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Precarity:
Editorial

Daniel T. Barney, Editor
When the officers of the Caucus of Social Theory in Art Education (CSTAE) and I wrote the call for Volume 40: Precarity for the Journal of Social Theory in Art Education (JSTAE), we could not have imagined all that would take place in 2020. Anna Lowenhaupts Tsing’s (2015) questions we posed within the call, what if “precarity is the condition of our time?” and “what if our time is ripe for sensing precarity?” (p. 20) were both hauntingly insightful for this particular year and are addressed expertly by scholars within this volume. The following is a brief introduction to the work of the authors and artists within JSTAE Volume 40: Precarity:

Michelle Bae-Dimitriadis and Olga Ivashkevich provoke art educators to decenter Whiteness within the field, and to radically acknowledge White supremacist ideas and policies when using the precarious term “we” that renders specific voices and perspectives disposable.

Cala Coats invites readers to engage with her essay that addresses stickiness as a concept, condition, and practice through a narrative score that becomes an aesthetic pedagogical exercise as it is improvised and “played.”

Brooke Hofsess explores the everyday precarious practices of pedagogical resiliency through a concept of salvaging after unexpected flooding disrupted an educational program she developed called Ecologies.

Melisa Cahnaman-Taylor, Sharon Nuruddin, and Tairan Qiu address precarity through the presentation of a translingual pedagogy researched using a translingual memoir data collection and analysis that invites educational researchers to let go of our desires to conclude our work with prescriptive solutions to precarious failures.

Kevin Jenkins created a visual essay that exists on its own terms in relation to policies and the precarity of particular bodies in particular sites, including making oneself vulnerable in the field of art education in scholarly venues such as this very journal. Notwithstanding the power of this work, Dr. Jenkins also pairs his visual essay with a written essay that provokes critical self-reflection for scholarly readers and academics attempting to navigate the precarities of trans lives.

Kevin Tavin and Mira Kallio-Tavin discuss the precarious position of why the field of art education might choose to remain silent concerning the life work and scholarship of John Derby. Organized around the concepts of Stigma, Confinement, and Silence, the authors critically analyze the oppressive ableist and sanist practices in art education.

Carol Padberg offers a creative abecedarius, where her acrostic follows not only the order of the letters in the alphabet, but a line of questioning and calling out, of thought experiments and provocations for action.

Christina Hanawalt first narrates an investigation of the caring entanglements of mentoring beginning art teachers, and then concludes her essay with precariously critical provocations for the field.
Additionally, we have included the work of two artists who have recently responded to concepts of precarity, Pearl Corry and Julian Harper.

**Pearl Corry** began *Fundamental Gestures no. 13*, a GIF collage series she started during the Covid-19 quarantine, through the social media platform Instagram. The artist describes the precarity of worrying about keeping her job and studio space running during a time of such uncertainty, but she began to play with the idea of using Instagram as a way to compose a different kind of painting where a narrative is constructed over time. Pearl creates each work in the series by first appropriating using a search function and then altering and layering the found GIFs in a new digital “painting” that followers can view and to which they can immediately respond in a very accessible way. These works capture the feeling of precarity, but also offer the artist a way to negotiate the sense of precarity she feels at the present moment.

For further information please visit Pearl Corry’s Website: www.pearlcorry.squarespace.com or follow her on Instagram @pearlcorry

*Figure 1. Fundamental Gestures no. 13, Pearl Corry, 2020*
Julian Harper’s project *Nothing is Enough, Everything is Important,* “is more about a general state of mind,” he states. He describes the work as a response to recent precarious transitions in his life. Julian elaborates in the following: “The relationships I used to feel centered by, are now quite unstable. My body and the hand come into conversation, and the hand is activated in many ways at my behalf and my expense. Power is both being exercised and stolen, and the power is both physical and social. I also wanted to do something a little dumb.” He explains, “The task is truly pointless, and yet it becomes so important for me to attempt. The task is also impossible. It is impossible to balance anything forever.”

For further information please visit Julian Harper’s Website: www.julianharperart.com
Precarity is certainly the condition of our time. The uncertainty and imbalance that is pervasive within the world today, where life promises no stability, undoubtedly requires resourcefulness, resiliency, and remaking, but also a refusal to repeat and replicate into the future through an optimistic sensing (Tsing, 2015) that is offered as a keen noticing of our present precarious moment within the field of art education proposed by the authors in this volume.

Reference

Correspondence regarding this volume may be sent to the editor:

Daniel T. Barney
Brigham Young University
daniel_barney@byu.edu
Precarity in Feminism and Feminist Art Education: Decentering Whiteness Through Reproductive Justice Activism

Michelle Bae-Dimitriadis & Olga Ivashkevich
Feminist art education has undeniably contributed to the establishment of a new knowledge by introducing an alternative perspective centering on women’s experiences and concerns which disrupts male-dominated art making, research, curriculum, and pedagogy. By questioning whose knowledge matters, feminist art education brings girls’ and women’s stories, values, and ideas to the fore of knowledge production and identifies a breach in the dominant educational conversations on visual culture, material culture, and social justice art education by revising and expanding existing knowledge. It also adopts interdisciplinary frameworks such as sociology, history, and science to critically examine gender inequalities in diverse contexts of art education curriculum and policy making.

Nonetheless, feminist art education’s central critique of gender inequalities and capitalist patriarchy often overlooks a “complex confluence of identities—race, class, gender, and sexuality—systemic to women of color’s oppression and liberation” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 4). The dominant feminist art educational approach uncritically embraces the idea of sisterhood assuming that White women’s experience could stand for all experience (Haywood & Drake, 1997). By privileging the ideas of Whiteness—which has been recently identified as a major issue in the predominantly White field of art education as a whole (Acuff, 2019)—feminist art education tends to use a collective language of “we” (we, the feminists) as unified, harmonious, and undisrupted. Yet, an emphasis on collective biographies of women artists/educators seems to be largely preoccupied with issues that mainly concern White women, which reflects a White-dominated field of feminism as a whole (Acuff, López, & Wilson, 2019). To give a simple example, feminist policy making has long been focused on income inequality by advancing a popular argument that (all) women make 79 cents for every dollar earned by their White male counterparts in the U.S.; while, according to recent statistics by the National Partnership for Women and Families (2019), “Black women are typically paid 62 cents, Native American women 58 cents, and Latinas just 54 cents for every dollar paid to White, non-Hispanic men” (para 2). This iconic 79-cents-on-the-dollar argument was apparently crafted by White feminist activists and used as an overarching, collective statement which overshadows a much larger pay gap that many women of color face in this country. While working towards an important feminist goal of gender equality, the utopian ideal concept operating under the self-reference of “we” tends to obscure complex, contradictory, and multi-layered lived experiences of oppression of women of color whose race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status...

1 This number slightly fluctuates from year to year. We cite the most recent wages report by the National Partnership for Women and Families.
make their gender discrimination rather distinct and more complicated than the mainstream. White, middle-class women’s experiences. Thus, the perspectives of non-White feminists remain merely a surplus, or an addition, to the mainstream feminism (and feminist art education); while the White feminists’ knowledge and agendas are placed front and center (Ahmed, 2012).

We see this use of a collective “we” within feminism as a condition of precarity. In her essay on precarity and precarious life, feminist theorist Judith Butler (2009) states that within the mainstream political and institutional discourses, some human lives are systematically ignored and are essentially rendered as disposable and “ungrievable” (p. 31). Considering some of the most vulnerable populations such as refugees who flee their home countries in the state of war and political detainees in Abu Ghraib prison, Butler claims that although all lives can be considered precarious in the global neoliberal capitalist landscape, these populations have limited or no access to the “social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (p. 25). Furthermore, she notes that within a neoliberal capitalist nation-state, “the shared condition of precariousness leads not to reciprocal recognition, but to a specific exploitation of targeted populations, of lives that are not quite lives” (p. 31). The condition of precarity then emerges as a deliberate omission and expulsion of human voices and experiences that seem foreign and marginal; which is akin to Stuart Hall’s (1997) theorizing about the symbolic expulsion of the racialized Other. It is curious, however, that while recognizing the precarity in relation to undocumented immigrants and political detainees of color, Butler did not explicitly acknowledge this condition being just as pervasive within a predominantly White feminism itself. While we recognize the significance of Butler’s notion of precarity in relation to some disenfranchised populations, we believe that it needs to be challenged and reframed using an intersectional feminist thought by scholars of color who expose systematic exclusion, marginalization, and silencing of Black and Brown women’s experiences within feminist theory and policy making (Collins 2002; Crenshaw, 1991).

A major manifestation of precarity within White liberal feminism, which is also prevalent within feminist art education and multiculturalism, is that it unproblematically assumes that social justice can be achieved by addressing racial diversity and inclusion (Ahmed, 2012). In this case, a collective feminist “we” is disguised under the name of racial inclusivity to create an illusion of equity. It is necessary to open up a conversation to unpack what constitutes an inclusive practice and agenda of diversity. Feminists of color including Black, Indigenous, Latina, and Asian scholars claim that White feminists’ inclusive approach positions the racialized gender issues of women of color as simply an addendum to feminist agenda and overlooks racial experiences they face in their daily lives (Ahmed, 2012; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015; Acuff, López, & Wilson, 2019). According to a multicultural feminist critic Sarah Ahmed (2012), mainstream feminism seeks to merely provide an “additional color” to its dominant Whiteness, which results in efficiently concealing the continuation of systemic racial inequalities (p. 53). Her critical investigation of the term and practice of “diversity” exposes the fact that the concept of diversity is used as a substitute...
to that of anti-racism in order to cancel out the “noise of racism” (p. 61). She argues that diversity is framed as supporting “individuated differences,” yet “without a commitment to take social action” (p. 53). The comfort zone of diversity’s inclusive approach does not necessarily achieve gender equity for all women. Thus, a commitment to diversity and inclusion does not seem to carry the same weight as a commitment towards equity in both mainstream feminism and feminist art education. It is important for feminist art education to be aware of this problematic use of concepts of diversity and inclusion, which fundamentally centers on White women’s perspectives and agendas. A major emphasis should be placed not on inclusion, but rather on centering and elevating marginalized lived experiences and voices. If Black and Brown women’s perspectives are not intentionally placed at the center, social justice and equity within feminism cannot be achieved.

Our passion and insight on the subject of racial inequity within feminism, and the issue of reproductive justice in particular, is foregrounded by our intersectional identity positionalities. As a woman of color, Michelle experienced countless racialized micro-aggressions after immigrating to the United States from South Korea in 1990. Her immigrant experiences have been situated in multi-layered marginalization which involved gender, race, class, and language discriminations when working in service industries and education fields, particularly as a student and faculty in higher education. Olga is a White immigrant woman who has been evolving in her understanding of racism through close friendship and frequent conversations with Michelle. Having grown up with a universal health care in Belarus where all women had free and equal access to reproductive care and abortion, she was disheartened to learn about the racial health disparities that exist in the United States.

Reproductive Justice as Intersectional Feminist Activism

To confront the precarity of systematic concealing of critical issues central to the lives of many women of color, we want to discuss a very prominent case of the reproductive justice feminist activism. Looking back to the history of reproductive justice in the U.S., Black and Brown feminists fought for the reproductive justice since mid 1990s, but their issues have not been paid great attention within the mainstream feminist movement (Ross, 2017). They encountered intersectional barriers which, at a greater level, prevented them from participating in the mainstream reproductive rights movement led by the predominantly White, middle-class feminists. Particularly, Black women’s painful history of having their reproduction measured and devalued by the social and economic policies is not a major concern of the reproductive rights movement’s agenda. Advocating for the pro-choice and reproductive rights, mainstream feminists traditionally didn’t speak out on the racism faced by Black and other women of color, and did not adequately address their unique and sometimes life threatening concerns such as forced contraception and sterilization, family caps on welfare benefits, and limited or no access to reproductive care (Gomez, 2015; Luna, 2009; Ross, 2016; 2017). According to Loretta Ross (2017), the concept of reproductive justice is much more urgent to focus on than the pro-choice driven reproductive rights, because many Black and Brown women are not treated as fully human in the
first place, and are lacking the same reproductive care—and consequently the same human rights—as White, middle- and upper-class women. She notes that the focus on individual choice to have an abortion ignores the complex systems of oppression and social inequalities that obstruct many disenfranchised women’s right to choose. For example, Black women on welfare “have been forced to accept sterilization in exchange for a continuation of relief benefits and others have been sterilized without their knowledge or consent” (p. 295). Ross is one of the twelve other African American reproductive justice activists who crafted the term after attending a reproductive rights conference in Chicago in 1994. They confronted White feminists’ main focus on abortion rights stating that “abortion advocacy along inadequately addressed the intersectional oppressions of white supremacy, misogyny, and neoliberalism” and that the systemic inequalities such as racism, sexism, colonialism, and poverty have historically shaped women’s "decision making around childbearing and parenting” (pp. 290-291). Furthermore, they urged the pro-choice abortion rights advocates to consider not only the intersecting racial and gender factors, but also immigration status, sexuality, ability, age, and carceral status all of which greatly impact marginalized women’s access and decisions regarding their reproductive care. After a growing frustration with their intersectional agenda not being recognized within the mainstream feminist pro-choice movement, women of color started forming their own activist coalitions (Bond, 2001; Luna, 2009; Ross, 2016). The oldest and largest activist organization, SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Coalition, was formed in 1997 using reproductive justice as its central concept. SisterSong defines reproductive justice as “the complete physical, mental, spiritual, economic, and social well-being of women and girls,” which can be achieved only when they “have the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about their bodies, sexuality, and reproduction” (Ross, 2016, p. 13). SisterSong, like many other smaller coalitions by women of color formed over the last two decades, focus on advocating for most pressing reproductive care concerns and injustices experienced by Indigenous, Black, Latina, and undocumented immigrant women, as well as specific economic and institutional policy changes which have been overlooked by the mainstream White, middle-class women’s reproductive movement.

One of the most pressing issues recognized by reproductive justice advocates is an intersectional struggle by undocumented women of color who are particularly vulnerable to human rights (and consequently reproductive rights) abuse due to their immigration status, which adds yet another axis of oppression to their racial and socioeconomic hardships. While immigration has not been traditionally considered a feminist issue within mainstream feminism, intersectional reproductive justice feminist activists and scholars have paid close attention to it because they saw women’s immigrant status and reproductive health as inseparable (Gomez, 2015; Gutiérrez & Fuentes, 2009). While the forced and coercive sterilizations of low-income Puerto Rican and Mexican-origin immigrant women (both legal and undocumented) implemented by the U.S. government in 1960s and 1970s have been well documented, most recent abuse of the detained undocumented Latina women at the Mexican border is a new emergent
issue, which a few activist organizations like SisterSong and Center for American Progress call attention to as being most egregious human rights violations. Women placed in the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody have no access to menstrual supplies, contraception, or counseling services for sexual assault and rape (Ross, 2017); while some women who are pregnant experience bleeding, miscarriage, and consequent life-threatening health complications are denied appropriate health care or have to choose an abortion in fear of their newborn child being taken away from them due to ICE family separation policy (Illmann, 2019a; 2019b). As Nora Illmann (2019a) notes, "The Trump administration’s anti-immigrant agenda, grounded in a white supremacist and misogynistic worldview, normalizes the dehumanization of immigrant women of color. From family separation, to attempts to erode asylum protections for families and domestic violence survivors, to inaction on reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act, immigrant women live at the crux of the Trump administration’s anti-women and anti-immigrant agendas" (para 5).

Despite an intersectional feminist activism’s efforts to call attention to critical concerns of disenfranchised women discussed above, the mainstream pro-choice feminist movement continues to treat women’s right to have an abortion as a central issue, while neglecting lived realities of many women of color whose reproductive autonomy and choices are obstructed by racial, economic, and institutional factors ranging from mandatory sterilizations, to lack of access to reproductive care, to forced family separation. As Gomez (2015) contends, instead of focusing on a single issue of abortion and "isolating [it] from other areas of social and reproductive oppression," an emphasis should be placed in the fundamental human right to have the procedure as a "constitutional right," as well as "linking this right to a larger discourse about reproductive autonomy, dignity, and a right to health" to ensure that it benefits all women (p. 112). In complete agreement with this statement, we also believe that the fact that women of color are continued to be seen as "invited guests" in the reproductive rights movement with their concerns being viewed as secondary to a pro-choice argument (Bond, 2001, p. 3) contributes to further divisions of feminist agenda and activism and suspends feminist coalition and sisterhood. We also see the case of reproductive justice activism as symptomatic of the fracturing of feminism as a whole, where many Black and Brown women tend to dissociate with the mainstream feminist movement or leave the movement to form their own activist coalitions, because their voices and agendas are being disregarded. Creating a unified multicultural feminist coalition where diversity and inclusion is not simply used as a token, requires a complete rewriting of the dominant feminist script and activism to decenter White power hierarchy by focusing on the intersectional struggles, experiences, and perspectives of disenfranchised women of color. Without placing marginalized women’s voices, concerns, and agendas at the center of feminism, social justice and equity are not attainable (Ross 2016; 2017). Precisely because these agendas deal with much broader fundamental issues of human and constitutional rights, both national and global, they have a much greater potential of benefiting all women instead of just the privileged few.
A Challenge to Feminist Art Education

Based on a prominent case of the reproductive justice activism which confronts the dominant feminist scholarship and practice, we would like to raise a few challenging questions for feminist art education that could help recognize an existing precarity towards minoritized women’s voices in our field. For instance, the recently updated mission of National Art Education Association Women’s Caucus, which serves as a major feminist organization in the field of art education, is still grounded in a White-centered notion of gender equity, stating that the group “represent[s] and work[s] to advance art education as an advocate of equity for women and all people who encounter injustice, and shall work to eliminate discriminatory gender and other stereotyping practices for individuals and groups, and for the concerns of women art educators and artists” (see https://naeawc.net). From this statement, it is evident that gender discrimination is placed before other forms of oppression, particularly racial discrimination, which masks and conceals the struggles and concerns of Black, Brown, and Indigenous women and immigrant women of color. In the same fashion, the generalized language such as “equity for women and all people” and the “concerns of women art educators” does not explicitly acknowledge lived experiences of art educators of color (as well as of those with disabilities, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, of non-binary sexual orientations, etc.) which are much more complex and challenging than experiences of White, middle-class, able, heterosexual women in the field. This colorblind mission of Women’s Caucus appears symptomatic of the field of feminist art education as a whole, where minoritized women’s perspectives are still treated as supplementary to the dominant narratives and agendas under the slogan of diversity and inclusion (Acuff, López, & Wilson, 2019; Bae-Dimitriadis, 2019). Particularly given most recent establishment of the NAEA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I) Commission, whose major goal is to promote voices and issues of marginalized art educators and students, the task of confronting these issues has never been more urgent in our field (ED&I Commission Press Release, 2019).

The first and necessary step in decentering Whiteness in the field of art education in general, and feminist art education in particular, requires a radical acknowledgement of its own White supremacy. In doing so, the following basic questions may help reshape our field towards equity and social justice: What voices, issues, and experiences by minoritized female art educators are neglected and invisible in our field or viewed as peripheral? What steps do we need to take to position these voices and issues at the center of feminist art education scholarship, professional discussion, and curriculum? What theories, narratives, and art making and teaching practices should be used in our field to ensure that minoritized perspectives are always acknowledged and emphasized? As feminist art educators and long-standing members of NAEA, we believe that grappling with these questions can bring us closer to an ambitious goal of social justice and ending racialized gender discrimination. We should always be mindful of the precarity of “we,” where our predominantly White organization’s policies and agendas can overshadow, silence, and disregard voices and perspectives of art educators of color, thereby rendering them disposable.
Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:

Michelle Bae-Dimitriadis
Pennsylvania State University
mb1065@psu.edu

Olga Ivashkevich
University of South Carolina
olga@sc.edu
References


Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015) suggested that “precarity is the condition of our time” and that “our time is ripe for sensing precariousness” (p. 20). One symptom of our current precarious condition is an existential smoothness, blinkered to the reality of long-term uncertainty through a perpetual flow of empty speech (Guattari, 1995, 2005). While the idea of a smoothness might conjure images of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) smooth space of unbound potential, I am suggesting something else: a precarious smoothness that has lost its porosity and plurality. It is an affectless and oversaturated condition, stuck in perpetual opticality that is produced, in part, by designer capitalism (jagodzinski, 2007). Here, tunnel vision propels an unimpeded flow of familiar, shallow, and recurrent interactions. This precarious flow accelerates through a neoliberal desire for efficiency and instant gratification that forms a mossy, slippery sheen as a numbness and blindness to the perceptual pain of affective connection.

In response to this increasingly normalized condition, it is time to re-condition for stickiness as an affective and polyvocal orientation to the world. An orientation is what we move toward, the familiar or home-like (Ahmed, 2006). Stickiness as orientation embraces vulnerability, welcoming the affective intensity of care and concern (Cullen, 2018; Manning, 2004). A condition is more of an active disposition, the way we participate in and respond to relational encounters. To condition oneself is to become primed for experience and response-ability, to get in shape (Haraway, 2016). Tsing (2015) explained that, “Response always takes us somewhere new; we are not quite ourselves anymore—or at least the selves we were, but rather ourselves in encounter with another. Encounters are, by their nature, indeterminate; we are unpredictably transformed” (p. 46). Stickiness becomes a kind of glue with gooey, sharp, and raw textural variations that emerge from corporeal proximity and discourse, scuffing the smooth surface formed by the neoliberal drift (Ahmed, 2004; Sedgwick, 2003; Tsing, 2015).

**Stickiness as Performative Becoming**

Art’s affective force is sticky. Guattari (1995) suggested that art is the thing around which subjectivity can reform itself, and I suggest that stickiness might become an aesthetic force in education and research, accentuating territories of relations. Stickiness as methodological condition strengthens our capacity to affect and be affected by creating polyvocal connections and collective response-ability (Springgay, 2011). In his ethico-aesthetic paradigm, Guattari recognized the complementary nature of performance art, combining the cognitive and conceptual with affective and perceptive comprehension. He was particularly interested in the orality of performative modes, and their capacity to produce “mutant percepts and affects” as “assemblages of aesthetic desire” transmitted through “affective contamination” (Guattari, pp. 92-93).
Performance art delivers the instant to the vertigo of the emergence of Universes that are simultaneously strange and familiar... It shoves our noses up against the genesis of being and forms, before they get foothold in dominant redundancies – of styles, schools, and traditions of modernity.

(Guattari, 1995, p. 90)

Perhaps stickiness can be viewed as a kind of performative contagion, mutating our relations to the world and each other through transformative polyvocal rhythms.

**Sticky Invitation**

I invite you to participate in the following narrative piece as an exercise in stickiness. Approach it as a score or as working material for your own improvisation. You may approach it first as an anticipatory set. Perhaps you need to read it silently first to find a flow or develop a familiarity. After the narrative drift, I provide a more in-depth theoretical context of stickiness as methodological condition, and conclude with additional provocations to return to the narrative through sticky repetition, improvisational divergences, collective oratory, textual modulation, and experimental play.

The piece traces my experience becoming sticky with a pinecone, following the drift and abrupt jolts of traveling thoughts. As an artistic approach, my intension is not merely to share my story in a more narrative mode, but to invite readers to become vulnerable with the piece as a conditioning exercise in lingering, improvising, and finding rhythm with the unfamiliar. On the one hand, the narrative maps my experience walking and thinking; but, the piece also operates on a second plane of stickiness as embodied praxis between the author, reader, audience, and the text. My hope is that the invitation to performatively read the piece aloud, in unison, or through improvisation activates a different kind of response-ability, where the piece and performance operate as transversalizing aesthetic practice (Coats, 2019). Guattari (1995) celebrated the power of performance art as a processual praxis with the ability to catalyze affect and change the nature of subjectivities as a co-creative event, and as an experimentation with new modalities of “group being” (Guattari, 1995; hoogland, 2018). This piece is not meant to provide answers, but instead to produce a shared experience, by embodying a part of my world as it is inevitably bound to yours.

Consider how you find a rhythm with someone else’s story. It often requires repetition and focus. I have included suggestions for performative inflection, but these are aesthetic choices based on my initial performance of it. They are yours to play with. **Bold sections invite groups to read in unison.** How does performing attune and disorient? How do my words as directives and images pull you along, as you adhere, slip, or diverge? To become sticky is not simply to follow, but to form a rhythm with another through improvisation and elasticity. As you attune to the materiality of your body as aesthetic experience, consider how your utterance forms a stickiness to text and movement. How do your performative responses emerge from memories and associations? How is the tone of your voice appropriated from another encounter? How does your performance reveal a stickiness to your past or present?
Cue flowing water…

(read as if setting sail)

A thought’s logic isn’t a stable rational system… A thought’s logic is like a wind blowing on us, a series of gusts and jolts. You think you’ve got to port, but then find yourself thrown back out onto the open sea.  
(Deleuze, 1990, p. 94)

MEMORIES CLING
My family and I moved to Arizona from Texas last year. Recently, while on a camping trip, I noticed a pinecone floating down the creek adjacent to our campsite. As the kids prepared the sleeping bags and firewood behind me, I walked with the pinecone, following along the water’s edge, curious where the creek would take it. East Texas is carpeted with pinecones. Their ubiquitous presence makes them almost invisible over time. I hadn’t seen … or maybe I just hadn’t noticed a pinecone since leaving … and at that moment… watching the all-too-familiar pinecone drift in the water— the distance from my previous life registered with me.  
(surprised recognition)

“There it is again!”
What causes you to pause? When does an object register with you?

GETTING STUCK

(deep breath)

That day by the creek, I could see that a short distance ahead of us, the water was churning more heavily. The pinecone became stuck in a dam bound together by a plastic bag entangled with twigs, knots of fishing line, colorful packaging covered with familiar text, and other discarded minutiae. The efficiencies and conveniences of suburban life felt both familiar and alien in the openness of this temporary natural home. The pinecone’s pointy edges clung to the detritus, as water flowed rapidly around it.

Where does potentiality and creation register in our bodies?

(read as a teacher)

Female pinecones’ sharp woody scales form a protective seed shelter until maturation. While the resin and sap that coat them are both nourishing and healing for pine trees.  
(slowly)

But away from the tree, the nurturing and protective stickiness of resin and spikes binds the pinecone to the world differently. I wondered if the pinecone was well-served by its pointy exterior, or if the house that protected its seeds, that bound it to the trash and the leaves, was a danger in this instance.

1 https://youtu.be/VUHHUhFkOCU
2 A refrain that Isabelle Stengers (2011) employs from Whitehead’s concept of the sense object.
Is stickiness a detriment or benefit?
Would the pinecone be better off with a smooth surface, making it able to drift without disruption?
Being adrift has been described as our neoliberal condition—one of perpetual drift, unable to focus for long, or to slow down long enough to dig deep.

How do methodological performatives with procedural rules and representational boundaries create the proverbial ruts in which we become stuck to residual expectations of familiarity and data-driven outcomes; where the desire for more generalizable data merely creates conveniences and efficiencies, like the mound of mass-produced fast food wrappers that bound the pinecone?

In our desire to codify methodologies, are we willingly blinkering ourselves, like the horse in a parade who can only see straight ahead… drifting, drifting, drifting… blinded to the periphery, for fear of the overwhelming anxiety that might emerge from a consciousness of all that is moving around us?

... As ideas form in gusts, do we allow them to cling to us or do they float away or drown under the weight of managerial performatives in teaching and research or the pace of life?

Where does potentiality and creation register in our bodies?

RESIDUAL CONTAMINATION
Could stickiness be the index of a potential for becoming other? Rather than becoming stuck in the proverbial rut?

How might an ethics of stickiness as connection embrace the residue of a life’s experiences?

“…shift research from an information society to an in-form-ation society, from being to becoming… reanimating thought as the ontology of lived life – becoming with the world and stressing the movement of things.”
(jagodzinski and Wallin, 2013, p.17)

Artist, Ana Teresa Fernandez, has created a series of paintings and photographs that illustrate and document her performances of repeatedly jumping into a body of water wrapped in a white bedsheetswearing black stiletto heels, each time, fighting her way back to the surface of the water.

She describes the bedsheets as the stage for questions of labor, gender, sexuality, and fertility – the site of so many of life’s most intimate experiences. Fernandez explained the reality of the performances in relation to life, where with each struggle, there comes the potential of realizing life differently… and also the potential for death… which may bring a rebirth.
FLOWING WITH THE WORLD

*(the resolution at the end of a fairy tale)*

The pinecone eventually began to bounce and dance again, finding its way to the edges of the detritus, going underwater briefly as the water flowed around it. I wanted to intervene by throwing something else in the water to break up the mass and unhook the pinecone, but I figured that would actually push the trash further downstream, contaminating more flows. Finally, a strong enough wave allowed it to break free from the mound, throwing it back out into the water, and carting with it bits of leaves and string. I realized that it would inevitably carry the residue of suburban convenience, and histories of land use and contamination.

The stream is already constituted by contaminants born from global industrial development and mass consumption... as is my body and that of the pinecone. **We share the same tainted water, air, and soil. We don't simply wash through the stream – it washes through us.**

*(another deep breath)*

**Where does potentiality and creation register in our bodies?**

The encounter with the pinecone began as a moment of recognition – of realizing my past was with me again, where the object became a mirror and a rupture. As we moved together, its stickiness formed a new path, as affective binder that eliminated the bifurcation of seed, water, body, time, and land. Stickiness became a capacity to become affected – attuned to ways we are collectively constituted by and part of the same world— to the life of the pinecone as research event. Rather than a search for a truth or an inquiry into the yet-undiscovered: **it is time for a call to care, becoming affected, and attunement to the world** – or what Oscar Wilde (1891) called a “temperament of receptivity” (p. 43)... **looking less for what has not been discovered and more closely at that to which we are already bound.**

...End flowing water
A Sticky Context

“The ideal I’m envisioning here is a mind receptive to thoughts, able to nurture and connect them, and susceptible to happiness in their entertainment” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 1).

Stickiness as Orientation

Sticking has been articulated as connective potential through attunement and assemblage-forming, and in relation to emotion as cultural and discursive binding (Ahmed, 2004; Tsing, 2015). We are all stuck to the specificity of the cultural, material, and historical conditions by which we are constituted. These conditions bind us and are bound to us. “Each being carries with it its own world, a world that subsists in its encounters. But its every encounter implies another world” (Cullen, p. 61). Stickiness as affective disposition is an awareness of the agentic, assemblage-building force of the world, but it is also an outward-reaching desire to form with the world.

In response to precarity’s force of disaffection, Tsing (2015) proposed the “arts of noticing,” as a way of looking for “what has been ignored because it never fit the timeline of progress” (p. 21). Noticing is more than visual awareness. It is a curiosity about the way that world comes together, and what forces assemble to generate new paths. Similarly, Ahmed (2004) suggested that,

The capacity for wonder is the space of opening up to the surprise of each combination; each body, which turns this way or that, impresses upon others, affecting what they can do. Wonder opens up a collective space, by allowing the surfaces of the world to make an impression, as they become see-able or feel-able as surfaces... the very orientation of wonder, with its open faces and open bodies, involves a reorientation of one’s relations to the world. (p. 183)

Curiosity and wonder become connective capacities that activate affective intensities and germinal attachments to other entities, where concern as gathering force creates the potential for a deep bio-egalitarianism with the more-than-human world (Braidotti, 2011; Butler, 2004; Massumi, 2002; Tsing, 2015). As Manning (2016) explained,

It requires an attentiveness to the field in its formation. This attention is ecological, collective, in the event. It is relational, relation here understood as the force that makes felt the how of time as it co-composes with experience in the making” (p. 51).

In my narrative, I walk with a pinecone, witnessing and realizing the profound precarity of my current life as we move together. The relational encounter enhanced my affective capacity, as I recognized the state of my body such that it involves another, and my singularity within a precarious neoliberal assemblage (Bennett, 2010).

Stickiness as Elasticity

Stickiness operates on planes of both encounter and reflection as an onto-epistemological concept of subjective becoming and ethico-political entanglement – a dimension of creativity that lies in the nascent force of the aesthetic (Massumi & Alliez, 2014). Conditioning for a sticky orientation invites the affective trauma of removing our blinkers, the blinkers worn willingly to limit our field of vision, by attuning to precarity’s inherent vulnerability. This process involves
a de-habituation of a neoliberal orientation that is rooted in individuality, efficiency, and competition. Conditioning in this sense is not like weight training or a repetition aimed at mastery; instead, becoming sticky is a conditioning for openness and malleability in a perpetually uncertain world, allowing impressions to form and a residue of experience to collect (Ahmed, 2004, 2006; Haraway, 2016; Singh, 2018; Trafi-Prats & Caton, 2020).

In this sense, stickiness as methodological condition is not about a desire for acquisition or parasitism, but a symbiotic condition of elasticity that forms with and folds into the world. This quality emerges by building intensive rhythms with the world, dwelling with and binding to singularities as an assemblage-forming orientation in fluid methodological spaces (Ahmed, 2006; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016; Manning, 2004; Tsing, 2015). Intensive openings are sensed through relational encounters as “movement begins to fold into another movement, we feel its elasticity, opening the movement’s shape to its inevitable deformation” (Manning, 2004, p. 34).

Intensive openings are sensed through lingering, a technique of both slowing down and moving with, which encourages attunement by dwelling with discomfort. Affects register in lingering events, where “experience has to be pulled out of the indeterminate, activated from the virtual of the not-yet” (Manning, 2004, p. 37). Relational movements operate in the space between constraint and improvisation. The notion of constraint is critical to understanding how stickiness is expressed. Manning (2004) describes how walking as relational technique, constrained by the requirement that one foot must always be on the ground. The limiting rule of walking, as opposed to unlimited choices of movement, created a repetitive interval, and this time-space of the relational interval becomes the opening for potentiality to be expressed and realized. This is where the stickiness forms and elasticity emerges. Allowing oneself to foreclose a desire for certainty by lingering with relational elasticity develops an improvisational ability, like a jazz musician building rhythms with the world (Butler, 2004; Manning, 2004; Massumi, 2015; Nxumalo et al., 2018).

**Stickiness as Aesthetic Methodological Process**

Research orientations that prioritize predetermined methodological structures with rigid interpretive analytical frames often operate through a precariously smooth tunnel vision, where the world is muted beyond the well-worn rut of the methodological frame by a dependence on validity, generalizability, efficiency, and scalability. In contrast, methodologies rooted in becoming, ambiguity, and emergence accept that all knowledge is partial, and that methodological processes are world-building (Fox & Alldred, 2015; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). The evolving forms of post-qualitative research are inspired by a simultaneously growing body of posthuman and new materialist theories that acknowledge the precariousness of our interconnected and interdependent world (Bennett, 2010; Braidotti, 2012; Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012; Haraway, 2016; Singh, 2018). This resistance is echoed in a history of radical art approaches that similarly facilitate breaks from habitual understandings of art’s form and purpose.

Arts-based methods invite discomfort and illuminate truths in ways that allow
for indiscernible findings, eliminating boundaries and revealing borders. They create aesthetic experiences oriented to participation, openness, and intuition through responsiveness and interconnectedness with the more-than-human world (Leavy, 2015; Manning, 2016). Manning (2016) argues for techniques rather than methods in art-based research, focusing on affect, excess, and intensity as active modes of becoming: “...inventing metamodels that experiment with how knowledge can and does escape instrumentality, bringing back an aesthetic of experience where it is needed most, in the field of learning” (p. 44). Arts-based methods that exceed a representational frame embrace art’s affective force, concerned less with what art is about, and instead with what art can do (jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; jagodzinski, 2015; Hickey-Moody & Page, 2015; O’Sullivan, 2001). In this sense, art is a manner of being with the world as affective event through emergent processes rather than an object that represents life as abstraction (Springgay & Rotas, 2015).

To explore stickiness as affective conditioning, I have borrowed the technique of the performative score, which is a performance and conceptual art practice using linguistic statements as art. Conceptual “scores” can function as autonomous verbal artworks but they are not necessarily literary (Friedman et al., 2002). Score development was common for Fluxus artists, and had its roots initially in the work of Dada artists and is often credited to John Cage. Artists vary in their expectation of participation or enactment by viewers, and many have been “played” as performance events. Scores as methods are also employed in a variety of other art practices, such as the social, curatorial, and pedagogical, as well as dance and other performance arts (Lippard, 1972; Lucero & Shaeffer, 2020; O’Connor, 2019; Obrist, 2013; Sholette et al., 2018).

Scores have an interesting relationship with pedagogy and practice-as-research (O’Connor, 2019), as they are often didactic, performative, and instructional, similar to teaching tools. Using the score as a conditioning exercise invites a performative experimentation through relational emergence. In this article, I map a relational movement (Manning, 2004) in my narrative with the pinecone, and I attempted to generate a different kind of relation to the story through a connective and collective performance of reading it. I invite you to return to the piece, becoming sticky through performative engagement with that which “we might imagine as trivial” (Tsing, 2015, p. 20). Shared cultural utterances, such as those that take place at church or cultural performances produce assemblages through mutually generated rhythms and collective vibration. The performative utterance demands a different kind of energy and responsibility of readers, as they internalize the text as a textured, affective, and relational medium (Sedgwick, 2003).

**Stickiness as Return**

I conclude with an invitation to return to the drifting narrative through a set of provocations that may be applied to the original text or to create new paths inspired by it.

1. Repeat the performance with others.

2. Develop a new refrain to insert and read in unison.
3. Linger with one passage. Have group members select different lingering passages.

4. Rewrite the part that follows your passage.

5. Close your eyes. What do you see in the story? Recreate it.

6. Create a counter-flow.

7. Eliminate the academic. Make it more academic.

8. Visually recompose.

9. Where are you stuck?

10. Find your pinecone.

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:

Cala Coats
Arizona State University
cala.coats@asu.edu
References


A Precarious Stance

Sometimes common entanglements emerge not from human plans, but despite them.  
- Tsing (2015), p. 267

Atop an angular rock, Meg’s bare feet and balance work to steady her body despite frigid rushes of water and slick, mossy patches. The creek bed is much too shallow to submerge her head. She bends, pushing a GoPro beneath the rushing surface. Photographer Dorthea Lange believed the camera to be a tool for seeing without a camera. Lange’s viewpoint produces, for me, attunement with “common entanglements” (Tsing, 2015, p. 267)—what is happening above and below the waterline, with and without the camera; ripples breaking over rocks, garbled upstream voices, trees conversing, fish nibbling tender raindrops, raindrops starting a human

1 With the exceptions of my research assistant, Shauna Caldwell, and my colleague, Laura England—the names of Ecologies of Girlhood participants have been changed to pseudonyms.

Figure 1. GoPro footage (carefully exploring the creek bed)
ear, damselflies preying on gnats, toes numbly gripping against the force of water and cold, rocks being built upon by caddisflies. Meg (age 9) and a freshly charged GoPro collaborate in “dedicated apprenticeship” (Taylor, 2017, p. 1455) with this lively creek.

Meg and her mother participated in a week-long summer immersion, Kindred Light, for girls ages 9-12 and a significant woman in their life. The immersion contemplated ideas of light and girlhood in Southern Appalachia through photographic and poetic ways of attending. This essay evokes the concept of salvage after extreme weather conditions uprooted this community arts program located within a rural town in Western North Carolina. Kindred Light was part of Ecologies of Girlhood, an on-going arts-based research project supported by an intergenerational, intersectional, and interdisciplinary trellis. Ecologies arose from a wonder and curiosity about ways of being and becoming in Southern Appalachia (Hofsess et al., 2019).

For me, Meg’s precarious stance evoked a sense of the “patchiness of the world” (Tsing, 2105, p. viii) where I found myself building salvaged stories. (Re)viewing Meg’s footage (along with other GoPro data from Kindred Light), I recalled British anthropologist, Tim Ingold (2011) who remarked,

Rather than thinking of ourselves only as observers, picking our way around the objects lying about on the ground of a ready-formed world, we must imagine ourselves... immersed with the whole of our being in the currents of a world-in-formation: in the sunlight we see in, the rain we hear in and the wind we feel in. (p. 29).

Meg’s precarious stance, as documented by her GoPro footage, embodies the kind of immersion and imagination Ingold framed. As I wrote my way with and through the pedagogical rubble of Kindred Light, Meg's image and other GoPro documentation by the participants coalesced in the creative essay that follows. Here, I aim to contribute to this special issue by touching ecological precarities amidst the currents of place-based discourses within art education.

Don’t Call This World Adorable

Poet Mary Oliver (2004) cautioned,

Don’t call this world adorable, or useful, that’s not it.

It’s frisky, and a theater for more than fair winds.

The eyelash of lightning is neither good nor evil.

The struck tree burns like a pillar of gold...

... Don’t call this world an explanation, or even an education. (p. 33)
Thinking/living/writing with the concept of salvage stirred up layers of sustainability circulating in the *Ecologies* project. Across the past few decades, sustainability has been a prevailing interpretation of environmentalism (Alaimo, 2012; Alaimo, 2016) and environmental education (Taylor, 2017). However, broadly speaking, the concept of sustainability carries with it a sense of intergenerational ethics and equity with regard to ways of being in the world that preexist the word itself in many cultures and traditions (see Braidotti, 2013; Nolet, 2009). While a comprehensive review of the multiple and varied interpretations and practices of sustainability are well beyond the scope of this creative essay, I focus on how sustainability permeates *Ecologies of Girlhood*, part of my ongoing research pertaining to issues of renewal. Specifically, after severe local weather conditions intervened with *Ecologies* programming, a space opened for wondering: What work does thinking art education and sustainability alongside one another do? And, how might this work be lived with “an appreciation of current precarity as an earthwide condition that allows us to notice... the situation of our world” (Tsing, 2015, p. 4)? These salvaged stories artfully attempt to do that work. These stories do not necessarily generate answers, but rather illustrate potential ways of dwelling with the complexity of such questions.
As enmeshed political, economic, environmental, and educational crises proliferate, interdisciplinary Anthropocene debates provoke shifts in the paradigms through which the concept of sustainability circulates (Alaimo, 2012; Derby, 2015; Taylor, 2017). International encounters with sustainability in art education have aggregated as critical, cultural place-based approaches (see, Bequette, 2015; Bertling, 2015; Bertling & Rearden, 2019; Blandy & Hoffman, 1993; Conkey & Green, 2018; Graham, 2007; Inwood, 2008a) eco-art and ecological awareness pedagogies (see, Inwood, 2008b; Inwood, 2015; Inwood & Sharpe, 2018; Sams & Sams, 2017; Song, 2009; Vasko, 2016), as well as relational, participatory, and performative engagements with sustainability (see, Garoian, 2015; Gradle, 2007; Illeris, 2012; Illeris, 2017). Although, in some cases, these categorizations become blurred. My thinking drifts across these aggregates and beyond.

For example, eco-poet Linda Russo (2015) flagged place-based approaches that “pre-determine what is meant by “place,” what is encountered in/as “place,” and with that, the agency of that which encounters/is encountered” (para. 3). Writing about a community research project to (re)story Chicago as Indigenous lands, Bang et al. (2014) reframe place-based education this way.

... we might imagine that ontology of place-based paradigms is something like ‘I am, therefore place is,’ in contrast, the ontology of land-based pedagogies might be summarized as ‘Land is, therefore we are.’ This reframing in our view carries considerable weight in relation to the way we think about, study, and live culture, learning and development with land. (p. 45).

Furthermore, Affrica Taylor (2017), member of Commonworlds Research Collective, theorized pedagogies of “learning with rather than individual (human) thinking and learning about” (p. 1458). Infused with these ideas and others, Ecologies of Girlhood opts instead to enact “lines of inventive connection” (Haraway, 2016, p. 1) that explores how art education becomes through place-relations of creeks, fields, stories, caregivers, reptiles, flora, learners, folklore, photographing, insects, walking, histories, and dancing.

Due to my location in Southern Appalachia, I have been compelled to linger where sustainability entangles with what writer and historian Elizabeth Catte (2018) deemed a fictation of politics in her book, What you are getting wrong about Appalachia. Namely, perceptions about rural living, poverty, politics, and faith that have long been in place and yet have been inflamed after the election of Trump. Thinking with and through a feminist new materialist and intersectional framework for the past few years (see Ahmed, 2017; Alaimo, 2012; 2016; Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016; Kimmerer, 2013), I have led collaborations with colleagues and community members to create annual summer immersions for local girls and their families.¹

¹ Ecologies would not be possible without the significant contributions of others. In particular, Shauna Caldwell has been integral to the unfolding of this project, working closely with me through all three Ecologies summer immersions, and in the spaces between. From 2018-2020, I received a Graduate Research Assistant Mentoring award through the Graduate School at Appalachian State University. This award funded two graduate students to support Ecologies: Shauna Caldwell, a graduate student in Appalachian Studies whose roots in Appalachia and relationship with the environment shape her creative work, and AJ Schlaff a graduate student in Political Science whose research examines corrupt redistricting powers in order to generate informed, effective redistricting intended to facilitate our democracy. I am immensely grateful for the
Ecologies is rooted in “inter-theoretic conversations” (Rosiek et al., 2019, p. 334) between feminist new materialist and Indigenous scholarship that vitally attune to matter and place; conversations that attempt “new conceptual understandings about the play of difference in complex ecologies, and how human values (including values related to the nonhuman world) can sometimes be shared across cultures” (Bignall & Rigney, 2019, p. 177).

Through this quest of salvaging (explored further in the next section), I keep close at hand the work of Stacy Alaimo (2012) and her awareness that when it comes to sustainability, often “people and their activities are animated, but the material world is rendered as abstract space, not living places, biodiverse habitats, or ravaged ecologies” (p. 562). Alaimo’s writings cascade upon my thinking about Ecologies of Girlhood, and how this project theoretically and pedagogically brings to bear the concept of sustainability. In the generativity of Alaimo’s work, and other writings within the trajectory of feminist new materialisms that also call to question human exceptionalism, I recognize that “(o)nce we take indigenous worldviews into account, the ‘newmaterialisms’ are no longer new” (Horton & Berlo, 2013, p. 18; see Rosiek et al., 2019; Truman, 2019). There exists “… long and vibrant trajectories of Indigenous practice and theory that understand land as encompassing all of the earth, including the urban, and as much more than just the material” (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 8).

Contributions of Shauna and AJ, and for the support of the Graduate School.

1 I pause here to recognize the complications of my engagement with Indigenous perspectives and knowledges as a white, Western scholarartist, I proceed with respect and humility through these inter-theoretic conversations as I aspire towards inclusive citational practices and collaborations.

Ecologies explores living feminist lives co-creatively with place (Ahmed, 2017). “PlACES produce and teach particular ways of thinking about and being in the world” (Bang et al., 2014, p. 44), and Ecologies evokes arts-based approaches to teaching, learning, and inquiring about those ways. To date, these annual programs have included, Ecologies of Girlhood (2017), Becoming Wildspaces (2018), and Kindred Light (2019). Each workshop explored the visual, material, affective ecologies of girlhood in Southern Appalachia, although the thematic focus changed with each summer immersion. This creative essay dwells with the 2019 program, Kindred Light, which explored the interconnectedness of physics, photography, poetry, ecology, feminism, performance art, and place in the hours leading up to sunset during one summer week.

During these summer immersions, girls engaged with their family and community members through creative modes of exploration, documentation, and curation. The girls and women participated in various visual, oral, and mobile research methods, including photography (GoPros and alternative photographic processes), walking interviews on local trails, and storytelling. Again, this creative essay includes the GoPro images, which I use to elongate the salvaged stories I crafted from my encounters during the Kindred Light program.

In her work bridging Indigenous and scientific knowledges in sustainability wisdom, plant ecologist, writer, and distinguished professor, Robin Wall-Kimmerer (2013) emphasizes gratitude and reciprocity as vital tenants. Relatedly, teacher, researcher, and poet Michael Derby (2015) advocated that education functions best “when organized around ideas of interrelatedness, generativity, ancestry, kinship, humility,
and wonder” (p. 3). These qualities sustain the pedagogical ethos of *Ecologies* programming—programming that traverses disciplinary boundaries and burgeons across lakes, gardens, studios, and exhibition spaces alike. These places become ephemeral field stations for inquiring with participants self-identifying as women and girls.

**Salvaged Stories**

What follows are three salvaged stories; simply told and cultivated from everyday practices that explore a craftsmanship of attention with the world. Salvage can be understood as rubbish extracted to become valuable and useful (Merriam-Webster). Years ago, I experienced an artist’s residency in the home studio of an established papermaker. One morning she noted a strip of abaca in the wastebasket at the foot of my work station, pulled it up, and snapped it back upon the desk—“Never throw away handmade paper. Too much goes into making it.” I have never forgotten that exchange and what I learned about salvaging as a way of thinking differently about the potential to interrupt the—at times—careless urge to clear away our scraps, messes, excesses, and missteps. What can be salvaged from discarded paper? Perhaps a recognition and reverence for how plant fiber, fire, water, labor, time, creativity are all brought to bear in the life of paper.

When a significant portion of the *Ecologies* annual programming was canceled due to extreme weather conditions, my thoughts returned to this lesson of salvage, and I began to rethink what transpired—alongside the concept of sustainability—with the hope of finding new recognition, reverence, and perspective.
Salvaged from pedagogical rubble after local flooding affected the course of *Kindred Light*, I composed these stories to explore the uncertainty and vulnerability of thinking/living-writing with place relations. As multispecies feminist theorist Donna Haraway (2016) articulated “(e)ach time a story helps me remember what I thought I knew, or introduces me to new knowledge, a muscle critical for caring about flourishing gets some aerobic exercise. Such exercise enhances collective thinking and movement in complexity” (p. 29). These stories attempt to unplug the concept of sustainability from an eco-humanist paradigm, where stewardship and other well-meaning varieties of “our-centeredness” (Derby, 2015, p. 57) thrive, and open it to becoming “something else-with” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.11) relations of place. Put in the words of Anna Tsing (2015), “(t)he time has come for new ways of telling true stories beyond civilizational first principles” (p. vii).

**Strange Hesitation**

A swift 1.7 miles of gravel and asphalt roads connect my home and campus office. Both the steady rain and the need to load materials compel me to navigate this short distance by car. I am not overly concerned

![Figure 4. (writing creatively with light and lake)](image-url)
by this rainfall as it is expected that rain will affect the flow of *Ecologies* workshops at some point in the week of *Kindred Light*. Our town is saturated with about 50 inches of rainfall each year, with 35 inches more in snowfall. The previous year was our wettest on record with over 93 inches. Yet, returning home, my foot strangely hesitates over the last step before landing at the bottom of the staircase. My skin reads cool water which has breached the foundation of our home, swelling from the western edge of the house across the first floor.

Intensities of rain caused washed out roads and mudslides, wind snapped poles, damaged electrical systems, runoff seeping up through foundations of homes and schools, and 5,556 reported power outages as loosened trees collapsed on power lines. How do we practice art education with attention for “the extreme intimacy of ecological entanglement, via the air, water, and matter we take in and continually re-become” (Reed & Russo, 2018, p. 39)? I phone a colleague who lives near Crab Orchard Falls, where our workshop is scheduled to occur the following day. She sends a photograph of the trail that her neighbor posted to social media. A blur of rushing water, silt, and foggy mist overwhelms the bank and nearby walking structure.

*Figure 5*. GoPro footage (noticing with running creekwater)
How many inches of rainfall, how fast the inches arrive: “The differences matter—in ecologies, economies, species, lives” (Haraway, 2016, p. 29).

Beyond Our Wanting-Doing

By mid-week the waters receded enough to safely enter the creek. My arm extended, bracing to support the movement of Rachel whose feet unprotected by water shoes are sensitively learning the skill of walking a creek bed. It is equally sharp and slick—craggy rock and decaying leaves. “Rooted but in flow” (Woolf cited in Braidotti & Regan, 2017, p. 174) I think—live art education with relation to where I dwell—a small mountain town located at 3,333′ above sea level within the North Carolina Blue Ridge; A ridge created sometime between 1.1 billion to 250 million years ago, when an uplifting of the Earth’s tectonic plates shaped this wedge of mountain range.

About an hour before, several daughters, alongside their mothers, met me at Hardin Creek. This creek flushed with about nine inches of new rainfall and runoff, alternates as the loudest voice among our small group. Our meeting location moved 13 miles east due to recent flooding. It can take a while for flood waters to recede here in these mountains. This particular summer evening felt more like October with its chilly gusts of wind. It was raining lightly as we gathered for “off-the-beaten path practices” (Haraway, 2016, p. 127). Not far down Boone Fork Trail, which tucks behind a local church with its plentiful edible garden and zippy play structures, Hardin Creek drains about 200 acres of forest. With mature trees estimated to produce and release between 200,000 and 1,000,000 leaves annually, the decomposition of these fallen leaves is integral to stream ecosystems like this one. The forest feeds the creek with its decay, while the canopy protects the bank from heavy rains that provoke erosion. Creek bodies operate with a pulse that continually modulates their composition of sunlight, leaf litter, stones, aquatic insects, algae, rain, fish (England, personal communication, June 12, 2019).

We clustered in conversation for only for a very few minutes. A plastic Tupperware containing a few GoPros and flip cameras was circulated for those interested. I shared a story about Hazel Larson Archer, a female photographer who lived and worked at Black Mountain College—about 70 miles away from where we stood. Seventy years ago Archer became the first photography instructor at the experimental college. Her colleagues saw her as someone who “saw what we who hurry never have the time to see. She saw the life processes. She saw the tree—converting the sun radiation; she saw the tree breathing” (R. Buckminster Fuller, quoted in Archer, 2006). Raindrops and wind trickle across leaves overhead as I gently proposed: If you take a camera, how can it become a tool for seeing with the creek, seeing with life processes?

My friend Laura, a stream ecologist, threads another story about life processes through the cameras, creek, women, and girls: Sunlight feeds everything in the creek except rocks. Bugs in the creek eat concentrated sunlight in the form of algae; fish eat bugs, some of us eat fish. Everything alive, including us, is made of sunlight (England, personal communication, June 12, 2019). She pulls up out of the water a sweep net encouraging water to rush through its fabric shell. Clear of water—snails and mayflies crawled along the curves of canvas.
Derby (2015) “calls upon educators in a time of ecological emergency to not only impart the rhetoric of sustainability but to find ways to both read and be read by the world” (p. 10). Listening with this random sampling of macroinvertebrates tells more stories about the health of the water in this creek. We find a bunch of gilled snails that rely on clean water with high levels of dissolved oxygen in order to breathe. Finding these creatures is a sign that clean, oxygenated water flows here. If there was a lot of sediment, the snails’ gills would clog and they would die out (England, personal communication, June 12, 2019). Overturned rocks reveal an array of small homes built by caddisflies. Caddisflies design intricate, protective structures using leaves, small pebbles, and other matter. Laura tells us a story of one particular ecologist who raises caddisflies in order to harvest their structures into jewelry to sell at professional conferences, offering the insects construction materials such as opals, crystals, and gold pieces.

Some minutes later Meg and I are hovered over a small clear tupperware container partly full of creek water and a few small aquatic insects. Laura has a few plastic spoons and magnifying lens to share, along with a selection of field notebooks and guidebooks. Her daughter is cold from immersing herself in the water while Laura had set up these materials ahead of time, and rocks her body inside a small

Figure 6. GoPro footage (reading with creekwater, pebbles, macroinvertebrates, sand)
fleece jacket. In a few minutes she will ask Laura for her car keys to escape the cooling winds. Meg is opposite the picnic table from me, holding a magnifying lens. I gently attempt to navigate a spoon under a small stonefly to pass her way. Immediately its body stiffens and appears lifeless. I move the spoon away quickly, hoping I had not somehow inflicted harm. The disappearing spoon reanimates the stonefly almost as quickly. I try again, with ever more tenderness and respect. The critter stiffens and I am humbled “to listen to what the world means above and beyond our wanting and doing” (p. 39).

Reading snail lungs and a creek’s pulse; being read by cold water and stoneflies; our learning becomes with the “resonant structures of the world” (Abram, 1996, p. 140). The threads of sustainability interwoven through Ecologies are not the photographic or poetic modes of practice themselves—but the relations that, like our footsteps along creek beds, temporarily disturb, unsettle, and fall into new configurations of clarity. As Horton and Berlo (2013) explain,

*The ecological promise of these ‘new materialisms’ is to invite a dialogue among a wider host of agents, imaging*

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*Figure 7. GoPro footage (listening with macroinvertebrates)*
a profoundly relational world in which humans interact with, rather than act upon, others. Indeed, we maintain that grasping multiple forms of liveliness has implications for questions of global environmental justice in raising the possibility of an ethics that binds not only affluent and poor, colonizer and colonized, but also the material entities upon which all our livelihoods depend. (pp. 17-18)

The threads cast with and through sustainability and its practices never merely touch the ecological.

**Foraging Relations**

A spray of glittering light thrown across still water is dulled only by islands of rhizomatous aquatic herbs. A mother duck and ducklings stroke by as Joy wonders out loud to her mother if the water lilies multiplied across the lake’s surface are strong enough to hold the weight of a human body or how a cyanotype might be made without removing a water lily from its cemented root and stalk. Shauna gathers a few strands of yarrow as we walk around the trail looping the artificial lake and plunges it into a thermos of blistering hot water to “co-craft” (Derby, 2015, p. 33) a wild tea toner. Cyanotypes are often toned with tea, coffee, wine tannin, borax and soda ash in darkrooms; Shauna and I remark how long it took us to see how toners could be foraged and made with light, plant, and other place relations. In the distance, a white mansion overlooks a patch of gravel where we are clustered, working—not long ago this public land a private family estate. Gravel bits and exposed toes lapped by wind-swept water as the sun becomes heavy in the sky.

The movements of wondering and foraging open conversations of sharing, possession, boundaries, vulnerabilities,
and climate. Foraging is not sustainable in the singular action of taking—becoming reciprocal requires giving back seeds, caring for soil, planting anew. The complicated relationship of giving and taking between humans and plants becomes exposed alongside the cyanotypes. As Indigenous scholar, writer, and artist, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) articulated in her writings on land as pedagogy, “Meaning then is derived not through content or data, or even theory in a western context, which by nature is decontextualized knowledge, but through a compassionate web of interdependent relationships that are different and valuable because of that difference” (p. 11). How does participation in *Ecologies* invite attending to such a web of relations so our footsteps, or our foraging, come to matter differently within that web?

Lake water becomes image through the wet cyanotype process, wild yarrow tea slowly muddies the paper’s hue to a deep black-brown. These are small, collaborative gestures, but as Taylor (2017) affirmed, “It is a low-key, ordinary, everyday kind of response that values and trusts the generative and recuperative powers of

*Figure 9. GoPro footage (shadows with wet cyanotypes laying on darkroom trays and gravel)*
small and seemingly insignificant worldly relations infinitely more than it does the heroic tropes of human rescue and salvation narratives” (p. 1458). Just a few yards away a cluster of bees weave in and through a field of unplucked yarrow, wild carrot, grass, and chickweed. Yarrow nectar and pollen feeds hoverflies, ladybugs, and other insects, and becomes wildcrafted by humans for soap, salve, and tea due to its medicinal properties. My thoughts flutter towards the work of contemporary artist collaborative, Artist As Family, and their idea of “social warming” that categorizes modes of art that make relationships (Brown, 2014, p. 242). Yarrow and tea, tea and photograph, photograph and girl, girl and waterlily, waterlily and lake, lake and sunlight, sunlight and mother, mother and time. Multiplying relations, precarities, and potential stories—what makes one story folklore and another a future?

Coda

Poet laureate Joy Harpo (1983) encouraged,

*Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their tribes,*

*their families, their histories, too.*

*Talk to them,*

*listen to them. They are alive poems…*

*… Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.* (p. 35)

I think of Harpo’s encouragement often in my quests with arts-based research broadly, and throughout my work with *Ecologies*. In my thinking/living/writing, listening for “alive poems” (Harpo, 1983, p. 35) is a practice that develops the quality of my attention.

I began this essay with a broad question, “What work does thinking art education and sustainability alongside one another do?” As I kneaded these salvaged stories again and again into this question, I listened for learnings to take back into my practices of artmaking, teaching, inquiring, and remembering. My hope was that by kneading together the concepts of salvage and sustainability through an arts-based approach, this essay might offer other art educators the opportunity to work on their own questions related to sustainability, place, and precarity. To generate some momentum in that direction, I close with a few working questions:

What kinds of pedagogical practices explore a craftsmanship of attention with the world?

What relationships does art education make with place? Who and what is excluded?

How might practicing “inclusive citations and collaborations… address some internal challenges emerging in new materialist scholarship and build more respect for the relevance of Indigenous philosophies to the practice of social science” (Rosiek et al., 2019, p. 334)?

What other concepts (in addition to salvage) invite art educators to rethink place-based approaches?

How do time and place become predetermined as “certainties” (rather than precarities) in art education?
How do perceived boundaries between human and other-than-human entities affect art education concerned with place, particularly in precarious ecological times?

And, how might our practices, our relationships, our certainties, our boundaries be opened up through the lens of precarity for renewed attention?

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Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:

Brooke Hofsess
Appalachian State University
hofsessba@appstate.edu
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Translingual Public Pedagogy, Precarity and Inquiry: Learned Limits and Limitlessness Through Memoir

Melisa Cahnmann Taylor, Sharon Nuruddin & Tairan Qiu
Precarity & Translingual Pedagogy

“Translingual,” “translation,” “translanguage,” and “transgender” are all terms that embrace the Latin root “trans,” a prefix drawing attention to fluidity and things that “cross” boundaries, disrupting dualistic, binary norms. The term “translingualism” has replaced previous terms such as bilingualism or multilingualism to draw attention to new repertoires of exposure, integration, and fusion among diverse languages and cultures rather than separation and distinction. This paper discusses our engagement in translingual public pedagogies as related to critical pedagogies of precarity (Zembylas, 2019), drawing attention to arts-based practices of reflection on one’s complicity and/or disruption to monolingual-monocultural norms. To critically think through precarity we drew upon artistic practices of noticing (Tsing, 2015), specifically memoir as method in educational inquiry.

Translingualism and the Arts

Canagarajah (2013) describes translingualism as taking place on translocal scales where multiple language norms intelligibly co-exist. Moving from the language of literature, he applies translingualism to communities of practice in many settings that constitute “an openness to diversity, collaboration with others, and a willingness to accommodate norm differences” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 56) including workplaces, leisure spaces, and many other contexts of formal and informal practice. Razumova (2015) prefers “transculturality” over translingualism to address the interdependence of most people’s economic realities as almost universally affected by migration and new communication technologies, a term that may be perceived as “synonymous with Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic” (p. 135). Translingualism, transculturality, and other closely related terms such as Garcia’s (2009) translanguaging scholarship joins poststructuralist analysis that is critical of knowledge claims that privilege monolingual norms and bring them into being. While the term multilingualism perceives “additive” relationships between separate languages, Canagarajah (2013) notes that translingualism “addresses the synergy, treating languages as always in contact and mutually influencing each other, with emergent meanings and grammars” (p. 41).

Art-making processes provide critical tools for confronting precarity rooted in translingualism, challenging, as Berlant (2011) argues, normative notions of materials, objects, boundaries, languages, identities, and stories. Like languages and translingual practices, the art-making process carries stories and histories of movement (Hegeman, 2019), and becomes “unhinged from routinized forms of expression and released to the potential of pedagogical (and theoretical and methodological) uncertainty” (Rhoades & Daiello, 2019, p. 72). Theoretical moves toward overlapping and precarious identities are more difficult to realize pedagogically, in so far as translingual
pedagogy requires participants “to confront their complicity in others’ suffering and injury, without sentimentalizing the terms and conditions of doing so” (Zembylas, 2019, p. 106). Moving away from a focus on educative narratives of grand transformations, our focus has been on misunderstandings, mistakes, and considerations of failure as critical to meaningful translingual engagement.

The NEA “Big Read” Context

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Big Read offers up to $15,000 to 75 communities across the U.S. to promote community reading of a single book of “literary merit.” 2017 marked the first year that a book in translation appeared on the approved list: Yu Hua’s (2003) To Live, translated from Mandarin Chinese into English by Michael Berry. This paper’s author, Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, received this award and worked with co-authors, Sharon Nuruddin and Tairan Qiu, planning a six-week series of art and literature events in our college town during the 2018 Lunar New Year [see figure 1]. Events featured the Chinese zodiac animal, the dog, and included Grace Lin’s (2006) novel The Year of the Dog, aligning events with our university “Dawg” mascot. Through zither music, mahjong, papier-mâché parade dragons, dumpling preparations, tai chi, calligraphy, fashion design, tea customs, and other modalities experienced by those who have moved between geographic borders, we attracted well over 2000 participants to book-related events [see figures 2, 3, and 4]. Our goal was to capitalize on existing “food & festival” interests among the

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Authors thank numerous UGA students and faculty and Athens community members and artists for their volunteer assistance with 2018 programming.

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Figure 1. Year of the Dawg Calendar (2018).

members of our community (see Cutshall, 2012), but also to deepen, through a wide variety of arts engagement, access to precarious knowing, documenting what Berlant (2011) refers to as “what it feels like to be in the middle of a shift.” Tsing (2015) says of precarity that it is no longer “the fat of the less fortunate,” but a “requirement of collaborative survival in precarious times” (p. 2). We documented what it meant to be vulnerable co-learners on pathways of translingual participation through and beyond arts and literature programming.

Our data included interviews, field notes, and surveys as well as more innovative trans’ approaches such as memoir method.
Figure 2. UGA students present as guzheng musician Rosalie Zhao performs during the Year of The Dawg (2018). Photo credit: Shannon Montgomery.

Figure 3. UGA students, volunteers, and local community members attend the Lunar New Year Celebration at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia (2018). Photo credit: Shannon Montgomery.

Figure 4. Parade with handmade dragons (2018). Photo credit: Emily Haney.
Our team studied fiction and creative nonfiction literature to inform the ways we interpreted data and personalized analysis. We discuss the various limits we encountered as translingual scholars, memoirists, and public pedagogues, and expansive moments of *limitlessness* where fractured differences between identities gave way to new pathways for translingual participation.

**Translingual Memoir Data Collection and Analysis**

Our study included autoethnographic strategies inspired by Farrell’s (2011) description of “immersion memoir” where we created a “framework to actively engage in experience and memory” in our efforts to “solve a personal mystery” (n.p.) of living and teaching in translingual spaces. We collected ethnographic data including participant-observation, interviews with 24 participants, 182 survey responses from high school youth and event attendees, as well as field notes in the form of our own translingual memoirs. Our methodologies included “stories built through layered and disparate practices of knowing and being” (Tsing, 2015, p. 159). Studying NEA focal books as well as published memoirs and memoir craft essays, we sought methods for “getting curious” and “responding to, rather than resolving, complexity” (Staley, 2018, p. 290). Our inquiry aimed to blur relationships between the researcher and researched. We invited artful, co-construction of narratives to attend to and challenge issues of representation.

**What’s in a Name? Findings & Lost Things**

As educational researchers, we are accustomed to representations of empiricism that contain “findings” often in terms of happy endings to successful educative practices. Through memoir inquiry, we learned more from what was lost, rather than what was found. We found (or lost) “naming” as a many-prismed theme. Here, we share excerpts from researcher memoirs that draw together the naming of our (mis)understanding. After sharing these translingual moments as empirical and pedagogical meaning-making, we draw implications for translingual educational practice.

**Stretching Output: Mispronunciation as Opportunity (Cahnmann-Taylor)**

I was the 2018 Big Read project director and am faculty in a Teacher Education Program. My identities have been fluid and changed over time to queer- and cis-gender, Jewish and secular, semitic “white,” English and Spanish bilingual (Spain, Mexico, and pan-Latin), social scientist and artist identities, among other identities such as parent, spouse, professor, applied theatre artist, and poet. As increasing numbers of Chinese graduate students join our university program, I have become increasingly interested in acquiring and understanding Mandarin-English translingualism. At the beginning of the project I convened several Chinese graduate students in my program with several school district teachers.

“I see you’ve just joined us, how do you pronounce your name?”

I was among five white, U.S.-born educators and Kuo (name used with permission), my (then) doctoral advisee and assistant when we met in January 2018 to plan the high school curriculum celebrating Chinese literature. Our meeting on Google Hangouts was mediated by dysfunctional technology. Kuo’s microphone wasn’t working, so I answered
(uncomfortably) on her behalf.

“Kuo,” I said, as I have said her name so many times before.

“Like cool?” the district consultant asked.

“Yes,” I said, “but without the ‘L’.”

Kuo nodded to the screen. We could see her but the sound never came on so only one of the district educators called her by cell phone (no speaker) and still struggled to pronounce her name. “Ko,” “Ko-ul,” each tried, spoke to the video camera, apologized, and then we moved on to discuss the high school Lunar New Year curriculum and flipgrid greetings Kuo, Tairan, and other students would create (<https://flipgrid.com/7d296b>).

In my January 2018 memoir notes I wrote: What’s a name if you can’t say it? How can one confidently teach through such foreignness to translingual becoming? When each phoneme seems like an explosive in a multicultural landmine, the mouth can be a dangerous place of ignorance, naiveté, or chauvinism.

As I read Hua’s (2003) novel and prepared public pedagogies, I was haunted by how much I didn’t know as I revisited each of the novel characters’ names, worried about saying them out loud (see figure 5). In the translation, character names are capitalized and not spelled with tonal markers. In contrast, a Mandarin speaker wrote this name list with tone markers to help me with pronunciation:

jiā zhēn
fèng xià
yǒu qìng

I lived comfortably with these (unmarked) characters’ names while engrossed privately in the novel but when planning to publicly discuss the book, my (dis)comfort changed. Swain (2000) refers to this kind of output as “stretched language,” requiring second language learners to go beyond what is comfortable and familiar in mediated dialogue. Despite numerous opportunities to linguistically stretch, Mandarin input remained aurally insufficient for my independently confident output, thus requiring my interdependence on translingual others.

As I promoted the first public celebration of Lunar New Year in February, I revisited my own experiences of hyper-invisibility every fall during Jewish holy day celebrations, when those of Jewish faith must make difficult yet invisible choices concerning high stakes participation.
between their religious or “secular” lives in our Southeastern town. As I expanded my transpedagogies to the East, I recognized the precarity of my own family’s belief in melting pot assimilation giving way to what Tsing (2015) refers to as “a wild new cosmopolitanism” living in what she calls the ruins of “unrecognizable others” (p. 98). Longing for repair, I initiated requests for religious diversity awareness in our local district. My wish for greater religious awareness and mindful action became a signed district policy in December 2018 due in large part to the agentive writing and reflections during this project (Jaben-Eilon, 2018). It deepened my questioning of the misleading view of Chinese national movement to the U.S. as “unprecedented” rather than a natural, ongoing outcome of human movement toward resources as a response to a myriad of stresses including economic, environmental, religious, and academic. Meaningful investment in translingual pedagogies “allows us to explore the ruin that has become our collective home” (Tsing, 2015, 3-4). In deepening recognition of growing Chinese national populations and Asian Americanness, I was able to recontextualize my own non-dominant identity as what Manning (2016) refers to as an “enabling constraint” (p. 197). What may have begun as a reflection on aural limitation to names expanded from phonemic awareness to social action.

Relating the musical concepts of form, rhythm, dynamics, timbre, melody, and polyphony to the art of doing qualitative research, Bresler (2005) discussed how “aural attention provides a back-bone to perception, documentation, and data analysis. It is equally present in the communication stage, following different conventions for aural presentations, versus written ones; for popular ethnographies versus more formal papers” (p. 174). Ultimately, translingual memoir combined with ethnographic field notes helped stretch and tune aural, physical, and visual attention in the process of naming as social action.

Dis/Connections: Finding Ourselves in the Contact Zone (Nuruddin)

I am an African-American bilingual education scholar who works in the space of Spanish-language instruction and Spanish-English translation. My mainstream, suburban upbringing led me on a quest of self-discovery, both as a Black girl and as an emerging bilingual. My world was small, and I often felt trapped between it and the world I knew existed outside. Coming into the project, I felt disconnected from Hua’s (2003) historical fiction and Lin’s (2006) creative memoir. However, as translingual scholars and educators, introducing a wide range of voices into our classrooms not only encourages us to “celebrate both our differences and our similarities (Bishop, 1990, p. xi),” but a shared vulnerability where dis/connections, mis/performances, and our consistent moments of failures and triumph can be the impetus for expanding our limited worldviews. We see ourselves, reflect, and walk through doors, in and out of translingual and transcultural spaces, embracing the human experience in all its forms. Despite years of language study and living in Spanish-speaking countries, I found—through analyzing my own project participation—that I had much to learn about the universality of the human experience, but I feel more comfortable now with stepping outside of my comfort zone and finding myself in the messy limitations of what Pratt (1991) calls the contact zone. In my memoir notes on To
Live, for example, I share the tragic death of a friend’s son, and reflect on the pain of survival:

January 2018:

There was a lot to process while reading. I felt myself relating my experiences with birth and death, wealth and poverty, marriage, parenting, friendships, gender roles, and so many other aspects of life. I thought of my friend whose 10-year-old son—an otherworldly athlete, poet, dancer, and student—died after being hit by a car. He was a beam of light: the one who would win the sport scholarship, play pro basketball, win gold at the Olympics for his amazing acrobatics, and publish literary masterpieces. He reminded me of Fugui's grandson Youqing, a skilled student and athlete, who also died young. I recalled the heartbreak after receiving the phone call, and cried for my daughter—then an adoring toddler—who delighted in his dance moves. I also reflected on how human beings become victims of both choice and fate. I often labor over the choices I’ve made that caused the greatest pain to those around me, and wonder if time and relationships can ever be mended. When Fugui gambles away his family’s wealth, I felt for them, especially Fugui’s father, only to realize that a loss can save a life. If it weren’t for the family’s bad luck, Fugui would have been executed instead of Long Er, ill-fated heir to the family fortune. In exchange, Fugui lives to be an old man, watching everyone around him perish. I wonder, is life his punishment? The fact that he could still tell his story with humor and hopefulness reflects the fact that his family, even in death, forgave him, and I understand that in life the most important thing we can do is to live.

Ellis’s (1993) account of living after the death of her brother in a plane crash encourages readers to “experience an experience” (p. 711), noting that true accounts fit within ethnographic, social science, and literary fiction in what we learn from them. She states that “[a]s social scientists, we will not know if others’ intimate experiences are similar or different until we offer our own stories and pay attention to how others respond, just as we do in everyday life” (p. 725).

The Year of the Dog served as a valuable contact zone in my understanding of the Taiwanese American experience and its dis/connections to my experience. There were beautiful, sometimes sad moments throughout both books, and as I read, I translated the characters’ experiences into my own. Through my reading, I engaged in translingual practices, not only with unfamiliar words and histories, but within my world, perpendicular and parallel to those of Asians and Asian American immigrants. Here is one of those crossings:

February 2018:

Finding yourself in a world that seeks to underrepresent or misrepresent you is daunting, whether you are a 14-year-old Taiwanese-American girl in 1980s New Jersey, or a 14-year-old Black girl in 1980s Maryland. I identify with many of her experiences, in part, because we came of age during the same era. It was an era devoid of positivistic, standardized testing, but also when teachers were the sole purveyors of culture and knowledge. If a student’s name and culture carried deep meaning for her and her family, teachers, administrators, and fellow students were not required to respond with understanding, knowledge, and care. In finding herself, I feel that Grace was much better prepared for that task than I. She had a history that could be mapped to a home language (Taiwanese) and to her parents’ home
country. Not me. There were no celebrations of African American (AA) heritage in my home. No “AA” camp like the Taiwanese American, “TAC” camp that Grace and her friends attended during the summer. In fact, an elder in my family has said on many occasions that when she was growing up, “we thought white people knew everything.”

Throughout my engagement with the Big Read events—my children also participated in some of them—I noted various connections between Taiwanese and Chinese cultures and my own, but also found that much, and perhaps more, can be learned when there is nothing tethering our experiences to others. When there is willingness to grow from ignorance and an acknowledgement that we must engage in socially situated activities (Lave, 1993) that force us to address our own biases and misunderstandings, educators can provide enriching community learning opportunities between our students and local residents.

The art of translingual memoir writing as inquiry helped me to articulate dis/connections during engagement in this project, embrace paradox, and settle into uncertainty. Participation in community pedagogy paired with this reflective process allowed me to name understandings of multiculturalism where African Americans stand outside of and are often alienated from U.S. immigrant stories and to pose critical questions about African Americans’ place in the joint enterprise of translingualism.

“Yes, I am from China.”: Being and Becoming an In/Outsider (Qiu)

As a Chinese, cisgender female, born and (mostly) raised in China for eighteen years, I see myself as a knower of Chinese culture, societal norms, and language. However, as an international student in the U.S., I was also an outsider of some societal norms in the locations where our work took place. As an outsider to the lives and perceptions of our public pedagogy participants, I prepared for my own and others’ perceptions of “foreignness” as we traversed translingual spaces.

Sharing memoir notes with the co-authors and reading about others’ disconnections with Chinese and Taiwanese culture in Hua’s (2003) and Lin’s (2006) books transported me back to my elementary years in Canada, when people struggled with my “foreign” sounding name. In my memoir I wrote:

Just as Lin’s character “Pacy” struggled upon being renamed “Grace” when entering public school, I remembered being a new immigrant in Vancouver when I was in 3rd grade. My mom had given me the temporary name, “Terry,” and told me that I was Terry instead of Tairan when I was in school. She was fearful of me being made fun of because my Chinese name would not be “normal” to Canadians. Back then, I never questioned my mom’s decision to help me fit in a society that required me to assimilate to their norms to thrive in school.

![Figure 6. Vegetables on display during the 2018 Lunar New Year Celebration at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia. Photo credit: Shannon Montgomery.](image)
Alongside writing and sharing memoir notes, we reviewed data collected for this project, including surveys with those in attendance at our events who had also received free book copies. In her responses in our post-event survey, U.S. born “Sam” (all names are pseudonyms) surprised me that her connection to *The Year of the Dog* (Lin, 2006) was also the narrator’s story about her name. The participant explained that in second grade there were two “Sams” in her class, both female. Her teacher appointed her the cisgender female name “Samantha” to differentiate the two “Sams.” She wrote: “I had never been called Samantha, so it was quite an adjustment for me.”

I contrasted this to a high school participant responding to why they felt it was important to study Asian literature and culture traditions in our town where the Asian population is relatively small, to which they answered:

*I am an Asian-American and I feel like my culture (although I am not Chinese) is under-represented in general. Growing up, in many ways, I felt out of the norm due to some cultural practices I follow. I think if we all have a deeper understanding of other cultures, people won’t feel as out of the norm and we can understand each other better.* [see figure 7]

Previously, I had understood that only “foreigners” would be renamed in U.S. public schools and express feeling “not normal.” The data were more complicated. U.S.-born teens and adults could also experience uncertainty and insecurity that social and cultural precarity causes to surface. In losing one perception I gained another: names and practices could be conceived of as foreign or familiar depending on a wide variety of variables such as language, race, nationality, and culture, as well as gender, possible sexual orientation, and even in terms of cultural values for individualization (as evidenced by not allowing for two “Sams” even if of the same gender identity).

When I interviewed attendees at our events and reviewed the survey data, many made positive remarks about my beloved homeland. I enjoyed witnessing people celebrate the cultural practices that are important to me. “I think China is becoming more and more powerful in a lot of ways and I would like to visit China one day. It is already one of the greatest world powers,” said Johnny, a middle-aged Hispanic male.

Figure 7. High school youth and educators look at their Chinese New Year art (2018). Photo courtesy of Lindy Weaver.
When interviewed about what she thought when hearing the word “China," a young white female, Lisa, said: “I think about the long history and culture of China, and how it is doing better than the U.S. in economics now... My son has a Chinese friend in school and I am glad my son is making friends with kids from other cultures and languages.” Jiexi, a Chinese man who came to our event with his wife and daughter said: “China is becoming stronger and stronger, we are proud of being Chinese.”

Despite these many positive encounters, a less positive (to me) moment felt more impactful. This is an excerpt from my February 2018 memoir notes:

“Are you of an Eastern descendant?” An elderly white lady who was holding her granddaughter’s hand asked as she tapped me on the shoulder during the Lunar New Year festivities at the botanical garden. “Yes, I am! I’m from China!” I turned around, beaming with a big smile. I was excited cause someone was asking about China.

The lady turned to her granddaughter who was staring at me in the eyes, “See, this is what a Chinese person looks like." The little girl started glancing at me up and down. “Look at her brown almond eyes and straight long black hair... this is what your Chinese classmates are going to look like when they grow up. Just take a long and hard look at her," she continued slowly.

I don’t even have almond eyes... wait... what is happening right now?

In that moment, I had wanted to say that Asians, or people from “an Eastern descendant” (as she put it), entail great diversity. Each dynamic Asian population has historical, cultural, economic, linguistic, and political experiences of their own (Chang, 2017); not all Asians look alike, and the little girl’s friend is not going to look like me when they grow up. I wanted to tell her, “I don’t have almond eyes” and “generalization can be dangerous.” I wanted to ask where she was coming from.

Instead, I stood there, smiling awkwardly, as the little girl stared.

I could have had a deeper conversation with the “old lady” and asked why she wanted to show a Chinese person to her granddaughter; I could have communicated my discomfort and vulnerability with her and told her about different kinds of “Eastern people;” I could have held her hands and brought her into “transformative mutualism” (Tsing, 2015, p. 40), or asked her about her identities, preparing to offend her by confronting the racialized lens with which she viewed the world. I could have done any of these things, but I did not. I was “stuck” as Staley (2018) and Ellsworth (1997) might say, within binary us/them limitations. I was stuck because I was scared. I was stuck because I was not taught to be confrontational. I was stuck because I could not think of how to confront in that moment.

While I had experienced great pride and positive visibility for the naming of things Chinese, including connections between my own experiences and those of U.S.-born individuals of my new hometown, I also experienced negative hyper-visibility, poked like a caged zoo animal and categorized like an item on a grocery store shelf. Translingual spaces of public learning can be hurtful. As immersion memoirists and researchers, we went into the Big Read event series like
documentary filmmakers who move into scene with a camera, uncertain of what will be captured (Smith, 2011). In these contact zones, I was powerful and vulnerable as an insider and outsider.

Discussion

Writing memoir as translingual pedagogy and inquiry allowed new individual and educational possibilities to arise, walking new and alternative directions through precarity (Powell, 2019). Producing new sound systems; connecting to new literatures, cultures, and nonhuman materials, and recontextualizing old and new labels of differences—translingual memoir scholarship helped us articulate moments when we felt stuck, uncertain, angry, or embarrassed by limitation, our own and those of others. New inquiry practices with new publics and new literatures expanded opportunities for endless grappling with the edges of our own certainties. When participants in our study connected Hua’s and Lin’s books to universal limitations shared by “Samanthas” and “Sams,” we noticed other connections made to African American, Jewish, and other U.S. experiences of daily complicity in the oppression of differences in language, religion, race, language, and culture.

In a climate that often insists on duality, on viewing languages, cultures, religions, races, and sexual orientations in terms of binary divisions and separateness, engagement in the arts—literary and/or visual—facilitates what Tsing (2015) describes as “transformative mutualism” (p. 40) where each worldly encounter is filled with both destruction and possibility. Seeking the “potential of failure” is a vital ‘edge’ (Lucero, 2015) in (1) educating the artist’s deep appreciation of precarity in one’s cultural, social, linguistic, and economic worlds, and (2) fostering the embrace of the vulnerability, indiscernibility, and relationality that precarity brings.

We conclude our study with the implication for all engaged in literary and visual arts education to let go of prescriptive “what to do next” solutions (Lather, 1998, p. 488) to nurture precarity and failure in a variety of school and non-school settings with researchers and participants of all ages, languages, ethnicities, nationalities, races, and religions. We understand failure broadly, as Hamid (2019) described it: the universal failure of all humans to be “native of the place we call home.” Beautifully rendered narratives such as Hua’s and Lin’s help readers acknowledge connections between losses that may appear local to “loss that is the other thread uniting and binding our species” (ibid, p. 18).

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:

Melisa Cahnmann Taylor
University of Georgia
cahnmann@uga.edu

Sharon Nuruddin
University of Georgia
snuruddin@uga.edu

Tairan Qiu
University of Georgia
tqiu19@uga.edu
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Cissexism and Precarity Perform Trans Subjectivities

Precarity is not experienced by all. Rather, as Judith Butler (2009) notes, it is the extreme state of precariousness—a heightened exposure to institutional and social violence imposed on marginalized populations such as people of color, non-white immigrants, people of non-Christian faiths, and LGBTQ+ people. Nor does precarity impact the people in these groups evenly. The three digital artworks in this essay highlight some of the ways in which trans people navigate precarity and are performed by it.

What dialogue might this work create within the art education context and what are the potential pedagogical implications of this visual essay and by extension other creative work? Art education editors and reviewers often ask such questions. I wrestle with these types of questions. Given that this is a visual essay, what further elaboration/explication is required for the images herein? What do I want students to learn about precarity?

At the end of this visual essay, the ___ (author/teacher) should be able to:

Demonstrate that trans lives and experiences fit within the framework of Marylin Stewart and Sydney Walker’s (2005) Enduring/Big Ideas, i.e. connecting the relevance of trans existence to art education.

There is precarity, or a heightened vulnerability, when one is called upon, whether this is intentional or unintentional, to validate and demonstrate how one’s trans existence matters for art education.

There are also high risks when it comes to writing outcomes in advance. Doing so is not only prescriptive but also a missed opportunity for readers to insert/read themselves into the text. The already-read, according to Roland Barthes (1974), are “those who fail to reread [and] are obligated to read the same story everywhere” (p. 16). Rather than compose already-read-written outcomes, I invite readers to fill in the “blanks” to re-read/re-story the images and text. Re-reading is an act of play rather than consumption (Barthes, 1974) that is closer to a reiterative process that could potentially result in plural and multivalent outcomes and actions.

At the end of this visual essay, the ___ (reader/teacher) should be able to:

___ (insert active verb here) that precarity, or heightened vulnerability, is relational, i.e., consider how their own actions generate precarity (e.g., cissexism and isolation), and explore possibilities to change, reduce, and remove the threat by doing the following ___ (insert action here).

Trans people face heightened levels of precarity such as extreme discrimination and bullying. The lifetime suicide attempt rate for trans and gender non-conforming people averages at 41% with the highest rate at 46% reported by trans men (Haas et al., 2014). I am one of the 46%. However, my suicidal ideation and attempts were not caused by being transgender in and of itself but rather due to cissexism, which Julia Serano (2007) explains as a belief in the validity and superiority of cis people’s genders and lives and
the invalidity and inferiority of trans people’s genders and lives. It is systemic cissexism that heightens precarity in legal, medical, educational, economic and social structures aimed at reducing the conditions for trans people to lead what Butler (2009) calls a livable life. It is systemic cissexism that also places trans people at risk of physical violence from others.

At the end of this visual essay, the ___ (reader/teacher) should be able to:

___ (insert active verb here) the impact of their language and actions in the school and classroom environments for trans students (Focused.Arts.Media.Education, 2017; Pérez Miles & Jenkins, 2017).

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**BEFORE TELLING ME TO “GET A SENSE OF HUMOR” WHEN I DISLIKE YOUR TRANSPHOBIC JOKE OR MEME POST, CONSIDER MY EXPERIENCES.**

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I have been: verbally harassed on a daily basis at school for an ambiguous gender expression, physically assaulted by police in a women’s bathroom, denied access to either bathroom by a college administrator, called “it,” “subhuman,” and a “fucking freak of nature,” told, “People like you should be shot and left to die in the street,” and had a shotgun held to my head.

**So, no, I can’t get a sense of humor over the things that help dehumanize me.**

*Image 1. Humor and History.*
____ (insert active verb here) their language and actions to improve the school environment for trans students by ____ (insert action here).

Two of the artworks are photographic self-portraits with text. Humor and History speaks back to accusations of oversensitivity to social media posts, often viral, that serve to mock and demean trans people and their lived experiences. Inconvenient Truth comments as well on the dismissiveness by some and aggression by others, including educators, who refuse trans-affirming protocols such as respecting new names and pronoun...
In 1994, I was 23 and stranded in a high crime area of Fort Worth when my motorcycle broke down on the freeway. I walked along the access road to find a pay phone. It was late, and I was alone.

A woman in a glittery green dress and heels approached me from the corner of an empty building—a former gas station gone out of business. She asked if I needed help.

She knew I was lost and afraid, even of her. I shook my head but then reached into my empty pockets.

She took change from her purse and paid for my call. She looked around us and insisted she stay to look over me until my friends arrived.

I turned to thank her when they did, but she was already gone.

My hero that night was a trans woman of color and a sex worker. That may seem unlikely to most, but I know such bravery and resilience.

I hope she too survived that night and all of them after.

Image 3, Unlikely Hero.

usage. Such refusals also expose trans people to ill treatment by others who witness these acts (Pérez Miles & Jenkins, 2017).

At the end of this visual essay, the ___ (reader/teacher/editor/reviewer) should be able to:

___ (insert active verb here) how microaggressions or “subtle” slights whether they are intentional or unintentional hurt people (Niemann et al., 2020) and inflict harm on the psychological, emotional, and sometimes physical well-being of transgender people (Jenkins, 2018) by doing the following ___ (insert action here).

___ (insert active verb here) the ways that social media serve to mock and demean trans people but also function as gateways for these communities to build coalitions (Jenkins, 2018).

Unlikely Hero is a digital image with a short autobiographical tale depicting the empathy and kindness given the artist by a member of the most vulnerable of trans communities, trans women of color working in the sex trade, in which both people are held in tension between trust and hypervigilance during the encounter.

At the end of this visual essay, the ___ (reader/teacher/editor/reviewer) should be able to:

___ (insert active verb here) that trans lives matter by doing the following ___ (insert action here).

___ (insert active verb here) how communities respond to conflicts to humanize or dehumanize marginalized populations that lead to calls for inclusion such as #translivesmatter and #blacktranslivesmatter.
At the end of this visual essay, editors and reviewers should be able to: Reflect upon the requirements they place upon vulnerable people to heighten one’s precarity for publication.

Each work marks the conscious recognition of precarity that trans people must perform through and how that precarity permits some actions and denies others as we empathize and reach out, speak back as well as speak up, hide ourselves in isolation or present ourselves through the vulnerability of visibility in solidarity with one another.

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:

Kevin Jenkins
The Pensylvania State University
kevinjenkins@psu.edu
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5595-4595
References


Stigma, Confinement, and Silence:
On the Precarious Life and Death of John Derby

Kevin Tavin & Mira Kallio-Tavin
In this commentary, we take seriously the call of this issue of JSTAE to address the question of what does it mean to be in a precarious position and a precarious subject within educational institutions. Structured around three concepts, Stigma, Confinement, and Silence we discuss the life and death of art education scholar and colleague, Dr. John Derby. We attempt to address how John’s scholarship helped other researchers in art education orientate themselves and take a critical stance based on disability studies. Furthermore, we discuss the dispositions of precarity that ableism associates with mental disabilities, such as vulnerability, insecurity, and fear, dispositions that we argue John explored and challenged. Lastly, we speculate why some researchers in the field of art education may find themselves in a precarious position, and choose to remain silent about John and his work after his death by suicide, in August 2018.

Stigma

As Tobin Siebers (2014) points out, disability studies “views different kinds of thinking as a critical resource for higher education (p. xi).” Like other forms of contemporary anti-oppressive scholarship, disability studies in part attempts to rupture normative and repressive ways of seeing the world and experiencing it, and open new spaces and opportunities for research and practice on education. John Derby (2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011) did all of the above by providing invaluable research on disability studies and art education. But it was more than John’s scholarship that provoked and encouraged others, it was his life. In numerous publications, Derby (2009, 2013) discussed his own mental disability and the precarious stigma he often faced because of it. As Jennifer Eisenhauer (2008) has written, stigmatization of people with mental disabilities is not merely only a matter a personal offense but a systemic “larger cultural discourse characterized by bias mistrust, stereotyping, fear, embarrassment, anger, and/or avoidance” (p. 17). Furthermore, Lerita Coleman Brown (2013) writes that the “ultimate answers about why stigma persists may lie in the examination of why people fear differences, fear the future, fear the unknown, and therefore stigmatize that which is different and unknown” (p. 156). John Derby (2013) wrote about stigmatic, precarious, and oppressive discourses, where people like him, “with mental disabilities are unjustly blamed for their conditions and considered weak-willed and cognitively inferior . . . that we are routinely ridiculed for not just ‘snapping out of it’” (para. 2).

John would often talk about these discourses and their effects. As close friends, we, the authors of this essay, would often hear from John that he didn’t feel that he fit in well with academia because of his mental disability, or did not do well in job interviews, where normative models

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1 John Derby is one of only a handful of established scholars on the subject in art education, including Doug Blandy, Jennifer Eisenhauer Richardson, Mira Kallio-Tavin, Karen Keifer-Boyden, Claire Penketh, and Alice Wexler.
of an exemplary colleague or professor is often based on a non-precarious subject who is secure about themselves, outgoing, socially fluent, good in small talk, and can represent themselves as a strong and fearless leader. Siebers (2014) describes how the normative perspective subscribes to the stance that “the best teachers have the best interpersonal skills… the most energy… they make their students laugh” (p. xii). Like Siebers, we believe that there doesn’t seem to be much space in higher education for professors who do not fill these expectations, especially persons who always seem to exist in a precarious position in relation to job security.

Indeed, Price et al. (2017) engaged in an extensive research project through a cross-institutional survey of higher education faculty with mental disabilities (the first of its kind), and found that a majority of faculty felt a sense of stigma and therefore avoided disclosure because of fear and risk of it affecting tenure or promotion, poor treatment by administration, peers, and students, a lack of salary or job security, and so on. In addition, to citing numerous specific and substantive examples, Price et al. (2017) state:

Fear of stigma was a significant theme that ran throughout many of the open-ended responses. One participant wrote, succinctly, “One word—STIGMA”; another wrote, “FEAR of losing [all] credibility.” Another elaborated more fully: “I do not think that the risk of serious reprisal is high, but I have seen a colleague with a serious mental health issue subjected to constant gossip, originating with administrators, and I believe such would seriously damage my ability to work.” (para. 29)

John told us several times, for example, how fearful he felt during interview situations and how he had such a hard time representing himself the way his peers expected (personal communications). Of course, the stigma he faced in those situations can be contributed in part to how precarity generates fear of difference. While John was an extremely productive and tenacious researcher who introduced new concepts, possibilities, and potentialities for art education, the stigma he faced demonstrates in part higher education’s orientation as a lack of understanding and acceptance of scholars with mental disabilities (as noted above), including judging mental disability as a problem incompatible with research, teaching, and scholarship (and especially when it involves hiring).

Confinement

Margaret Price (2014) states there is a “theoretical and material schism between academic discourse and mental disabilities” (p. 8). As mentioned in the previous section, there is a normative belief that these domains are not permitted to coexist, because together they are too precarious—too uncertain, unpredictable, unstable, and way too risky. Price (2014) argues “academic discourse operates not just to omit, but to abhor mental disability—to reject it, to stifle and expel it” (p. 8). Based on the work of Jennifer (Eisenhauer) Richardson (2018), one may see this as a form of confinement, perhaps not dissimilar to confining people with disabilities to hospitals, prisons, or asylums. Confinement, in this context, “revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it. . . around the properties of places and the possibilities of time” (p. 13).
Beyond the metaphorical description of confinement, there is a long history of, and real and material consequences for, individuals deemed mentally ill confined in psychiatric hospitals, or similar places. Indeed, involuntary confinement and hospitalization is a significant problem for the disability community, where detention determined by clinicians and/or social services personnel... becomes little more than a rubber stamping exercise. The criminal law parallel would be a statute allowing imprisonment for severe naughtiness, with it being left to the police to determine what constitutes naughtiness, when it is sufficiently severe, and how long the individual will spend in prison. (Bartlett, 2012, p. 831)

The stigma and disempowerment experienced by psychiatric confinement is often extremely violative in terms of bodily and physical intrusion, and limitations of personal movement and environment (Bartlett, 2012). Indeed, when interviewed through numerous studies, a majority of people with mental disabilities that are involuntarily confined considered their detention unjust. For example, Priebe et al. (2009) found that one year after being confined, only 40% of 396 patients believed their involuntary confinement was justified, while Gardner et al. (1999) found approximately half of the individuals they interviewed retrospectively viewed their detention as unjust.

John Derby (2013) wrote in his article, Accidents happen: An art autopathography on mental disability, about his own injustice of being involuntarily confined while a doctoral student. John critically explores the personal, cultural, and institutional contexts of the precarity of mental disability through autopathography. He recounts his involuntary confinement while pursuing a PhD at The Ohio State University. His recollection includes the intake interview, where he is asked about suicidal ideation:

A resident entered and asked me predictable questions. I answered honestly, emphasizing that I was depressed, plain and simple. “Are you having suicidal ideations?” “Yes.” “How often?” “Daily. No, almost daily. Maybe weekly, but more frequent in the past month. None in a couple days. Probably every couple days.” “Do you have a plan?” “Yes. I know exactly how I’d do it. But I haven’t put the plan in motion...” (para. 23, italics in original)

John continues to discuss other moments when he had suicidal ideations and came very close to ending his own life. Towards the conclusion of the article, John ironically (but with the hope that it would be true) declares that his autopathography will not be seen as an acknowledgement of his vulnerability to others (which is at once a normative, ableist, and precarious position), but as a generative and enthusiastic force that will never be used against me in any way. It will be cherished by Art Education and Disability Studies scholars, and anyone who receives this story will be stunned, soberly convinced. I will never have to conceal my mental disability for social or professional reasons. It won’t be a problem that I’ve revealed aspects of my disability that are routinely used to criminalize or stereotype people. The risk of publishing this before earning tenure won’t hurt—if anything, it will help! (para. 33)
Unfortunately, John's mental disability was a problem for others and the stigmatization helped to literally confine him in places, and symbolically confine him in terms of a future yet to come, and possibilities without fear, especially (and ironically) after his suicide.

**Silence**

Just like mental disabilities, suicidal ideation and suicide have very deep roots in our collective thinking and judgement. The same dispositions that fuel the stigma of mental disability often drive precarious discourses and silence around suicide. Talk of suicide is most often forbidden or self-censored. When discussed it is mostly understood as a sin or a shame, and up until recently a criminal act (Tadros & Jolley, 2001). This stance also extends to believing that suicide is reserved only for people afflicted with mental illness, excessive addictions, and/or criminal behavior, or simply a selfish choice made by a person who just couldn't *snap out of it* (Derby, 2013).

Because of its stigmatization, the mere mention of suicidal thoughts triggers a medical model that forces most agencies (schools, universities, corporations, etc.) into the "risk assessment-hospitalization-risk assessment feedback loop" (Cutle & Mazel-Carlton, 2019, para. 9) where subjects deemed in a certain precarious condition trigger *involuntary help* from the service of others. This is what happened to John while he was a graduate student. There are models, however, that challenge the hegemony of risk assessment. The peer support group Alternatives to Suicide (Alt2S), for example, embraces discussion rather than silence, and offers a de-medicalized orientation towards suicide.

The organization states the following:

> *instead of focusing on predicting a person's behavior, our dialogue focuses on why they are having thoughts of suicide. Suicide itself is not framed as the problem, but understood to be the solution of a whole host of issues. . . Conversations expand from why to also why not, meaning dialogue will often explore the reasons that people have chosen to stay in this world.* (Cutle & Mazel-Carlton, 2019, para. 2)

As a stigma, suicide, like mental disability, represents a major breach of trust, "a destruction of the belief that life is predictable" (Coleman Brown, 2013, p. 156). John Derby’s suicide seems to have multiplied the stigma that had already been used to characterize him. Rather than discussion about John’s death being framed as an act by a person who was, at that time, in an unbearable life situation, left alone by family and by colleagues, there seems to be silence. While not attempting to make broad judgmental claims towards the community of higher educators in our field, we, the authors, also note that when there has been a break in this silence, most of the conversation we have heard or followed about John’s death has taken paths as described earlier by Eisenhauer (2008), Coleman Brown (2013), and Price (2014). One path is to simply declare the subject of John’s death too precarious to talk about (personal communications, 2018). Another path is to discuss John’s death through rumor and media speculation. Still another is to include stereotypical narrations of people with mental disabilities about *giving up, and not trying hard enough to do one’s best.*

According to Price (2014), when there is a tragedy, people need narratives, people
need case studies, especially based on media reports. It seems important to try to find a reason why something happened by answering the question how did this happen, as if that would somehow explain with common sense why this happened, and how this will not happen to us. As Price (2014) writes, the tiniest details of one's life are “taken apart and reconstructed in a narrative aimed to show that someone was a ‘time bomb that sputtered for years before he went off’” (p. 143). The idea is to make sure that particular individual was unfit for life and made many mistakes.

Not the end…..

Through this essay, we hope to increase dialogue on different types of precarity, especially those associated with mental disabilities in the field of art education, in part by troubling the ableist approach taken for granted in higher art education. Informed by John Derby’s life work and through a disability studies perspective, we look forward to the field becoming more self-critical towards its ableist and saneist practices in higher art education, and embracing a more proactive, engaging, and affective force of precarity.

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the authors:

Kevin Tavin
Aalto University
kevin.tavin@aalto.fi

Mira Kallio-Tavin
Aalto University
mira.kallio-tavin@aalto.fi
References


Index of Dirt:
Composing and Composting in Art and Education, circa 2020

Carol N. Padberg
Index of Dirt: Composing and Composting in Art and Education, circa 2020

This photo essay presents an abridged version of a performative lecture addressing strategies for regenerative art education and arts-based research. Using an alphabetized compilation of stories, texts, objects and lessons, the index provides examples of how embodied, field-based art education can provide appropriate learning methods for art students of the Anthropocene who bear the burden of the economic, environmental, and emotional precarities of our times.

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:

Carol N. Padberg
University of Hartford
padberg@hartford.edu
INDEX OF DIRT

1/4 rayado
48 hojas

A Performance by
Carol Padberg
November 9, 2019

interlabor
On the margins, beyond the walls of the institutions that have come to dominate our conception of what counts as education, as well as within pockets of mainstream institutions, there are practices springing up that are characterized by a radical exploration of the knowledge, pedagogy, relationship between mind and body, and between the self and society that might be required to live in the complexity of current conditions.

-Keri Facer, from Storytelling for troubled times: what is the role for educators in the deep crises of the 21st century? (2019)
Welcome to the Index of Dirt.

We perform this index as a multiplicity, a holobiont. You may be seeing Carol Padrón and be interpreting us as a biological individual, but we are nothing but multiplicity. And you may be experiencing this moment in a linear, clock-based timeframe, but we are not doing that, either. We exist in cyclical time. We perform this index in the Long Now, where past, present and future speak.
"Rather than representing violence through the use of minerals such as cobalt, can art imagine the replacement of extractive economies anddatum systems that oppress, and then envision and ways to put these new economies and systems into practice?" from Mary Mattingly, describing Göhret.

D is for Damage. AP teaching with the Damaged Planet present in the room, and in the curriculum.
D is for Death and Regeneration as an embodied part of an art and ecology curriculum.
D is for Deep Time, and DNA.
D is for Dystopia, dammit.
D is for Mary Daly, a creatrix of radical indices.

D is for Living Dirt and for Dye Sheets (Display the Dye Sheets from Oaxaca and tell the story of the workshop in Teotitlan).

C is for Cancer, dammit.
C is for Corporations as People, dammit.
C is for Carbon Footprints, dammit.
C is for Cobalt see Mary Mattingly.
C is also for the Charisma of oyster mushrooms, sunflowers and coyotes.
C is for Copal from Oaxaca.
C is for Care.
C is for Cob Building.
And for C is for Collaboration.
G is for Generosity and Goodes, and Getting Lost.
G is for Gifts.
G is for Greed, dammit.
G is for Recognizing Grief, personal grief (show digital recorder and photo of my father and state how I still live with it), listened to his voice on the recorder.
G is for Ghosts (text).
H is for Hildegard of Bingen.
H is for Heart Surgery on the Baby.
H is for Horse Hair on the baby.
H is for Humanities: Indigenous humanities, eco-humanities, and more.
H is for Heat.
H is for the Holobiont (text).

HOLOBIONT: “When you think of a cow, you probably envision an animal producing milk, eating grass, and perhaps producing methane at her other end. However, cows cannot do this. Their domestic genome does not encode proteins with the enzymatic activity needed to digest cellulose. What the cow does is chew her grass and maintain a microbial ecosystem in her gut. A vast number of species live in there, making up what is commonly called the gut microbiome. It is this population of gut microbes that digest the grass and makes the cow productive. The cow is an obvious example of what is called a holobiont, and organism and its persistent communities of symbiotic microbes. Holobionts are the foundation of all life on earth, both within and beyond borders, because if these are stable, useful, then innovative individuals can be developed. Therefore, Holobiont by Birth – Multilogue Individuals as the Construction of Cooperative Processes.

GHOSTS:
“The ghost figure takes on ecologies of damage in which plants are always there haunting presents. It’s a haunting with all the things you can’t leave behind. In contrast to the modernist dream that you can break from the past and everything will be new and shiny.”
Anna Hing from interview.
https://edgeofacca.net/anna-hing/
I is for Interdisciplinary.
I is for Indigenous.
I is for Index.
I is for Indigenous
I is for Index.

J is for Seed Jars
For Justice
For Journals. See Stokes
From Roxanne Swentzell, et al.,
Teaching methodology for indigenous
Field based learning
For Jasper
J is for Jet Fuel, damnit
K is for Keepsakes
K is for Kin (text)

Nan: “The best way I think we gonna work, it is allowing the
land to dream through you, so allowing the imagination to open to
the collective entanglement of a story, and not thinking it’s an
individual task. It is something that comes through you. Indigenous
people would say it’s through your ancestors, but the ancestors

Lorem Ipsum
L is for the Lateral
for Land Acknowledgements
L is for Labor. See lesson on art and
labor by Susan Jahoda and Caroline
Woolard in Making and Being,
Embodiment, Collaboration and
Circulations in the Visual Arts,
L is for Love.

Carol Padberg’s Land Acknowledgement for
Hartford, Connecticut: I live and work
in the Connecticut River Valley, on the
unceded land of the Podunk, Tunxis,
Mangunk, and Pisag peoples. This is the
528th year of European colonization of
these lands. I am grateful to live here
and I honor the strength, resilience,
knowledge and cultures of the Native
people of this land.
Pattern "In this time of extinctions, we are going to be asked, again and again, to take a stand for life's meaning/falseness. We are called to live within faith that there are patterns beyond our known patterns and that in the midst of all that we do not know, we also gain knowledge." by D. G. Hine, "Sharks and Monsters, Living on a Damaged Planet," p. 661
Q is for Quotidude and Queerness and Questions
R is for Readlining, damnit
S is for Radical Softness
(See the book by Gender Fail)
T is for Research questions and for the need at times to not have research questions

for Reciprocity and for Rubrics


RUBBER SOFTNESS BARK
EDITH R. WALKER, 1945

RECIPIENCY — BILLDO LEAD GAYCE; RESISTANCE — BILLDO AMSTR

RIVER LAB CLASS

Recipients

ROOTS AND CANALS
$ is for **Slowness** and for **Stickiness**
$ is for **Sweep**
for hand-carved wooden **Spoons**, and **String games**, and **Subjectivity**
$ is for **Self** and for **Solidarity Economies**
$ is for **Settler Colonialism**
$ is for **Stacked Functions** and $ is for **Shanks**
$ is for **Subjectivity** (text)

**Textiles**

I.E.K
**THE THINK PRESENT**

Threads from Yucca

**SUS/EXTIVITE:** “I guess I’m trying to subjectify the universe because I’d like to see if subjectifying it has given us. To subjectify is not necessarily to re-see, counter, expose....

I.E.K,

“...may involve a great real rupture of the mind and imagination.” 

Territoriality

Plant favor

don’t trust everyone you meet
TEMPORALITY

"Rather than remaining wedded to a universalising singular measure of temporality then, rather concepts of time, development and change are being proposed as scholars turn to feminist
and indigenous knowledge traditions. Here, plural temporarities are proposed
that one recognises, for example, a mutuality and
reciprocal responsibility to past, present and future
generations, that are
premised on principles of
gift giving and exchange that
are attentive to temporality
as a cyclical process, drawing
attention to the cycles of the
year, of harvests, of new
moons, birth and deaths,
growth and decay, or that
make visible the co-presence of
the multiple times by
working in the long now."

Keri Kauer, Skrying in
brutal times; what is it me
for students in the depth
of the 21st century?

T for Temporalities

and T for Traditional
Ecological Knowledge (TEK)


T for Textiles as an
Interdisciplinary learning device
T for the Tong Women’s
Collective

T for Turbulence

for Linda Meintzauks

T for Turquoise, Sun Eco Art
WORK-OUT/TUNE-UPS/TURN-ONS Trust

"What’s Next Eco Mediaisation and
Contemporary Arts: Intellectual

and T for Temporality
The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education / Volume 40 (2020)
This book presents an abridged version of Carol Pedersen’s performative lecture addressing strategies for regenerative art education and arts-based research. Using an alphabetised compilation of stories, texts, objects and lessons, the index provides examples of how embodied, field-based art education can provide appropriate learning methods for art students of the Anthropocene who bear the burden of the economic, environmental, and emotional precarities of our times.
Encounters with Care: Mentoring Beginning Art Teachers Amid the Pre[CARE]ious Conditions of Neoliberalism

Christina Hanawalt
I thought about including issues with isolation and with administration. That’s in there, but overwhelmingly it’s about the fact that emotionally my job is really draining because I’m constantly worrying about my kids and about their lives and about what happens to them when they go home...but the positive outweighs the negative—or you have to make it. So, there’s not a lot about art-making in here.

Casey (personal communication, April 25, 2015)

Introduction

Casey expressed these sentiments during a final workshop I hosted for six first- and second-year art teachers at the end of a study I was conducting during the 2014-15 school year. She was talking about a handmade book (Figure 1) she had created as an expression of her experiences during her first year of teaching in a public charter elementary school. Casey was one of two elementary art teachers (Lauren being the other) in the study who, over the course of the school year, repeatedly expressed a dawning realization that their jobs were not so much about teaching art as they were about caring for kids. While teachers’ expressions of care and concern for children are perhaps not surprising in a broad sense, for me the beginning art teachers’ repeated statements that indicated how concerns for care began to eclipse the role of art stood out to me as something both significant and unsettling within the context of my study.

Based on my experiences visiting the teachers’ school contexts and the conversations we shared during both my school visits and three workshops I hosted on a university campus, I began to see how Casey and Lauren’s expressed dedication to caring for their students was tied up in a larger network of social, cultural, political, and material relations they were negotiating amid K-5 school cultures. I knew it was likely no coincidence, for example, that Casey and Lauren both
taught in Title I schools with free or reduced lunch rates of 65% or higher and that their schools had the largest populations of students of color compared to the other teachers in the study. Casey and Lauren both identified as white and female, which is true of approximately 80% of the teacher labor force (Taie & Goldring, 2018), and therefore their desire to care for the students in their schools was also fraught with the possibility that they might be caught up in a “savior complex,” viewing their students through a deficit lens and assuming they needed to be rescued from their circumstances (Emdin, 2016). In addition to these already fraught circumstances, Casey and Lauren were met with the following embodied, material, institutional, social, emotional, and affectual school experiences: both teachers taught from a cart rather than in a classroom; one teacher travelled between three schools each week, usually two per day; both regularly experienced physical outbursts by students that included throwing objects such as chairs, shoes, and rocks at other students or sometimes at the teachers; both were emotionally distraught by stories they heard about students’ lives outside of school, such as parents in jail, experiences of abuse, and lack of basic needs, such as food; both teachers’ schools were heavily encumbered by behavior management and character development programs, as well as standardized approaches to teaching and learning; one had a mandated curriculum tied to charter school funding; and one was part of a large school system in which, like many school systems, new teachers were heavily observed and evaluated according to pre-determined teaching standards. My point in trying to establish a larger perspective of the complexity of these new teachers’ experiences is to suggest that when I pulled back from a micro-level view of their desires to care for their students, I was able to recognize, at a broader level, how the contexts in which these expressed realizations emerged were, in fact, extremely precarious—thus rendering these concerns for care more complicated than at first glance.

Pre[CARE]ity

By positioning “CARE” within “precarity,” my aim is to explore what happens if, as a lens for analyzing what it means to care as an art teacher in K-5 school contexts, we think these concepts together. What would it mean to understand the network of caring relations that encompasses both students and teachers in K-5 schools as situated within conditions of precarity—conditions that extend beyond the school and that are tied up in gender-, class-, and race-based inequities of the past and present? Also, what insights might this analysis provide for those who prepare and mentor beginning art teachers?

According to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), the need to think about care is pressing, given what might be described as the precarious state of a “present permeated by worries about the unraveling of life from all possible crisis fronts—environment, economy, values” (p. 8). She continues on by describing as well the slow, background violence (Nixon, 2011) that receives less attention, but that is pervasive, destroying “more fundamentally the very tissue of existence” (Puig de la Bellacasa, p. 8). Calling attention to slow violence highlights one aspect of the danger in viewing the condition of precarity as tied to surges in crises—as if the precarity exemplified by these crises is
a state of exception (Fragkou, 2019). Crises that arise in the context of schools, for example, are not exceptions; rather, they are produced from conditions of ongoing, slow violence in the form of systemic inequities and social, cultural, and political relations of power.

Further refuting the human propensity to view precarity as an exception, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015) instead recommends that we understand “current precarity as an earthwide condition” that allows us to acknowledge the indeterminate nature of experience and to take notice of aspects of life that go otherwise unnoticed (p. 4). Tsing encourages a commitment to fieldwork and observations aimed at taking notice of unpredictable, experiential encounters that defy the continuity and stability of the status quo—disturbances that, when viewed as ephemeral assemblages, might reveal the possibility of something new. While Tsing’s research provokes ephemeral assemblages and entanglements brought together at the intersections of capitalism, commerce, landscape, and society, in this paper my interest is in the happenings that emerge at the intersections of teaching, care, and the neoliberal contexts of US public schools, especially at the elementary level.

In my work mentoring beginning art teachers in recent years, I have experienced several encounters that have defied the continuity of my own understandings about what it means to care—for students in K-5 public schools and for the beginning art teachers working in those contexts. Arguing that significant encounters with care often go unnoticed in a US educational system largely defined by a neoliberal agenda (Atkinson, 2018), in this article I explore such encounters as disturbances that might reveal the nuances and intricacies of the entanglements at work. Through this exploration, I aim to show that these caring entanglements are, in consequential ways, run through with precarity—not only as an existential condition of life, but as a specific set of social, cultural, political, and material relations that produce an unequal distribution of both precarity and care, especially along the lines of gender, class, and race. In order to theorize this perspective of precarity further, I draw on the work of Judith Butler (2004, 2009, 2012) and other feminist scholars (Fisher, 2011; Fragkou, 2019; Lorey, 2015) who have built on her work.

I begin by reviewing literature relevant to the neoliberal agenda of education in the US and feminist conceptualizations of care, both past and present. Next, I move toward describing the details of my encounters with care in the cases of both Lauren and Casey by first situating those encounters in the context of precarity (Butler, 2004, 2009, 2012). Then, after analyzing each set of encounters with regards to both the conditions of precarity and the consequential effects produced, I conclude by offering provocations for how those who support beginning art teachers might, given the earth-wide and school-specific conditions of precarity, prepare them to navigate the complexities of caring relations in schools.

**Why Take Notice of Care?**

**The Neoliberal Agenda of US Education**

At times, the topic of care has been at the forefront of research and theory in education, having undergone particularly productive scrutiny by feminist scholars (e.g. Collins, 1991; Fisher & Tronto, 1990;
Gilligan, 1982; Grumet, 1988; Noddings, 1984, 2002; Walkerdine, 1986). However, in contemporary K-12 school contexts, care—as both disposition and practice (Tronto, 1993), and as embodied, affective, and emotional (Zembylas et al., 2014)—seems to go largely under-recognized and under-theorized as the swiftly moving current of the accountability culture carries on with force, leaving little time to notice much else. According to Dennis Atkinson (2018), the neo-liberal agenda of education in both England and the United States conditions teachers and students in schools to govern themselves according to standards of “economic ambition and competition” (p.15). Adherence to these standards, then, results in teachers and students who follow highly prescribed ways of being that are “constructed through the signifiers of performance, assessment, progress and achievement, which anticipate known pedagogic subjects (teachers and learners)” (Atkinson, 2018, p. 15). Within this context, the focus on forward-moving progress toward known goals is strong, and thus “it may be the case that there is an inherent blindness in education to the untimeliness of events” (Atkinson, 2018. p. 3) that do not fit these neo-liberal rhythms of progress. In the case of my experiences with mentoring new teachers, events marked by care often fall into this category of untimely events.

Concurring with an inherent blindness toward care in schools, in the June 30th, 2019 special issue of Gender and Education titled “Picturing Care: Reframing Gender, Race, and Educational Justice,” one of the co-editors Wendy Lutrell (2019) describes the effects of a neo-liberal accountability culture that has “erased the humanity and personal integrity of all that happens in school settings” in favor of quantitative assessments (p. 564). Within this climate, Lutrell explains that “Practices of care defy simple categorization and cannot be rendered as neutral ‘data points’” (p. 564). Thus, while practices, emotions, and affects associated with care are always present in schools and in the experiences of teachers, they run alongside accountability practices that continue to hold them at bay, reifying the subordinate value of care and dismissing caring relations that deserve attention.

**Prevailing Boundaries that Define Care**

In Joan Tronto’s (1993) landmark book Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for Care, she points out that “[s]ince our society treats public accomplishment, rationality, and autonomy as worthy qualities, care is devalued insofar as it embodies their opposites”—that is, traditional conceptualizations of care have been connected with privacy, emotion, and the needy (Tronto, 1993, p. 117). In part for this reason, Tronto argues that previous attempts by feminist authors to advocate for the importance of care by grounding their arguments in women’s morality have been largely ineffective. For example, authors such as Acker, (1995-1996), Noddings (1992), and others (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Lyons, 1983) were increasingly “disturbed at the privileging of men’s experiences in studies of ethical decision making, identity development, and modes of learning,” and proposed that “women’s ways” (Acker, 1995-1996), such as a strong ethic of care and a preference for connectedness (relationships), should take center stage. Noddings (1992) argued for care as a centerpiece of school reform efforts, suggesting that “Our aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people” (p. xiv). This establishes care as tied to women’s morality—the notion that
caring dispositions and practices that have been traditionally associated with women, and particularly mothers. (Collins, 1998; Grumet, 1988) have something significant to offer to society as a whole. However, Tronto explains that this approach by Noddings (1992) and others has not been able to disrupt or redraw the moral boundaries that have excluded women from fully participating in public life in the first place. Likewise, any corresponding attempt to alter the value of, or recognition for, care in society has also been thwarted by prevailing moral boundaries shaped by power structures, political contexts, and widely accepted social values.

According to Tronto (1993), prevailing moral boundaries include: (1) the boundary between morality and politics that requires them to be completely separate notions, with one maintaining superiority over the other; (2) the “moral point of view” boundary that maintains morality as informed by reason and removed from intrusions of context or emotion, and thus moral actors as detached and autonomous, and; (3) the boundary between public and private life, which in Western thought has positioned women in the private sphere (pp. 6-11). These moral boundaries form a set of norms that function to privilege some ideas of morality and exclude others. In the case of an ethics of care, the conventional association of care with morality versus politics, women versus men (thus private versus public), dependence versus autonomy, and emotion versus reason has continually positioned care as something easily contained by prevailing moral boundaries, thus limiting its transformative potential.

Tronto (1993) makes the point that care, as associated with women’s morality, does not fit the goals of a capitalist society focused on rationality, individual accomplishment, and autonomy and thus continues to be dismissed as ultimately insignificant. This argument might also explain why care continues to be devalued in school contexts that have similar goals. For example, pervasive images and discourses of teaching are premised on the notion that teachers are autonomous subjects free from the complexities of context and circumstance (Britzman, 2003). And, as previously discussed, the neo-liberal accountability culture of schools requires teachers to embody the pursuit of “economic ambition and competition” (Atkinson, 2018, p. 15). And yet, while there seems to be no room for care to matter within these prevailing norms, Deborah Britzman (2003) points out that, paradoxically, dominant stereotypes also construct teachers as the ultimate, selfless care-givers. For women teachers in particular, “good teachers” are also expected to possess the qualities of the “good woman”—“self-sacrificing kind, overworked, underpaid, and holding an unlimited reservoir of patience” (p. 29). Thus, teachers are caught in a contradictory context in which they are expected to be ambitious, autonomous achievers as evidenced through quantifiable data and performance measures, and simultaneously self-sacrificing care-givers despite the fact that care is ultimately not valued as a measurable achievement. Here again, even if efforts were made to acknowledge the value of care, if those efforts were bound by the limits of care as a moral virtue tied to “women’s ways,” emotion, privacy, and dependence, as in the work of Noddings (1992), they would not have enough force to affect change. According to Tronto (1993), while these authors made eloquent efforts to center care as a virtue,
they have ultimately “been unable to show a convincing way of turning these virtues into a realistic approach to the kinds of problems that caring will confront in the real world” (p. 161).

**Alternative Conceptualizations of Care**

The conceptualization of care in what is often termed relational feminism (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2002) has focused on care as an individual virtue expressed through dyadic relationships between a care-giver and a care-receiver, such as a mother and child or teacher and student. However, authors such as Tronto (1993; 2013) and Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) suggest a move away from such individual or dyadic theories of care and toward an understanding of care as “a ‘species activity’ with ethical, social, political, and cultural implications” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 3). In Fisher and Tronto’s (1990) oft-quoted definition of care, for example, they theorize it as:

*a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live it in as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” (p. 40).*

Fisher and Tronto’s definition of care thus goes well beyond the dyadic relationship and even goes beyond the human to include non-human animals and the environment, emphasizing what Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) refers to as a “key theme in feminist ethics, an emphasis on interconnection and interdependency” (p. 4). By highlighting the fundamental interdependency of more-than-human entanglements, these authors suggest that care *must* be present in the web of life in order for living to be possible. In addition, by moving care beyond the limits of the individual and positioning it as an activity that is necessary to live in our world “as well as possible,” Fisher and Tronto (1990) aimed to emphasize that care is defined culturally, and functions socially and politically. Tronto’s (1993) further efforts to position care as a universal aspect of life also aimed to highlight how care is often inadequate, as it is situated within the “inequitable distribution of power, resources, and privilege” (p. 111). Tronto suggests that only if we move away from care as associated with women’s morality and toward a recognition of care as an ethic with political import, can we harness the capacity for care to function as a strategic concept that can contribute to a more democratic, more just, and more humane society.

**Resonances between Care and Precarity**

Three key aspects of the reconceptualization of care offered by Puig de la Bellacasa (2017), Tronto (1993), and Fisher and Tronto (1990), include: (a) the interdependency of humans and non-humans in a web of life that requires care, (b) the recognition that care and care work are distributed inequitably through relations of power and privilege, and (c) the suggestion that care can and should be harnessed for ethical and political efforts toward justice. Notably, these same key aspects can be found in the feminist scholarship that explores precarity for its ethical and political implications. For example, interdependency is exemplified by Butler’s (2009) description of precariousness as “a feature of all life” (p. 25) in that, as human beings, “we are, however distinct, also bound to one another and to living
processes that exceed human form” (2012, p. 141). In this way, Butler suggests we are socially vulnerable, both exposed to and responsible for others. However, Butler (2012) also acknowledges that a view of precarity as merely a shared condition of all humans risks a return to “an uncritical universal humanism” (Fragkou, 2019) that does not go far enough to recognize the way power actually works through precarity. Therefore, as with care, Butler (2012) explains precarity as encompassing the unequal distribution of vulnerability, whereby social, political, and governmental efforts deem some lives more worthy of protection and more grievable (Butler, 2009) than others. According to Butler (2009), “Precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death” (p. 25). And lastly, in her foreword to Isabel Lorey’s (2015) book State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious, Butler describes how Lorey dismantles notions of precarity as a politics of victimization in which vulnerability is viewed as an imposed weakness and site of non-agency, and instead asks us “to consider those forms of political mobilization that rally precarity against those regimes that seek to augment their power to manage and dispose of populations—in other words, precarity as activism” (p. 14). Thus, the feminist scholars I’ve identified in this article have theorized both care and precarity as a call to action—a potential way forward toward more just and equitable forms of life.

Beginning Art Teachers and Encounters with Care

In what follows, I take a first step towards carrying out this call to action by further exploring the care-related encounters that emerged in my work with Casey and Lauren. My goal in describing these encounters is not merely to draw attention to moments where care is a pressing concern for teachers or mentors, nor is it to suggest that we simply need to care more for students in schools or for beginning art teachers. Rather, following the motivations of Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) I agree that it is more productive to ask:

...not ‘how can we care more?’ but instead to ask what happens to our work when we pay attention to moments where the question of ‘how to care?’ is insistent but not easily answerable. In this way, we use care as an analytic or provocation, more than a predetermined set of affective practices. (Atkinson-Graham et al., 2015, p. 739)

For both me and the beginning art teachers I worked with, the question of ‘how to care’ was certainly not easily answerable. In fact, the exploration of caring encounters that formed the basis for this article became even more complex as I began to take notice of how the gatherings of human bodies, material contexts, relations of power, circulations of affect, discourses of neoliberalism, histories of care, and racial injustices (and on and on) are entangled in conditions of precarity—thus firmly situating care within precarity. Therefore, in the following descriptions, I intentionally draw attention to a multiplicity of factors and forces that shape caring encounters. My aim is to show how, for example, things like the physical spaces travelled by teachers, the norms of discipline and behavior imposed on students, the neoliberal focus on performance and accountability, the norms and standards of curriculum, the lives of students in and outside of schools, and the
emotions, affects, and practices produced in these encounters are intertwined in relations of precarity—relations that both bring care to the fore and demonstrate the conditions and effects of its inequitable distribution. These are the complex encounters to which I now turn.

Lauren

Lauren was teaching in a large county school system where she was an itinerant art teacher. Three days of the week Lauren was at Franklin Elementary School, which she described as having a low socio-economic status. The other two days of the week, Lauren taught at Briarwood and Stratford, which she described as affluent schools. Because Lauren was teaching in schools that had a stark disparity in socio-economic levels, she often commented on how the school differences impacted her teaching. In our first session, which took place in November, Lauren explained:

My Monday through Wednesday school is [Franklin], which has a high poverty rate...they get breakfast at school, and they get lunch at school. It’s like, sometimes that’s what they get. They maybe don’t go home and eat. So, I teach the same lessons there as I do here (Briarwood)...I’m teaching in the same exact way, the exact same stuff, like same samples, same PowerPoint, same everything. But I don’t have that discipline problem here that I do there.... it’s just a completely different, you know, perspective on what I’m supposed to be teaching. Because here (Briarwood) it’s super academically-driven; and there (Franklin) it’s [about] developing character... So, it’s just TOTALLY different. Like, I’m teaching the same lessons [at both schools], but I’m teaching through the arts totally opposite things” (Lauren, personal communication, November, 13, 2013).

This notion of “teaching through art” was something that came up in our second group workshop (January 18, 2015) as well. During that workshop, Lauren and I had the following dialogue:

Lauren: 
I find that I’m teaching kids more than I’m teaching art to kids—[that’s] how I think I’m working. I always wanted to be a teacher but wasn’t sure what I wanted to teach. Art is secondary to the teaching in my practice. I try to teach through art—is [sic] always how I’ve thought of it. I don’t necessarily teach art, but I’m teaching through art.

Researcher: 
What would you say you’re teaching?

Lauren: 
I think I teach a lot of character development kind of stuff, and personal goal-setting and problem-solving, and things like that through art. And, I of course include all of art history and all of the stuff that you’re supposed to do. But. I think a lot of it is also teaching social [skills] and how to be a progressive person and honest person in today’s world.

Teaching as an Act of Care

It seemed that Lauren saw her commitment to teaching kids through art as part of her overall interest in caring for her students. Lauren described having a strong bond with her classes, making sure to give the kids at Franklin a lot of hugs because they seemed to crave attention. By the time of our second workshop in January, we were having a conversation
about how the teachers’ perceptions of “What makes a good art curriculum?” had changed as in-service teachers, and Lauren responded, “what undergraduate courses don’t teach is “how to care for kids” (personal communication, January 18, 2015).

Lauren’s creative practices as an art-on-a-cart teacher could also be interpreted as a form of care. For example, because she felt bad that students did not have an opportunity to get up and walk from their homeroom to an art room, she would often start her class sessions by having students walk out into the hallway, making a big loop before re-entering the classroom as art students. In addition, Lauren would integrate movement in her younger classes by enticing them with dance parties during the last few minutes of class. Lauren even mentioned that she was considering incorporating some yoga in her classes.

In relation to the other beginning art teachers in the study, Lauren was one of the more progressive in terms of her approaches to art curriculum, and this became more evident as the year went on. Lauren was interested in “trying to expose the students to new art materials and ways of thinking about art and their connection to it” (Lauren, written reflection, November 13, 2014). For example, Lauren had inherited a free set of plastic tubes/tunnels that could be combined together, and on free art days she encouraged the students to play with them and think about how they could be considered sculpture. Along similar lines, she had puppets that she used to talk about performance art. Despite Lauren’s earlier description of teaching the same lessons across multiple schools, in the spring Lauren described doing several projects, like one focused on graffiti art, that were developed with student input. She said she often previewed project ideas with her students to get their feedback and determine which ideas they were excited about. She also encouraged students to bring popular culture interests into their work in order to make the projects more engaging.

Given the range of experiences Lauren provided her students, it was easy to forget that she was an art-on-a-cart teacher. Lauren described often having only five minutes to transition between classes, sometimes having to use an elevator to get to her next class—but this didn’t prevent her from doing clay projects, for example, with her students. On more than one occasion, Lauren said she never wanted her students to feel like they were missing out because they had an art teacher on a cart. She said, “I want my kids to be pumped. ‘Yes, I have Miss M! We got the girl on a cart! Finally!’” (Lauren, personal communication, March 15, 2015).

### Noticing Inequities

Lauren was, in fact, perceptive of the inequitable differences of her school contexts. Lauren noticed the differences in resources between her schools early on in the school year and even tried to force a school representative to discuss the issue at a professional development session by posing the question, “How do you equitably divide resources within the county among different schools?” Lauren had noted, for example, that the school where she needed more support for disruptive students in the classroom or students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) had markedly fewer paraprofessionals than the affluent schools. According to Lauren, Franklin had approximately eight...
paraprofessionals for about 800 students and the paraprofessionals mainly covered things like lunch or recess duty rather than helping in classrooms. Alternatively, Briarwood had paraprofessionals working with high needs children in the classroom. Human resources were not the only thing that was inequitable, however. Lauren also said that Franklin was a physically run-down school, and, during the year of the study, mold had been found in the first-grade wing. According to Lauren, school administration was not supportive under the circumstances even though teachers and students were becoming ill. For that reason, by spring the entire group of first-grade teachers—eight teachers total—decided they were leaving the school the following school year. This was in addition to the already high turnover rate of teachers at Franklin.

Although Lauren picked up on the differences between her schools and the inequitable distribution of resources, she didn’t necessarily make a connection between these factors and the ways school policies and procedures were implemented in the schools or the ways these concrete realities shaped her practices. For example, moral behavior initiatives and programs brought an emphasis on behavior to the fore across the schools, but Franklin was the only school that implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS; https://www.pbis.org/), a program that is based on a rhetoric of positive rewards while also generating metrics of discipline. However, Lauren attributed these practices to Franklin’s overall concern for equitable practices and to students’ challenging behaviors rather than any larger socio-cultural issues. In addition, Lauren struggled throughout the year with how to handle classroom management at Franklin. She implemented some unique strategies of her own, such as making calls to parents to let them know about their child’s positive behavior. But, she also developed some stricter discipline strategies with other teachers, such as deciding to implement book reports for students “who can’t handle learning by making art, but can learn by reading about art” (Lauren, personal communication, March 15, 2015).

**Casey**

The school where Casey was teaching was a K-5 charter school in a major city. Students attending the school were chosen through a lottery system, with priority given to children living in the city school district where the school was located. As Casey explained, students did not generally live in the area where the school was located but were bused in primarily from areas of the city that were identified as wage-poor communities. The funding and charter contract for Casey’s school were tied to their use of a specific curriculum, which included a detailed sequence of lesson plans for the visual arts. The curriculum was designed to build content from year to year, but Casey’s students had not had a consistent art teacher for several years. In fact, Casey was the first art teacher to last more than a few months; three previous art teachers had quit after as long as three months and as little as one day. According to Casey, the most recent art teacher gave the students coloring pages every class period.

**Curriculum as Care**

Casey noticed early in the school year that the art curriculum was not relevant to her students, so she worked hard to develop more engaging lessons despite
challenging circumstances. Casey had 45 minutes for her classes, with no transition time between them—despite the fact that she had to travel on an elevator between four levels of the building. As an art-on-a-cart teacher, she often entered classrooms where students’ behaviors were already at an escalated level, which meant she ended up using her class time to try to de-escalate the situations. She described entering a second-grade classroom where, even before she had a chance to get settled, a student picked up a chair and hit another student with it, breaking the other child’s nose. Outbreaks like this were not uncommon. Casey described incident after incident of students breaking out into fights, hiding from teachers, or having emotional meltdowns. As Casey expressed, “There’s a rough moment in almost every class” (Casey, personal communication, November 20, 2014).

As the year progressed, Casey seemed to take more and more risks beyond the given curriculum. When I visited in March, she told me about a lesson focused on the work of Jacob Lawrence, describing, “we talked about what it means to be proud of your neighborhood even when it’s a really hard place to live” (Casey, personal communication, March 12, 2015). When some of the students were making jokes about being poor, she used it as an opportunity to share about her own life growing up poor in the foster care system, and even being homeless. Casey explained:

A lot of them have that, but they’re embarrassed about it. I’m trying to make it a place where we can talk about that. We’ve had some really great conversations about where they live. A lot of them live in [area of the city], a really bad area. It’s hard. Or they live in [another area]. Even being able to tell them [that area is a walk in the park compared to Harlem, especially Harlem in the 1940s as a black person who had no rights. Making them realize that they really do end up saying it with their artwork. Then they did a torn paper cityscape of their city and their neighborhood and we did some drawings. I was able to teach them some stuff about landscape and about foreground and background. We threw that stuff in there, but then also making it relevant. That was really great.” (Casey, personal communication, March 12, 2015).

I also noticed that by spring she was adjusting her art practices in a way that fit more closely with her own philosophy of art education and with what she saw as the needs of her students. Casey’s philosophy, a visual representation of which can be seen in Figure 2, described creating a safe place for students. As an extension of her philosophy, Casey began giving her students more time to free-draw in sketchbooks. At our March meeting, she explained:

I feel like that is a way for them to really tell me what’s going on. Yeah, it’s art therapy! I’m not an art therapist and I don’t try to be but I know it gives them a way to talk about it and tell us what’s going on. I try to make it so that our projects give them some way to express themselves, not obviously crafts. I think it’s just a little bit more of me being like screw the curriculum—‘Here, look. We talked about it (the curriculum). Now do this.’” (Casey, personal communication, March 12, 2015)
In addition to giving the students more opportunities for self-expression, Casey pushed for her students to experience art beyond the planned curriculum in a variety of other ways. Casey described teaching her classes in the school’s yoga studio when the opportunity arose. Because the yoga studio was set up much like a dance studio, she set up a variety of stations in the room—collaborative drawings, small-scale and large-scale drawings, drawings on the mirrors with dry-erase markers—all of which allowed the students the opportunity to move freely, lie on the floor, and spread out in the room. Casey said her students absolutely loved it and she had no behavior problems during those classes. The other experience Casey worked hard to provide her fifth-grade students, in particular, was field trips. Throughout the year, Casey researched local gallery exhibits within walking distance of the school in the hopes of taking advantage of the school’s location in a cultural hub. By the time of our last workshop together, Casey said she had finally been able to take the students on more than one field trip and she was amazed at how well they responded. She implored the students to be good representatives of the school and make her proud, and they did just that. After a tough year with the fifth grade, she finally saw a different side of them.

School Practices

Because of the student behavior issues the school struggled with, there were numerous forms of behavior initiatives, school procedures, and teacher training programs in place. The school emphasized Covey’s “The Seven Habits of a Happy Child” as well as five main behavior reminders such as “Raise your hand to sit or stand.” In addition, Casey said each teacher had their own management system in place such as ClassDojo, which allowed multiple teachers to award points to students through an app, or a strategy where the students in the class were all assigned jobs such as police officer, secretary, or custodian. Despite all of the programs in place, discipline issues still existed. Although there was a school behavioral specialist, teachers were told he was to be contacted as a last resort. In the midst of any incident, teachers were to begin by using the training they had received on how to deescalate volatile incidents. In addition, teachers had received restraint training that instructed them to, when necessary, approach students from behind and wrap their arms around them to keep them immobilized. Once behavioral events were resolved, teachers had to go through a series of steps to report each incident. Casey dreaded having to recount incidents
to the behavior specialist, for example, stating, “in some of the situations I feel so terrible about it, because I just feel like a failure” (Casey, personal communication, November 20, 2014).

**Teaching from a place of vulnerability**

With Casey, more than any of the other participants, our time together always left me feeling the emotional weight of her experiences. Similar to Lauren, she proclaimed that art-making was often secondary in her teaching, stating, “Students’ lives are more important to me than the art that they make” (Casey, personal communication, April 25, 2015). Casey often shared with me some of her most difficult experiences with students. Casey described one student who often had to be carried onto the bus because she would throw herself onto the ground and cry that she didn’t want to go home to her mom. One night, Casey stayed late for a Parent Advisory Council meeting, where the family showed up ten minutes before the meeting was over. When Casey asked the kids what they had been doing since they left school, they said, “sitting in the car” (Casey, personal communication, March 12, 2015). That night at the school, Casey said she sat with the students until 7:45pm to help them do their homework and gave them granola bars in case they wouldn’t get to eat that night. Casey said she went home in tears that day.

In the handmade book (Figure 1) Casey made at the end of our year together, she emphasized the quote, “teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability” (Palmer, 2017), which demonstrated just how tightly her experiences of teaching were tied to her commitment to her students. She ended one section of the book with the word “love,” because she got so many notes from students that ended that way. Her final touch was her response back to her students, stating, “I love you,” because as she told the group in the workshop, “I do love my students” (Casey, personal communication, April 25, 2015).

**Noticing Complex Entanglements of Care**

The encounters with care that surfaced in my work with Casey and Lauren functioned as disturbances (Tsing, 2015) that unsettled my understandings about what it means to care as an art teacher in K-5 schools. By pursuing these disturbances as provocations through the lens of feminist theories of both care and precarity, I now see more deeply and with more complexity the complicated entanglements in which these beginning are teachers were situated. And, while there may be other aspects of these entanglements that are worthy of attention, I want to focus here on what I see as a major nexus of paradoxical tension that is generated within these entanglements. Namely, that these beginning art teachers and their students are held to, and blinded by, the neoliberal expectations of education in the US, which include a racially discriminatory emphasis on “security” (Fisher, 2011; Lorey, 2015) in school spaces, while simultaneously experiencing both the precariousness and precarity of life in and outside of schools. Lauren’s and Casey’s encounters with care demonstrate how neoliberal agendas of education that prioritize the market values of competition, individuality, and “security” create a spectacle of illusion that refuses to acknowledge the “differential distribution of care and injurability that frame the opportunities and access kids have to live and learn within and beyond the site of school” (Fisher, 2011, p. 385). Neoliberalism attempts to construct
teachers as autonomous workers, whose primary focus is on individual performance as demonstrated through the accomplishments and regulated behaviors of their students; yet, teachers’ encounters with care in K-5 schools are inherently bound up in a network of interdependency and vulnerability that cannot be separated from the conditions of precarity that define students’ lives. As Butler (2012) explains, “the life of the other, the life that is not our own, is also our life, since whatever sense ‘our’ life has is derived precisely from this sociality, the being already, and from the start, dependent on a world of others, constituted in and by a social world” (pp. 140-141). This is the condition in which the bodies of teachers and the bodies of students are both vulnerable to and responsible for the other—an ethical relation that is not chosen, but that is the condition of being in a social world. Thus, the unequal distribution of precarity that produces conditions in which students do not have an adequate supply of food when they leave school, do not have enough paraprofessionals in their school, or are heavily surveilled through codes of conduct in school cannot be thought or experienced apart from what it means to care in schools. And, this reality produces affects, emotions, and behaviors—on the part of the teachers and the students—that exist despite the unwillingness of schools to recognize them.

As Tronto (1993) pointed out, the fact that care is covered over by agendas such as capitalism and neoliberalism is what allows pervasive inequities in caring practices and resources to persist—in other words, creating an even further state of precarity. In fact, a blindness toward care contributes to conditions in which teachers like Lauren and Casey might unknowingly perform versions of care—whether their own or those encouraged through school practices—that actually sustain inequities and racial discrimination despite what they believe are good intentions. Therefore, in these next sections, I first elaborate on the ways that Casey and Lauren experienced encounters with care that went largely unrecognized, especially as they were situated within contexts of isolation that speak to a gendered history of women teachers and care work. Then, I move on to demonstrate how Casey and Lauren’s unrecognized encounters with care were further situated within social discourses and institutional systems of racial discrimination that perpetuate harmful and inequitable practices in education.

Caring in Isolation

Both Lauren’s and Casey’s encounters with care, and the emotions and affects produced, were largely experienced in isolation. While Casey and Lauren were not isolated in a single classroom like many of their elementary school counterparts, their positions as art-on-a-cart teachers left them isolated in other ways. Once they entered a classroom, they were on their own with their students. In addition, Casey was the only art teacher in her school, having no other colleagues to rely on for day-to-day happenings; and Lauren was itinerant, traveling between three schools, therefore experiencing relative autonomy. According to Tronto (1993), the private arena of care is commonly associated with a women’s morality approach, which positions women in the private realm of the home—or the classroom—for example. In Sandra Acker’s (1995-1996) comprehensive review “Gender and Teachers’ Work,” she describes how the identity of elementary school teachers has often been associated with mothering due to the way “Teachers spend long
hours with ‘their’ children, as mothers do with theirs, often in relative isolation from other adults” (p. 121). According to James (2010), the factory model of the teacher as isolated in a classroom with students likely contributes to the ways teachers define themselves as carers (p. 531). Yet, she also points out that this model, combined with the notion of ‘teacher as mother,’ can result in teachers feeling they need to take on the responsibility for all of their students’ lives (James, 2010)—unmanageable for teachers of 25 to 30 students, let alone art teachers who see around 300 to 900 students each week. Casey’s experiences certainly demonstrated the immensity of the responsibility she felt for her students, which resulted in many tearful breakdowns. Yet, Casey’s raw emotions had no place in the context of the school. In fact, she said she vowed never to let her students see her cry (personal communication, March 12, 2015).

Given the historical associations of women with care work, it is no coincidence that the workforce of teachers in the US is primarily comprised of women, who are tasked with being compliant workers amid precarious contexts that leave them isolated and with limited support or resources. It is also no coincidence that the schools in which teachers experience the most intense emotions, affects, and propensities toward care are supposed to be serving students of color from wage-poor communities, and that those schools have the least amount of resources. These are realities that further reveal the politics of care (Tronto, 2015)—in terms of who is expected to care and who is worthy of care—and thus inequitable distribution of precarity.

Entanglements of Whiteness, Deficit Thinking, Systemic Inequities, and School Practices

As I mentioned in an earlier section, in contexts where white women are teaching students of color, there is a propensity for the teachers to operate from a whiteness ideology (French, 2019) by taking up a deficit model of thinking, viewing students as “lacking” in a variety of ways that might be “fixed” by the teacher (Emdin, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This stems from the fact that whiteness operates as the “axis around which other races are constructed in hierarchical relations of power and material and psychological privilege” (Spillane, 2015 drawing on Haney Lopez, 2006 and Wildman, 2000). Deficit thinking through the lens of a whiteness ideology could have certainly contributed to Lauren’s and Casey’s feelings of responsibility. This seems especially likely in the way that Lauren described her responsibility for teaching character development and how to be “an honest person in today’s world” to students at Franklin.

While Lauren did notice the inequitable distribution of resources across her schools, she did not have the critical knowledge necessary to notice how those inequities also played out in her own forms of care for her students or in other school practices, such as behavior management. For example, of the three schools where Lauren taught, only Franklin implemented a PBIS program. Was it determined, then, that Franklin students needed this kind of program more than the students at the other schools? Likewise, while Casey seemed less prone to deficit thinking—perhaps because of the unique perspective afforded by her own life experiences—she also never identified

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1 A 2016 report by the National Center for Education Statistics found that 77% of teachers were female. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/Indicator_CLR/coe_clr_2019_05.pdf
her school’s approaches to student discipline, a multi-faceted approach to controlling student behaviors and bodies, as problematic.

Despite both Casey’s and Lauren’s authentic efforts to care for their students, mistakes were made and opportunities lost—yet those mistakes were not merely a matter of individual concern. Casey and Lauren’s actions were situated within entanglements of social, cultural, and political relations that actively shape status quo norms and perceptions. And, those entanglements are indicative of educational inequities that have been firmly established over decades. For example, inequitable differences in the curriculum and procedures enacted in schools along the lines of race and class are well documented in the literature (Anyon, 1980; Brownell, 2017). As early as 1980, Jean Anyon’s analysis of five elementary schools across various economic contexts demonstrated that the curriculum in working-class schools was procedural, while the curriculum in affluent schools was more self-directed and focused on developing students as leaders and thinkers. In a more recent example, Cassie Brownell (2017) described the stark contrast between her experiences teaching in Post-Katrina New Orleans in an ‘elite’ school comprised of a predominately white, wealthy student body and one situated in communities marked by poverty and comprised of a majority Black student population. After teaching for two years in the low-income school where “students were mandated to not only move in silent, gendered lines through the halls, but they were not even trusted to have toilet paper within the restrooms,” Brownell was shocked when she discovered students in grades one through seven in the elite school “were able to move freely about the campus, unsupervised, throughout the day” (p. 212).

Today we see PBIS programs, like the one in Lauren’s school, implemented nationwide, with over 25,000 schools using the program as of 2018 (https://www.pbis.org/about/about). PBIS programs have become accepted as a standard practice in schools. However, researchers Christopher Robbins and Serhiy Kovalchuk (2012) have suggested that behavior programs like PBIS actually “dovetail” with an educational system focused on metrics and criminalization of youth (p. 199). In addition, Robbins and Kovalchuk (2012) have found that programs like PBIS “preserve racial politics and racial order(ing) through the disproportionate use of discipline measures toward youth of color” (p. 207). And yet, like educational policies that are framed through a rhetoric that appeals to a sense of common good, PBIS is framed as emphasizing ‘positive behavior’ through rewards, thus making it difficult for most teachers to see its potential down sides. In fact, Lauren expressed appreciating the PBIS program at Franklin because it was a consistent approach throughout the entire school. PBIS might even be seen by many as a caring approach to student behavior and discipline.

The popularity and rhetoric of PBIS, along with the variety of other approaches to controlling student behavior in Casey’s schools, is intertwined with a broader interest in “child safety” (Giroux, 2009) and ideals of security produced through neoliberal governing (Lorey, 2015).

2 For example, consider the names of policies such as “No Child Left Behind” or the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009), which appeal to a sense of public good despite the actual practices which have produced, in many cases, the opposite of good outcomes.
According to Lorey (2015), "neoliberal governing proceeds primarily through social insecurity, through regulating the minimum of assurance while simultaneously increasing instability" (pp. 16-17). Lorey (2015) refers to this as precarization (which she distinguishes from precariousness and precarity), or a neoliberal state of living that emphasizes security while "requiring and inducing precarity as a mode of life" (Butler, 2015). Neoliberalism has generated public fear tied to the loss of security and order, and therefore presents the safety of the public as the primary motivation for citizens to govern themselves and for programs, policies, and tactics that guard public safety at all costs. Through this lens, programs like PBIS—or more to the extreme, the hiring of school resource officers in many schools—function as a means of safeguarding students by creating "safe" environments where rules are followed and punishments are distributed as deterrents. Yet, as in the case of PBIS, which students’ lives are made secure and which students’ lives are punished largely falls along the lines of income and race, with students from wage-poor communities and students of color being the most often punished (Fisher, 2011). And, at the same time, “money that would go to hiring competent teachers, investing in new technologies, and maintaining school infrastructures now goes to metal detectors, surveillance equipment, fencing, and the hiring of security guards” (Fisher, 2011, p. 381). This is the work of neoliberalism—that in the name of security, the distribution of funds and resources creates realities that offer “the minimum of assurance while simultaneously increasing instability” (Lorey, 2015, pp. 16-17). And, in this same context, emotions and affects are not seen as an indicator of care deficits or a lack of resources that make life livable across income and race. Instead, when outbursts of emotion and affect inevitably erupt from the conditions of slow violence (Nixon, 2011) taking place, those outbursts are considered a consequence of delinquent behavior or a psychological issue rather than a product of oppressive conditions (Fisher, 2011).

Given the pervasiveness of programs like PBIS and their intersection with a neoliberal emphasis on safety and security for a “common good,” it becomes possible to see how, particularly as beginning teachers, Casey and Lauren’s sense of “right” approaches to care get formed. Thus, while deficit thinking needs to be challenged at a personal level, beginning teachers would also benefit from recognizing how the underlying ideologies that contribute to notions of care grounded in deficit thinking are symptomatic of the precarity generated by a wide range of systemic inequities that impact school practices and students’ lives.

On Becoming Vulnerable and Taking Action: The Place of Care in Art Education

Through the encounters with care that came to light during my year of working with Casey and Lauren, I was—and perhaps they were—unpredictably transformed (Tsing, p. 46). According to Tsing (2015), “Unpredictable encounters transform us; we are not in control, even of ourselves. Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as our others” (p. 20). Much like Butler’s (2012) proposition that we are made vulnerable through our interdependency, Tsing (2015) describes these unpredictable encounters as predicated on vulnerability; in the
precarious present, we are unavoidably vulnerable. Vulnerability is, of course, not a desirable trait for teachers in most current educational contexts in the US where neoliberal discourses proclaim the individual teacher—in K-12 contexts as well as higher education—as a self-reliant contributor to the machine of progress and economic prosperity. Yet, encounters with care and the vulnerability-to-others they are capable of producing continue to surface despite “the simplifications of progress narratives” (p. 6)—which is precisely why these encounters and effects are worth noticing. As provocative disturbances, encounters with care create conditions to see, learn, understand, experience, and make something new from what some might describe as “the ruins” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Tsing, 2015) of education in the US.

A surprising finding from the experience of revisiting Casey’s and Lauren’s stories is that, despite claiming that art was secondary in their teaching practice, both of them made significant investments in forms of art curriculum and pedagogy that defied the status quo in their school contexts. Although I did not go into great detail in this article (see Hanawalt, 2018 for an in-depth discussion of accountability), the weight of the accountability culture was felt immensely in both of their contexts—whether through the teacher evaluation process in the case of Lauren, or the focus on tests and a mandated curriculum in Casey’s case. Yet despite their precarious positions, both of these beginning teachers were willing to challenge that culture through practices that give us a glimpse of what is possible if we position art as not secondary, but as central to an ethic of care as a political endeavor. Through Casey’s efforts, her students were not limited to a mandated art curriculum focused mainly on art created by white, European males. Rather, they had the opportunity to learn about artists relevant to them, and to experience embodied forms of artmaking in a yoga studio where they could move freely in ways uncommon to their school context. And, despite being challenged by student behaviors and feeling the pressure of surveillance by her new teacher mentor-as-evaluator, Lauren did not limit her students to art as a practice of following directions to make a pre-determined end product. Rather, she showed them how art could be performative, playful, and relevant to contemporary life. As Tsing (2015) articulates, precarious contexts make “it evident that indeterminacy also makes life possible.”

**Taking Action and the Role of Art/Education**

As Fisher and Tronto (1990) argue, care must be present in order to live in our world “as well as possible” (p. 40). Therefore, we might re-imagine what happens in both teacher preparation programs and K-12 schools in order to acknowledge the role of care as well as the conditions of precarity in which caring encounters occur. In fact, Fisher (2011) calls for a precarious pedagogy that entails both a recognition of pedagogy itself as precarious—occurring in relations of unpredictability and uncertainty, and also a recognition of the politically induced conditions that create inequitable distributions of precarity for students both in and out of schools. Here, Fisher drives home the point that pedagogy cannot be thought apart from the precarious conditions that define the concrete realities of students’ lives. And, she proposes that any form of education that aims to call itself “caring” or “democratic” must recognize the ways
both emotion and affect are produced through precarity (Fisher, 2011, pp. 419-420). Following Fisher’s proposition, what might become possible, for example, if pre-service teachers were taught to recognize precarity as the context in which we are interdependent and vulnerable to others, where emotions and affects are produced, and in which care is required? This investigation would include and require a study of the ways care and precarity are situated within neoliberalism and distributed inequitably in both schools and life, especially along the lines of gender, race, and class. The goal of such an investigation would not, however, be mere resilience (Butler et al., 2016)—preparing future art teachers to survive amid the realities of schools and their entanglements with students’ lives. Nor would it be to create a hierarchy of victimhood by determining which students are harmed the most and thereby essentializing their experiences or assuming non-agency (Fisher, 2011). Rather, the goal of this work would be to: (a) challenge the ways neoliberal agendas of education do cause harm by defining, derailing, and concealing both care and precarity (Fisher, 2011), and (b) develop the capacity for resistance (Butler et al., 2016) in order to take a stand and take action in ways that disrupt the wider hierarchies of power at play. And, this work would need to be supported during the early years of teaching, when beginning art teachers experience, in a particularly embodied way, the vulnerability and precariousness upon which teaching is predicated.

Though the pedagogical and curricular risks enacted by Lauren and Casey took place as acts of care within the isolated spaces of their art rooms, small gestures have the potential to become political. In her book on ecologies of precarity in twenty-first century theatre, Marissia Fragkou (2019) offers examples of how theatre productions in the United Kingdom have been addressing precarity, and, in the case of several examples, she argues that glitches or hiccups can “turn into small political gestures that disturb conventional frames of recognizing precarious lives” (110). Imagine, for example, how Lauren’s and Casey’s gestures could have carried more weight if they had understood the precarity of the entanglements in which they were situated. Further, art educators in higher education and K-12 contexts might consider how artistic practices and processes might function as both small gestures and active attempts for larger-scale disruption. In a book edited by Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay (2016) called Vulnerability in Resistance, the authors present a collection of chapters that offer some examples, such as artistic interventions, mobilizations, and community and school projects that take up various forms of resistance. A common understanding that underlies all of these approaches is that the aim is not to “end the threat of precarity”—which might only be imagined through civil wars or a breakdown in society, but to locate “where, within these governing mechanisms, cracks and potentials for resistance are to be found” (Lorey, 2015).

Concluding Provocations

Given that my intention was never to offer suggestions for how to care more but to more deeply consider “how to care” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) amid precarious conditions—as art teachers and as art teacher mentors, I end here with a few questions for further provocation:

How might we move from a dyadic conception of care between teacher
and student, to a focus on care that is grounded in more-than-human interdependence? In other words, what would care look like if it went beyond teacher-student or mentor-mentee? How would the inequitable distribution of care and precarity in the lives of students be considered? How might we attend to the role of emotion and affect in the lives of both teachers and students? How might this lead to more just forms of art/education, whether through curriculum, pedagogy, or social action?

What are the current neoliberal discourses that are working through teacher preparation programs and that may be blinding those of us in higher education to encounters with care that are critical for us to imagine alternatives? What do certification exams and edTPA make us blind to, for example? How will art teacher preparation programs respond to the move to trace new teacher “success” back to their undergraduate programs? How will students in K-12 schools be served or not served as a result of these accountability tactics? Where will care fit in?

What can art as a political form of care do? How might we further consider the role of artistic practices, such as social practice or artistic interventions in the public realm, that rely on interdependence and ambiguity (Hegeman et al., 2020)? How might we engage students (K-12 and pre-service) in these artistic practices as a means of foregrounding both care and precarity?

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the author:

Christina Hanawalt
University of Georgia
hanawalt@uga.edu
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