

How then do we tell our story if we teach in a setting where parts of our stories, such as religious identity, might need to be concealed?

## *Dressing Up:* Exploring the Fictions and Frictions of Professional Identity in Art Educational Settings

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What fictions do we tell ourselves in order to teach? How do our stories as educators impact how we see our learners? Building from auto-ethnography research I begin with the personal and then invite co-participants to further illuminate a shared experience (Chang, 2008). In this example, I highlight the self-reflective work toward revealing and concealing identities associated with “teacher.” Using collage pedagogy (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008), students in a pre-service art education class, created paper doll narratives marking and unmarking themselves through collaged backdrops and clothing choices which performed identities that would impact their role of teacher. Future teachers also “undressed” themselves from fashions that impeded their abilities to see their students beyond stereotypes. Through the design of the dolls and reflexivity, we examined the frictions of identity and representation within the larger social, political, or institutional landscapes of what it means to be “teacher/student” in the 21st century school sphere.

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What do our identities reveal about us? More importantly, as an educator, what is significant about one's professional identity? How has one's history and story impacted one's position within art education settings? How do these layered narratives impact how one sees one's students and in turn how students see their teacher?

In an art education methods course, we employed autoethnography as a "cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details" (Chang, 2008, p. 46). Although self-narratives focus on the author, they are never purely a study of oneself. As relational beings, we are invariably connected to others. I used an autoethnographic approach in an art methods course for students entering the teaching profession during several lessons that culminated in the creation of paper dolls. I wanted to move beyond an investigation of self by including pre-service teachers' reflections on what it means to be a teacher. Within this interconnectedness, I wondered what frictions might emerge in what we chose to reveal or conceal about self and others through the materiality of paper dolls? How did these frictions become sites of power but also possibility (Foucault, 1975/1977)? So who am I? Who are my students? Who are we in relationship to each other?

### Beginning Layers

#### Layer One: Who Am I?

I began class sharing my layers of self through a reading of the following statements.

I am a 42-year old heterosexual female who is a college professor.

I am a 42-year old heterosexual, female, and an able-bodied college professor.

I am a 42-year old heterosexual, female, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background.

I am a 42-year old heterosexual, female, a mother, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background.

I am a 42-year old white heterosexual, female, a

mother, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background.

I am a 42-year old Christian, white, heterosexual, female, a mother, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background.

#### Layer Two: Who Are the Learners?

When asked about their identities as related to being future educators, students responded with the following:

We are first generation college students.

Our families tell us we should not be art teachers.

Our friends think our major is easy.

I wonder what my future students will think of me?

We fear losing control of our future classroom.

Can I do this?

I lived in a car growing up.

I struggle with depression.

I can't wait to teach.

What are the fictions we tell ourselves and our students in order to engage in the practice of teaching and learning? From the phrases above, what do we come to assume about individuals? How might we view them as educators? Do they fit the cultural storyline of proper *teacher*, with *proper* meaning embedded historical and cultural expectations of what it means to be a teacher? If being the *proper teacher* using the *proper curriculum* creates the *proper student*, where is the conflict in learning (Britzman, 1998)?

An autoethnographic approach to understanding self with others invites conflict in examining identity and identification within cultural expectations. In order to create vulnerable dialogue, autoethnography operated as a site of revealing self from a postmodern perspective—that is, a self that is complicated, multifaceted, and impacted by an ongoing deluge of cultural, social, and political forces that seeks to locate agency within these competing forces.

To begin, I start with my story of self, essential in an autoethnographic approach, followed by the stories of my students. From here, we use our stories

created through mapping and collage to critically examine what it means to be a teacher in the 21st century. This interconnectedness was created by listening to my students' stories. Students also created *teacher identity* paper dolls to further explore their professional identity by revealing and concealing layers of self through clothing choices. Using collage pedagogy (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008), we examined the bombardment of visual culture texts related to *teacher* and created a site to critically deconstruct culturally held beliefs of what it means to be teacher. This criticality is essential to autoethnographic work that is more than storytelling, but a site of revealing fictions and frictions.

### Further Layers of Self

My story begins with my doctoral work, where I studied the impact of socioeconomic status on the culture of the art room (Pfeiler-Wunder, 2013a, 2013b; Pfeiler-Wunder & Tomel, 2014). I interwove my story of growing up working class on a family farm and its impact on how I saw myself, my students, and curriculum. Class and gender became the identities I used to mark myself as *other*. In turn, I assumed these reflections provided me a sensitivity to when students felt *othered* in classroom settings. However, gender and class representations limited my perspective. I needed to employ Ellis and Bochner's (2000) "reflexive ethnographic" in which "authors use their own experience in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions" (p. 740). Through listening to my students' stories, I wanted to see what aspects of identity were important to students during this point in their journey so I would not be ignorant due to assumptions I held from my own story of becoming an educator. These landscaped narratives occupy a space of telling with expression and move beyond a story of events, characters, and settings (Potteiger & Purinton, 1998). Instead, a hermeneutic circle allows for interpretation by the writer and the reader. Just as a natural landscape is impacted by a range of environmental, social, and cultural forces, so are the ways in which individuals construct their stories. As H. L. Goodall Jr. (2008) shares,

when we engage in writing or telling a story, we create alternative pathways to meaning that are imaginative and analytical; that are guided by a narrative (rather than propositional) rationality; and that are relational—in production of meaning, they connect the teller of the talk to the listener or reader of the story. (p. 140)

I found that in telling my own stories, I had to be cautious of the pitfall in autoethnographic work of over-relying on memory to construct my story. Building on the research of Hanawalt (2015), Hyatt (2015), and Spillane (2015), this meant I needed to invite a conversation on the failure to do the critical work of examining our own professional identities in tandem with others in order to transform art educational settings.

So why did I start with "I am a 42-year-old Christian, white female, heterosexual, a mother, and an able-bodied college professor who is a first-generation college graduate from a working-class background?" When I started exploring the art room through the lens of socioeconomic status, I needed to reflect on how I positioned *others* in order to position myself. Cultural studies theorist Hall (2000) discusses how seeing *other* as subject we constitute a human community. We acknowledge a need to access some "true self...hiding the husks of all the false selves we present to the rest of the world" (Hall, 2000, p. 145). He advocates moving from a modernist view of self as rational and objective. Although it might help us sleep at night, it does not address the frictions of self in relationship to other. I do wrestle with sleeping at night when I reflect on the complexities of preparing future art educators. Similar to Akkerman and Meijer (2011) and Hanawalt (2015), I feel as if I am in negotiation alongside my students in becoming the teachers we want to be versus who we think society or school cultures ask us to be.

My working-class background did have an impact on my identity and representation as a teacher. I also needed to do the critical work called forth by Kendall (2013) and recognize my privilege as a white woman raised as a Christian. From an early age, I saw images of cross burnings by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in our

local paper. I could not understand this level of hatred. I also questioned how the Catholic school I attended in the very small community in which I grew up could emphasize the Golden Rule of treating everyone equally while being so unwelcoming to anyone who was not white and Catholic. In *White*, Richard Dryer (1997), a white writer, explores how representations of extreme whiteness, such as is exemplified by KKK members, serve as cultural counterpoints to “ordinary whiteness.” This allows white people to see themselves as speaking and acting, “disinterestedly as humanity’s most average and unremarkable representatives” (p. 223), not allowing white people to see their privilege.

This work of vulnerability allowed me to move from the intrapersonal to the interpersonal by bringing critical discourse into an arts-based project—collaged paper dolls—that captured the layers of identity assumed, revealed, and made in/visible. Together, my students and I traversed the landscaped narratives of our professional identities by trying on layers of self and dressing up to understand ourselves in relation to our professional identities as teacher.

### What is Professional Identity?

In the many times I have taught the course, we have begun with the question “What is professional identity?” Professional identity is connected to both our inner and outer worlds. Miller and Garran (2008) “describe [professional identity] as an inner world where we aspire to our own identities and an outer world where the social reality of our identities can be assumed by others or even imposed by others” (as cited in Lewis & Hatch, 2008, p.115). Professional identity includes the intersectionality of identities, such as race, ethnicity, religion, economic status, social class, gender, nationality, chosen interests, sexual identity, politics, and personal history.

I invited students to begin the autoethnography by telling their own stories of teaching by recalling a memory of art learning/making, including details of how the teacher positioned them as a learner and how they positioned the teacher. I used this autoethnographic approach of beginning with personal reflec-



Figure 1. Pre-service student’s image of “who should I be?” vs. “who am I?” illustrated in early memory of artmaking.

tion in order to move more outwardly later in the class.

### Building Layers Together: Creating Dialogue Between Self and Others

From their initial stories of art learning, my students began to reveal how they saw the professional identity of the teacher and in turn their potential future selves as teachers. For example, in Figure 1, the student illustrated the tension between student and teacher playing perceived roles of the teacher in a role of power and the student wanting choice.

Garoian and Gaudelius (2008) advocate for the use of collage pedagogy in curriculum by nature of collage illuminating the range of disparate images individuals are bombarded with daily. It is this cognitive disassociation that provided multiple perspectives necessary for critical engagement (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008). I worked to complicate the frictions between the “Who am I?” versus the “Who should I be?” as a teacher through visual culture images and assumptions of what it means to be a teacher. These images were outcomes of students’ reflections on how their experiences in school impacted how they saw the role of the teacher. We also started by deconstructing a teacher poem:

I dreamed I stood in a studio  
and watched two sculptors there.

The clay they used was a child's mind  
 and they fashioned it with care.  
 One was a teacher; the tools she used  
 were books and music and art.  
 One, a parent with guiding hands  
 and a gentle loving heart.  
 Day after day, the teacher toiled with  
 touch both deft and sure  
 while the parent labored by her side  
 and polished and smoothed it o'er.  
 Each agreed one would have failed if one  
 had worked alone.  
 For behind the teacher stood the school  
 and behind the parent, the home.<sup>1</sup>

Googling the words “teacher” or “teacher poems” often revealed the warm and fuzzy glow of shiny red apples and endearing poems about the innocence of learners and the teacher’s ability to *transform* and mold all students into the image of *perfection*. Using Duncum (2002), I worked to dislodge romanticized perspectives of the teacher and the learner. Many of my students wanted to hold tight to the cute version of the Hallmark Holiday Card of *teacher* or *kid*. At one point, several students tried to argue that childhood was sweet and innocent when another student chimed in: “My mother was an alcoholic and could be abusive...my childhood sucked.” The friction between an imagined landscape was quickly transformed into a vista that offered another perspective and possibility for how one *sees* their childhood and thus the childhood of the learners in their classrooms.

Following their personal art learning stories and cultural deconstruction of the teacher stereotypes, we then employed deep intrapersonal reflection by completing the Identity Mapping Exercise (Congdon, Stewart, & White, 2002). The Identity Mapping Exercise asks students to reflect on how various identities/communities make them the person they are, and how this impacts curriculum development. Students are asked to reflect on such identities/com-

<sup>1</sup>The origins of this poem are not clear. It is frequently attributed to Cleo V. Swarat, occasionally attributed to Helen McCormick, and sometimes listed as anonymous. Also, it is sometimes titled *Unity* and at other times it is titled *The Two Sculptors*. While frequently included on various teacher and school websites, the author and editor were unable to find a definitive source.

munities as recreational, family, religious, economic status, etc. These identities/communities are then ranked in importance providing reflection on which parts of their identities are most important to them at this point in their professional journey. These activities all led to the collage paper doll assignment. The Identity Mapping Exercise parallels the autoethnographic use of a culture-gram where people visualize their social selves (Chang, 2008). Both the mapping exercise and chart invite participants to see their present selves from multiple perspectives, including social roles, people, groups they spend time with, and diversity criteria by which they judge themselves (Chang, 2008, p. 97). Finally, I posed a series of questions to consider as they began imagining the layers of self through various outfits and objects/accessories they would design that would literally or metaphorically reveal layers of self. These questions were:

What are the stereotypes we might hold of the art teacher?

How might we alter, change, or push against these stereotypes?

How do our personal narratives impact how we see the teacher?

What baggage might this bring to our notion of teacher?

What considerations should we make related to the lenses through which we see the teacher and learners, such as gender, race, class, ability, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation/identity, etc.?

From here, we designed and created paper dolls marking and unmarking ourselves through the selection of collaged backdrops and clothing choices. Paper dolls allowed a study of both the history and meaning of a cultural object. This acted as a form of autoethnographic data because, historically, paper dolls were tools of play and imagination while also teaching morality and gendered roles. The use of paper dolls became a fitting site in examining one’s own story and potential friction of expected teaching roles. How might playing with paper dolls embedded with historical meaning allow new sites of possibility for my pre-service students?



The first paper doll appeared in 1810 in a chapbook called *The Little Fannie Figure* and was aimed at the upper classes. Here a little girl sneaks off with her maid to the park and loses all her possessions (Oatman-Stanford, 2013). The doll and story are meant to teach a lesson about how girls spend their time, reading or in idle play. Paper dolls also occupied a prominent role as a visual culture tool as a prize in many purchased goods in the 20th century, such as Lyon's Coffee and Pillsbury Flour (Johnson, 1999). They were also a teaching tool and toy in magazines, such as *Jack and Jill's*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *McCall's*.

The dolls, snipped and cut, marked gender, class, consumerism, and opportunities to understand other. Through the spectacle of play, young children could play with Betsy McCall who "lives in a little white house" ...featuring her "very best dress" for parties (Janie & The Bleu Door, 2017) or be world travelers in the 1964-1965 *Dress Up for the New York World's Fair* paper doll book where children played with costumes "from many different lands" (Martin & Martin, 1963) to learn about other places.

These choices in play, followed by the creation of their dolls, performed identities that would impact their role of teacher. Students could also *undress* themselves from fashions that impeded their abilities to see teacher and learners beyond stereotypical views. This interplay between revealed and concealed meanings enacted Derrida's (1993/1994) notion of "re-visiting, re-remembering, re-conceptualizing, and representing knowledge from the past...whereby someone or something invisible...becomes other than what we already know" (Derrida, 1993/1994, pp. 100-101). This is integral to autoethnographic research where self-study involves study with others because collage acted as a site to critically engage or deconstruct culturally held beliefs of what it means to be teacher. What follows are examples of dolls created by pre-service teachers and how their clothing and background created sites of resistance and possibility.



Figure 2. Pre-Service teacher paper doll celebrating self and other.

### Dressing and Un/dressing through Paper Dolls— Revealing and Concealing Fictions and Frictions of Professional Identity

#### Considering Other

Guys don't forget to observe your world, make connections to patterns, imagine everything and listen to nineties rock!!! Also, tolerate all differences! (L. Hartford, personal communication, May 2, 2016)

In this example, the student's zest for life, music, and artmaking was evident in her personality in class and was also revealed through her paper doll. The added note of "tolerate all differences" was also a liminal space of negotiation. Here I saw the student wrestling with course work on multiculturalism and respecting *others* intermixed with our own class conversations about honoring each student in their future classrooms. I also saw a friction with the use of "tolerate." I wondered if students believed that if they were open to students from a range of experiences, classes, races, sexual orientation, that was enough? How might I move them beyond a place of seeing or recognizing other to a place of understanding the social, political, and institutional barriers that inhibit individuals from fully participating within particular institutions? This

is especially important because schools that often function from a predominantly white, middle class ideology (Brantlinger, 2003).

If learning is to be relational, then how might I create a space for this critical conversation about what we reveal and conceal without the fear associated with the knowledge that ultimately this was also a graded assignment? This was also the first class in the major and the students would be working with their classmates for approximately the next three years. Who did they want to be to their professor? To their peers? As a future educator?

My hope was the nature of layering and building *landscaped* stories through our relational experiences would push students to make critical decisions about what to reveal/conceal through the creation of their dolls. Collage narrative enables a critical examination of constructed assumptions (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008). As Garoian and Gaudelius share (2008), it is the “in-between spaces within the fragments of collage, where knowledge is mutable and undecidable,...” a place to examine what “...curricula says we are supposed to be and what we have in actuality not become” (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008, p. 92).

Some paper doll projects took the form of closet spaces, where dressing up meant a plethora of cloth-



Figure 3. Pre-Service teacher paper doll featuring paint tube as a symbol for spirituality.

ing options where they shared the identities that mattered most to them. This was an outcome of completing the Identity Mapping Exercise. Students often revealed family, recreational, and religious identities

as those highly important to them. They also wrestled with when particular identities could or should be revealed in the classroom. Especially their religious identity.

### Spirituality and the Classroom

In this passage, the student shared the tension of revealing or concealing her spirituality through her paper doll (see Figure 3):

As I struggled to make an article of clothing which wasn't too cheesy to represent my religious, or spiritual (I don't really care for the word "religious") identity, I had another idea. So, the yellow paint tube represents my love for God. It is meant to symbolize how everything I do is for him and art is one gift he has given me. (A. Whitney, personal communication, May 2, 2016)

This passage revealed the friction as a site of power and possibility. We had discussed white privilege in class and she shared this made her hesitant to reveal this part of her identity in her dolls. This caused me to pause and consider how much I stretched my students to examine the power of their identities in a classroom space while also honoring who they were as individuals in my classroom. A. Whitney also shared this in her artist statement:

"I owe it to myself to be as truthful as I can be" (Check, 2002, p.56). Teachers' relationship with their students is the most important part of their job. In my future classroom, I want to tell my students my story, I want to have conversation and honesty between the students and myself. (A. Whitney, personal communication, May 2, 2016)

How then do we tell our story if we teach in a setting where parts of our stories, such as religious identity, might need to be concealed?

### Tensions Within Self

This student revealed her struggles with depression and anxiety by adding several props to her paper doll. She revealed that she sometimes has a hard time



Figure 4. Pre-Service teacher paper doll featuring pillow related to depression and t-shirt on lesbian pride.

getting out of bed in the morning which is why a pillow is included in her piece. At other times, she would like to be home alone eating pie and Chinese food (see Figure 4). She is concerned about how her anxiety might impact the challenges of working with large numbers of students in a school setting.

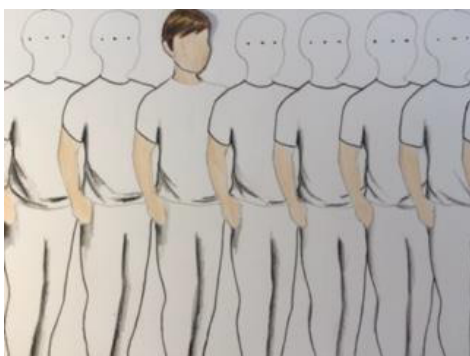


Figure 5. Pre-Service teacher image of student feeling “copied and pasted.”

Other students used their dolls to reveal challenges with perceived body types and sexual identity. As part of their pasts, they were working to reconcile concerns that could potentially be read negatively in future classrooms.

### Influences from Past Schooling Experiences

Students also shared the range of clothes that represented different selves or concerns for how the past would impact their professional identities.

I wanted to mention the fact that I went to Catholic school when talking about my identity’s beginning. So why would anyone think it’s smart to ditch your personal interests and aspects just because you’re going into a profession that’s “dressy” so to speak? I hated feeling like I was copied and pasted [referencing attending Catholic school, see Figure 5], and now that I’m in school to be a teacher myself, I realize that breaking that feeling is the key to feeling special as a student [referencing self and future students]. I love rock & roll, going to concerts, exploring places...I worked way too hard to find myself in the past years that I don’t think there’s a way to go back and put them on hold. (D. Leonard, personal communication, September 14, 2016)

Another student also wanted her identity as a strong and independent woman to be present in the class while also being considered nurturing. Through collage pedagogy, the students created “writerly texts” where the paper dolls were not simply to be read but the narratives could be rewritten and readjusted and literally stripped away as the students dressed and undressed their dolls (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008, p. 93). The *Rosie the Riveter* Teacher Doll was created as a children’s storybook with perforated edges around the clothing. The classic text of teaching had possibilities for new story lines by illuminating tensions between the strong independent teacher, a feminist with a strong voice, and the cultural stereotype of the teacher as nurturer. This also raised the question of why we might hold onto the nostalgic notions of teacher, learner, and curriculum. Perhaps the weight of teaching can be understood when we juxtapose the nostalgic perspectives of teaching with commonly spoken phrases like: “Teachers change lives” versus “Teachers ruin lives;” “Teachers inspire the future” versus “Teachers maintain the status quo;” or “Teachers inspire passionate engagement in life” versus “Teachers prepare students for a mundane existence.”

Our fears become illuminated through the collage narrative, as Ellsworth (1997) shares, that “exposes, examines, and critiques the academic knowledge of institutionalized schooling” (as cited in Garoian &



Gaudelius, 2008, p. 92). The signs that mark teaching, such as red apples and happy teachers set against green chalkboards, opened up “in-between space” where meaning is negotiated by the reader. Landscapes are continually changed by frictions, environmental, political, and social forces. When we consider the landscape of learning as a new frontier, as within any interaction of teacher, student, or curriculum, the culture of the classroom becomes a site of something yet to become (Britzman, 1998).

Paper dolls also revealed growing up homeless and living in a car. Dolls revealed the weight of losing one’s mother and becoming the mother to siblings. Dolls celebrated the excitement of teaching, of wearing professional dress-up clothes, and the hopes of being taken seriously. Dolls were funny, serious, and complicated, just as the nature of teaching and learning should be if we embrace the fictions constructed, deconstructed, and told of what it means to be teacher.

### All Dressed Up?—Final Layers

What are the fictions we tell ourselves and our students in order to engage in the practice of teaching and learning? Through personal narratives, we revealed assumed, hidden, and constructed professional identities that interplay into the interactions and sometimes frictions among learners, teachers,

and ultimately learning. The stories told represent the *Third Space*, where the fragments created through collage narratives “expose[d], examine[d] and critique[d] the academic knowledge of institutionalized schooling” (Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008, p. 93). We worked to engage in the vulnerable and critical work of dissolving the fictions we tell ourselves in order to embrace the often difficult relationships and power dynamics of teaching.

This work calls for developing curriculum from a post-structural hermeneutic perspective embracing vulnerability, tension, and conflict. Learning should be an interpretive process emerging from the individual stories within the culture of the classroom and the social, political, and psychological elements that impact students’ reactions, acceptance, and resistance to learning. When these frictions arise, the postmodern educator embraces this game of “critique and deconstruction” (Slattery, 2013, p. 137). The subject—the teacher and learner—is an ontological process understood within the dynamic interplay of curriculum, pedagogy, and perhaps learning. Becoming is emphasized and knowledge is seen as emergent, constructed and layered.

### Notes

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