, which is. Because in the end the acrylic dries, it becomes very stable on the paper. It like thickens the paper and makes it not so rippable and all that kind of stuff. And we can roll it and take it anywhere.

LINDA: How useful it is in educational contexts or how useful it is in other programs, or anything...anything. Actually any comment. Take off.

HARMONY: I am part of Wellsprings, and they have like a watercolour room, a pottery room, and self-expression of life.

IZZY: Where's this?

HARMONY: It's for cancer survivors. And, you know, they have a whole art therapy room upstairs, and you like can see the mountains and stuff like that. So, it's like...

LINDA: Beautiful.

TIANA: It's very soothing and relaxing.

HARMONY: Yeah. It makes you forget.

TIANA: Even just for a little while.

HARMONY: Well yeah, just momentarily forget something ...

TIANA: Yeah and your body heals better when you aren't thinking about it.

HARMONY: You just remember that you are still there, and you can stop, think outside the box a little bit. It's just, it's like a step back.

TIANA: Or it allows you to take your anger out that you have because now you have that, right?

HARMONY: That's why I bake.

LINDA: Which is a good medium too. It's an art. It's very nurturing, It's all, all of the above.

IZZY: It's art too!

TIANA: See when it comes to being able to do art of any form. Like, I don't know if I'd say crafts, but like drawing, painting, colouring, things like that, you can actually get your anger out on paper, rather than screaming and yelling at someone. Like to me, doing crafts doesn't do that for me, because then I just want to tear it up afterwards.

PAM: In my form of medium, which, the reason I say crafts is because that's what I say my medium is. I don't know how else to word it. If I feel like ripping up paper, I do, and put it on there ripped up. It's part of it, in the way I, my medium is.

LINDA: Yeah, I never saw it as arts and crafts.

TIANA: Yeah, and everyone has their own form...

PAM: That's why I said my medium.

LINDA: Yeah.

TIANA: See I never even knew I enjoyed painting until studio time started. Um, and then because of studio time I stopped liking painting, because every time I started something I would get interrupted and wooh right out the window would go my idea. So that's when I stopped, so...

LINDA: So what we could do next week when we are doing all this discussing. Would that disturb you, like if you had something going, that you could work on all day?

TIANA: I remember doing art therapy on children. Like I did art therapy for the first time when I was 3. My therapist covered my, her entire office with a roll of paper and she put all these crayons everywhere and for the two hours I was with her, that's all I did was lie on the floor and colour. No talking, no nothing.

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LINDA: Ok, given the circumstances...like you have a nurturing parent class, you meet for 6 hours once a week. You have a class in the morning and then you want to have studio time. How do you make this effective? When you have...because I've heard that it's, it's short, you know, there's no privacy, all these little things. How would you make it more effective? How do you make that whole experience most effective? So, what would you do to studio time? Go ahead, George.

GEORGE: What you should have done, maybe, was like the trial run. First two classes or whatever, and then discuss with the group, like, what do you not like and like about it, and should we set some rules. So you have maybe two classes where they just try it out and its just open the way it is now. But then you go back and you discuss what you like and what you don't. What you think needs to change, if you need to set some rules...

LINDA: Oh, interesting. So you personalize it for each time.

GEORGE: Like every, will be different. Like you'll be doing this with different groups. Every group is going to be different, so you're going to have to set your own...

TIANA: Well, that's it. Everybody's different. Like even us as a group, we are all so different in what we want to do, what we don't want to do, what works for us, what doesn't work for us. So, there's a happy medium that needs to be found, and we never found it.

KARISERA: I wouldn't say that we're all completely different. Everybody in here at least has one or two things that match up with somebody else, so we all kind of clicked.

TIANA: We have similarities, but we are all very different from each other.

KARISERA: We are all our own personalities. We all at least have one or two things, like we have at least one thing that we can relate to the other person with.

PAM: We're all parents.

LINDA: You're an incredible group. I mean look at us. We've been sitting here, talking.

We're sitting here talking coolly and calmly, and it's so.... How many situations do you find where people can sit together and hash over something for how many hours, so peacefully?

TIANA: It's not even how many situations you can find people, it's how many situations can you find women to be able to sit in the same room, without blood. In all honestly, it is. You really need to be able to find the right group, and the differences...

LINDA: It's remarkable. It's wonderful. Anybody else have any ideas on how to make it effective?

PAM: One idea, with this group, this parenting group, we have so many days after the actual graduation that we're still going to meet. What about instead of morning class, afternoon studio, one day, one day?

LINDA: Oh, a whole day of studio. A whole day of class.

PAM: Yeah. So you actually have that time to finish the project. Like a lot people are saying there's not enough time. One way of giving people more time is doing one-day class, one-day studio.

TIANA: Or make it a two-day thing, like within the same week. Cause you can do a full day nurturing parent and a full day of studio, but I know what you're trying to get out of studio time and nurturing parent together, is what can we, what helps us learn more, when we do studio time, from what we learned in the morning. So you can't separate it by a full week. Because, I have a mommy brain, if it's not that day, that moment...

LINDA: Yeah, you're into a whole different...yeah.

TIANA: It's hard in a situation like that, where you want spread it out. Yes, it's a good idea to have more time, and we could have more time in one day. But we start, we don't really technically start until 11 o'clock in the morning. We have now lost two hours. Like we could start at nine. That's two hours. And then we end at 2:30. You know, what about four. There are ways of making the day longer. So, we can do nurturing parent classes while having lunch, you know, rather than break.

GEORGE: It takes a long time for us to regroup too.

TIANA: Yeah, well, and that's it.

KARISERA: The problem is, you're required to give person watching the children time off, so I have to bring my child in.

IZZY: Then bring your child in.

TIANA: None of us had ever said we don't want your kid here.

IZZY: Today at lunch, well, who was there? That was nice and relaxing and laid back, and...

Cause we were in the room, and you were there too. We were just eating. But still, it was nice and relaxing. My son was there. But, I don't know if you guys felt it or not, but I did.

TIANA: I guess the whole parent kid time that we get at the end of the day, yeah, it's nice.

But, in all honestly, we could do that during lunch. What is more, one-on-one with your child and more personal with your child then having a meal with them. Right? You're sitting down, you're face to face. Rather than let's get them all wound up doing all these arts and crafts things and they're not even really spending any time with said parent. So, because there's all these other kids going "oh look at me, come over here, come play with me!" You know, like they don't. I think drumming is about the only one where the kids actually sat still the entire time. The rest of the time, there were....

LINDA: They were busy.

IZZY: Yeah.

KARISERA: Yeah, but what if you have a kid that you can't get to sit still? That there's no way to keep them doing an activity with you? My son cannot sit still for more than 15 bloody minutes.

9 May 2013 (AM Session)

In attendance: Linda, Karisera, Harmony, Pam, Tiana, George, Venus

Missing: Izzy

LINDA: Yeah. It's so clear. The comments were phenomenal. You guys are right on it. I mean, you're just brilliant. They're absolutely brilliant. I'm really glad you guys joined, and thank you for being here again. Next week I'm going to bring in the transcripts written out, and we're going to go over them.

So, next week's an important week because I want your input on what's going to be on the transcripts that I take to the report, okay? We're going to make sure that these are absolutely the way you want it to be. And then, at the end we'll figure out what points are most important for the report. Today, what if we can review some of the issues we talked about last week so Venus can join in the conversation. And then you will have the freedom to do any pieces if you want to. What do you think?

How did studio in the nurturing parent program affect you? Did you like it? Did you dislike it? Any comments on it?

GEORGE: It's just time to do your own thing.

LINDA: George, you talked about how people should come in, and we should have it set in a schedule in the first couple days, first couple meeting days. Like say, the lesson is in the morning, studio time's in the afternoon, and then ask the group how to change that to make it more effective. So that it's customized. So that it fits that group's needs, um, specifically.

GEORGE: So it works for everybody.

LINDA: Yeah, so that it works for everybody. Which was a really neat thought, Except that when I was listening to the recordings you said in the beginning you were a little confused about what even studio time was in the beginning. So how long would you give for the testing of it and then getting the group to figure out how to make it more effective?

GEORGE: I don't know. I think maybe, I think the first two sessions, or maybe three, cause then you get a feel for what it is, and what is working and what's not working. And then you can set up your guidelines or rules or whatever you want to call it.

LINDA: Yeah. So, just enough time to get your bearings and realize.

GEORGE: You realize, yeah, you notice what works and what doesn't right away, I think. And if it needs to be changed.

LINDA: Yeah.

GEORGE: That's like the same with this group, right? We're always kind of adding or reminding or whatever the rules, or guide, not rules, guidelines.

LINDA: Yeah.

GEORGE: I think that's with any group.

LINDA: Yeah. And it becomes more workable for each group. Nice. How about you, Tiana?

TIANA: It just means you have your time to process things. Like it's, I don't know. Studio time's a little bit like self care--getting your down time to be able to do what you want, when you want, how you want, without interruption. Though it didn't work out that way. No, it's kind of what studio time to me, what I thought it meant was, yeah, time to process things, time to just relax and get things....

Yeah, and you get to explore what things you like to do. Like, I had an idea I enjoyed painting until I started studio time, and then I found out I don't enjoy painting when interruptions happen. Then I just give right up. Completely. So. Yeah.

LINDA: Which would come into customizing it towards the group. You, we would figure out where you wanted to do it and what kind of space you wanted, yeah, and the time that you need.

TIANA: Well, it didn't seem like we had enough time. With studio time. It's like we were rushed through everything. So with interruptions it was kind of hard to get things where you wanted it.

PAM: I just thought that it was good to express how you are feeling.

LINDA: One point I made last week was how important each one of your voices are in this cause you are the ones with experience in this studio, and this is the best place I can get the information for my report. What I heard was amazing things. You all have some incredible ideas about it. The sophistication of your thoughts is remarkable to me, and I'm quite impressed and thank you for helping with this. Would you like to say anything Karisera? Or do you want to go Venus?

VENUS: I know studio time was like, when I did it, it was me just expressing how I felt. And I did it because I liked it. I just like art. That's all. I like experiencing new things to do. I like experiencing new things to do, I guess.

TIANA: And studio time allowed you with that, with all the different things that are over in the buckets.

VENUS: Yeah. Colours, materials, glue, colours, paint, ha ha, cool!

=====

LINDA: If you want time to do some work on these things, now's the time to find it or we can just continue. I just thought maybe we'd go through these fast. Like, how you liked sharing your work during presentations? Like bringing it...

VENUS: I had no problem, I guess.

TIANA: I didn't like doing it. People are judgey. Judgey people.

PAM: It was hard to explain cause it's just what I'm feeling and half of the time I'm feeling different feelings at one time. It's hard to explain my art, because half the time I'm feeling multiple different emotions at once. And that's why it's hard to explain it.

LINDA: Hmm. Do you think that the work itself does the explaining? I mean, do you need to add words to it?

TIANA: Not everybody gets what you've just put down on paper. So, to you, what you've just done tells you how you feel. But it's not gonna tell anybody else because they're not in your head.

LINDA: And is it important for everyone else to...

TIANA: No.

ALL: No

TIANA: No, it's not important at all for anybody else to know why or how or anything behind what you've just done, unless you feel it necessary to share that.

But in all honesty, you know, it's not absolutely important to have to explain, because even if you explain it not everybody's gonna get it. Not everybody's gonna understand how this big blob of splattness to you is happiness. They're gonna look at it and go okkkkayyyy.

Right? So...

LINDA: Do you think it can mean one thing to the person who produces it and one thing to others who are looking at it, to the observer? And how important is it that the, for the observer? The observer's opinion. How important is that at the end?

UNKNOWN: Not.

TIANA: It shouldn't be, but to someone like me it totally is, and that is why I don't like sharing. But that is because I've got my own issues with self-doubt and what not. So, but for a healthy person it doesn't matter, the opinion of other people. If they don't like it, it's like "Oh well. I like it. I'm good with that." Right? But, I used to..., it depends on the situation. Like for someone that paints and sells their paintings to them it's very important what people think of their stuff, cause it's their livelihood. Like they're painting to sell it, so they

want people to like it. But I don't think people take to heart somebody not liking their stuff, normal people. I'm not normal so...

LINDA: So you think some people see it as a very personal conversation, and some people take it as a...

TIANA: Yes...take offence to it.

LINDA: Or take a social...,see it as communicating.

TIANA: Yeah.

LINDA: How important do you think it is to use that for communicating?

TIANA: It's important, but not everybody's gonna understand the communication you're trying to get across.

LINDA: Hm.

TIANA: So it makes it a little more difficult, but I don't know. Like I said, it depends on the situation.

LINDA: Difficult than what, than words, than just talking?

TIANA: Than just talking, yeah, than just talking.

LINDA: Gotcha.

TIANA: Like I could make a picture, and I could know exactly what everything on that picture is supposed to be saying, but George over here will look at it and go, "Well I get half of it, but what's with the rest of the mess?" So, it all just...I don't know, maybe it's a conversation starter for a situation but...

LINDA: Well, if they're asking the question "what's the rest of the mess?" they're inquiring. They are engaging with you in a conversation.

TIANA: Yeah. Yep. I don't know.

LINDA: Yeah. Any other opinions on that?

GEORGE: Most of the stuff I did was for my kids.

LINDA: So, it was a conversation with your kids?

TIANA: It was things you could do for your kids.

GEORGE: Yeah, because that was all that was on my mind like during studio time.

TIANA: Well, and George was just working on getting her kids back. So she was trying to make it so she had things to present her kids when they came back, right? I think. I know, you made door hangers or something for your girls.

GEORGE: Yeah.

TIANA: Things like that so they were....She did something personal to welcome them home rather than just having them come home. She wanted to make sure it felt like home, I think.

GEORGE: Hmm-hmm.

LINDA: So you were communicating with your kids. You were showing them how much you care.

GEORGE: Hmm-hmm

LINDA: You were showing what, showing that you, you were....It was like saying, "Welcome". Like saying, "I love you".

TIANA: Yay, you're back!

GEORGE: So that why, I guess sharing wasn't hard for me cause it wasn't really me expressing anything inside of me. It was just showing my love for my kids. So, no one's gonna judge that.

LINDA: It's pretty big.

TIANA: I don't know. I know some pretty judgey people. (laughs)

LINDA: So you worry about what people think about?

GEORGE: I don't know. Cause I didn't do anything really that was personal.

TIANA: Your hoodie.

GEORGE: Oh yeah.

TIANA: Your hoodie. When you bedazzled yourself.

LINDA: That was beautiful.

(laughter)

TIANA: I don't know. I don't think studio time really means for you, you. It's just, I really enjoy baking, and I love baking cause it's downtime for me. Not everybody sees baking as downtime, but to me it is. And I'm not doing it for me, I'm doing it for somebody else cause I don't eat half of what I bake. It's personal time, but it's, personal time doesn't always have to mean about you. Like my kids, they're my number one, just like George over here. So, a lot of the stuff that I did make, [my son] loved it because he always does. But [my other son] was, you know, like, he didn't really care and that bothered me that he didn't really show an interest in something I was trying to do. So, yeah.

GEORGE: Yeah, my boys took apart the stuff I made and made other things with them. My girls still have theirs.

ALL: (laughter)

LINDA: Hmm. We've got a couple boys in our family now and I notice that they love to take things...,they want to know how things work. It's not...

TIANA: Curiosity with boys' brains is way different than girls.

LINDA: Not destructive. It's like curiosity.

TIANA: Girls are more factual and boys are like, "hmmm, let's see what happens if I do this?". Girls are like, "I know what happens when I do this".

ALL: (laughter)

TIANA: Like a boy will climb a tree, fall out and see if it hurts. A girl automatically knows that if you fall out of a tree it's gonna hurt.

LINDA: Are you saying they're smarter? (laughs)

TIANA: Yeah, it's hard to say. I have two boys, so. But no, I find that boys are like that. They're more apt to touch rather than look, whereas a girl is more apt to look rather than touch. So, that's why I don't want girls cause boys are way more fun.

PAM: I have all three girls and they drive me bonkers. But I love them.

GEORGE: Yeah, girls, boys are different.

LINDA: One question I might ask you, Venus, because we also discussed this last week. Was, did studio time change anything with you? Like taking it from nurturing parent, the information from nurturing parent and then going into studio time. Did it make you realize things more, or change anything for you? Or change anything in general for you?

PAM: Even your emotions.

LINDA: Even your emotions, yeah. We discussed that a little bit last time too.

TIANA: I don't know. I personally don't think having studio time after nurturing parent helped me understand the, whatever we learned in the morning, just because everything we learned in the morning, there were quite a few times that the people teaching it shouldn't have been teaching it, so I shut down. I wouldn't listen. I wouldn't participate. Studio time helped me calm down afterwards, like come back out of the shutdown.

LINDA: Mmm. Interesting. What do you think Izzy? Karisera? You have any comments on that one?

TIANA: I don't know. I know I'm not the only one that shut down during some of the nurturing parenting classes that we had.

GEORGE: Exactly.

LINDA: Why did you shut down? What happened?

TIANA: The people teaching it, and some of them that were really good at teaching what they taught, were just saying the wrong things. And, yeah, other things were...

GEORGE: (inaudible) personally (inaudible) meant to personally attack people, but it just felt like it... or perceived that way.

TIANA: Yeah.

GEORGE: Some of them didn't know what group they were talking to.

TIANA: Yeah. Some of them shouldn't have been teaching at all.

GEORGE: Yeah, that's exactly it. Some of them don't know how to talk to groups or people.

TIANA: Or the type of group that we were in. Like there are lots of groups out there where people are very stable, very good with their emotions, very, you know, "We're great. We're awesome". And then there's us. We're all messed up in our own little way.

UNKNOWN: Yeah.

TIANA: I know I am. Like, I've got so much of my past that I've never dealt with, and some of the topics that were discussed took me back to my past. And then other opinions that were said within the group pushed me even farther into that. So I would just shut down. So, rather than, forcing, otherwise I probably would have been asked to leave. I'm sure I would, actually I can guarantee you I would have been asked to leave. (laughs) But, coming down

here, I've been able to kind of breathe and do what I wanted to do, helped me get out of that little shell that I put myself back in.

LINDA: Is that something that you thought about too Venus? Or anything different?

VENUS: No. I don't know. Studio time is studio time.

ALL: (laughter)

VENUS: I don't know. To be honest. I had to be there. I had to be there. But, I don't think it's made any changes or anything like that in me, or whatever (inaudible).

TIANA: Helped me find another outlet, is all, is about all studio time has given me. I now know that I don't have to just hide and run--that I can, you know, sit down and do something with my hands to keep my mind off of it or get my mind out of it. But, I wouldn't say it changed who I am, just helped me find an outlet.

VENUS: Yeah.

LINDA: Did you see it that way? Was there any relief or was it just, boring?

(laughter)

VENUS: It wasn't boring.

TIANA: I enjoyed some studio times more than others. Like the whole yoga thing, no, I didn't enjoy that session at all. I could have gone a lifetime without having to do that.

VENUS: I wish we did more of the, ah, how do you say it, medallions?

TIANA: The circles.

LINDA: Mandalas. Yeah.

VENUS: Mandalas. I wish we could have like.... Those were awesome.

TIANA: I know when I was in my other therapy group, they had photocopies of different kinds that were already pre-made, and we got to colour them the way we wanted them

coloured, or painted, or glued, and bedazzled and what not. Like we had our choice on what they ended up looking like. But, they started us out. And they have copies of things like that, that would have been...

LINDA: Just to give you some ideas of what's going on, just ideas to pursue.

TIANA: Like it's one thing to make our own, but I think it's a little easier to have one pre-made, and then we see which one we connect with more.

VENUS: Yeah.

TIANA: Rather than having us make our own.

LINDA: They didn't have any pre-made?

TIANA: No.

LINDA: Okay.

TIANA: No. We had a book to look at and then a bunch of circles.

LINDA: Oh.

TIANA: I ended up throwing the one that I made in the garbage because I didn't even finish it. I just ripped it up and threw it in the garbage.

LINDA: Ah. Because I was wondering if you were introduced to it? But you don't think you were introduced to it enough to be able to go back and just do it on your own.

TIANA: Oh yeah. No. That's like we understand that they're circles and shapes and intertwined and all that stuff, but, yeah, everything's like that. Dream catchers are circles and shapes intertwined, right? You know, so...

LINDA: So when these things are introduced to you, you'd rather have a little bit more information about them specifically. And you don't mind that?

TIANA: I prefer more information about it. Like when we did the drumming, we had, he was so patient with us, and he gave us so much information, and he allowed us to play with that information. I think I learned more with the drumming and how to do the drumming rather than any of the other stuff.

LINDA: So, that's bringing a little structure into studio, actually.

TIANA: Yeah.

LINDA: So you don't mind the structure coming in.

TIANA: I like structure.

LINDA: Okay.

TIANA: Structure is my friend.

LINDA: Yeah. But you also have mentioned that you liked the free space and having that time to yourself.

TIANA: Oh, definitely.

LINDA: So maybe a balance?

TIANA: Yeah. Like for the first little while, you know, have it introduced, have it discussed, have it, you know, until we understand it and we are able to go off on our own to do it. Or to stay within in the group and continue on doing it together.

LINDA: Hmm.

TIANA: So, yeah, we just don't like being thrown into things. It kind of leaves you there sitting with a blank piece of paper, going, "I'm out of here". And then, you know, your mind's somewhere else.

LINDA: Hmm. But, you seem to do very well with those blank canvasses.

TIANA: (laughs) Actually all the paintings I've made are shoved in the closet. I took them off the walls.

LINDA: Why?

TIANA: Ahhhh, wasn't, they were unfinished, and I can never finish them, so... The one that I had made, the last big one I made, I was totally on track to what I wanted and people kept interrupting me, and so it ended up just being a big sloppy mess. And my boyfriend's buddy asked me and he [inaudible] paints. He actually, he teaches classes as well. He goes, "Well what do you call it?" I said "Girl Interrupted" (laughs). Like there was nothing to it. It was just this one big blob of mess. So, two of the first ones I made are still out. They're just not hung up. I want something on my wall that I can be proud of and that I don't have to explain. People can just know that I made it and I like it and it's there and if they don't like it, don't look at it.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm.

TIANA: So, that's my philosophy on the world. You don't like me? There's somebody else over there.

LINDA: So would you like time to do that?

TIANA: I always like time to do that.

LINDA: Would you like time to do that today?

TIANA: Maybe.

LINDA: It's up to you.

TIANA: Yeah.

LINDA: Whatever you guys want to do. If you want to prepare to do some (inaudible) and do (inaudible) everything's here. You can take it and do it, or we can continue talking. It's great to, both, all ways.

TIANA: I dreamt of a painting last night that I wanted to do, but I don't know how to do it. (laughs) Yeah.

KARISERA: I'm sorry I wanted to colour. I hate colouring with crayons; I like colouring with pencil crayons. They're all mixed up, and you can never find the right colour. I kind of went a little OCD.

LINDA: Nice. I always do that. I have to have them in order so I can work too. Yeah. What else did we talk about last week, that Venus would maybe like to make a comment on?

TIANA: Well you tried to go over those questions with us last week, but we always went off topic.

KARISERA: Yeah.

PAM: Yeah. We did.

TIANA: Or we would stay on topic, but never make it to the actual question. (laughs)

LINDA: Yeah. Well no. They actually don't mean that much to me—my questions don't mean that much. Your comments mean everything to me. [pause] So any comments?

TIANA: I don't know. I'm pretty commented out right now. I think I've talked pretty much the entire time.

LINDA: You did a nice job of it.

TIANA: I don't know. I'm not afraid to voice my opinion. Never have been. Even as a small child—got hurt, got me hurt quite a bit—but I've never been afraid to voice my opinion.

LINDA: You're brave then to keep going if it got you hurt. A lot just shy away.

TIANA: I used to shy away. But I've done a lot of work in the last three years. So...

LINDA: A lot of work?

TIANA: Work, on me, in the last three years since separating from the last abuser.

TIANA: I actually miss the time that we had with the kids.

LINDA: Yeah. I thought that was really special.

TIANA: I've worked on child-led play before, just me and [my son], by ourselves. And, ah, and it's so neat watching him just sitting back and letting him, like the body painting that we did of, when they trace their body or whatever, and then we let them paint. I only painted the shoes and the belt. The rest I just let him go and do whatever he wanted.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm.

TIANA: And it was pretty cool, the end result. So, his face was blue. I think, ended up being blue or something.

LINDA: That was another neat comment everybody brought up last week, Venus, was, um, that the kids should become a part of the studio time.

VENUS: Oh yeah, definitely.

LINDA: We had different opinions about the free time, and that's only because we're all, have different situations.

TIANA: Yeah.

VENUS: I love doing things with my kids. I love doing art with them. Anything. I love doing, making stuff, especially if they have things to come to me with and tell me how they want to make it. Like stuff like that.

LINDA: Oh, how lovely. Yeah. What do you think? Maybe you have a few more comments about, about, um, kids and studio. What do you...?

TIANA: Oh just watching them...The stuff that they just come up with to make is unreal.

LINDA: They're kind of naturals.

TIANA: Yeah. Their brain isn't polluted by the real world. (laughs)

Figure 4 A child in the studio



Linda: Interesting point.

TIANA: That's what it is. It really is, is they still have their little imaginations, they're still learning, and they're not worried on if someone's going to like it or not. They're not.

VENUS: They smile and laugh, especially about the things that they make or something like that.

TIANA: Well, and that's it, right? Like kids, they don't care if somebody likes it or not. Well, mine do. They really want to make sure I like it, but they don't start out that way, you know. It's not until it's a finished product that they're like okay "Do you like it?" Right, so, kids are so, they're awesome like that.

LINDA: Yeah. What do you think George, about kids and studio?

GEORGE: Yeah. I think it's a good idea. I'm spacing out.

LINDA: That's okay.

TIANA: She's in her own studio.

LINDA: You're thinking. That's not bad.

TIANA: Well, and even if we had two studio times: one for us personally, and then one for us and the kids.

LINDA: hmm-hmm.

GEORGE: Yeah.

TIANA: You know, like when my son came down and painted that one day. I was probably more relaxed watching him do his painting. Like he just, I don't know. It's just neat watching your child explore things and try new things. And, cause like we got home, and that's all he wants to do now is paint, paint, paint. I even had to buy him his own paint set. You know. Like he just loves it.

LINDA: Wow. I noticed when he came down at first he was kind of shy, and he was watching what you were doing, and then all of a sudden he was on fire.

TIANA: He was in there. Oh yeah. He was like the day with the drumming. Like, he didn't want to do anything until he was on my lap, and he needs to be in a comfortable place and so, but yeah, he's always been that way with me, like he really likes to stand back and watch. He's always really copied me.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm. That's cool.

TIANA: Yeah.

LINDA: Pam, you had your daughter in and what did you think about that? What do you think about kids and studio?

PAM: It's good. Like we get your [inaudible]. Um, it's great if we have like half time with the kids, half the time ourselves because, yes, it's really good to do studio time with your kids. It's good to see their faces when they're exploring different things and that, and, but it's also good to have your own time.

LINDA: Hmm.

PAM: Like I was saying last week, where adults need me time as well. And if people are like me, I don't get a whole lot of me time. And because after school, it's, I'm running around doing things for my kids and my extended family and everything else. I end up not stopping until like the middle of the night, and then I get up at six o'clock get the kids ready for school again.

LINDA: Yeah, what does that do to you when you're, like all of you, when you're taking care of everybody else so much?

GEORGE: [inaudible]. Like for me what got me in my situation last year. It wasn't my kids. It was adults that I was taking care of that stressed me out. It's just me now. So, I think, I don't know. For me, studio time with the kids is, would be my ideal thing.

TIIANA: You just have to learn to set boundaries so you're not taking care of everybody. Yeah. I used to be like that. I used to put everybody before me. Always.

LINDA: But, when do you have time to think about those boundaries that you have to make? When do you have time to even think straight?

GEORGE: I don't know.

TIANA: You need to, regardless. Like even with the kids, you need to set up boundaries with your kids, right? Like my kids know that when they go to bed, it's bedtime. It's not let's get up and run around and, you know, "I'm thirsty," "I'm hungry." No you're not. You just don't want to go to bed. They know that's my time. I take about 45 minutes every night after the kids go to bed. And then if I have dishes or anything to do, then I do all that. But, I always make sure, whether it's to have a shower or just sit down and put my feet up, I have to have that time otherwise...

VENUS: That's exactly how I feel at night. When it's time for my kids to bed, it's like I spend all my time on you kids, like give me some time to myself.

TIANA: Well, that's why kids always go to bed earlier than parents.

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LINDA: So any other thoughts on making it more effective. Things that (inaudible) don't like about it. Mostly making it more effective. I mean, that's the whole point of this discussion is how, how, you know, what the materials (inaudible). I would love, quite frankly to have a studio where I have an oven for people who want to bake, a music corner

with just this array of instruments. I saw one school in the southeast once. Beautiful stuff. I'd love a big cabinet full of books, as much art supplies, even electronic stuff, you know, for people to find that, those special languages that they like to speak. So, got any thoughts on that? How would you make it more effective?

PAM: Like we said last week, the biggest thing was we didn't have enough time.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm.

KARISERA: More time.

PAM: More time would make it more effective.

LINDA: Yeah. Gotcha. Good. Yeah, it's finding the time. Maybe, if it was an established place you could come in anytime that you needed.

PAM: Yeah, maybe.

LINDA: We tried that over at the main site once. We had a bunch of artists who were actually preparing for an exhibit. And they asked for materials specifically, so we didn't have just this big array. We got specific materials for them, and then we had like three days of open studio time, and they could drop in any time they were free.

PAM: Yeah. That would be nice.

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LINDA: One other thing that I wanted to ask you, Venus. Did you like sharing your work at presentation time?

VENUS: Oh. It was no problem. It was no problem.

LINDA: Did you get anything out of it?

VENUS: No, just a, just a bunch of comments, good comments, I guess.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm.

VENUS: Likeable comments about my stuff. And I liked it, I guess.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm.

VENUS: Yeah. It was all right. It's not that bad.

9 May 2013 (PM Session)

In attendance: Linda, Tiana, Harmony, Karisera, Izzy, George, Venus

LINDA: Here's the thing: One thing in my report is how facilitators can be more effective.

We talked about how studio time could be more effective, but I'm wondering how facilitators of studio time could be more effective.

GEORGE: I don't think they can be. You did an awesome job.

TIANA: Like how the facilitators in studio time?

LINDA: In studio time. Yeah. I mean you all talked about studio time. But, how, how can the, you have these facilitators. Tiana, you had said that things could be a little more structured at the beginning so you get the idea.

TIANA: Hmm-hmm.

GEORGE: Yeah.

TIANA: So they can have the material properly...

LINDA: How can a facilitator of studio time be most effective? Take it away.

TIANA: Most effective...

LINDA: Yeah.

TIANA: Well to have their stuff already ready. Like, come in better prepared. Not just come in and expect us to be able to just go, "Okay, well this is what you want. Sure, I'm a professional. I can do this". Like with the mandala thingies. Right? Like she just kind of came in and said, "This is what we're doing, this is a BIT of the background, here's a book so

that you can see what, you know, what is out there.” But that was it. There was no....We didn’t have the option to pick an already made one.

LINDA: Yeah. Okay. Now that brings up unstructured and structured studio time.

TIANA: Yeah.

KARISERA: Yeah, they need to understand that not all of us, you know....Some of us are really, really creative and can just blow through it on our own. Some of us need a little more structure to figure out what we’re doing with it.

LINDA: Okay.

GEORGE: I think there should be options. Like you have an idea at the beginning of the class and if people want to venture off and do their own thing, they have that option. But if they want to do whatever is their planned activity, they can do it.

TIANA: Yeah. If they want...

LINDA: Yeah. And not be required.

TIANA: The whole yoga thing. I wasn’t able to do it cause my hand. I was in a splint.

LINDA: Yeah, but you had no options.

TIANA: I had no options at all. Like I couldn’t go and do something else. I had to sit there. And because I couldn’t do it, my son didn’t do it because I wasn’t doing it. There was no options for me to be able to go over and maybe do something else rather than participate in that.

HARMONY: And there was no other option. Like they didn’t give her something that she could do with him to copy her.

TIANA: Yeah. Well, yeah. There was nothing. I know there's yoga poses and whatnot that you could do without having to use your hands. I know that. Like not all of it's lying on the floor and sticking your butt in the air.

LINDA: So it's considering everyone in the class.

TIANA: Well, and that's it right. The abilities of everybody, cause everybody's different. Even when it comes to your own studio time, some people can paint, some people can colour, some people can't colour, some people, you know. Like you guys give us the option with everything over there to pick what we're able to do. When the instructors come in to help us with studio time, they need to have for all individuals, not just a certain criteria of individuals. So, I've found that even when we were doing the nurturing parents classes, it was kind of, a normal situation rather than an unnormal situation.

KARISERA: I don't know. I found, I found, aside from that one that like peed everyone in the group off, most of them were able to at least semi-adapt to the different situations.

TIANA: Some of them.

KARISERA: That one was just...

TIANA: But most of the stuff they talked to us about was very generic. Like I know, I purposely actually missed the last two on addiction and domestic violence. Well the one I didn't. I was actually sick. But the domestic violence one I completely avoided because it's not something that I'm able to do yet. Um, so, I can't speak for those two classes, but the ones I went to, they were definitely generic. They were kind of on the every day, I don't know, like normal statistics that they take out there of all these people. Like even with [my son], when I took him in for his four to five year shots, they're going off a graph of how tall he should be with how much he should weigh, and they tell me he's obese, because his

height and his weight don't match up. And that's kind of the same thing with these instructors that come in, is they're just assuming everybody falls under that same graph. So it would be nice if they came in with options, or knowing what kind of group they come into might help a little bit, I think.

KARISERA: Yeah. I found that with my son too. They think he's underweight because of how tall he is.

TIANA: Yeah.

KARISERA: But, the thing is he outweighs everybody around him.

TIANA: Yeah. So yeah, like it's don't do it on the graph scale of all these normal people. Do it on the situation you're walking into. Like [the centre], I know not everybody that comes to [the centre] has issues. I probably, without being too, whatever the word is, probably 90 percent of the people that come here have a background of some abuse, addiction, things like that. There is some stuff. So they, these instructors, like, even [his name] the drumming guy's been here before. So he knew what to expect, and there was no judgments off of him or anything. Like you walk in and feel comfortable. Like I was comfortable as soon as I walked in. Like I didn't feel like he was like, "Oh, this kind of group again" type thing, right.

LINDA: Hmm.

TIANA: But I know with the yoga lady that's kind of how I felt, was she just didn't want to be here, because she felt uncomfortable or something because of the type of people we are. I don't know.

HARMONY: Yeah. She kind of gave off a different energy. Like, how was it? It was more a, I'm-rich-you're-poor kind of attitude when she walked in. And like you feel that.

TIANA: Yeah. Oh yeah, especially when you are, like with me coming from such an abused background. I sense everything. I can sense when I'm in danger, when someone's feels like they're better than me. Things like that. And the yoga lady that came in, it was definitely like she was way better, thought she was way better than us.

HARMONY: Kind of like I can bend like this can you?

(laughter)

TIANA: Yeah. And I know not all yoga ladies are like that because I've met quite a few that are very down to earth, very. They don't care who you are or where you came from. They just want to share what they know. And she wasn't like that. It was, she was almost, it almost felt forced with her.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm.

TIANA: So, I think they should be, they pick a little bit better I think or, have a little bit more knowledge given to these instructors coming in to the type of group of people that they'll be dealing with. So, cause I know yours didn't want to sit still. Mine wouldn't do anything except for sit on my knee.

HARMONY: Mine just watched.

TIANA: But when it came to the drumming, they were all involved, and I think that's cause the kids also felt comfortable with the instructor. Like he was all about, you know, "You join in. If you don't want to, that's good. You know, just sit back and listen and watch".

LINDA: Hmm-hmm. What does make this one successful? What's the difference between those two?

TIANA: Yeah.

HARMONY: Well the kids too. The kids have a similar type of issue. Like I have [my son] with ASD, you know. Like for him to see a new person, and this person will be telling them what to do, it's hard.

TIANA: Yeah. It's hard. Yeah. It's hard to adjust.

HARMONY: Especially if they don't feel comfortable with them. Cause it's like saying, "Here take my kid. I'm going to go over there for 20 minutes."

TIANA: Yeah, and I'll see you later. Like there's no way with my kid I would be able to do that. Like he has separation anxiety, definitely.

HARMONY: Exactly. They're very different, and they have to be routine. Like those people are routine. Like the drumming.

TIANA: Oh yeah.

HARMONY: He comes in with them. They see him.

TIANA: Well and he's been here many times before, not just with the kids, but with the other nurturing parent group. And I know not everybody's going to be like him, and it's hard, you know, like it's a lot to expect that everybody's like that, but they need to come in with no judgments and know that some of these kids, like I know the yoga lady kept telling all the kids, "You have to sit down. You have to sit down." You can't sit down! You can't tell these types of kids, especially mine, "Sit down!" You know what he's gonna do, he's going to jump around more because he's been told he's defiant. So, you know, like they need to understand that they're not coming into a normal situation.

UNKNOWN: No.

TIANA: It is a more difficult situation.

HARMONY: And this is an early intervention program.

TIANA: Yeah.

HARMONY: And that's what they lack when they walk in.

TIANA: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, they don't...

HARMONY: Cause they don't actually understand what you guys are doing here with us.

TIANA: [the drummer] does. Cause I know he's been here. Yeah.

HARMONY: Well yeah, [the drummer] does but...

TIANA: But, and I think that's why I was so comfortable with him.

HARMONY: And kind of, I do get the same sense from [the women's shelter counselor]. I know it was domestic violence and everything, but I think you weren't here for that one.

TIANA: Yeah. I avoided that one at all costs.

HARMONY: She knew what kind of group she was dealing with because she's also been the group. So dealing with someone who's actually been on both sides of the fence helps with that.

TIANA: Well, and it also helps with us accepting and listening and not taking them as if they're judging us and telling us that, "No. You're wrong because this is how you feel." No, I'm not wrong cause this is how I feel. This is how I feel. Like that first lady that we had on the brain development. They don't understand it. They're the ones that should write the notes that the person comes in, you know, and then they can go, "Okay, well that's not something I should say, so we're gonna say this instead." Right? Like you don't tell a group of women who have been through addiction, who have been through abuse, who are trying to get help for their children that, "Oh because you were abused you'll never be mentally sane." Like, excuse me? (laughs)

KARISERA: Or because you were abused your kids will be abusers.

TIANA: Like you need to come in. Yes, we get that everybody has the right to their opinion. We all have our own opinion. We're all very strong about our opinions, but you have to come in knowing that you cannot push your opinion on us. You need to speak to us as if we're humans, cause we are. It's not like we're you know. Yeah, some of us are pretty messed up. Me. I should say. I'm pretty messed up. So some of these classes—even the studio time stuff like the yoga thing, I actually took that quite personally. That there was nothing for me to do. Like I wanted to leave. I was uncomfortable cause I couldn't participate in anything.

LINDA: What did you think of that Venus?

TIANA: No. She, I know you were here for the drumming.

VENUS: Yeah. I was here for the drumming. I enjoyed the drumming.

LINDA: Were there some that you didn't enjoy?

VENUS: Um, none in particular.

TIANA: She's like no, I'm letting Tiana tell my story.

GEORGE: She got it. She hit the nail on the head.

HARMONY: Like she made us feel like this big. Like it's bad enough that we get that in the outside world. We don't need some other person telling us that's what we're doing.

TIANA: Yeah. Well, like this, this nurturing parent and studio time is supposed to be safe. That's what it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be safe for us. And if we're not feeling safe, we're not going to learn what we're supposed to learn. We're not going to participate the way we should participate. I was actually more angered by that first lady because of George, and I think Izzy even was having issues with that first lady. She wasn't validating them with their questions. I think that's what pissed me off more than anything.

HARMONY: Yeah.

TIANA: Um, because I dealt with people like her before, so. Like my father—he's like her, you know. Even my mom can be like that sometimes. So I've dealt with a lot of people like that. So it bothers me, but it doesn't bother me as much as some people have it bother them. But, yeah it's, they need to be better equipped for the situation they're coming into. They really do. Like even the mandala lady that came in. It was awesome that she had those books and tried telling us, you know, the story behind it and stuff like that. But she just expected us to be able to sit down and make it.

LINDA: And know what to do.

TIANA: And like I had no idea what to do.

LINDA: Hmm.

TIANA: It's like, "Oh well maybe I should do this, and well no because that doesn't have anything like that, or that one doesn't either or that one". You know, like they expect us to, in a 15-minute blurb on what it's about, they expect us to know what we need to be doing after that.

LINDA: Izzy, we're talking about how the facilitators of studio time can be more effective. And we're talking over some we've experienced this session.

IZZY: Do it right, you're not kidding.

TIANA: Some of these people that come in, like I know the yoga lady she teaches classes, but she doesn't sit down with her class and only do like a 10 minute this is what we're going to do. She explains to them all the first class and then they work on it for 10 to 15 classes afterwards. Like she had all of that shoved into 45 minutes.

LINDA: Too much material.

TIANA: Well, too much for us...

LINDA: Too much of an agenda.

TIANA: Yeah. It's like, okay you're coming in, you want to teach us some stuff for for relaxation or, you know, getting our anger down, all that. You know, like that jar. It was an awesome idea, but my son's sits on his dresser. He...

GEORGE: Mine does too.

TIANA: Like he has nothing to do with it. I shake it up once in awhile just when I'm bored, you know, I need something to look at.

GEORGE: I think if that's what she wanted to show us, our whole class should have been on that.

TIANA: Well, and that's it.

GEORGE: Instead she tried to get the poses, she tried to get that and...

TIANA: Well, yeah. She was...

LINDA: Our whole class should have been just that you said, hey? Gotcha.

TIANA: Like she was, she was shoving something that she teaches in 10 to 15 classes into I don't think it's even 45 minutes. I think it's only like 20 or 25 minutes that we had with the kids. I think that's all we got. You know, so it's too much, and we have so much going on, and our kids have.... Our kid's, they're brains never stop, especially when they're in programs like this. They got all those little things that are issues for them, and all of a sudden they're being overwhelmed. Of course they're going to run around in circles and not listen to anybody and jump and push and, like with the drumming, we were told...

IZZY: I loved that.

TIANA: I know. So did I. But like we, we were told, okay, "This is our beat," you know.

[knocks three times] Do that. And then, you know, he'd be like, we do that for 15 minutes and then all of a sudden....We had a lot longer with the drumming though. I don't think we were supposed to, but we did. But, yeah, and then, you know, we got that down, so he'd switch it up a little bit. And we'd get more practice with it. And it was, you know, yeah you screw up, you stop, you start again.

IZZY: I loved that! I loved that!

TIANA: You know, but with the yoga or even with the circles, you screwed up, you screwed up! There was no catching up. There was no trying to re-fix it. There was no patience. It was, this is what it is, this is how you're doing it, this is how long you have to do it. Now do it. So, well, it overwhelms, especially children, very much. So I think they should be better prepared when they're coming in. They need to know what kind of facility they're coming into.

KARISERA: She really is hitting the nail on the head with like all of us.

TIANA: [whispers] It's because I'm awesome.

KARISERA: None of us have to talk. She's already got it.

LINDA: She is awesome.

GEORGE: I think she reads minds.

TIANA: I do. I do.

GEORGE: She just takes your thoughts and...

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LINDA: Do you think the instructors or facilitators know more than you do?

GEORGE: No.

UNKNOWN: No.

TIANA: It depends. They know more about what they're teaching us than we do. Well, sometimes.

GEORGE: The have the textbook, right?

TIANA: Some of them do; some of them don't.

LINDA: Good question.

TIANA: Yeah. Some of them do; some of them don't. But like the lady that came in to teach yoga. She definitely knows more about yoga than I do...

LINDA: Okay.

TIANA: ...because she has studied it, you know. But I definitely, probably have way more life experience than she has in her pinky.

LINDA: So then transmitting that information that she knows wasn't so successful.

TIANA: Yeah. No. Not at all. She was just kind of like expected...

IZZY: I liked her though.

GEORGE: The drumming person was awesome. The yoga lady sucked.

TIANA: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Pretty much. That's my view on her.

IZZY: What did she do?

KARISERA: She had these embedded view on you mentality the entire time. And then she tried to cram everything in. She was yelling at the kids to sit down and be quiet [inaudible].

IZZY: Oh yeah.

TIANA: I'm sure she's a nice lady. Like don't get me wrong. I'm not judging her as an actual person, but as a teacher she sucks.

KARISERA: She does not fit in here.

TIANA: Not for, for us she sucks.

LINDA: When you present something to a group, I mean you should have some kind of...

TIANA: Oh yeah.

HARMONY: Well even when, I know she wasn't here for that either, but when we had the addictions lady come in, she gave resources. She was personable, she, you know. She didn't tell us we were doing anything wrong. She was like, "Let's fix it." She knew what crowd she was coming into.

IZZY: She's the best addiction counselor you'll ever meet. She's amazing.

TIANA: But she knew what she was coming into. She understood the dynamics of our situation.

HARMONY: We were comfortable enough to open up to her. And she even stayed behind to help with resources and make sure we had resources.

LINDA: Hmm-hmm.

HARMONY: The same with the domestic violence. She left us all those pamphlets with the purple [inaudible]. You know, she left us with resources.

TIANA: And, that's it, right? Like they knew the situation they were coming into.

HARMONY: Even the practicum students when they came in. I mean we, we traumatized the one, and [inaudible].

IZZY: She was rude.

TIANA: No, you and I traumatized the one. Don't say "we". You and I.

IZZY: You know what bothered me about her is she sat there with her own lunch and wouldn't even eat ours. I think it's rude.

LINDA: Well, isn't that interesting. I've felt offended about that in the past. Like when a friend, I would actually reconsider whether they were even a friend, when time after time they wouldn't sit down and actually eat with me. There is something about eating together. It's so interesting, huh?

KARISERA: I don't eat when other people around me aren't eating. I can't do it.

TIANA: It's, well, sitting down to eat, it's like sitting down to eat with your family.

LINDA: Yeah, so it's something that makes an attachment, hey?

IZZY: Yes, she sat down with us, but like...

TIANA: See, I may have been offended, but she said she didn't know that she could have the food.

TIANA: She had no idea, so she came prepared.

LINDA: Yeah.

TIANA: And I'd rather go prepared and still rather eat mine, rather, over whatever was served, right? Like I should have been bringing my own meals cause half the time I couldn't eat what was there because it was pork, cause you know.

LINDA: But you see how, when we cook, that's one of the most nurturing things and that brings people together.

HARMONY: I made sure I had a list except for that one time with the banana.

TIANA: The banana. Yeah.

HARMONY: That's not your allergy.

LINDA: I mean, just the fact that cooking is language that speaks to nurturing so much.

TIANA: Yeah. But, no, when it comes to food, food has always been known as a togetherness thing.

HARMONY: It's a bonding thing.

GEORGE: A social [inaudible].

TIANA: It is. Like over in all these other countries, when it's dinnertime, it is the entire neighbourhoods' dinnertime. You know, like I've....It's unreal the things that, I don't.... Canada's not like that, which is really weird.

GEORGE: My culture, we are...

TIANA: Well yeah, and, and I,... That's what I actually really love.... One of the reasons why I love the native culture so much is because they are so family oriented. When it's dinnertime, there may be 30 extra kids at that table, but those kids are fed. There's no, "go home to your mom".

KARISERA: The next day you may not have any kids to feed [inaudible].

TIANA: Well, and that's it. I've got family in Italy that, when they have dinner, it is the entire town's dinnertime. You know like and it's not just special occasions. Even the guys that live in my basement. They're Somali. And when it's Ramadan they bring food up to us. It's like wow!

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LINDA: We've had good discussions on that, but more about facilitators. Any more comments?

TIANA: We were probably not the correct group, people to put together in a group. (laughs)

IZZY: We all have a bit of crazy in us.

TIANA: Well, but we're all so strong willed and strong opinionated. Like...

LINDA: Which is great

TIANA: We all know what we want. We all fought, fought through.

TIANA: Yeah, no, we've all fought for everything. Like we have fought to get to where we are today. We have fought to get to where we are today, all of us.

IZZY: I'm still fighting.

TIANA: Oh, so am I.

GEORGE: Everybody does.

IZZY: Oh yeah.

TIANA: We are all in a fight to continue.

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HARMONY: I think the other thing with facilitators is like when we have the parent-child activity it's so rushed. It feels like we're only with our kids for 10 minutes. It's rushed the whole time. The kids don't, like we know they enjoy it because they get mommy time, but it's rushed cause then they have, like they're timings off, like do we bring the kids in, do we not, do we...

TIANA: Yeah, I think they need to structure the program a little bit better. Like I know that they don't want to start until like 11, but, seriously, that only gives us what three hours in the day to do everything. That's not very long. Like we should be starting at like nine.

GEORGE: Oh, I was, well, I know this is good conversation, but I think we should remind the group that we're talking about studio time not nurturing parent.

LINDA: That's true.

TIANA: Well no, but we start our class in the morning at 11:00 or 10:30. We then go until what 11 or 12?

HARMONY: But we have to stop studio time to be rushed around.

TIANA: But then we stop around 12, 12:30 to have lunch, and then we start studio time about 1:30. And then we see the kids at two till 2:20 or something like that, right?

LINDA: Yeah. There are a lot of smokin' breaks and stuff, I suppose. But you sort of have, I don't know. There's time.... Time goes by...

TIANA: But no. Like this, when we first started, I think the time that we had, we were given for studio time, was about an hour. That's not enough to do anything. It really isn't. So like we start our morning rushed. Then we have to rush through lunch. Then we gotta rush through studio time, then we gotta rush through our kids. By the time we get home, the studio time didn't help us at all because we were so rushed through it all.

HARMONY: We're exhausted.

TIANA: Right? So, I think they need to structure the day a little bit better in that form. That way the studio time actually gets in there and give us what we're trying to get out of it.

LINDA: Well, we do like George said, start it with whatever they do, and then get the group to figure out the schedule.

TIANA: Yeah.

LINDA: So there's more input.

GEORGE: But then it's a time issue. You need more time factored into studio time.

LINDA: So you figure out. You figure out what's important to you. You have certain hours, like six hours or five hours, right? And then you, and then everybody, all the participants think about [inaudible].

GEORGE: I think the lunch hour is not wasted time, but we could be doing something in that time too.

LINDA: Well, that's that eating together and relaxing together, which is, as...

TIANA: Well, yeah it could be done down here.

LINDA: Yeah.

GEORGE: That could be factored ...

HARMONY: Then studio time's started more.... It's more effective.

LINDA: Yeah. That's a neat idea. Very interesting.

HARMONY: Cause we're going down three sets of stairs.

GEORGE: Or to go lunchtime with the kids, and then we do, after lunch we do our little activity, and then studio time, or something. It needs to blend more. It's like very broken up and very rushed, and we're just going like...

LINDA: Hmm. Okay.

GEORGE: We're wasting the time getting into things.

TIANA: So it makes it so that studio time's not giving us what we need.

LINDA: Hmm. There...

GEORGE: It's broken up and scattered.

LINDA: There is something to say about sitting around a table and sort of taking a break from lessons, everything, and just sitting together and eating and enjoying...

ALL: Oh yeah.

HARMONY: But yeah, we could do the lessons down here to like, instead of just going from one end to the other end.

TIANA: I think they want us to get exercise in there too.

LINDA: Exercise. (laughs)

HARMONY: We did that one day of studio time all down here. We spent the day down here, and we all had fun.

LINDA: Yeah. Yeah. That was [inaudible]

HARMONY: Like it was great. We brought our kids down for lunch. They went back up.

They thought it was [inaudible]

LINDA: Maybe a couple of those interjected just in the year. Just have time to really get into it all. Okay, if we want to do a little bit more and if you want to do work, we can do that.

Next week we can start out with the scripts right away and then you can you can be painting while we're discussing and rewriting it, cause they're going to be in black and white in front of you. Okay? So, there'll be time.

HARMONY: Like studio time I find really productive but it's rushed.

LINDA: Yeah.

HARMONY: It's there and it's relaxing, but it's rushed.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS—WRAPPING THEORIES AROUND THE DOING

A Hermeneutic Approach to Analysis

I began writing this chapter by reading and rereading the edited transcripts while listening to the original recordings. In this way I could capture a more profound intrinsic understanding of what we wanted to say. I could remember how we communicated our ideas beyond the words, and hear how we relayed our ideas in the sighs, chewing, and shuffling chairs. With Wittgenstein's musings in mind, I stopped theorizing about the life-world and bathed my senses in the rich give-ness of the doing (Jardine, 2013). I remembered the full experience of being there.

A hermeneutic analysis is synonymous with interpretation, and one's interpretation begins with reflection, as Moules wrote:

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. (Moules, 2002, p. 29)

I engaged in the hermeneutic circle by dynamically interacting with the data as a whole and in part, through listening, remembering impressions, reading, interpreting, discussing those interpretations, and finally, writing.

My analysis is a small part of this study. It is only one view. It is not comprehensive or complete. It can change with the day. It is my contribution to the dialogue at this moment in time. In accordance with Gadamer, I have attempted to recognize myself, and my role, in the work. I have tried to be transparent in how I interpret the work by laying

bare my pre-understandings, fore-structures, and prejudices. I understand how my judgment is affected not only by the prejudices I recognize, but by those I do not know. In my attempt to preserve the character of these conversations without reducing them for my own purpose (Moules, 2002), my understandings may present an open-endedness that lacks the answer. The page number following each quote locates the quote in the verbatim transcripts in chapter three.

It is interesting how, for the most part, the participants' understandings of the studio aligned with and confirmed the definition of studio I had in mind when entering the project. The NPP facilitators and I had discussed these understandings during our pre- and post-class meetings. But my directions for studio time to the participants were kept to a simple: "Do whatever you want." As George explained, "We were told that there was just a time to be open, creative, and relax" (p. 68). And the participants came in and did just that. I understand that human beings communicate ideas in more ways than with just words. And perhaps some of the participants might have agreed with anything, particularly those under court order. But their understanding of studio and the pleasure they took in it seemed far from forced. In fact, when I presented the studio the first day of the research year, I wrote in the class notes how they came in as if entering a "candy shop." They started working right away. As I noted in my NPP journal in November 2013, they were "10 steps ahead of me." Their enthusiasm and appreciation for the studio was established from the beginning, and they carried that enthusiasm through into our research work.

The Value of Studio

From our lived experience, we co-researchers, the participants and I, engaged in a critical dialogue. We openly questioned everything to develop an understanding of the

studio. We spoke of our impressions and pieced together our understandings to make collective sense of them so we could carry that knowledge into our practical world. No one's thoughts were too precious as we juggled understandings. We realized that understanding is not an end itself, but a means to develop a better understanding (Macedo, 2011).

When I play the recordings back, I want the world to hear them. The recordings are richer with meaning than the transcripts alone. All the participants took part in the conversation. Together, in the studio, we played with our understandings of the studio, of studio time, and of effective facilitators. We played as children do, understanding the freedom that play facilitates in the serious attempt to organize our environment and display it in a meaningful way. We laughed and teased each other, and became comfortable with each other. We felt our differences, but also found our similarities. We became more deeply involved with each other, weaving our concerns and feelings together, building stronger ties, and discovering a stronger self in this community. Finding voice.

The participants' pleasure was apparent in their comments. During our conversations, Venus repeated twice in a row, "I had to be there" (p. 93), clarifying with, "I did it because I liked it" (p. 86). Izzy, consistent with her first statement, "THERE ARE NO DISLIKES!" (p. 58), praised the studio experience endlessly, often interjecting explications such as, how she "loved it" (p. 61) and "it is awesome" (p. 62). As she spoke, the intonation and exuberance in her voice, matched with a scholarly stance, expressed a passionate yet firm conviction to her words.

Time to breathe

Participants spoke about the importance of having space and time to relax and settle into themselves. Tiana described her experience saying, “I’ve been able to kind of breathe and do what I wanted to do, helped me get out of that little shell” (p. 93). Harmony described it as being “relaxing...writing just opened it up.... I finished my songs” (p. 64). George proclaimed how the studio experience changed her attitude from negative to positive (p. 67). She explained how at first the feeling would go away “quickly” (p. 69), but then, after awhile, she “always wanted to be positive” (p. 68). The participants mentioned several times how they relaxed in studio, explaining how “your body heals better” (Tiana, p. 79) in this relaxed state. They identified studio as “Me Time” (Pam, p. 74), and found it important in that, “If you don’t take care of you, how can you take care of your kids”(Pam, p. 74)? Tiana described it as “self care—getting your down time to be able to do what you want, when you want, how you want... time to process things, time just to relax... to explore what things you like to do” (p. 85).

A chance to work together

All agreed studio time was more than the much needed “me time;” it was also the groups’ time to work together. We enjoyed working together in a group. “having everything in the morning and then doing it here, like, we bonded. And not in a creepy way” (Harmony, p. 69). Many participants stated on their evaluation forms for the NPP that, above anything else, they liked sitting with and being a part of the group. In the studio, feelings of belonging and sharing ideas were discussed. Tiana struggled with everybody being different (p. 81), inciting a volley of ideas:

KARISERA: I wouldn't say that we're all completely different. Everybody in here at least has one or two things that match up with somebody else, so we all kind of clicked.

TIANA: We have similarities, but we are all very different from each other.

KARISERA: We are all our own personalities. We all at least have one or two things, like we have at least one thing that we can relate to the other person with.

PAM: We're all parents.

TIANA: How many situations can you find women to be able to sit in the same room, without blood? (p. 81)

They confirmed their joy in finding a friend in each other. Participants bonded in and out of the Centre. They exchanged numbers, helped each other with babysitting, or had play dates together with their kids.

Finding voice in presentation

Their views were divided when it came to the studio element of presentation. Some found it to be a positive experience. George said it gave her ideas, adding, "it helped us to get to know each other better and where we're at. Cause we're showing what we feel and what's going on with us right now" (p. 68). Others found it challenging, explaining, "It's hard to explain my art because half the time I'm feeling multiple different emotions at once" (Pam, p. 86). Tiana explained, "What you've just done tells you how you feel. But it's not gonna tell anybody else because they're not in your head" (p. 87). I asked whether the observer's opinion is important, and could it just start a conversation? Tiana affirmed, "maybe it's a conversation starter for a situation" (p. 88).

Presentation is a time to learn to dialogue and find the ability to be heard, developing communication skills. These skills are important in learning to live cooperatively in society, but are difficult to learn when the learner feels vulnerable. Kelly (2012) wrote, "People need actual time together to get to know one another to develop the trust and friendships that give each the feeling of support in a community. These highly interactive, social times ... create supportive networks" (p. 36). This was confirmed again by the overall bonding experience.

Being judged kept coming into the conversations about presentation and the participants' critique of the facilitators. This revealed the vulnerability of the learners. "Everybody judges everybody in the world these days... but be able to self express without being judged in a group setting... is nice" (Izzy, p. 78). Tiana explained how it was nice being in a group setting where one of the rules was not to be judged. She confided, "I've got my own issues with self-doubt" (p. 87). She often spoke of being interrupted in her work, not having the time and space to be alone, but at the same time revealed, "I don't want to be secluded" (p. 66). Establishing a safe and comfortable environment seems crucial.

The unexpected consequences of play

The word "play" (Tiana, p. 95) was only mentioned once in the entire conversations, but all the elements of play defined in chapter one are present in the comments. Participants repeatedly expressed their pleasure and desire to be in the studio.

As parents, the participants had witnessed and, in fact, appreciated the way children work in the arts and in a studio situation. They understood the creative play of children, and often wanted to bring the kids into the studio to work with them. George said, "Studio time with the kids... would be my ideal thing" (p. 102). Pam supported, "It's good to see

their faces when they're exploring different things" (p. 101). Tiana explained, "The stuff they come up with to make is unreal.... Their brain isn't polluted by the real world... they still have their little imaginations, they're still learning, and they're not worried on if someone's going to like it or not" (p. 99-100). Venus said, "They smile and laugh, especially about the things that they make" (p. 100). She further stated, "I love doing art with them... especially if they have things to come to me with and tell me how they want to make it" (p. 98).

The participants revealed how studio work had expanded beyond the perimeters of the class time. "It didn't really stop at studio time. It was too short here, but it just, it stayed with you to make the time to do it" (Harmony, p. 64). Izzy said, "I actually ended up bringing it home with me. I ended up doing stuff at home. I ended up painting my whole house and floor.... I just made my own colours.... I just kept making it, making a different colour" (p. 62). George was also eager to tell how the positive attitude she adopted from studio encouraged her to do more things at home with her kids "like different papers, gluing, and using stuff. And our whole art box has gotten bigger.... Actually, it got me doing things that I used to like, like beading.... Things I let go of, it kind of brought it back" (p. 69).

One NPP facilitator who struggled with the concept of studio uncovered a deeper understanding of play during our interview. She admitted she "did not quite understand at first." But said the thing she noticed most was the "joy in them. It was a time to take care of themselves in their lives. Moms don't have time to do that. They were just excited about studio time." When I probed why studio had that appeal, she said it must be "part of us to have that creative outlet.... I definitely saw that in them. They were excited ... not texting

their friends, not being busy ... they were engaged.... like a kid going through the bins, in minutes they were engaged.”

According to Laing (2012), the pleasure of play incites and restores one’s desire to engage. It makes us want to repeat the activities, which leads to mastery. Mastery gives us a sense of accomplishment, building self-confidence. The kindergarten teacher said that most of the participants who come into the Centre think life is over for them. They come to the Centre only in hopes of saving their children, never expecting to change their own lives. As play offers the chance to entertain alternative possibilities without adverse consequences, their engagement in studio and its playful activities has the potential to change their outlook, their behaviour, and possibly future events in their lives.

On Being a More Effective Facilitator

Participants shared many thoughts about what made for good facilitation—and also what made facilitation less effective. The following explores the key themes that emerged.

Be there

There was a significant incident early in the group discussions when one participant commented on a learning situation where she felt “no one listened” (Pam) to her. She explained, “What I say don’t matter because I try to explain. It’s like, nope, that wasn’t the way it was. It’s like other people say how I feel. I was told I was wrong to feel that way” (Pam). This conversation was not included in the edited transcripts as the group felt it did not contribute to the focus of their discussion on the effectiveness of studio. I find it important to mention for two reasons. First because of how they resolved their problem, building a cohesive community. One participant spoke of how the group must reword the way they communicate their ideas. The offended individual had left the room and then

returned and explained, “The only reason I walked out is because if I didn’t at the moment I would have yelled and that’s not polite. It wasn’t that I was sad or things. I just would have yelled. I am very easily tempered. And I either yell or walk away from the situation to deal with it. So it’s no offence to anybody that I walked out. I walked out because I didn’t want to yell at everybody or anyone” (Pam). She continued with, “The way [she] was speaking was what was getting me annoyed, but it wasn’t specifically [her] fault. And that’s why I was saying no offense to anybody” (Pam). After this explanation, the group resumed discussions for the remainder of the time without incident. I found this act of conflict resolution noteworthy.

The second point, and most important, was how the group identified the importance of being there, face to face, through all possible lessons. Several of the group members realized that. One particular participant had, in fact, missed several sessions due to health and family reasons, and her absence was recognized by the group as the key cause of the problem. They understood it is important to be there:

HARMONY: We have our understanding upstairs. It’s just some people don’t.

GEORGE: She’s never made a connection with us.

HARMONY: She’s never really bonded with the rest of us either. She hasn’t been here every time.

Start with respect

A participant can miss meetings and still gain something from the program, but in light of the participants’ conversations it seems crucial for the facilitator to always be there in body, mind, and, as I learned, in spirit. The participants made it clear that all participants and facilitators must connect in order to build trust and find a comfort zone with the

learners so they feel safe. As Tiana explained, “Studio time is supposed to be safe. And if we’re not feeling safe, we’re not going to learn what we’re supposed to learn. We’re not going to participate the way we should participate” (p. 111). Facilitators need to understand the situation they are coming into and the “group of people that they’ll be dealing with” (Tiana, p. 108). This knowledge of the group is built through being there, face to face.

Participants are worried about being judged (Kelly, 2012). The learner needs encouragement (Lowenfeld, 1987). Unlike the facilitator who left them feeling like: “You screwed up, you screwed up! There was no catching up... There was no trying to re-fix it” (p. 114), Harmony recalls a facilitator who “didn’t tell us we were doing anything wrong. She was like, ‘Let’s fix it.’ She knew what crowd she was coming into.... We were comfortable enough to open up to her” (p. 116).

This facilitator was in fact identified as one who had “been the group ... been on both sides of the fence” (Harmony, p. 110). When this facilitator did her session presentation, she stopped and looked one of the participants in the eyes and notably explained how all the names for the participant’s disease were just words. And, in fact, the participants could make up their own words and redefine themselves. To this point, Harmony had spoken out earlier, saying, “That’s not a word, that’s, that’s a being”.

Judging and labeling are insidious in the many ways they enter into our relationships with others. Tiana instructed us, “you have to come in knowing that you cannot push your opinion on us.... Like you don’t tell a group of women who have been through addiction, who have been through abuse, who are trying to get help for their children that, ‘Oh, because you were abused you’ll never be mentally sane’” (p. 110).

Harmony supported her with, “We don’t need some other person telling us that’s what we’re doing” (p. 111). Tiana said she had met many facilitators that were “very down to earth, very. They don’t care who you are or where you came from. They just want to share what they know” (p. 108). Tiana clearly stated, “You need to speak to us as if we’re humans, cause we are” (p. 111).

The front desk clerk at the Centre understood the importance of discovering our humanity and being empathetic, accepting the people you are working with as worthy. As one of the other NPP facilitators commented in an interview, when working with people it seems only right to “love being around people ... and be there in the moment of other people’s experience.” If we do not fully believe in what we are doing, working with genuine intentions, the learner will feel our discomfort. Tiana made this clear. She spoke of one facilitator who “didn’t want to be here because she felt uncomfortable or something because of the type of people we are” (p. 107). She revealed how sensitive the learner is, saying, “I can sense when I’m in danger, when someone feels like they’re better than me” (p. 108). Any agenda, no matter how well executed, is lost when the participant does not trust the facilitator.

Listen

The kindergarten teacher instructed, in one of our interviews, that the first step is to listen. “You can’t help if you don’t know what they need.” As facilitators it is important to listen to the feedback and learn from it (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Further, be cognizant that you may be listening to someone who has never been listened to before.

If we facilitators want to help people find voice, all we can really do is listen and validate those voices. We can engage in what Kelly (2012) calls “plus-ing.” Kelly describes

the process of plus-ing as follows: “Creating a status-less educational environment involves the creation of a culture that validates and augments any idea from all participants at all times” (p. 27). Plus-ing means that we listen and accept what others contribute without compromising their statement. Then we can add to the statement with our understanding.

Invite participants to help plan

The participants rose to the occasion when I asked how they would improve the practice of studio in studio time. The main complaint about studio was the lack of time. We discussed at length how to stretch and rework the schedule within our time restrictions. Frustration was felt on both sides. Facilitators complained that the participants wasted time in getting to the sessions, and the participants blamed poor scheduling on the facilitators. No solutions were found in the discussions, although as noted earlier, participants did reveal that studio had expanded beyond the perimeter of the class for them, with many of them taking their creative activities home where they continued them, often involving their children.

The participant’s engagement in dealing with the problem of timing made them become more cognizant of time management. They discussed having alternate days for NPP and studio, so they could have full days of studio. They actually took their plans to extend studio time to the point of suggesting childcare time or doing “nurturing parent classes while having lunch, you know, rather than break” (Tiana, p. 82). This brings us to a remarkable discussion. When asked how studio time could be improved, George suggested that not only should the participants decide how studio time is run but, each year, each group coming to the program should create the program to suit themselves. She explained:

GEORGE: What you should have done, maybe, was like the trial run. First two classes or whatever, and then discuss with the group, like, what do you not like and like about it, and should we set some rules. So you have maybe two classes where they just try it out and it's just open the way it is now. But then you go back and you discuss what you like and what you don't. What you think needs to change, if you need to set some rules....

LINDA: So you personalize it for each time.

GEORGE: Like every, will be different. Like you'll be doing this with different groups. Every group is going to be different, so you're going to have to set your own... (p. 81) so it works for everybody.

LINDA: Yeah, so that it works for everybody. Which was a really neat thought. Except that when I was listening to the recordings, you said in the beginning you were a little confused about what even studio time was in the beginning. So, how long would you give for the testing of it and then getting the group to figure out how to make it more effective?

GEORGE: I think the first two sessions, or maybe three, cause then you get a feel for what it is and what is working and what's not working. And then you can set up your guidelines or rules or whatever you want to call it.

LINDA: So, just enough to, time to get your bearings and realize.

GEORGE: You realize, yeah, you notice what works and what doesn't right away, I think. And if it needs to be changed. That's like the same with this group, right?

We're always kind of adding or reminding or whatever the rules, or guide, not rules, guidelines. I think that's with any group. (p. 85)

George suggested that the participants should be part of the planning of the programs. They should have more say in how they help themselves and their children. When the learner is given the chance to be the protagonist in their learning, developing projects of personal relevance and leading the facilitator in their education, the learner is intrinsically motivated to take their learning to practice.

Find teachable moments

As the facilitator's first and most important role is to promote the intellectual life of the learner (Rinaldi, 2006), and it is the educator's duty to build on the learner's experience (Dewey, 1938), it follows that the facilitator must establish sensitive listening and embrace the learner's point of view (Vecchio, 2010). The learner and facilitator learn together.

Kumashiro (2009) said that as facilitators we must realize that we don't know all. "Becoming a learned practitioner can never be about mastery or full knowledge" (p. 10). In her interviews, the kindergarten teacher instructs facilitators to expect to make mistakes and not be afraid of them. We might consider them as learning opportunities. In witnessing our vulnerability, the learner is empowered. We become more human and approachable. The facilitator and the learner build a comfort zone with each other. And most importantly, the learner is recognized for the unique knowledge they offer. Their voice is heard.

On the other hand, the kindergarten teacher, supported by Freire (2011), Kearney (2005), Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012), and Kumashiro (2009), professed that the facilitator cannot be naïve. As the kindergarten teacher explained in an interview, facilitators must know the material "to the point where you see the whole picture in terms of the full range

of curriculum.” Facilitators need to deal with “real life and real learning.... [the participants] have issues that they bring into the conversation and the conversation does go down different roads.” The kindergarten teacher explained that we need to understand what we are teaching, and boil it down to the most important points, “Those few things that I want them to walk away with.” Therefore, it is unrealistic to walk in with a full agenda. We need to balance the agenda with the teachable moments. “You don’t want it to get out of control, but you take advantage of that teachable moment and let it happen.” There may be time to cover the rest of the agenda later, but nothing may be heard if it is all said at once.

To structure or not to structure

When I asked the group if they thought studio would be useful in other contexts, George, Izzy, Tiana, and Harmony volleyed ideas, agreeing that it “would be good therapy”(Tiana, p. 77) in a “classroom base” (Izzy, p. 77). A few did not fully understand the idea of the studio and confused its concept with art therapy. And the two approaches are, in fact, comfortably close in theory and practice, with the difference lying in therapy’s tighter structure to serve more defined purposes of targeting specific problems and its delivery by a licensed professional psychologist. There were several discussions on the participant’s preferences for more structure or not. A guest instructor, specializing in art therapy, brought in materials for a mandala project. She brought in books and samples and even pre-drawn circles for the participants to colour as they desired. The session proved to be not quite structured enough for Tiana who said, “It’s easier to have one pre-made, and then we see which one we connect with more Rather than having us make our own” (p. 94). Tiana further commented on how she liked another instructor because “he gave us so much information, and he allowed us to play with that information” (p. 95). Tiana stated,

“Structure is my friend” (p. 95). Harmony countered Tiana’s ideas with, “I can go sing. But the second I have to structure it, I’m not going to do it. Cause then you feel like a puppet, and then it’s do it their way only. Before studio time ... everything you did art wise was structured. It’s structured in school, it’s structured here, it’s structured there. It’s not a form of therapy, whereas studio time allows you to do something that’s not structured” (pp. 72-73). This difference in the needs for structure may be an indication of the different levels of creative development among the participants.

Encourage creativity

We discussed the idea of being creative after Izzy declared, “But who knew? I had creativity in me” (p. 70). Karisera offered, “I know I’m creative. It’s just finding the right outlet” (p. 70). I asked the group if they thought everyone had the potential to be creative, and they all responded with a yes. Karisera added, “Everybody has got a touch of artist in them ... It’s in you” (p. 71). Venus added later, “I just like art. That’s all. I like experiencing new things” (p. 86). Tiana confirmed, “Studio time allowed you with that” (p. 86). Harmony commented how studio allowed you to “think outside the box” (p. 79), and Izzy added how she could “be unique” (p. 61). “It actually helped me express what I am feeling instead of holding it in” (p. 62). Tiana explained how everyone’s abilities are different (p. 106). Just as Kelly (2012) explained, those who are more creative have been encouraged and learned to see the world with openness for the new, or for different combinations of the old. They have learned to question, take risks, and value the complexities that come with taking nothing for granted. Others need guidance towards developing these understandings. Tiana suggested the need for options to bridge the differences. “When the instructors come in to help us with studio time, they need to have for all individuals not just a certain criteria of

individuals. So, it would be nice if they came in with options” (p. 106). George explained, “Like you have an idea at the beginning of the class and if people want to venture off and do their own thing, they have the option. But if they want to do whatever is their planned activity, they can do it” (p. 105).

Other voices

Some of the other NPP facilitators did not share the same understanding of the studio as the participants and I. These facilitators often had difficulty with the loose design and unfettered freedom that studio offered the participants. My relaxed attitude seemed negligent in defying the traditional order and control of a classroom. There was no obvious regard for an agenda. In one incident, a facilitator expressed frustration about failing to recognize the significance of a particular painting. The painting consisted of a flower and a few lines designating an angel with a heart as a body that stated, “Fall in Love with Everything.” (See Figure 5 on the following page.) She saw the painting as being child-like in execution, with a lack of training, or, on my part, a lack of instruction. It also seemed like a dishonest statement to her. This is often an issue in community service programs where clients do or say anything they think the authorities want to hear so they can pass their course—which is often seen as punishment—and go back to what they were doing before. Go back to being left alone. I had to explain how this painting, with its simple symbols, embodied the values of the NPP quite nicely. And if the facilitator’s problem lay in questioning the sincerity of the artist, I clarified that even if they weren’t practicing what they painted, they were indeed processing it. Another time, the same facilitator could not understand the importance of a participant colouring in the lines of a pre-set drawing.

Studio supports any language chosen by the individual, including colouring books, as long as it is chosen by the individual and facilitates their learning and communication.

Figure 5 The “Fall in Love with Everything” painting by a program participant



These facilitators seemed to have difficulty understanding the kindergarten teacher’s insight about finding the most important points “that I want them to walk away with” and to let the teachable moments happen. In another incident, well into our year of study, I sat with a facilitator after a typically noisy class, and she exclaimed with frustration, “What are we doing with the manual at all!” No one was attentive to it. They preferred to sit and share the events and feelings of their everyday. We discussed where the fault lay. Was our use of an ineffective method the fault of the people we were trying to help? And was something else at work here? The participants demonstrated and constantly voiced their interest in simply sitting and talking with each other. This was reiterated on their class

evaluation forms from 2011 to 2013. As the kindergarten teacher explained, these participants typically live very isolated lives, rarely connecting with others. They enjoyed the camaraderie.

The job of the facilitator

For the participants, building relationships and feeling part of community was of the utmost importance. Studio provided a time and space where voices could emerge and engage with one another. And is this not the main goal of education? To build a common language where we can recognize and hear each other? Is its goal to find copacetic ways of living in the world (Lowenfeld, 1987)?

As the kindergarten teacher said, if we facilitators want to help people find voice, all we can really do is listen. We can engage in “plus-ing” (Kelly, 2012, p. 27). We can open our ears and our hearts and accept what others contribute without compromising their statements. Then we can add to the statements with our own understanding. In this way, we can weave our collective understandings to find a common language and interaction of daily life to create a social world of shared meaning.

Freire (2011) believed the ultimate responsibility of finding voice lies solely with the individual. He believes no one is capable of helping others gain voice. “Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right” (p. 88). To gain voice therefore, is best done by sitting around, sharing our thoughts, and building a relationship with the community, in the community, and becoming the community. The facilitator’s job is to provide a fertile ground for these discussions and to validate the learner’s voice.

CHAPTER 5: RUMINATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

An Interpretation That Is True About Something

My analysis is intended to be evocative and provoke a conversation with the reader. It is not comprehensive or complete. As I wrote, it can change with the day. Hermeneutics is not about being right but is rather about finding an interpretation that is true about something (Moules, 2002). Again, I invite you, the reader, into this conversation to expand the bounds of this paper into an ongoing exploration of finding voice. For the more voices that are included in this study, the more depth, perspective, and complexity is brought to bear on how we view and understand the world. The more points of view, the clearer, more nuanced, and ultimately freer, our thinking can become (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). “Like in the making of a fabric, each person gathered experiences their own bias in the bias of the fabric itself—and this seeming paradox (‘the bias of the fabric’/‘the bias of the listener’) is part of the story’s hold and why we are held *together*” (Jardine, 2014, p. 2).

Through this study, the co-researchers and I strengthened the argument that the studio, a place and time that allows the individual to pursue the creative practice of self-instigative development of original thought and problem resolution, is vital to education and communication. It further encourages the generation of these understandings through analytic development facilitated by collaborative research and experimentation vital to enabling voice and ultimately empowerment (Kelly, 2012). We found that studio allows space, time, and materials to reflect on self. Working in the studio facilitated balancing the new information offered in the lessons with the participants’ own knowledge of the world, allowing them to make new and unique connections that nurtured a personal

understanding of the world. Working with the many languages of learning and communication, they were able to discover and express their understanding, thus finding voice. From what the participants have reported, the studio has proven to be an overall positive experience. As George said:

I think I was influenced, like, you know we were told that there was just a time to be open, creative, and relax if you need it... I don't know the way you guys explained it, kinda, you're supposed to be in a positive light. So that when I did think about what I wanted to do, I always wanted to be positive (p. 68).

It has provided a welcome space and time for self-reflection. Through its playful nature, and with materials of choice, it brings the individual's interests and ideas forward, giving balance to "objective and internal conditions" (Dewey, 1938, p.42), in the educational context. It connects the traditional, manual-based material to the learner's experiences. Further, the studio encourages positive experience in that it "arouses curiosity, strengthens initiative and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future" (Dewey, 1938, p.38). In coming to know and collect positive moments in life, we might repeat these moments and build a resilience that helps us see past the toxic experiences, enabling us to better our lives. The studio promotes growth in a positive direction.

I think this has been a successful study, a successful moment in time, where the participants learned to transfer lived experience into knowledge. We participated in the dialogical process of learning and knowing (Macebo, 2011), gaining a deeper knowledge of ourselves and what gives us quality in our lives. We found voice and gained a confidence to

use those voices in our community. As detailed in chapter three, the participants offered clear and specific feedback on how facilitators can work more effectively within the context of the educational context of the NPP. The challenge now lies in having these voices recognized and heard by the members of the broader community, in society.

On Being Heard

Already having a voice in society, the facilitator can encourage the other members of the society to listen and hear these other voices. I have found voice in the university community by joining and working with that community to validate ideas on the usefulness of the studio. For participants, the opportunity to find voice was presented by the studio itself and by this research study. Involving the participants as co-researchers proved to be empowering for the participants and developed their voice in the community. By participating in the open discussions, and then reviewing and editing those discussions to focus on making their arguments more effective, the participants learned to speak a language that might be heard and considered. I told the participants I would bring their words, the transcripts, to this thesis. By bringing the participants' story of studio into my conversation with the university, I have enabled them to become active members of this societal roundtable.

With our understanding of the importance of studio in an educational context, the participants and I are now in the process of forming a focus group to advocate for the development of a permanent open studio space at the Centre to be used by all the participants engaged in programs at the Centre. We will take our argument for studio to the board of governors and executive director of the Centre, and have the opportunity to contribute our understandings to the community. In forming this new focus group, learning

and working toward creating change in this organization, we will be assuming a responsible role in society.

Balance must be found where those in the margins work critically and creatively to find their voices that can be heard in the society. In this way they can learn to succeed in being heard in whatever context they find themselves. While, on the other hand, members of the society open the perimeters of the social world they have created, understanding that all have a right to have voice in society. This opens the possibility for all individuals to contribute to the democracy, to have voice, and have the opportunity to take a responsible role in society.

Ruminations on the Artist as Studio Facilitator

In light of the understanding of studio developed by the participants and myself, it is important for the artist, *atelierista*, to oversee the facilitation of the studio because the artist will better maintain the studio's integrity. Artists are sensitive to Malaguzzi's "aesthetic vibration," giving completeness to thought and passion to life by connecting the rational with the imaginative, and the cognitive with the expressive. They understand this aesthetic as a powerful element for understanding and connecting with reality (Vecchi, 2010). They are encouraged in their training and tend to address things in the moment, without depending on routines and past experience. They engage in proactive creativity with its inherent reflexive nature. They understand the need for structure in learning, for an agenda, but they also know there must be a chance to take the knowledge of the manual to one's own personal understanding and to apply it to life to make the learning be known. They recognized that a secure yet open space and time are needed for exploration and play to allow and develop this understanding. By allowing experimentation, the chance to play

with alternatives without adverse repercussions, participants can find new solutions. As with Malaguzzi's *atelierista*, artists tend to teach knowledge paradoxically, questioning all. They may learn what matters in society but then challenge that knowledge by asking why it matters (Kumashiro, 2009). In guiding the studio, it is the artist's obligation to gradually intermingle roles with the learner, sharing and growing the learner's understanding of studio until the learner is ready to step into the role of the facilitator. The artist thus passes the torch, and the learner assumes this responsible role in society. Regardless, my advice to any who attempt to lead this studio situation would be to keep an open heart and mind and, most importantly, listen to the participants.

My Role in the Study

I have approached this study by taking on three roles. In this study I have been the facilitator, trying to be more effective in helping those who find themselves in the margins of society. I have been an *atelierista*, defining, presenting, and maintaining the integrity of the studio. Along with this, I have been a student at the university, attending classes and conversations with faculty and cohorts. I have compared historical and contemporary theories on how learners learn and how teachers teach. Further, I have been a researcher seeking a more effective pedagogy for a marginalized population by bringing the studio into the educational context of the Nurturing Parent Program.

I have listened to the participants to understand the learner's point of view. Also, by being a student at the university and "doing" studio myself as a way of learning and communicating, I became a co-learner with the participants. We also became co-facilitators of the studio as we developed an understanding of studio and constructed its meaning together. Finally, in sharing our notes, experiences, and thoughts, we became co-

researchers regarding the effectiveness of the studio and its facilitators. We worked together in all aspects of this study and built a common ground and comfort in each other's company. I have engaged my personal self and worked as a member of the group. I became one with the participants where all members were part of the sense making.

A Note on Anonymity and Confidentiality as Labeling and Silencing

I felt very uneasy about taking names out of this study. The participants were more than eager to reveal themselves. They were proud of themselves. They had finally been given voice. In being the masters of the studio, participating in the research discussion group, and preparing their report in the form of the transcripts, they gained voice. They wanted the community of people who had been advising them, the educators, social workers, psychologists, practicum students, and so forth, to hear their voices and what they had to say. Mistaking audio recording for video, they dressed up for the first day of our gatherings. They wanted to be seen. They said they wanted this work published. They wanted to be heard. I feel that the impact of their communication has been lessened by their facelessness. They have not been fully recognized, "as another self bearing universal rights and responsibilities" (Gilham, 2011, p. 114).

I also had difficulty taking out the name of the participating organization. As this study is built on the story of people gathering at a certain place, at a certain time, discussing certain things in a certain frame of mind, the particular characteristics of the organization that enable this study to unfold should be recognized along with the individuals themselves. I have felt that being made anonymous presented participants as Tiana's dreaded, "generic... every day ... normal statistics, that they take out there of all

these people” (p. 106). The whole issue of “face to face” (Kelly, 2012), of being seen, recognized, and heard keeps appearing to me as quite important in empowering people.

Future Research

The next time that I undertake a study of this kind, I will do a participatory action research study and let the group construct the entire study around the topic presented. This approach is consistent with the findings of this research project. When facilitators walk with the learners, listening and contributing as a co-learner, “keeping the conversation going and open-ended” (Moules, 2013, p.6), they stay flexible to the needs and wants of the learner. As George said in the research discussions, “Every group is going to be different, so you’re going to have to set your own... adding or reminding the rules, or guide-not rules, guidelines, change.” (p. 81 & 85).

Along with defining the focus of the study, participants will plan the place, time, how the meetings are to be conducted, and what subsequent questions will be asked. As George put it, they will set their own guidelines. My role will be to keep everyone focused, challenge their ideas and discussions to encourage critical thinking, and take their words, their voices, to a finished written form. Perhaps they will also contribute to the final product by aiding in the arrangement of the material and doing the writing.

It is our responsibility to unravel our own positionality and understand that our world-view is not neutral. There is no immunity from social hierarchies; there are no innocents and we must see “how we are upholding someone else’s oppression” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 145). Paralysis or apathy from guilt, or feeling that we cannot do anything because we have not “been there,” only protects hierarchies and holds oppression in place (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). In fact, silence supports oppression (Sensoy &

DiAngelo, 2012). There is something to be said about caring. It is a complicated position to unravel and reveal true intentions, but “one wonders if we disclaim our obligations, if we walk away from that which we are bound, then we might render the sufferer into an oblivion where one suffers alone” (Moules, 1999, p. 256). To find a way to be helpful is not a straight line between the desire and doing. It calls for a conscious effort to understand the effects of one’s actions. It calls for a rigorous meeting of heart and mind (Kearney, 2005).

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APPENDIX A – EXHIBITION VIDEO INFORMATION

YouTube Link to Exhibition Video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbVNCIpaUPA>

For Windows users who cannot access the YouTube version and wish to play the version on the included DVD-ROM, you may need to visit:

https://support.apple.com/kb/DL837?locale=en_US

to download a copy of the necessary software to play the file.