Growth, Learning, Assessment, and Assessment
Editorial: Growth, Learning, Assessment, and Assessination

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In thinking about “Growth, Learning, Assessment, and Assessination,” this year’s theme for Volume 34 of The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education (JSTAE), I am compelled to reflect on the past academic year. While undergoing the initial stages of my extensive tenure application process, I found myself writing narrative after narrative in an effort to encapsulate the seemingly unquantifiable service requirements of my faculty position. Needless to say, most institutions recognize and acknowledge publications, presentations, and exhibitions as ‘legitimate’ scholarly production for art education faculty. However, I found making the case for all of the “other” important things that take up so much of my time each week more difficult. In the meantime, Syracuse University adapts to changes as our former Chancellor, Nancy Cantor, leaves behind an unprecedented legacy of supporting and promoting community engaged scholarship while the new Chancellor ushers in his vision. Cantor gained notoriety through her widely recognized and critiqued mission, Scholarship in Action when she emphasized the role of the university as a public good. However, Cantor is not alone in redefining and assessing unconventional forms of scholarship. Imagining America, a consortium of universities and organizations dedicated to advancing the public and civil purposes of humanities, arts and design, formed a Tenure Team Initiative (TTI) some time ago, to change policies, procedures, and criteria for assessing faculty candidates for tenure and promotion in order to free faculty “from the impediments of undertaking publicly engaged art and scholarship, and to ensure such work is formally recognized as a legitimate scholarly and creative activity” (Ellison & Eatman, 2008). Imagining America remains on the forefront, posing questions regarding the assessment of faculty who deviate from conventional definitions of scholarship. While I try to make sense of the tenure process, and as the university faces its transition, edTPA, a new multiple-measure assessment system for evaluating student teachers, is piloted and implemented throughout the United States and Common Core Standard debates continue across the country. For better or for worse, assessment seems to continually impact many of us on the personal, local, state, and national levels.

Assessment is not just a hot topic, it is gaining momentum, and is arguably dictating the culture of many of our institutions. Therefore, it was no great surprise when the benefits and detriments of assessment in art education emerged as one of the top journal theme options during The Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education’s annual meeting at the National Art Education Association’s convention last spring. Certainly our chosen theme is timely, and the voices in this volume provide a diversity of perspectives and lenses for examining and deconstructing assessment on multiple fronts.

My lingering thoughts on Cantor’s tenure and the work of Imagining America bring to mind Civic Design, a practice of connecting multiple institutions and resources to focus on the common good outcomes of our communities. The practice of Civic Design recognizes the ever-changing nature of our society and the downfalls of affixing ourselves to single modes or approaches. This approach contrasts with the conventions of
management where societal challenges are viewed as problems for individual entities to repair or fix (Garvis, 2012). In his 1994 book, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-made Landscapes*, social critic James Kunstler stresses the lack of Civic Design and social responsibility as he critiques the historical evolution of America’s suburbs. Kunstler notes that the misallocation of resources, exclusion of voices, and general neglect of human needs results in places no one cares about. I find parallels between Kunstler’s observation and Charles M. Payne’s (2008) description of urban school reform history, in which schools are filled with apathetic teachers and students. Passion and commitment can be restored when voices are included and responsibilities are shared. Payne (2008) dissuades us from mandating full participation but suggests that we cultivate the efforts of those who are open to change with hopes of making incremental progress and eventually winning over the culture. The essential premise behind Civic Design is that it requires openness to possibilities while forward movement is achieved collaboratively by weaving tools together. I am of the mindset that our approach to assessment should stem from the same convictions.

Unsuspecting discoveries are often made when we move beyond the one-size fits all mentality and examine challenges and assets through multiple lenses and perspectives. For years I was ashamed to admit that my S.A.T scores did not meet the minimum admission requirements for any of the small colleges and state universities to which I applied. However, there were a few divergent thinkers who were convinced that my visual arts portfolio evidenced that I possessed attributes that I had yet to fully cultivate. My advocates (mentors and art teachers) saw my potential for leadership and academic success long before I did. They witnessed my consistent pursuit of ideas as my curiosities expanded in the art room; a place where my achievements or abilities could not be measured through a Scantron. Without my teachers’ keen insights, I could have easily fallen through the cracks as many surely have. JSTAE Volume 34 speaks directly to the aforementioned cracks and blind spots within conventional assessment measures, but also suggests alternatives.

I am excited to include the mixed media works of Bob Sweeny in this volume. In his “Scanscapes I-V” series, Sweeny draws inspiration from the relationship between utopian architectural forms and standardized testing. The intersections and overlaps created through Sweeny’s layering of materials extend ‘the space between’ metaphor. What have we missed? Who do we leave behind? Sweeny’s works present questions resulting from colliding worlds of the quantitative and the qualitative. In his artist statement, he suggests that art can be found in the margins, spaces or cracks within the systems, tools or machines of assessment.

Clayton Funk describes efforts two men made to will the machines of intelligence. He offers a historical parallel between Chicago’s early 20th century educational bureaucracy and a 19th century science fiction short story. Funk tracks and critiques the development of “mental testing” in the Chicago Public Schools as instituted by Superintendent, Edwin G. Cooley (1857-1923) in the first decades on the 20th century. By sharing this narrative as a “science fiction of intelligence”, Funk analyzes Cooley’s bureaucracy of testing and tracking, through the lens of Bierce’s tale, “Moxon’s Master” which describes a robot designed to play chess that ultimately murders its creator. Bierce’s short story provides Funk with an epistemological lens through which
he examines Cooley’s bureaucratic ‘machine’ in relation to Moxon’s destructive robot, with a focus on their respective efforts to define and will intelligence for their own gains.

Two of the articles, offer teacher’s perspectives and attitudes on assessment and teacher evaluation stemming from private schools and secondary art classrooms. David Rufo, a 4th grade classroom teacher at a private school in central New York, discusses the hurdles associated with cultivating a classroom culture centered on self-initiated learning and student governance. In “An Arts-Based Classroom Confronts Educational Metanarratives: Grand Narratives, Local Stories and a Classroom Teacher’s Story” he shares how conflicting ideologies and dominant narratives can silence teachers who are interested in engaging in the kinds of constructive dialogues they hope to foster in their own classrooms. Rufo examines the ways in which two conflicting teaching paradigms can be used to perceive of and evaluate the management style of his unconventional classroom.

Jill Palumbo discusses the culture of assessment and evaluation at the state and national levels. Her research, which is primarily based in Virginia State high schools, describes the difficulties with employing subjective and inflexible assessment measures when evaluating art teachers. In addition to sharing her own vulnerabilities regarding assessment as an art teacher in a private school, Palumbo reports the opinions of Virginia art teachers regarding the validity and purposes of art teacher assessments along with teachers’ attitudes toward their evaluators who lack content knowledge in the arts. By closely examining how teachers in non-tested subjects and grades are evaluated, she suggests how we might develop more authentic assessments for art teachers. Palumbo notes the need and desire for a more collaborative role in the development of assessments.

Like Palumbo, Matthew Suthlerlin advocates for engaging assessment as a process. He employs Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) metaphors, deterritorialization and reterritorialization while he transcends and expands the perceived boundaries of student assessment. By promoting the use of networked (student and teacher) avatars, performance, and video Sutherlin’s students devise their own methods for reflecting on their experiences by building and interacting with “learning fragments”. Through this process the subjectivity of the reflections are pushed and bring forth connections that would not otherwise be apparent.

Nadine Kalin and Daniel Barney recognize the need to re-conceptualize art education in order to make new discoveries as well. As a point of departure for envisioning and considering other possibilities, they deem “predetermined usages of art education inoperable.” They suggest withdrawing “from measuring, accounting, standardizing, and carrying on within art education today, in order to enter a space of indecision and inaction where we risk uselessness…” Kalin and Barney fiercely reject the machine of art education and its inherent paradigms and demands in order to reclaim it.

While the seemingly constant hurdles stemming from the culture of assessment daunt many educators, there are those who have emerged as strong teachers and scholars within this ever-changing landscape. Despite these troubling times, some are conditioned for change and eager to face the challenges brought forth by issues like high stakes testing, Common Core State Standards, and edTPA. They are not deterred by the current vulnerability and nebulous future of art education. They remain resilient, watchful, hopeful, passionate and continue to inspire me and countless others. The scholars.
included in this volume and the diligent reviewers who helped make JSTAE Volume 34 possible provide an example of such inspiration.

Three years ago, Kryssi Staikidis, past editor, convinced me to accept the nomination as JSTAE’s Associate Editor. Through her support, my confidence grew as I honed the necessary skills to undertake my responsibility as the editor. I could not have hand picked a better person to orient me to this process. I have already had many invaluable experiences working with JSTAE but I am most grateful and proud of the relationship Kryssi Staikidis and I have built over these years, working together as a team, a part of the collaborative process fostered by the Caucus. I also want to thank Melanie Buffington, our current Associate Editor, for her assistance and Kelly Gross, past editorial assistant, for offering technical support with the website along the way. Alexandra (Sascha) Kollisch, the current editorial assistant, offered unyielding devotion to the new and improved face of the journal. Without her keen eye, organizational skills, and masterful design abilities our vision for this volume would not have come to fruition. And lastly, I am ever grateful for the hard work of the authors and all of the reviewers who reflected upon and supported authors’ work throughout the year.

Assessment has a growing presence in our schools and classrooms. I often encounter host teachers who express their exhaustion with the changes that always seem to be on the horizon. Teachers are in constant state of flux, perpetually adapting to new administrations, policies, and assessment measures with countless campaigns and acronyms. While assessment is now unequivocally a part of our educational systems, many teachers are still sadly not afforded the luxury of reflection and miss opportunities to regroup and envision creative alternatives to these issues. Volume 34 of JSTAE gives voice to the challenges some educators endure but it also offers unique and creative perspectives on the merits of assessment and the benefits of change.
**Journal of Social Theory in Art Education** **CALL FOR PAPERS**

We welcome multiple interpretations of the theme for JSTAE Volume 34:

**Growth, Learning, Assessment, and Assessment**

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**DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 15, 2013**

Please direct any questions or concerns to Sharif Bey, JSTAE Editor 2013-2015 at sbey@syr.edu http://jstae.org

**Growth, Learning, Assessment, and Assessment**

Many art educators continually readdress their attitudes, approaches and teaching strategies in this era of increasing teacher accountability and high stakes tests. While some teachers are up to the challenge, others are seemingly exhausted by the constantly changing landscape of policies, acronym, and assessment measures of teachers and students. What is the utility of assessment in the art room, museum, university, community setting or grant writing? Can we effectively quantify the boundless teaching and learning experiences that we engage in through the visual arts? What are the advantages of the imminent changes assessment in the visual arts might bring? Or, will these measures result in the further dismantlement - assessment of the unique learning that only the visual arts can facilitate?

We hope that this call for JSTAE Volume 34 will encourage submissions from any possible author, poet, artist, writer, researcher, teacher, whether in higher education, K-12, administration, policy, museum education, community-based art education, or general education. We hope that contributors will address this call from a broad range of perspectives. For this reason, the editors of JSTAE and membership of the CSTAE hope to inspire individual or collaborative responses related to the theme: **Growth, Learning, Assessment, and Assessment**

**Reviewers**: If you would like to serve as a JSTAE reviewer, please send to the editor a list of your publications in the area(s) of emphasis that you offer to review. JSTAE reviewers are selected based on the following criteria: (1) CSTAE member, (2) has published work in the field, (3) has published in an area related to the article asked to review, (4) has not submitted an article for review in the particular volume.

The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education (JSTAE) is the official journal of The Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education (CSTAE). JSTAE serves as an alternative voice for the field of art education through the promotion of scholarly research that addresses social theory, social issues, action, and transformation as well as creative methods of research and writing.

The JSTAE submission deadline is November 15, 2013 for Volume 34. To be considered for publication, original manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the 6th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. Manuscripts should range between 2500-3000 words in length with an abstract of 100-150 words. Images are encouraged with manuscripts and should be sent in digital format (jpg, gif, or png) with accompanying copyright permission. Double space all manuscripts, including abstract, quotations, tables, references, and notes. Include a brief biographical statement along with a cover letter designating that the manuscript is original, has not been previously published, and is not under consideration elsewhere. To facilitate the anonymous review process, please place your name only in the accompanying cover letter and not in the manuscript, following guidelines for ensuring a blind review at the JSTAE website. Manuscripts should be submitted electronically, preferably in Microsoft Word with .doc extension to [http://jstae.org](http://jstae.org)

*The Caucus on Social Theory and Art Education (CSTAE), http://cstae.org is an affiliate of the National Art Education Association (NAEA), http://arteducators.org*
References


The similarities between utopian architectural forms and standardized testing are many. Both set forth a behavioral model that is designed to elicit a prescribed set of actions, which are then measured, codified, and folded back into the dynamic relationship set in motion. These models also involve rhetorical strategies, employing terms such as ‘efficiency’ and ‘progress’ that reassure the user that they will benefit from the process.

Art, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest is a form of ‘desiring-machine’ that functions only as it breaks down. While art can be found in the elegant forms of the geodesic dome, or the masterfully-designed standardized test, it can also be found in the margins, the gaps, the areas where the dome leaks, or the test simply measures how well one can take the test. These SCANTRON landscapes provide a view of a utopia that is unrealizable, even as architects in both fields continue their construction.

BOB SWEENY
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Scanscapes I-V
Bob Sweeney, *Scanscape I*, 2014, Mixed-Media, 8”x 8”
The Creatures We “Assassinate”: A Tale of “Mental Testing” as Science Fiction in Chicago Public High Schools in 1909 - 1924

CLAYTON FUNK
The Ohio State University

This article tracks the development of what educators and psychologists, in 1909, termed “mental testing” in relation to art education in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). According to CPS Superintendent Edwin G. Cooley (1857-1923) American civilization was in trouble due to the influx of Southern and Eastern European immigrants in Chicago. He and other educators sought to ward off the social collapse they feared with the efficiency of science. As part of what Sol Cohen termed the “medicalization of education,” Chicago’s Department of Child Study tested students for mental capacity and those considered less intelligent were placed in technical classes, while others considered advanced went to professional and academic classes. The author tells this narrative as a science fiction of intelligence, to analyze Julia Wrigley’s narrative of Cooley’s bureaucracy of testing and tracking, looking through the lens of Ambrose Bierce’s (1842-1914) science fiction short story, “Moxon’s Master.” This comparison reveals parallels in Cooley’s bureaucracy and Bierce’s science fiction in relation to social efficiency and art education in Chicago.

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According to American gilded-age reformers like Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Superintendent Edwin G. Cooley (1857-1923), American civilization was headed for collapse in 1909. Cooley’s solution was to administrate the CPS according to principles of science and efficiency. Cooley eventually resigned, however, because of struggles over his administrative approach (“Expect Cooley,” 1909). In that same year the noted author Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914) compiled a collection of his short stories to mark the close of his literary career. In this collection appeared a short story, “Moxon’s Master,” which first appeared in 1893. It was a tale about a reclusive student of science named Moxon. A narrator in conversation with Moxon, who speculated on the nature of life and the presence of it in all matter, tells most of the short story. Later, the narrator found Moxon playing chess with a robot in his machine shop. When Moxon achieved checkmate, the robot lost control and murdered his opponent, and the building burnt down. The narrator awakened in the hospital pondering if it all was real, or not (Bierce, 1893/2014).

These two men – Cooley and Moxon – both worked with systems of artificial intelligence and imposed them upon their subjects – Cooley’s public school students and Moxon’s robot – making them creations of science. Cooley and other educators like him were out to ward off social collapse with a system wherein students were tested and sorted according to their mental capacity. Based on these mental tests, students considered less intelligent were placed in technical classes, while those considered advanced went to professional and academic classes (Wrigley, 1982). With everyone in their “place” social order would be restored. Bierce was known for his ability to manipulate the epistemological elements of time and space (Grenander, 1997) and in this article; Bierce’s short story becomes an epistemological lens through which I treat historian Julia Wrigley’s (1982) account of Cooley’s educational bureaucracy, with tropes found in Bierce’s science fiction.

Conversely, both Cooley and Moxon did not maintain control over intelligence. Cooley, in fact, encountered resistance to his reforms from mid-level superintendents, building principals, teachers, and organized labor (Rousmaniere 2007; Wrigley, 1982). This narrative also attempts to reveal parallels in Cooley’s bureaucracy in relation art education in Chicago, in what I term the science fiction of intelligence. This narrative speaks to the theme of this volume of the *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education: students’ growth, learning,* and assessment, which become acts of assessment – as barriers and limitations while those considered advanced went to professional and academic classes (Wrigley, 1982). With everyone in their “place” social order would be restored. Bierce was known for his ability to manipulate the epistemological elements of time and space (Grenander, 1997) and in this article; Bierce’s short story becomes an epistemological lens through which I treat historian Julia Wrigley’s (1982) account of Cooley’s educational bureaucracy, with tropes found in Bierce’s science fiction.

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*Figure 1. “Education in the year 2000”, by French postcard artist Villemard c1910. National Library of France*

**The Machine and Science Fiction of Intelligence**

The *World English Dictionary* defines the term “machine” in two ways — First, as an “an organized body of people that controls activities, policies, etc.” (Machine, 2014, para. 8), as found in the CPS and its bureaucracy. The second definition is “an assembly of interconnected components arranged to...
transmit or modify force in order to perform useful work” (Machine, 2014, para. 1). Moxon gave a similar definition of a machine: “Any instrument or organization by which power is applied and made effective, or a desired effect produced” (Bierce, 1893/2014, para. 4). In fact he declares, “I do believe a machine thinks about the work it is doing” (para. 6). Cooley’s test-driven efficiency was precisely such a bureaucratic machine that “thought” – it differentiated and sorted students according to their intelligence levels and then tracked them into art and industrial classes. Moxon’s discussion of machines that “think,” in robots programmed and automated for specific tasks, parallels the narrow focus of Cooley’s technical high schools, where students learned to think in rhythm with factory machines (Bierce, 1893/2014; Callahan, 1962). Testing students’ abilities to do tasks and programming a robot to also do tasks are arguably two ways to create forms of intelligence and they are both overlapping fictional representations of mental activity and constitute a science fiction of intelligence.

If the CPS testing machine can be defined as a technology, then educators treated students as technologically classified humans, as if they were cyborgs from myths of science fiction, which were part human and part machine (Pope, 2005). Child-study psychologists ranked students’ mental capacity by imposing a particular medical language of descriptors such as “backward … subnormal …[or] feebleminded” (Ryan, 2011, p. 343). This part-technology and part-human culture of schooling comprised Cohen’s (1999) medicalization of education and included, “the infiltration of psychiatric, psychoanalytic and therapeutic norms, concepts, and language of discourse … into virtually all aspects of American schooling … in the twentieth century” (p. 249). Indeed, Cooley intended Chicago’s public high schools to be designed as clinics that functioned as therapeutic machines that created a pleasant and calming atmosphere to support students’ adjustments to the world (i.e., learning) (Gyure, 2011).3 Ironically, these clinical spaces also truncated student’s identities as they limited students to the kinds of classes they would be allowed to take. Students were faced with long-term limitations in the jobs they could get upon leaving high school that paid lower earnings, lesser housing choices, and lower social status.

**Cooley, Child Study, and Social Efficiency**

Chicago Public School art educators were among the teachers ensnared within Cooley’s assessment bureaucracy and there is much in this narrative that today’s art educators can learn to better understand their own metrically laden school systems. Then and now, public school administrators were, and still are preoccupied with profiling the conditions of education through high-stakes testing. Our current discourse about everything from school report cards to school systems have constrained teachers and hampered students (Fitzgerald, 2013; Heilig, 2011). Likewise, early 20th-century art teachers also felt constraint in the CPS technocracy driven by test data and tracking.

The CPS culture of testing was only a small part of the larger bureaucracy that stretched across metropolitan Chicago.

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3 School decoration in the gilded-age American high schools constituted the placement of graphic and three-dimensional art forms to facilitate the development of good character in students; but Gyure’s (2011) history reveals that art educators were also enamored of the therapeutic value of school decoration used to create a calming school atmosphere, especially in Chicago’s new and innovative high school buildings of the early 20th century.

4 Kidel (1999b) defines progressive education as specific educational traditions that derive from John Comenius, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel. Broader uses of the term progressive connote the advancement of science, technology, and industrial growth in the 19th and 20th centuries. Cremin (1961) traces the decline of the progressive education era to the closing of the Progressive Education Association in 1955, but Kidel (1999b)
were bent on moral and fiscal reform. They reorganized and centralized the city, suffusing Chicago’s press, commerce, and public affairs with tropes of efficiency. They strove to eliminate waste and control in a city that had expanded by two thirds, from 503,185 in 1880 to 1,698,575 in 1900 (McClelland, 2014). By the turn of the 20th century, the majority of Chicagoans were mostly European working-class immigrants who outnumbered native-born Anglo-American Chicagoans. Because of this shift, the elite officials and executives in charge of Chicago’s civic and commercial affairs believed something had to be done, lest society as they knew it would collapse (Rury, 2005). Just as the city planners set out to reform an entire city, the Chicago Board of Education (CBE) and Superintendent Cooley deployed reorganization of the CPS into a social and economic hierarchy, in concert with the newly stratified metropolis.

Public High Schools in Chicago

The CPS stood in a sea of contention, with every problem from language barriers to the ethnic animosity among new immigrants struggling to establish themselves. These newcomers segregated themselves in their own neighborhoods, each with their own political bosses who negotiated with bosses in other wards. Personalistic alliances and corruption created a cacophony of politics in Chicago’s public agencies and, not the least of them was the CPS system (Wrigley, 1982).

The solution to these problems was to expand Chicago’s high schools from exclusive college prep academies into much larger high schools with vocational classes for working-class students. Reform efforts progressed unevenly through the 1890s, but when Cooley moved into the CPS Superintendents office in 1900, he put forth his agenda of differentiated schooling. Cooley planned a dual system in which schooling after the grammar grades was housed in two kinds of high schools. Some students would be sent to technical high schools, where boys learned mechanical drawing, woodworking machining, and electrical work and girls learned domestic applications of handicrafts, sewing, and cooking. Other students would go to elite high schools for professional classes to prepare for managerial jobs, architectural drafting, commercial art, photography, and college preparation at some high schools (Gyure, 2011). Cooley had the support of the recently formed Chicago Commercial Club (CCC) of elite corporate executives, including retail magnate Marshall Field, who was also a school board member. Field and other corporate elites wanted schooling to focus on vocational training and not excessively intellectual academic subjects, which, they felt, were wasted on working-class students (Wrigley, 1982).

Cooley’s dual school plan met with resistance, however, led by the Midlevel Superintendent Ella Flagg Young, (1845-1918) who advocated for child-centered education, teachers, and the arts. She opposed Cooley’s dual plan and pushed for comprehensive high schools with a combination of vocational, professional and academic subjects. Flagg supported teachers and felt they should have a voice in the administration of schools. In fact, Cooley endured many battles with teachers and organized labor. Eventually the Chicago Daily Tribune reported that the embattled

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5 Ella Flagg Young was a progressive educator and student of the philosopher John Dewey. She first became superintendent of schools in Chicago in 1887, then professor of education in the University of Chicago in 1899, and principal of the Chicago Normal School in 1905. From 1910 to 1911 she was elected the first woman president of the National Education association, and finally, Young served another term as CPS Superintendent from 1909 until her resignation in 1915 (Wrigley, 1982).
Superintendent would resign from his post, citing stress and exhaustion ("Expect Cooley," 1909).

The CBE appointed Young as the succeeding CPS Superintendent, to appease the wrath of teachers and their affiliates. Cooley left Chicago for a job as president of the D. C. Heath Publishing Company of Boston, but returned to Chicago in 1911, when the CCC hired him as business adviser from where he continued to promote vocational education. In later years, business leaders presented Cooley’s vocational education plan before the State Legislature, in 1913, 1915 and 1917, only to be defeated each time (Wrigley, 1982).

Child Study

As school administrators and commercial magnates battled in public view, there emerged a quieter force, known as the “child study movement.” Child study “of the first half of the twentieth century sought to describe child development as a maturational process that is independent of experience and learning” (Maturation, 2008, para. 2). In other words, psychologists studied children to determine how they developed naturally without formal tutoring. It was “the first organized movement to target public school reform in the United States and to deploy the terminology of centering in or on the child” (Baker, 2001, p. 428). Child study was also part of the larger mental hygiene movement that was unfolding within the “medicalization of public schooling” (Cohen, 1999, p. 249). These so-called clinics shielded students from what raged outside – the cacophony alarmist educators saw as “[s]ociety … flying apart.” They believed that schooling with “scientifically constructed curriculum at its core could forestall and even prevent that calamity” (Kliebard, 1986, p. 29).

Child study for art educators differed from the strict control of efficiency educators. According to historian Arthur Efland (1990), child study in art education drew from late 19th-century psychological studies of children and their art, according to such European and American psychologists as James Sully (1842-1943), Earl Barnes (1861-1935), Georg Kerschensteiner (1854-1932), and Ebenezer Cook (1837-1913). Although a full discussion of this research could be an article unto itself, what is important to know here is that this strain of psychologists generally believed that children grew and developed on their own, moving through stages.

Child study and art education evolved from similar traditions. Let us backtrack to the 1880s and the unfolding of child study in women’s activism. Clubwomen reformers from across the United States adopted the practice of what Lawrence A. Cremin (1988) terms “familial pedagogy” that emerged in the 1870s within the social gospel movement among Protestant groups and social settlements. Both familial pedagogy and art education were based on the same educational philosophies, including the work of Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (1782-1852) whose idea of the “kindergarten” nurtured the capabilities of children (Efland, 1990). These reformers believed that a child’s nature had potential assets to shape into adult productivity and this perspective flew in the face of Cooley’s reasons for assessing the needs of his students.

Gould (1996) has shown that in the late 19th century, there began a shift away from the practice of physical assessments, toward ranking intelligence based on behavior and testing to estimate mental activity. Physical assessments were widely practiced in such

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6 Efland (1990) provides a more developed discussion of art educators in child study and developmental psychology. He observed that James Sully, Earl Barnes, Georg Kerschensteiner, and Ebenezer Cook tended to associate the art of young children with artifacts of indigenous people, calling them “primitive” (p. 160). This movement anticipated a later shift toward children as expressive agents through art making practices.
approaches as Phrenology and Craniometry—wherein intelligence was supposedly determined by measuring the structure of the cranium (methods now thoroughly discredited as pseudoscience).\(^7\) These scientists presented no qualms about assessing individuals and sorting them into social groupings.

The Chicago Board of Education (CBE) formalized child study, as a way to profile the physical and mental needs of the CPS’s overwhelming numbers. In 1899, the CBE commissioned Board member Dr. W. S. Christopher (d. 1905) as a principal advocate for a four-month study of CPS students. Many CPS students were recently arrived immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, and this study was meant to determine if they were “vital and vigorous children who could become energetic modern workers and citizens” (Churchill, 2008, p. 341). Data included: measurements of physical features—size, weight, strength, lung capacity, hearing, and general fitness, following the then-current belief that physical traits were indicators of good genes and thus determined mental capacity. Published results stated that the students “who have made greater intellectual advancement are on the whole taller, heavier, stronger, [and] possessed a greater endurance” (Chicago Board of Education, 1899, p. 52).

Christopher sorted the students in poorer condition into classifications of “backward” or subnormal (functioning below grade level) or the classification of “feebleminded” (more than backward). Although his work reflected the growing popularity of eugenics theories\(^8\) in the United States and Europe with a firm racial bias, Christopher masked his approach as based solely on the collection of objective data. Thus was constructed a human-conceived hierarchy of mental functions, named with testing descriptors to signify intelligence (Ryan, 2011).

Christopher followed current thinking at that time and embraced the notion that intelligence was an inherited, genetic trait. Preparing the way for the DCS, Christopher called for further study to determine the impact of nationality on children’s intellectual abilities. Christopher argued that if it “is the state’s duty to educate normal children, it is doubly its duty to educate these less favored ones,” using teachers with special psychological training. His final recommendation was to make child study a permanent practice in schooling these children. This practice was eventually organized within the DSC, established in 1899 (Chicago Board of Education, 1899, p. 27). The Child-Study Monthly praised Chicago’s new department as the most advanced child study agency in the country (Smedley, 1900).

Through this formalized agency, the CPS now had policy and procedures for differentiating and tracking students according to race, ethnicity, and economic class (Ryan, 2011).

Sorting students by mental capacity would also have affected CPS art teachers, with

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\(^8\) Eugenics was an umbrella term for a variety of social philosophies based on genetic theories of the time. A number of Educators disparaged students considered inferior, but are not always clear about which side of the eugenics movement they followed. Stephen Jay Gould (1996) is the most accessible history, while Edwin Black’s (2003) contains a copious account of American and European eugenics movements leading to World War II. Black (2003) describes two camps of eugenics practice: 1) Positive eugenicists followed theories of Francis Galton with constructive measures of genetic regulation, “suggesting, facilitating, predicting, and even legally mandating biologically conductive marriages” (p. 18). 2) Negative eugenics took prominence after Galton’s death in 1911 and sought to rid society of “genetically unfit—from medically infirm to the racially unwanted to economically impoverished” through methods ranging from selective breeding to forced sterilization (p. 19).
some of their students considered able to merely copy patterns, as carpenters, machinists, or domestic workers; and others considered able to design as artists and architects. In Cooley’s (1901) description of the differentiation of students, he did not refer to art, but he did refer specifically to manual ability. Cooley argued that many children had “motor classes of mind” because “intelligence was a variation in the life history of animals selected on account of its special fitness to aid in the struggle for existence” (Cooley, 1901, p. 54). He continued to state that people engaged in manual activity out of necessity did not need an abstract form of intelligence, which he believed would not develop in the majority of students. Looking through the lens of genetics alone, Cooley argued that because of what he considered natural limitations in so many students, the schools would have to shift from academic to practical subjects (Wrigley, 1982). This was Cooley’s clinical solution to maintaining social control, as a form of the medicalization of education (Cohen, 1999), complete with the race and class bias of Social Darwinism, enshrouded in its cloud of bureaucracy.

**Effects of Chicago Bureaucracy on Art Education**

Cooley’s (1901) statement about students with a “motor class of mind” could not have sounded more technocratic if it came from Moxon’s description of robots. To think that students were simply unable to develop the ability to think abstractly, let alone make artworks, would have undermined the foundation of child-centered teaching and shaken art educators (Cooley, 1901, p. 54). Reformers and activists like Ellen Gates Starr (1859-1940)

9 Ellen Gates Starr was a co-founder of Hull House with the well-known reformer, Jane Addams (1860-1935). She also spearheaded the Chicago Public School Art Society, which installed graphic and sculptural art forms in Chicago’s public

students and advocated for the presence of arts in public schools, drawing upon a long held tradition in Chicago set by the American social reformer activist, and educator Francis Wayland Parker (1837-1902).

In the previous decade, child-centered educators like Parker advocated for teaching that centered upon students’ overall understanding, with visual art forms like drawing and clay modeling, at the heart of most learning activities (Efland, 1990; Wrigley, 1982). Amburgy (2002) observed that approaches like Parker’s were criticized by efficiency-minded administrators like Cooley in the “fads and frills” controversy, which carried into the 20th century. In 1902 the issue gained momentum, when the legislative committee of the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) was charged with investigating the supposedly wasteful child-centered schooling (Wrigley, 1982). Their *Report on Public School Fads* (Chicago Federation of Labor and Industrial Union Council, 1902) revealed that instead of the alleged wastefulness from the fads, they found students acting in what they described as natural and intelligent ways, thriving and enjoying their schooling (Wrigley, 1982).

Wrigley (1982) notes that the CFL legislative committee ultimately rejected claims that child-centered teaching with art (i.e., fads and frills) weakened the schools. The report noted advantages in art instruction, such as plain paper for drawing from observation cost less than drawing books for merely copying pictures. Child-centered educators and the CFL generally did not object to vocational education, so long as it was balanced with academic subjects; but Cooley’s dual system would have centered vocational training in high schools and co-opted labor’s tradition of apprentice training. They also objected to placing academic subjects into separate high school buildings. See Brown (2007) for her history with Hull House and Addams.
schools, which would exclude most working-class students from academic courses they wanted to take for social refinement and advancement.

Just as Moxon found out too late that he could not control his own robot, Cooley’s control of working-class students through exclusion from the arts was effective only in school. Young adults of the working classes, including vocational high school students, often knew the value of arts and culture, especially academic education, from life in their native countries (Wrigley, 1982). In Chicago, members of the working classes sought out the arts where they could gain access, like art exhibitions at department stores, such as Marshall Fields, and the performing arts of Vaudeville Theatre (Oberdeck, 1999; Richardson, 1911). Amburgy (2002) noted that the common notion of most people not caring about art, placing more value on practical and useful forms of knowledge, was not the case. It is likely that students, whom educators excluded from learning about art forms, found other ways to form their tastes in the arts.

Social Efficiency

Cooley’s bureaucracy was part of a larger educational ethos known then as social efficiency, with parallels in Cooley’s administration and Bierce’s short story. Through Bierce’s (1893/2014) lens we see that Moxon cites theories also heard from educators and social scientists of the turn of the 20th century. To substantiate that a machine can have consciousness, for example, Moxon cites Herbert Spencer’s (1820-1903) theory that life “is a definite combination of heterogeneous changes” and if “consciousness is the product of rhythm, all things are conscious, for all have motion, and all motion is rhythmic” (Spencer as cited in Bierce, 1893/2014, para. 26). If the CPS bureaucracy can be regarded as a machine set in motion to produce consistent outcomes efficiently, as if it were a kind of reliable rhythm, then it might also be imbued with a consciousness, or at least in the minds of students collectively focused on their tasks under the bureaucratic cloud of “social efficiency.”

The term “social efficiency” was a broad umbrella term for many complicated efficiency movements in the early 20th century. For historian of education Edward Krug (1964), social efficiency was defined one way or another, depending on who was talking. On the other hand, another historian of education, Ellen Condliffe Lagemann (2000), termed social efficiency as a vague slogan without a clear definition. Still other historians (e.g., Kliebard, 1986; Schipps, 2006; Spring, 2005) define social efficiency in amalgamations of the machine bureaucracy with ideology. Tyack (1974) terms the educators who followed these efficiency trends as “administrative progressives.” Yet Kate Rousmaniere (2007) argued that all administrative progressives couldn’t be lumped together as supporters of this movement, for many mid-level administrators did not buy into scientific management. Thus, and the landscape of social efficiency was complicated.

Historian Herbert Kliebard (1986) framed social efficiency as a melding of social theory and systems of scientific management. The social theory of Edward A. Ross (1901) known as “social control” was prominent in the work of educators like David Snedden (1868-1961), Ross Finney (1875-1934), Charles A. Elwood (1873-1946), and Charles C. Peters (b. 1881).\(^{10}\) Kliebard (1986) characterized Edward

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\(^{10}\) Edward A. Ross (1866 – 1951) was a scholar in economics and a follower of race purification (Edward Alsworth Ross, 2014). Scholars who followed Ross included: David Snedden (1868-1951) who believed that the entire school should follow doctrines of social control and efficiency. He served as commissioner of education in Boston, where a system of dual schools was established. He returned later to the faculty of Teachers College, Columbia University for the rest of his career (Drost, 2000). Ross L. Finney (1875-1934) was an American Educator known for public education and genetics.
Ross’s thinking as “a kind of intellectual schizophrenia” (p. 91). In one sense, Ross was a Social Darwinist who admired the thinking of the “restless, striving, doing Aryan, with his personal ambition [and] his lust for power ... compared to the docile Slav or the quiescent Hindoo [sic]” (Ross, 1901, p. 3). In another sense, however, Ross also believed that social amalgamation had corrupted what he termed the “Aryan instincts of Teutonic genius” and it became necessary to place Anglo-Americans in charge of society. He reasoned that with Anglo-Saxons in charge, public school systems would supposedly become better institutions than families for instilling “obedience to an external law” (p. 164).

**Taylorism**

While Ross believed that his social hierarchy facilitated successful industry, there were practical matters. Frederick Winslow Taylor’s (1856–1915) scientific management, or “Taylorism,” as it is known, was efficiency applied directly to working tasks. Factories were organized so workers’ thoughts and movements synchronized with the repetitive rhythm of factory machines, thus producing humans in sync with technology. Taylor’s match of human consciousness with mechanical movement is also reminiscent of Moxon’s belief that consciousness was present in movement and rhythm of anything (Bierce, 1893/2014).

Historian Raymond Callahan (1962) outlined the organizational concepts behind Taylorism, called “functional foremanship.” In this system, Taylor replaced traditional, punitive military-style bosses with specialized bosses for specific roles, such as training, specializing in consistent speed on task, equipment repairs, payroll, routing materials, and discipline. This system was governed by four principals of scientific management: 1) Replace rule-of-thumb methods with the science of a task; 2) train, teach, and develop the worker according to scientific standards; 3) cooperate with workers to ensure work is done according to standards; and 4) divide equally the responsibilities between worker and managers. Arguably, the factory became a collective cyborg, with the most work carried out in the least amount of time, with the most efficient movements, all of which coupled human effort with mechanical power. Just as Moxon animated a robot with intelligence and chess-playing skills, it seems that school administrators like Cooley also “animated” their “creatures” by bridling the behavior of faculty and students in schools regimented as Tayloristic factories, creating a bureaucratic machine that thinks.

Taylor and Ross had complementary theoretical positions. As Ross (1901) believed that Anglo-Americans should maintain control over workers, based on what he considered natural ability; Taylor had moral concerns about overseeing workers. Proper supervision would curb what Taylor (1903) termed “natural laziness” and turn workers into “first-class men” (p. 1365). Yet, the two men differed: Ross’s social control was based on belief in Aryan superiority, whereas Taylor’s hierarchy strived toward a utopian objectivity of science and efficiency, which could instill humanitarian influences on labor relations. In effect, working precisely by the clock bolted down White Anglo-American privilege within a racially
biased hierarchy, which conflated Ross’s and Taylor’s theories into one structure. Eventually, the race and class bias of social efficiency emerged in U.S. public schools as Ross’s social control and Taylor’s scientific management congealed in the a technology of curricula, or a machine that thinks.

Social Efficiency and Curriculum

John Franklin Bobbitt (1876-1956), a student of G. Stanley Hall. He became known as a school efficiency expert in his day and is important in history for his scientific approach to curricula. His work was widely criticized by Progressives like John Dewey and William H. Kilpatrick, but his work laid the foundation for a new technological approach to curricula. (Kridel, 1999a).

John Franklin Bobbitt (1876-1956) was the educational giant of curriculum based on social efficiency. Bobbitt came to the University of Chicago in 1909, just when Cooley left the CPS System. Although Bobbitt (1909) was an advocate for Taylorism, his views were also imbued with the race and class bias of eugenics. In thoughts similar to Ross’s social control, Bobbitt pre-supposed that intelligence was inherited and correlated to racial characteristics. Just as Moxon drew from Spencer’s idea of consciousness in rhythm, Bobbitt framed the future of the human population with a magnified, pessimistic take on evolution: Humans were blind to their demise, seeing themselves in a “Eutopia [sic], a millennium, a City of the Sun, a Platonic Republic, but always defeated” (p. 385). His solution was biology that revealed the “secret of their decline” and he believed it would be “[e]ugenics, the newly-arising science which seeks to improve the inborn qualities of our race” that holds the solution to this social dilemma” (Bobbitt, 1909, p. 386).

Based on these theories, Bobbitt (1909) pointed to feeblemindedness as the reason that public school educators have a poor “raw material” (i.e., “students”) to work with, along with more “educational difficulties which are at present sufficiently bewildering.” (p. 387). Bobbitt (1909) framed his eugenics lens warning of a twofold problem: first, “[t]he more highly endowed classes furnishes a far smaller proportion of the parentage than is furnished by the stupid, unambitious, poorly-endowed strata at the bottom” (p. 387). Second, this shift indicated that “[a]bility is dying out at the top simply because it is not being born. There is a growing proletarianization of our high race, simply because the proletariat furnishes the major portion of the parentage” (p. 387). These problems, Bobbitt claimed, would have consequences in two undermining effects: 1) The melioration of the races, and 2) growth of “lower” races. Bobbitt’s message seemed clear: What starts out as the human race teetering on the edge of their “Eutopia” has become the collapse of “civilization … digging the pit into which it must fall if these two powerful, undermining processes are not checked” (p. 394). Bobbitt’s message became a major voice in school curriculum, as if to set in motion the forces behind the CPS’s bureaucratic machine to not only bring social order, but to prepare for the collapse of society.

It seems that if figures like Taylor and Bobbitt had their way, the making of all commercial products would become machine driven, while craft receded, along with the supposed “waste” of child-centered pedagogy in a race-biased hierarchy. The social efficiency expert David Snedden (1917) made this shift even more obvious eight years later, when he questioned the relevance of practicing the arts at all. He believed that in the new century, evolution had taken industrial society past a primal state into a future driven by science and technology. Any romantic strains of visual arts were to be abandoned. Efland (1990) summarized Snedden’s outlook stating, “that while art still had a place in life, it [was] not as important for the survival and expansion of civilized societies as science” (p. 165). As elite educators forecasted the reorganization of the
public school systems, they also bespoke the establishment of elite hierarchies on an apocalyptic scale. Undoubtedly, art educators would have faced challenges within turbulent changes in American demographics, especially if they bought into Bobbitt’s tragic forecast.

**Reflection on Growth, Learning, Assessment, and Assessination**

If science fiction foretells new developments in lived experience, then Bierce’s story that was first published in 1893 predated the beginning of Cooley’s superintendency by 13 years and yet, similarities emerge between Bierce’s story and Cooley’s Bureaucracy. What follows is a reflection of these parallels as they fit with the theme in this volume of the *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*: growth, learning, assessment, and assessination.

**Growth**

Human growth and development were implicit in science-fiction tropes of super intelligence with mechanical brains or intelligence potions in fiction (Bleiler & Bleiler, 1990). However, the fictive character of Moxon was not the only figure making claims about the presence of life and intelligence. The psychologist G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) believed that superior intelligence could emerge through art activities. He stated that “guardians of the young should keep out of nature’s way” (Hall, 1901, para. 3) so that children’s expression of their own ideas should be supported through activities, like drawing” (Hall, 1901 para 10). These conditions, Hall (1901) concluded, would “bring the race to the higher maturity of the superman” (para. 23). Conversely, one could argue that the obstacles Hall wanted to keep out of the way were the educational bureaucracies and the confining ethos of mental hygiene (Cohen, 1999). This bureaucracy did not promote what Hall (1901) termed “super intelligence;” instead, it curtailed it.

**Learning**

The difference between Cooley’s administrative control and Hall’s (1901) psychology boils down to how students learned best. Cooley felt that students in vocational classes should learn through discipline and hard work. He and his followers believed that liberal arts and art activities (i.e., fads and frills) would distract students from learning the value of hard work. To 21st-century ears, Cooley’s approach may seem extreme, but during the gilded age, his thinking would have been more tolerant than that of other Social Darwinists, like Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) and Arthur MacDonald (1856-1936), who concluded that individuals classified as “feebleminded” were supposedly an unredeemable threat to society and predisposed to crime and vice (MacDonald, 1893). In science fiction, such latent fear would have created suspense, just as it did when Bierce played the wonder of a chess-playing automaton against Moxon’s flirtations with power beyond his control, only to have his creature attack and kill him. Similarly, reformers also conveyed “suspense” and “danger” when they disparaged “organized state care of the ‘dependent classes,’” because it only to impeded human progress, contradicted natural law, and ultimately prolonged the suffering of individuals destined to be criminals (Platt, 2009, p. 20).

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13 The American psychologist and educator G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) was known for his evolutionary theories and for bringing the idea of adolescence to significance (HALL, G(ranville) Stanley, 2009).

14 Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) was a conservative Social Darwinist in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Lombroso believed in the existence of a “Criminal Class,” a morally inferior species with physical traits reminiscent of apes, lower primates, and save tribes and should be restrained (Lombroso as cited in Platt, 2009, p. 21). Lombroso’s work was not translated into English until 1911, after his death, but American criminologists knew of Lombroso’s biological determinism from Arthur MacDonald’s treatise *Abnormal Man* (1893).
Assessment

The DCS’s differentiation and tracking of students by physical assessment and testing was a way of taking stock of students, or what Bobbitt (1909) termed the “raw material.” Hence, student recordkeeping and processing were important, as if the CPS had become one of Moxon’s machines that think (Bierce, 1893/2014). In 1909, the association of a machine with thinking was unheard of to most individuals, for there was no formal distinction between natural and artificial intelligence, as in the 21st century. Artificial intelligence emerged later in the 1930s, when Alan Turing originated concepts leading to what John McCarthy would term “artificial intelligence” (McCarthy, et al., 1955, para. 1). In 1909, there were no computers, as there are today, but the human data-processing infrastructure in armies of teachers, clerical staff, typists, and calculating machine operators recorded and processed data on the ability and progress of each pupil mathematically and systematically. Every data worker knew the business well, from the superintendents’ with metric business methods learned in graduate school, to teachers whose jobs depended on teaching the same lessons on the same day, and recording grades and calculating averages (Callahan, 1962; Wrigley, 1982). These acts of assessment and recordkeeping, it would seem, fabricated fictional descriptors of mental activity that were computed and classified, naming students as “sub-normal” and “feebleminded” (Ryan, 2011, p. 343). Just as Moxon considered his robot the transformation of matter into the thinking automaton that fascinated readers, the CPS system became systematic thinking machine for assessing and sorting students, to create an elite social hierarchy.

Conclusion

Cooley was caught up in the craze of efficiency to keep order in a world that he feared was flying apart. As Bierce’s Moxon amazed readers by giving materials mechanical power and movement, in which, he claimed, existed consciousness; Cooley’s bureaucratic “machine” classified and sorted students by measuring their mental capacity and connected them with mechanical power and movement. Just as Taylor (1903), organized factories by synchronizing the minds of workers with the movement of machines, Cooley synchronized the minds of students with a bureaucratic “machine” that sorted them into differentiated levels of instruction with differentiated degrees of social power.

Cooley also followed principles of efficiency, thinking they would lead toward a science-driven utopia; but within the shadows, he was also preoccupied with maintaining an elite social hierarchy with privileged Anglo Americans in charge of individuals they considered less intelligent. Just as Bierce (1893/2014) told of animated automatons and made them seem unnervingly possible with Darwinian theory, Cooley envisioned American society out of control with a penchant for apocalyptic drama, if not the end of civilization. Bierce’s Moxon claimed that where there is movement there is life while Cooley pushed boundaries of natural law into the amorphous social realm of intelligence. At the end of this tale, readers are left to ponder which is the artificial or at least reduced to science fiction in acts of assassination.

References


An Arts-Based Classroom Confronts Educational Metanarratives:
Grand Narratives, Local Stories and a Classroom Teacher’s Story

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“In my own teaching practice I find it increasingly difficult to enact a pedagogy that empowers children, even in an independent schooling environment.”

This paper examines and deconstructs how a 4th/5th grade independent school teacher and his teaching partner were assessed based on their classroom management and teaching styles. The school administrator’s perspective and critique of this teaching team is expressed through a six-page performance evaluation report. As a member of the teaching team, the author presents an alternate perspective; advocating for self-initiated, interdisciplinary and creative approaches to learning. He viewed his practice as a site for a critical pedagogical discourse, ongoing analysis, reflection and revision. Here the author reflects on how two conflicting teaching paradigms perceive and evaluate the management style of this unconventional classroom.

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I was part of a fourth and fifth grade teaching team whose classroom practices and teaching styles were based on student agency and creative engagement. My classroom management and teaching styles were viewed, critiqued and ultimately prohibited by the administration. This is a commentary on the grand narratives surrounding traditional schooling and the power of those narratives to suppress “or preclude the existence of counter discourses and ways of knowing” (Rolling, 2011, p. 101). This case reflects how metanarratives operate as self-legitimizing frameworks that are validated and reified by popular consensus (Lyotard, 1984). It is a difficult and frightening proposition for teachers to openly oppose the precepts set forth by those in positions of authority. The simple act of acquiescence emboldens and solidifies the dominant discourse silencing voices and leaving the local stories untold. The local stories or “indigenous ways of knowing” (Kovach, 2005, p. 28) are essential to sustain a classroom where children are allowed to use arts-based approaches of inquiry. Arts-based classrooms offer students unique learning opportunities because “the arts provide a special way of coming to understand something” (Sullivan, 2006, p. 24). Additionally, “the arts provide access to forms of experience” that are otherwise difficult to obtain (Eisner, 2006, p. 11). Our students had opportunities to engaged in self-directed learning and our classroom was a safe space for creative “exploration, innovation, collaboration, and personalization by all students, with strong focus on process, not product” (Hathaway & Jaquith, 2014, p. 27).

Our classroom was more lab or studio than traditional classroom. Instead of desks and chairs, we had stools and butcher-block tables. Each table leg was affixed with furniture sliders so we could easily move the tables to the perimeters of the room when we needed an open space. My teaching partner and I taught at a Pre-K -12th grade independent school in upstate New York. Visitors often mistook our 4th grade classroom for the art room or part of the PE program. We integrated arts-based and kinesthetic modes of learning throughout the day. We constructed a climbing wall on two adjacent walls that ran from floor to ceiling. Students performed skits, presented ideas, or debated issues on a stage my teaching partner and I built. Once the lake effect snows arrived in billowing drifts, we took full advantage of the classroom set of snowshoes hung by our backdoor. During the 2012-2013

Figure 1. A panoramic view of the classroom showing the climbing wall, butcher block tables, walls adorned with students' creative expressions and the classroom stage.

school year, our students were sawing, hammering, drilling, climbing, trekking, sculpting or painting in addition to reading, writing, conducting science experiments or solving mathematical algorithms.

Our pedagogical philosophy emphasized student agency and self-governance, where students and teachers maintained equal ownership of the learning space. Students and teachers alike were allowed to access furnishings, materials and supplies. We removed the teacher desks and students sat or stood where they felt most comfortable.

![Figure 2. Clockwise from top: Students on the climbing wall, a student using a handsaw, a student learning woodworking skills, a student sets up an impromptu painting studio](image)

At the beginning of the year we did not set up or decorate our classroom. The stools remained stacked, the walls blank, doors unadorned, and supplies sealed in boxes. The students unpacked the room both figuratively and literally.

Students marked and decorated the walls, tables, floor, and ceiling according to their personal needs and interests. Eventually our classroom reflected the collective aesthetic of our new student body. The classroom transformed into a physically and visually active environment; an organic and ever-evolving work in progress.

Over the course of the year we received a great deal of positive feedback from parents, many of whom credited our hands-on, experiential, arts-based, child-centered classroom for their child’s successful learning experience. Oftentimes a prospective family member exclaimed from our doorway, “I wish I could go to school here!” However, our school’s new administration required faculty to move toward a traditional pedagogical framework.

**The Meeting**

At the end of the school year, two school administrators called my teaching partner and I into a meeting. We received an email prior to the meeting indicating that the Head of Lower School wanted to reflect on the 2012-2013 school year and discuss the upcoming fall semester. In her email she stated “I see many great things in both of you as teachers…but I also see some significant areas of vulnerability” (personal communication, May 27, 2013). To our surprise, the administrators handed us a six-page document outlining a list of over sixty complaints levied against our classroom practices and approaches to learning. Thinking this was our exit interview I braced myself and expected to be terminated. Surprisingly, both of our contracts were renewed.

In recent years, this independent school went through seismic upheavals, resulting in hiring a completely new administrative team. Our school was still reeling from the effects of the 2008
economic melt down and desperately searched for a fresh vision and new identity to secure its future in the 21st century. My teaching partner and I hoped for a plan outlining progressive ideals, democratic learning environments, critical pedagogies, and autonomy in learning and choice-based education. Above all, we valued student voice and agency and wanted our students to become critical thinkers, inventive problem solvers, and creative innovators.

By the end of the spring semester it was apparent that we fell on the opposite end of the spectrum with the administrative team and some of the traditionally minded faculty regarding educational theory, which made open and candid conversation surrounding educational practices futile. For years, the previous administration had instructed me to abstain from entering into a critical discourse, said my demeanor was off-putting, and informed me that any top-down initiatives were not open to debate. The enormous philosophical gulf between our educational approaches clearly informed this mandate. The aforementioned six-page document rebuked our classroom practices that valued student agency which included: enacting student generated ideas, holding debates and votes to determine classroom protocol, students co-creating the curriculum, allowing students equal access to classroom materials and supplies, offering opportunities for students to freely navigate about the classroom space, etc. During the meeting we were told our classroom time was “wasted by students negotiating the plan or agenda for the day” (personal communication, June 14, 2013) and that “students’

degree of control over the direction of instruction” made it “challenging for other teachers because students often expect the opportunity to vote regarding instructional decisions.” The administrators prohibited us from allowing our students to “negotiate assignments, projects, lessons” or any other aspect of the school day. As I began the 2013-2014 school year, I did not know how to comply with the demands put forth by the administration without sacrificing the key element of my educational philosophy: student agency.

**Two Lenses**

This paper will examine and deconstruct the two lenses through which our classroom management and teaching styles were perceived. The first perspective embodies the opinions expressed through the six-page document presented to us at the meeting. The other is from the perspective of the teaching team who viewed their practice as a site for a critical pedagogical discourse, ongoing analysis, reflection and revision.

Since the national move toward standardization in education following No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, classrooms became increasingly restrictive environments as discovery-based learning experiences offering relevant and meaningful ways of understanding were replaced by teacher directed instruction, prescriptive projects, and top-down educational initiatives (Giroux & Schmidt, 2004; Smyth, 2008; Zhao, 2006). Traditional and progressive approaches to education always clash. Gehrke (1979) wrote that schooling practices are “imbued with a certain sacred air.” Anderson &
Milbrandt (1998) recognized that schooling practices resist spontaneous expression and Friere (2005) maintained that schooling practices “negate education and knowledge as a process of inquiry.” In his Flow Theory, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi described the optimal learning experience as one in which participants find “a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment” (1990, p. 3) becoming “so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter” (p. 4). In this state of flow people are intrinsically motivated as they engage in self-initiated endeavors. When children begin the schooling process external forces control their learning experiences. These external forces extinguish the sense of agency found in what I consider optimal learning experiences. The dominant culture of education in the United States requires children to follow a standardized set of “social rules and norms” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 21) where learning is decontextualized and children cannot pursue their own interests. Similarly, Glasser (1969) argued for the use of relevant teaching material, found through agency, for meaningful learning experiences. Glasser believed that students “should have a voice in determining both the curriculum and the rules of their school” (p. 37). Critical theorist Joe L. Kincheloe (2008) argued that educators should replace scripted curricula, reductionist epistemologies, positivist attitudes, rigid classroom practices and decontextualized learning environments with a focus on “generative themes” (p. 11) that connect with the students’ life experiences. In my own teaching practice I find it increasingly difficult to enact a pedagogy that empowers children, even in an independent schooling environment.

**Point – Counter Point**

I informed the administrators that I could contextualize and respond to the assessment item by item after hearing the criticisms leveled against my teaching team. The head of Lower School replied, “I would prefer that you not go through and contextualize each of the comments shared. I understand that any one of the comments made could be slightly inaccurate or taken out of context. It’s the totality of these types of comments, taken together over the course of a year, that necessitate the need to impose greater structure and consistency so that the lower school program is more cohesive and in alignment with the vertical articulation school wide” (personal communication, June 14, 2013). This perspective denied “pluralist modes of thinking” (Malpas, 2013, p. 104) and failed to consider the local stories of our classroom. The perspective of the administration favored the grand story or metanarrative engendered by the school’s political framework and disregarded the complex and rich milieu of our classroom. Burbules describes metanarratives as “attempts to offer general and encompassing accounts of truth, value, and reality” (1995). Metanarratives organize and transmit knowledge into a prevailing, overarching and accepted truth (Malpas, 2013). I had a different perspective of my classroom than the one put forth in the document. In order to completely articulate these contrasting viewpoints it is imperative to analyze the comments, to offer my own “local understandings” (Jones, 2003, p. 510) providing a contextualization through a
first person narrative.

Areas of Focus
The six-page document criticizing our classroom practices was organized into 10 areas of focus. The topic headings included:

1. Curricular Alignment with Grades Above and Below
2. Instruction
3. Use of Instructional Time
4. Instructional Norms Regarding Student Behavior
5. Classroom Management
6. Degree of Student Choice
7. Classroom Cleanliness and Safety
8. Resistance to Engage Students in Science Fair Process as is the Institutional Expectation
9. Participation in the Learning Environment is Not Negotiable
10. Team Spirit and Collaboration.

The comments contained within topic headings 6-10 repeated the themes of the comments contained within topic headings 1-5. I will concentrate my efforts here on the first five topics to avoid redundancy.

1. Curricular Alignment with Grades Above and Below

The critique commented that the school’s curriculum is “not driven by an organic nature at its core” (personal communication, June 14, 2013). By contrast, the school’s mission statement and core values emphasized a student body that “thinks critically” and “discovers a passion for lifelong learning.” The school appeared to foster creative problem solving and critical thinking. These tenets did not coincide with the linear structures and emphasis on a sequential curricular alignment in the administration's critique. My teaching partner and I defined our classroom as “an organic and ever evolving site for inquiry, reflection, self-governance and community” (Rufo, 2013, p. 149) and desired to contribute to a school that offered opportunities for reflective professional discourses.

The critique went on to say that we had “difficulty connecting with colleagues in a way that results in meaningful and useful collaboration” and that the “Middle School teachers have expressed that they will not be able to teach the same content that they have in prior years and that they will have to completely re-vamp their plan for next year in science.” Throughout our tenure my teaching partner and I consistently reached out to our colleagues in an attempt to offer a better understanding of our philosophies and methodologies. In faculty meetings these attempts were usually met with indifference and sometimes with outright derision. When we met with faculty individually, they would appear amicable but we often heard that they later met surreptitiously with the administration to register a complaint or share concerns.

We were shocked to learn that the Middle School teachers felt they would have to overhaul their science curriculum. The Chair of the science department had an open invitation to our classroom throughout the year and many times she accepted. She observed our students as they conducted science experiments, wrote lab reports, and discussed findings. Additionally, I sat in on a number of sixth-grade classes including math, language arts, social studies, science, and fine arts in order to

learn how to better prepare our students for their eventual entry into Middle School. These visits provided me with opportunities to see how students navigated the various classroom spaces, the ways curricula were delivered, the interactions between teachers and students and the general culture surrounding the sixth-grade experience. Although my classroom operated quite differently, I felt able to ascertain the skills and content knowledge our rising sixth graders needed to be successful in Middle School.

2. Instruction

We were told that our “instructional times often seem chaotic.” This was a common opinion among faculty who were perceivably uncomfortable with our teaching styles. In fact, some of the faculty who made this accusation worked closely with us as part of an earlier teaching team. We held weekly meetings to discuss students, classroom protocol, curriculum, and educational theory so these teachers knew what we did and why we did it. Seemingly, that which began many years ago as a friendly partnership, eroded over time into an acrimonious impasse. If they examined our pedagogy through a traditional lens, they would likely misidentify or dismiss our classroom as chaotic or unstructured. We didn't follow linear curricular pathways, adhere to prescribed programs, or place an emphasis on ‘ritualized practices’ (Gehrke, 1979, p.106) common to traditional schooling culture. Arguably the learning environment we fostered actually required more structure, albeit an organic and malleable one because of its complex and fluid design. We were more interested in tapping into the students’ interests and how they might want to go about their learning. We developed a practice called “Reciprocal Engagement” which required “teachers to be attentive to the viewpoints of the students and allow their perspectives to effect change within the classroom” (Rufo, 2013, p. 152).

The next string of comments stated that a “lack of visual supports during instruction” reduced its value and that “instruction often seems informal, non-mandatory,” the critique mandating that “student participation during instructional periods will be the expectation.” I am not sure how it was determined that our classroom lacked visual supports during instruction as our walls were filled with student work, messages, and creative expressions. I surmise that this interpretation resulted from our classroom not posting commercially produced educational posters or signs. Everything on our walls was student generated. If our students felt they needed visual aids they created them and hung them wherever they found them most helpful.

I would not classify our instruction as informal, but I would describe it as one that actively confronts traditional schooling protocols. That same year it became a popular practice for teachers to use a poster in their room titled “Give Me Five for Good Listening” as part of their instructional time. This poster sets forth five rules for good listening:

1. Eyes on Speaker
2. Lips Closed
3. Ears Listening
4. Sit up Straight
5. Hands and Feet Quiet

My teaching partner and I did not share in this practice. We knew that

some of our students could listen without looking at the speaker. Others engaged by having side conversations about the topic being presented. We did not agree with the assumption that children had to sit up straight and keep their hands and feet still to be attentive. We felt the poster’s message reflected the factory model of schooling characterized by standardized and compartmentalized learning processes (McKay, 2004) and “top-down control and uniformity” (Reigeluth, 2004, p. 8). We believed offering students autonomy in how they engaged in their schooling lead to productive and germane learning experiences.

3. Use of Instructional Time

As our school moved toward more traditional modes of education, teaching was considered as a quantifiable act. Direct instruction was valued over inquiry-based and exploratory methods as classrooms were evaluated by how many minutes per day students were exposed to direct teaching. This initiative ran counter to the practice of “Reciprocal Engagement” (Rufo, 2013, p. 152) that we valued as part of our classroom culture. We found it beneficial to “adjust to the complex, changeable and powerful waves of energy within our classroom” (Rufo, 2013, p. 150) and modify the schedule based on the needs of our students. During the 2012-2013 school year, an active group of students displayed an intricate and complex group dynamic. The students often needed a five-minute snack break before transitioning back to our classroom after music or art class. However, the document claimed that “breaks after encores are unnecessary” and that “walking to and from allows for movement breaks.” My teaching partner and I sometimes suspended a lesson or activity if we sensed that students needed to first address an issue or ameliorate a difficult situation. When students did not find an activity interesting or meaningful, they were allowed to develop an alternate learning plan as long as it included similar skills or content. The administrators perceived this as a wasteful practice: “Time seems to often be wasted by students negotiating the ‘plan’ or ‘agenda’ for the day.”

4. Instructional Norms Regarding Student Behavior

In most of the lower grade level classrooms teachers and administrators understood student behavior according to how well the children adapted to predetermined rules of etiquette and propriety. Administrators usually stipulated these conventions at faculty meetings in the weeks leading up to the first day of school. Classroom practices that reflected “the factory model of schooling- processing students as if they were widgets on an assembly line” (Grant & Murray, 1999, p. 2) went unquestioned. A classroom that looked and operated differently from the norm, as ours did, was considered an outlier in need of reform. The criticisms ran the gamut from “students currently refer to teachers by surnames only” to “digital technology is often allowed for non-educational purposes.”

When students addressed me by my surname it was usually done in a spirit of conviviality. I did not feel the need for children to place the title Mr. in front of my name. I was not concerned with overt displays of respect. I wanted to earn the approval of my students by
being a thoughtful and considerate teacher, rather than garnering the illusion of respect by insisting that they address me by placing a Mr. before my surname.

Digital technologies remain a ubiquitous part of our society as “Internet connectivity in schools, homes, neighborhoods, and communities has become increasingly pervasive” (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009, p. 246). Although most teachers at my school integrated some degree of digital technology into the classroom, it was usually instituted by top down initiatives and seldom student generated. We ascribed to the belief that “people who have grown-up with personal computers and the internet (digital natives) function and think differently from people who had to adjust to and learn new technologies and approaches (digital immigrants)” (Kinash, Wood, & Knight, 2013, p. 57). There is a disconnect in education between the way in which teachers and students “define, conceptualize and position technology and the role of teachers and learners” (p. 58). We realized that technology permeated every aspect of the lives of “digital natives” by using technology as a learning tool. It seemed unproductive to relegate technology into narrowly conceived curricular frameworks, in a world where “computing and network capabilities [were] being designed and engineered into all sorts of everyday devices” (Goggin, 2012, p. 203).

Under the heading “Instructional Norms Regarding Student Behavior” were also the comments: “A culture of respect for property is lacking”, “Tables, walls have been routinely written upon, stapled and defaced” and “War paint in lunch room.”

I find the accusations that our students defaced school property especially disconcerting. During the 2010-2011 school year our students could express themselves by drawing and painting directly on the classroom walls. This practice began in late 2009 when students were permitted to draw a series of mazes on our classroom wall as an attempt to “allow creative independence” (Rufo, 2012, p. 45) and give students “a sense of ownership, a deeper relationship with the classroom space” (p. 46). However, students were never simply allowed to paint the walls whenever or however they pleased. Students first made proposals after which we would hold a class discussion, debate, and vote on whether or not the student should be allowed to mark a predetermined section of the classroom walls. It was a democratic process and all members of our classroom community were invited to voice their opinions and cast votes. Teachers as well as students were only allowed one vote each. Therefore, each student had joint ownership of the classroom space, a voice in determining classroom protocol, and agency as a member of our classroom community. That summer, the school painted over the student work on the walls and we were informed that our students were to abstain from painting or drawing on the walls. The students were saddened to learn that they were no longer allowed to paint on the classroom walls but their disappointment was somewhat assuaged because they were still allowed to affix their work to the walls using staples, pushpins, or tape. However, the administration also considered this a form of defacement. This leads me to conclude that it was not necessarily the way our students marked

the walls, but that they were allowed to mark the walls at all. Giving the students
the agency to make decisions concerning classroom décor and allowing them self-
governance seemed to be the real issue. By “curating the classroom space”
(James Haywood Rolling, personal communication, February 12, 2013) our
students were able to “stake a claim of personal agency” (Kear, 2007, p. 89).
We believed these acts of agency provided our students with “a sense of
connectedness, active involvement, and personal investment in their learning”
(Killeen, Evans & Danko, 2003, p. 254) that led to higher levels of motivation
and learning (Zimmerman, 2000).

5. Classroom Management

My teaching partner and I disliked the term Classroom
Management. To us, a classroom was not a governed space but a place for
children to engage in learning that was relevant and meaningful to them.
Schooling curricula and organizational approaches influenced by managerial
styles consider children to be “adaptable, manageable beings” (Freire, 2005, p.73).
Schools fill their classrooms with “routines of instruction” where “children
are not conceived as co-agents in the process of education, but only as
patients, recipients” (Hawkins, 2002, p. 229). As part of my teaching practice I
would occasionally sit amongst the students so that I could hear what they
were talking about in side conversations during instructional times. I was
surprised to find that they were usually discussing the topic at hand. When they
were not, I would try to ascertain how I might pique their interest in the subject
or to determine if their line of inquiry

was a more beneficial learning
experience for them at that moment.

Reflections

Clearly student agency was at the
heart of the matter: “The degree of
student choice and autonomy will be
more in alignment with organizational
norms.” It went on to state: “Students’
degree of control over the direction of
instruction makes it more challenging
for other teachers because students often
expect the opportunity to ‘vote’
regarding instructional decisions and/or
do not expect to have to maintain
sustained attention.” And as if to drive
the point home, “Students may not
negotiate assignments, projects, lessons,
etc.” The administration wanted to focus
on the aggregate of the comments rather
than hear my contextualization and
clarifications; the aggregation aligned
with their argument. Although our
classroom contained a structure, it did
not coincide with the prevailing
metanarrative at our school; a
hierarchical model positioning the
administration near the top, followed by
the faculty, with the students at the
bottom. Every aspect of the Lower
School students' schooling experience
was organized and controlled; protocols
surrounded each portion of the student's
day. Students were given instructions on
how to operate in the hallways,
classrooms, and dining hall. Adults led
students through the hallways who were
expected to walk quietly in single file
line. At the same time, the Middle and
Upper School students were allowed to
navigate the hallways in a more natural
way: laughing, moving quickly or
slowly, or stopping to chat with friends.
In the dining hall students were expected
to remain at their seats unless given
permission to get up by a teacher. On the other hand, teachers could often be seen gathering in small groups to have conversations, text or check email. Within the classrooms, tables once clustered together for cooperative group work were separated and organized into rows that faced the front of the room. Commercially produced programs were adopted with purchased texts and behavioral expectations established. The prevailing metanarrative ensured a framework that went unquestioned by the vast majority of practitioners. Teachers who chose to shed light on the metanarrative in faculty meetings or challenge its precepts in classroom practices were in danger of being considered outliers unwilling to collaborate, resistant to established conventions and “lacking team spirit.”

Nine Months Later

Nine months have passed since I began writing this narrative. Over the summer my teaching partner decided to take a year long leave of absence and home school his three young children. The following September I returned to my classroom as the fourth and fifth grade math instructor. This arrangement provided a way for me to continue teaching while avoiding the many conflicts I had experienced the previous year.

Because there was no mandated math curriculum set in place, I designed and adapted a portion of my math class based on the interests and learning styles of my students. Since I was no longer teaching science, I did not have to concern myself with aligning more closely with the science department. Because of logistical changes classroom locations were rearranged and the faculty members who previously complained to the administration about our classroom practices were moved to a different building.

However, it was evident that the administration settled on a specific agenda and plan for the future of the school. I no longer shared thoughts or ideas that could be perceived as critical or antagonistic to the status quo. My teaching practice became a subterranean affair. I began shutting my classroom door, especially when my class was involved in noisy, energetic activities. I refrained from sharing my articles and publications via our school's newsfeed or Twitter sites. I kept a low profile when it came to creative productions such as Math Palooza (a student-run, carnivalesque, math-based gaming celebration) or Math TV (a student produced math show using a closed-circuit television and camera set up). Parents, administrators, faculty, and students from other grade levels were usually invited to attend such special occasions, but I decided not to publicize our classroom events school-wide. This decision took the pressure off of my students and enabled them to work at their own pace, without being constrained by predetermined schedules or outside expectations. Students had the freedom to develop their personal visions without following a specific format or producing a final product that fit within an established criterion. In order to remain inconspicuous, I allowed my students only one hour a week to engage in open-ended creative learning explorations.

These changes made my teaching experience much easier though less fulfilling. Not having my teaching practices so closely scrutinized came as

a relief. During a recent lesson observation by an administrator, I received positive feedback including the comments “the classroom is less chaotic” and “students are more engaged in your instruction.” Yet this year I have not offered my students the same measure of agency as in previous years and there were fewer opportunities for creative investigations. Additionally, having four different groups of students for a quarter of the day meant there was less time to develop a sense of community. The departmentalization left little room for cross-curricular experiences or organic learning opportunities. Math class became an isolated event. Last year, my teaching partner and I designed an environment where our students had a substantial say in how they went about their education. Previously, our organic approach and extended blocks of time with the students provided many occasions for self-directed learning. This year, opportunities for self-governance and creative serendipity were limited.

I did my best to keep my math classes innovative. Most lessons included a constructivist approach with an accompanying hands-on activity. Students could choose to sit wherever they pleased and move the tables about or create alternative seating arrangements by stacking stools. Students continued to decorate the walls and mark the tables according to their personal aesthetic. Visitors still consistently mistook our classroom for the art room or part of the physical education program. But I wondered what my teaching partner would think of this year’s classroom. Would he find it in accordance to our philosophy or would he think it was too much of a compromise? Although we have kept in constant touch via email, snowshoe treks, and mountain bike outings, he has not been in the classroom since his hiatus. Our pedagogy hinges on student agency. Although I have offered my students creative and innovative learning experiences, I feel this year I have acted as a director rather than a guide and facilitator.

What Next?

If I remain at this school a new math program will be in place by next year. New construction is scheduled to replace our current building. The Head of Lower School informed me that students could not mark the tables, walls, and floors as they did in the past. I expect we will not be able to build a stage or construct a classroom climbing wall. Once again, I am faced with the challenge of trying to preserve a child-centered, experiential, arts-based classroom within an increasingly traditional school environment.

I believe every decision made by the administration was done, in their view, in the best interest of the school. The administration worked very hard to establish a solid reputation and ensure the school’s financial stability. Changes in personnel, curricula and classroom configurations were enacted to promote vertical alignment and ideological uniformity. However, failure to consider an institution’s diverse local stories can lead to unintended consequences such as narrowly focused pedagogical practices and a reification of entrenched metanarratives. Teachers who use arts-based methodologies can become marginalized when assessed through a fixed lens of traditional educational hierarchies. Arts-based approaches to
teaching and learning require divergent thinking made possible by an organic classroom structure that embraces student choice and teacher autonomy. In Engaging Learners Through Artmaking, Katherine Douglas and Diane Jaquith ask us to rethink education by imagining a “curriculum that emerges out of student-directed learning rather than explicit directions” (2009, p. 1).

Next September, as I head into the 2014-2015 school year, I will be separated from my teaching partner and placed in a new classroom. Nevertheless, I will continue to rethink education, imagine a student-centered curriculum and find opportunities to allow my students creative agency.

References


Bob Sweeney, *Scanscape III*, 2014, Mixed-Media, 8”x 8”
CAUGHT WITH OUR PANTS DOWN:
Art Teacher Assessment

“I sought to discover whether the standard forms of teacher evaluation and teacher observation procedures related appropriately to visual arts educators, especially when being evaluated by administrators from a non-arts background.”

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Teacher assessment is a hot topic in today’s high-stakes, test-driven, accountability-focused educational environment. My recent research addresses how high school art educators, under the umbrella of non-tested subjects and grades (NTSG), are assessed in their classroom teaching practices in the United States, Virginia. Based on my findings, it is clear that while the teachers surveyed do not fear accountability, they are wary of being evaluated by those who lack content knowledge in the arts, by methods that are subjective, and with criteria that are inflexible. This article addresses the need to develop open forums that include educators’ voices in order to create better teacher assessments that focus on student learning achievement in authentic and holistic ways. By learning about and sharing resources regarding how teachers in NTSG are evaluated suggestions are made to organize resources that may help develop more authentic assessments for art teachers focusing on meaningful student learning and achievement.

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Jonathan James has taken his pants off. He stands in the front of my ceramics class in his boxer shorts wielding a blow dryer. He stands there because there is an outlet for the blow dryer and he has taken his pants off because Chris Fox sprayed him with a water bottle in an inconvenient location. Jonathan also happens to be standing right by the door of my classroom, the door which the Dean of Faculty, Arnold Trundleburg, is due to walk through in no less than five minutes for a scheduled formal observation of my art teaching. As I stare in horror at Jonathan, a large and athletic star lacrosse player, who is gently waving the blow dryer across the inseam of his khakis, visions of my assessment feedback flicker across my mind . . . “Ms. Palumbo allows partial nudity in her ceramics class. This is UNACCEPTABLE! Not to mention a violation of Notre Dame Academy’s strict uniform policy.” In a flash, I unplug the blow dryer and command, “Jonathan James, put your pants on!”

This story, in which the names have been altered, illustrates an extreme example of an art educator’s experience with teacher assessment. I remember the situation vividly. I was a first year art teacher, feeling like I had been unwittingly thrown into a baptism of fire, struggling with classroom management. Many moments of my first year classes were comprised of chaos, and I, as a new teacher, sometimes felt in terror of looming administrators tasked with judging my teaching.

I often felt isolated in my teaching practice due to a lack of visual arts colleagues with whom I could compare notes. I was unsure of what criteria were even being used to assess me, as I come from a fine arts background with no formal teacher preparation training. I often wondered what other visual art teachers thought about their assessments and observations and where art was considered in the hierarchy of their school’s academic programs. Did these teachers also, during times of assessment, feel unprepared like they were caught with their pants down, so to speak?

Alternatively, were there schools with evaluative strategies that gave meaningful feedback to their educators that, in turn, helped them improve their teaching practices? I certainly hoped so.

These thoughts became the foundation for my research, and were planted in my mind over several years ago while teaching in a small private high school in rural northern Virginia. In order to answer my questions regarding art teacher assessments and evaluations, I designed a survey that addressed how, by whom, and in what ways high school art teachers are assessed in their classroom teaching practices in the state of Virginia. Additionally, my survey addressed the opinions of these art teachers regarding the validity and purposes of their assessments.

Assessment: “It’s Nothing Personal”

Assessment and evaluation both inform each other. Assessments are formative observations that are meant to provide useful feedback for the improvement of teaching practices. Evaluations result in summative judgments and appraisals regarding a teacher’s performance (Assessment & Evaluation, n.d., para. 1). Teacher evaluations vary from state to state and from school to school. In my research, I sought to discover whether the standard forms of teacher evaluation and teacher observation procedures related...
appropriately to visual arts educators, especially when being evaluated by administrators from a non-arts background. The very nature of evaluating the arts at all, let alone evaluating how one teaches the arts, poses some very specific difficulties such as the subjective nature of aesthetic preferences (Gholson-Maitland, 1988; Soep, 2004). Educational reform writers at The Hope Street Group stated that, “quality evaluation programs that provide professional development and constructive feedback have the potential to elevate the teaching profession and lead to greater learning in the classroom, benefiting students” (Teacher evaluation playbook, n.d., para. 14). Meaningful evaluation schemas such as these could be relevant to art educators as well as general educators, particularly if the professional development and constructive feedback offered is discipline-specific.

However, the road to developing better assessments has been bumpy. Education reform advocate Stu Silberman (2013) summarized this dilemma:

> It is fair to say that bureaucracies, red tape and a checkered reform history all certainly create obstacles to common sense solutions ... Teachers say the system must reflect their unique student populations, and policymakers say hard data must inform decisions. In fact, both needs can be satisfied, but only if diversified teacher voices sit side-by-side with student-centered policy makers. (para. 1)

Silberman (2013) acknowledged the rich opportunity for collaboration that exists between policy makers and educators in non-tested subject areas, “ultimately building trust between stakeholders” (para. 6). He also recognized that “fair assessment of an art teacher…cannot be based on school-wide student scores” (para. 6), and that the project of developing standardized assessments for all grades and subjects was a logistical quagmire, requiring states to invest more time and resources than they had originally expected. Impersonal top-down forms of teacher assessment thus seem doubly harmful: they fail to adequately evaluate the teachers, and they drain the resources of states and districts that try to develop and implement them.

When speaking specifically of art education, we find that the relationship between art teaching and assessment is “best characterized as awkward, if not overtly hostile” (Soep, 2004, p. 579). Of concern to art teachers is the correlation of their evaluation linked to measurable student learning goals that may be outside of their subject area. Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, summarily stated, “Everyone agrees that teacher evaluation is broken. Ninety-nine percent of teachers are rated satisfactory and most evaluations ignore the most important measure of a teacher's success - which is how much their students have learned" (2010, para. 65). Yet, the matter of effectively measuring student learning in art as a tool to evaluate teachers is a complex matter with which districts, schools, and individual educators are still grappling. We can hope and strive for an educational system that trains, employs, and develops competent teachers, however rating 99% of teachers as
satisfactory creates a far too narrow curve and ignores both issues of underperforming teachers and the recognition of high achieving teachers.

The Non-Tested Subjects and Grades (NTSG) Majority: We’re All in This Together

Teachers of NTSG comprise the majority of the educators in schools in the United States (Prince, Schuermann, Guthrie, Witham, Milanowski, & Thorn, 2009). Nationally, art educators and, in general, NTSG educators, are assessed in exactly the same way as all other teachers, with little or no differentiation of approach (Education Week, 2013; Regional Educational Laboratory, 2013; TELL survey, 2011). Research about how visual art teachers are assessed is folded into literature that addresses the assessment of NTSG educators who have a curriculum framework, but no standardized testing to indicate student growth performance. Thus, visual art educators are grouped with educators who teach a wide range of disciplines, including drama, music, vocational education, health, foreign languages and even subjects like math and language arts taught in non-tested grades (Regional Educational Laboratory Central, 2013). This group of educators is large and diverse, yet according to the literature, these teachers tend to be assessed in the same ways.

Methodology

To address the problems embedded in the overgeneralized methods of teacher evaluation, I researched what several states are doing to address the educator assessment in non-tested subjects and grades and how the related to the visual arts programs in secondary schools. Examining art educator evaluation requires an extensive comparative study of educational programs, policy, and even curriculum that scrutinizes the very aims of education. I sought to identify where and how the evaluation of visual art teachers landed within that spectrum.

Survey methodology was well suited for this study because it enabled me to query a potentially large participant group and it was flexible in that I was able to gather both qualitative (written responses) and quantitative (demographic information) data (Adler & Clark, 2008, p. 216). Prior to my survey implementation, I reviewed a variety of assessment tools in order to understand the various ways in which teachers are evaluated and to create relevant questions for inclusion.

Background to the study

In considering questions to include in the survey, I examined existing surveys and questionnaires in educational databases from the New Teacher Center including the “Teaching, Empowering, Leading & Learning: TELL survey” (2011) and “The Widget Effect” by Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, Keeling, Schunck, Palcisco, & Morgan (2009) in order to see how other researchers in the field have approached the evaluation of arts educators and teachers in general (e.g. Burton, 2001; Weisberg, Krosnick, & Bowen, 1996). I reviewed the literature to examine what previous researchers have surveyed in order to reduce possible redundancy of questions, gain relevancy by triangulating appropriate questions, and discover missing questions that ought to be addressed in my survey.

I also used my experience moderating a roundtable at the Annual Assessment in the Arts Conference in
Denver, Colorado 2012 to solicit relevant topics to be included in my survey questions. This conference was especially salient since its purpose was to “add to the body of knowledge of assessment; specifically, how creative academic programs can be appropriately assessed for accreditation, instructor feedback, and the improvement of student learning” (A. Ostrowski, personal communication, November 22, 2011).

**Design of the study**

The survey consisted of 47 questions grouped into five sections: 1. How are you assessed in the classroom? 2. Who assesses you in the classroom? 3. Why are you assessed? 4. What next? 5. Demographics (see Appendix A). The survey was organized using a combination of five-point Likert scale questions (Likert, 1932) relating to the assessment process, and open-ended questions (Schulman & Presser, 1979) that asked about the participants’ specific experiences with the evaluation of their teaching practice in order to generate easily aggregated quantitative data (Upton & Cook, 2006) and rich qualitative information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I included a section where participants were invited to share their own questions and concerns relating to evaluation procedures as well as a demographic section.

**Participants/location of research**

The participants in the finalized survey were secondary school art teachers in both public and independent schools in the US state of Virginia. I was primarily interested in surveying teachers in grades 9-12 for two reasons. Firstly, high school teachers are held accountable for imparting art knowledge to their students during a time when college preparation is considered crucial. Based on these expectations, I believed teachers in these grade levels would be evaluated in a more rigorous fashion. Secondly, as Burton (2001, p. 132) stated, “many elementary schools do not have art specialists or art programs.”

**Methods of Data Collection**

The survey was made active through SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey platform, on October 8th, 2012. The survey was closed and the responses were collected by March 21st, 2013. I used SurveyMonkey to administer my survey using an email listserv of National Art Education Association (NAEA). I opted to use SurveyMonkey Gold in order to take advantage of the beta statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) and text analysis software included. I used the SPSS software to generate percentile charts and graphs that organized my data visually for data analysis.

**Participant Recruitment**

I was able to recruit a random sampling of participants with the aid of the Virginia Art Education Association (VAEA), who disseminated my request for participation to its email listserv, for which I designed a consent form. The recruitment email was emailed on November 18th, 2012 and was included in the VAEA winter newsletter publication (Cubberly, 2013). The recruitment generated a response of 93 participants out of an estimated 496 public and private high schools in the state of Virginia. I based this estimate on high schools that have an enrollment of 80 or more students in order to maintain a viable visual arts program (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).
This indicates an approximate 19% response rate.

Data Analysis
The qualitative findings of the open-ended and free response portion of my survey were compiled, coded and categorized. The Likert scale responses provided direction to code the qualitative data into positive, neutral, and negative responses and SurveyMonkey’s beta SPSS analysis software was utilized to generate percentiles and rankings of the responses. The quantitative data also provided a comparison base for the qualitative data and was organized visually in the form of charts and graphs and compiled into relevant categories (Alreck & Settle, 2004).

Limitations
The limitations of survey methodology for my research purposes revealed themselves to be the length of the survey, the quality of the responses, and the potentially leading nature of certain questions, although I attempted to avoid any such bias. The length of my survey, 47 questions, was rather cumbersome. Out of the 93 respondents, only 45 completed the entire survey.

Another limitation to this survey may have been its implementation via the NAEA. Though I am certain I was able to survey a random sampling of high school art teachers in Virginia, the majority of the respondents were recruited directly from an email they received from the NAEA. This means that the majority of the art teachers sampled were NAEA members, who may be connected to a larger network of colleagues, more informed regarding assessment practices via NAEA publications, and more accustomed to art education advocacy than non-NAEA members, which could have potentially skewed responses. However, limitations like this are to be routinely accounted for in many survey implementation procedures (Lavrakas, 2008).

A Distorted Reflection: Using Student Growth Measurements to Assess Visual Arts Teachers
In an article from the Education Week teacher blog, “Teacher in a Strange Land,” national board-certified arts educator Nancy Flanagan (2012) summarized a collective opinion regarding the use of standardized testing in the arts to evaluate teachers. She claimed, “the tests tell us nothing about how students will apply artistic skill and expression to their real lives and careers. Further, they tell us nothing about the instructional quality of their teachers” (para. 6). She goes further to state in no uncertain terms, “We measure what we value…but we won't raise teaching quality in the arts by creating standardized tests” (para. 14). This is a concern voiced by a number of respondents that I surveyed.

The varied opinions about how to assess students in the visual arts have been quite well researched and documented (Boughton, 2004; Davis, 1993; Eisner, 1996; Hetland, Sheridan, Veenema & Winner, 2007; Stronge & Tucker, 2005). It is either a “blessing or a curse” (Boughton, p. 588, 2004) that there has been no commonly adopted state or national standardized measure implemented. Proponents of using standardized assessments and standards of learning would argue that the issue of including art in the assessed category is an interesting one. Assessment is what makes you legitimate. Flanagan (2012) opposed using standardized tests in the arts as a measure of job security and
stated, “this is like saying thank goodness for all those infarctions, because now we can staff our high-tech cardiac unit” (para. 7). The reality is that students learn in multiple ways just as teachers teach in multiple ways. There is no way to standardize this, nor should there be. Holding a teacher to standards that are not relevant within his or her curriculum or the subject they teach is demoralizing and counterproductive (Flanagan, 2012; Schmoker, 2012).

It is disconcerting that there is such an obvious disconnect among previous research regarding how art educators are evaluated when now more than ever, their evaluations are directly correlated and weighted according to student learning and academic achievement. This is a weight felt emotionally and professionally by educators across subject areas. Educators may feel wary about the purposes and aims of their assessments and may believe that, “teacher evaluation will continue to be nothing more than what teachers and administrators have aptly called a dog-and-pony show” (Schmoker, 2012, para. 15) and is furthermore an unproductive use of time and resources. Art educators who at times feel isolated in their teaching practice, may even fear the process and perceive it as a way to weed out teachers “the way a victim would regard a sniper: As a way to pick them off one by one” (Randall, 2012, para. 12). These are strong concerns that feed questions regarding who is actually responsible for performing the assessments of art teachers and how to provide them with the data that demonstrates measurable student learning in the visual arts.

According to Stronge and Tucker (2005), there may be many obstacles to the effective use of student performance data in the evaluation of educators; they stressed the importance of “maximiz[ing] the benefits and minimiz[ing] the liabilities in linking student learning and teacher effectiveness” (p. 96). A significant liability is that the ways in which a student learns in the art classroom may not be apparent to an evaluator who is not knowledgeable about the field of visual arts. Stronge and Tucker addressed this question stating that “measures of student learning are vitally important to judging the effectiveness of teachers and schools, but should never usurp professional judgment that integrates knowledge of other factors that affect instruction” (p. 96). The dilemma for art educators arises when the evaluator does not have a background or appreciation of visual art. Baeder (2012) brings some clarity to the conversation of teacher assessment and accountability. He stated, “Teacher resistance to evaluation is a red herring. The skill of evaluators, not the nature of evaluations, is the real issue” (para. 9).

The Heart of the Matter: Who is Assessing Us?

Understanding the visual arts is an important factor to consider when determining the assessment of art educators. The disadvantage with evaluation structures that attach a disproportionate significance to student learning outcomes is that their designers may not know how to measure aesthetics, conceptual development of creativity, (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) or studio habits of mind (Hetland, et al., 2007). Understanding the visual arts is a complex journey that fosters not only critical thinking and problem solving strategies but curiosity and a connection to culture and our place in society.
The people tasked with providing and implementing educational personnel evaluations are generally administrators such as principals, vice principals, department chairs, and deans of faculty (Bergsen, 2004; Dobbs, 1972; Eisner, 1996; Schmoker, 1999) within the school. Increasingly, art teachers themselves are asked to practice a reflective praxis and participate in their assessments. In what follows, the findings from the survey reveal the scope of how these art teachers are assessed and how they feel about their assessments.

**Survey Says: Art Teachers Provide the Data**

Out of all my survey questions, the responses from Questions 19 and 20 revealed the very heart of my research. Question 19 asked: *Do you feel that the person or people assessing you have a good understanding of the arts?*, and question 20 followed up with: *Is it important to you that the person assessing you have and understanding of the arts?* In question 19, the overwhelming majority, 63.8%, of the respondents indicated that their assessors ‘infrequently’ or ‘never’ had an understanding of the arts. 22.4% marked ‘sometimes’. Only 13.8% of the respondents indicated ‘frequently’ or ‘always’.

The response to Question 20 indicates that teachers truly desire to be assessed by those who have an understanding of the arts. 82.5% of the respondents indicated that it is ‘extremely’ and ‘very’ important to be assessed by those that possess knowledge about art. 15.8% of the respondents marked ‘somewhat’, 1.8% marked ‘not really’ and no respondent marked ‘never’. This supports my hypothesis that art teachers are assessed by those who may not comprehend the arts, and simply, that these teachers wish to be assessed by those who do. One respondent made the humorous comparison, “How is a ballerina to assess a plumber?”

![Figure 1](image_url). Art teachers perception of their assessors understanding of the arts.
The Results Are in: “How is a Ballerina to Assess a Plumber?”

Concluding Thoughts

Several recurring themes emerged in the resulting data analysis that relate to the art teachers personal experiences in the classroom. I coded and categorized participant statements into positive, neutral and negative grouping. Within the positive spectrum, art teachers are 1. Vested in their pedagogy, 2. Desire high expectations, 3. Want meaningful feedback, and 4. Crave collaborative evaluations.

1. VESTED IN THEIR PEDAGOGY: Art teachers love what they do. According to my survey, art teachers are primarily focused on student achievement, wellbeing, and engagement, and consider their jobs to be extremely rewarding because they genuinely enjoy working with students. Statements from the responses included, “my students are terrific. It helps to love the people you work with,” and “I get to help the next generation to become thinking, productive members of society.” These teachers are vested in their pedagogy and have their students’ best interests at heart.

2. DESIRE FOR HIGH EXPECTATIONS: Also, art teachers do not fear accountability; they desire it. One respondent even went so far as to write that his/her assessment went, “too well - I received a perfect evaluation - no one is perfect.” The respondents did not express any wariness of constructive criticism, but lamented the superficiality of their assessments. One admitted, “They are measuring a rather low bar of general teaching. They are not measuring what it means to be a good art teacher.”
3. MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK: Relationally, art teachers crave consistent, honest, and meaningful feedback. One respondent wrote that his/her feedback was, “nothing that helped me to teach better.” Another complained about the feedback quality, “It was basically you are doing a great job, keep it up, sign here,” while another wrote, “the written report was 1 sentence stating that I meet standards. There was no real feedback.”

4. COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION: Art teachers desire a collaborative role in the development of their assessments and also desire open dialogue. One respondent wrote, “A self-evaluation lets me advocate for myself, giving information that cannot be determined from a few classroom visits; being observed by multiple people brings objectivity.” Other respondents welcomed the assessment process as a form of self-advocacy, stating, “[Administration] can see the results of my efforts” and “It is important for administration to know what we do and why.”

Overall, art teachers indicated that they would welcome more rigorous and frequent formative assessment that involve collective goal setting and self-reflection practices. One respondent wrote, “We were doing amazing things in the art program and they knew we’d won awards so they said it was all great. They really had no idea what I was doing with the kids to get those results,” while another claimed, “My personal goals for [my students] exceed the administrations’. ” One art teacher with many years of experience replied that his/her assessments were, “meaningless and unhelpful. Administration doesn't see that even a 33+ [year] teacher can get better.” The responses I gathered consistently indicated that this particular set of art teachers desired to be assessed in a more meaningful and rigorous fashion that honored the accomplishments of students and the methods that art teachers utilized to foster learning.

Areas of Concern

Throughout my analysis of survey responses I was impressed and touched by how art teachers advocated for their passion to teach with such positive and proactive statements, however, major areas of concern surfaced as well. Significant themes emerged and I coded and grouped them as follows: Art teachers desire: 1. More depth, 2. A differentiated approach, 3. Less babysitting, 4. Time and resources, and 5. Evaluations by those who know art.

I. MORE DEPTH: Art teachers are wary of ‘snapshot’ assessments that result in a summative evaluation. One respondent wrote, “Sometimes there are efforts unseen in the observation. Evaluators should be privy to the time and effort that goes into your planning.” Other respondents stated, “I do a lot more than what an AP [Assistant Principal] observes in 20 minutes,” “I feel like they are just getting it done” and one participant wrote, “It is only a glimpse of what I do from a perspective of someone who does not teach my subject.” Many of the art teachers surveyed hold themselves to high standards of self-imposed criteria. One respondent wrote, “I'm hard enough on myself and understand what is required. I make adjustments constantly. I usually
don’t need some person to see a dog and pony show for 30 minutes and let that tell others if I’m a bad teacher or not.”

2. A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH: Many of the art teachers perceive the majority of their assessments to be unhelpful, superficial, and unrelated to their specific teaching practices. One respondent wrote, “We are not assessed differently and I always feel they are trying to force us into a universal mold” while another curtly stated, “Exact same process for everyone.” It would be beneficial to administrators and art teachers alike to directly focus on developing assessments that are specific to art teaching strategies.

When asked directly how they felt about their assessments one respondent wrote, “There are no areas in my assessment that relate to my own content area or address the relevancy or impact of my teaching pedagogy.” One respondent wrote, “They are cumbersome and provide little concrete information to help me improve instruction,” and another participant boldly asserted his/her assessments were “a farce.” One respondent summarized, “I don’t like the new assessment standards. I think they put too much weight on things we as art teachers cannot control and do not include peer reviews for teachers in the same content area. It relies on assessors with no art content knowledge.” Clearly, there is room for improvement and open discussion.

3. LESS “BABYSITTING”: Art teachers are weary of being assessed on their classroom management skills, especially when their classes are overloaded and consist of a population of students with varied learning needs. One respondent felt that his/her assessment focused on if there were “no fights in the classroom.” Other participants lamented that administration only cared that they were “babysitting” troublesome students. Some of the teachers surveyed also expressed concern regarding the fairness and objectivity of their evaluations. One respondent wrote, “I have found the greatest difficulty comes … when personal differences cloud a fair evaluation.”

4. TIME AND RESOURCES: Art teachers are also deeply concerned with developing authentic assessment tools that can realistically measure individual and collective student learning in their classes. One respondent wrote, “What they are looking for is for all students to improve on measurable criteria - in art we see everyone as an individual, so across one class 100% improvement is unrealistic.” Another conceded, “I have an issue with having to produce data to show student progress. Administrators want numbers to throw around, which are often very difficult to produce for art assessments.” Yet another participant wrote, “Some of the standards determined for SOL [standards of learning] testing don’t fit in the art room.”

Art teachers also expressed a vested interest in having the flexibility to develop and use quality arts curriculum. One teacher wrote, “Curriculum needs to grow and change to meet the needs of the current students so being able to adapt or change curriculum is important to student learning.” Some of the respondents expressed a desire to have their assessors recognize that lesson plans need not be followed exactly. One
art teacher wrote, “[There is] a lot of pressure to do lesson plans a set way that feels a bit like putting a square peg in a round hole” while another stated, “Lesson plans should not always be followed to the letter, there must be room for spontaneity and innovation as the conditions reflect.”

5. EVALUATIONS BY THOSE WHO KNOW ART: Ultimately, art teachers emphatically expressed a desire to be evaluated by those who have current art content knowledge. When asked if their evaluators had any art knowledge one teacher responded, “In the past, not at all. This year I have a person with some art experience but from long, long ago - so they really do not know what is current in the arts.” Another bluntly stated that his/her evaluator “does not have a clue.” When asked if it was important to be evaluated by people with art knowledge one teacher wrote, “What a crazy idea, having someone actually know what they are looking at!” One respondent summarized “I want someone who knows what great art instruction looks like to tell me what I can change or add to enhance instruction for my students. I want them to see how we educate beyond the classroom and be provided with other options that would benefit the students and me.” In other words, this respondent does not want any more ballerinas assessing plumbers.

These concerns appear to result from a lack of effective communication, not finger pointing or blame shifting. The art teachers surveyed expressed a desire to be on the same page as those evaluating them and generously presumed that their evaluators valued the same criteria for education that they did as illustrated. Two participants who responded illustrated this, “[Evaluators] do [value the same criteria as me], they just don’t know what it looks like in art” and “I believe our administration wants us to become better teachers.” A final respondent put his/her foot down and asserted, “… schools need a separate VISUAL ARTS Instructional Specialist. Someone who has been educated, trained, and has experience in art education. Not music. Not P.E. Not theater. VISUAL ART.”

Suggestions for Change: Learning to Dance Together

Throughout my investigations I learned visual art teacher evaluation research is rare but quite useful. I believe that it is important to continued evaluation research with newly practicing high school art teachers. The attrition rate for novice teachers is dramatic and concerning. Less than half of newly licensed teachers continue in the education profession after their 5th year of teaching (Jacob, Vidyarthi, & Carroll, 2012). This statistic applies to art teachers as well. Educational reformists and policy makers would be wise to address issues of retention in the teaching field and teacher evaluation research directly relates to this area. Researchers could gain a fresh perspective and new insights on this topic by connecting with art teacher preparation programs and asking enrolled students how they would like to be evaluated when they begin their careers.

On the other hand, we must learn more about those responsible for evaluating visual art teachers. Do they indeed lack background knowledge in the arts, and do they consider this a relevant concern that may affect their ability in conducting appropriate evaluations? Would these evaluators be
receptive to information to help inform them what art teaching looks like? A rich area for continued research would be to survey administration and those tasked with implementing teacher assessment in order to gather their opinions and feedback regarding the evaluation of visual arts educators.

The next logical step would be to cultivate informational tools that help inform administration about what they should look for in art teaching. Suggestions include creating an assortment of short videos, handouts, and brochures for art teachers to select from that specifically illustrate pedagogical aspects related to art education, curriculum, and how students learn in the arts classroom. This could give administrators the resources and tools to be more effective observers of good art teaching practices.

Because teacher-evaluation reform is a relatively new movement, very little technical assistance or best-practice advice is universally available. Realizing resources might be useful, Hope Street Group designed an online one-stop resource center to help states, school districts, policymakers, administrators, and teachers plan and design quality educator evaluation programs (Teacher evaluation playbook, 2011). It makes good sense to track and compile what has worked and what has not when it comes to evaluation reforms so policymakers can learn how other states have overcome obstacles and build the best systems possible.

Finally, research in developing mentorship programs for novice art teachers is worth investigating. Imagine a network of re-certified National Board Member art teachers that mentors, coaches, and peer assesses newly practicing art teachers in their first 1-3 years of teaching. These veteran teachers could revitalize their own teaching practice by working with a younger set and help enhance the professionalism of art teaching.

Measuring Value, Not Valuing Measures: The Way Art Teachers Teach

An art teacher may encourage “studio habits of mind” such as stretching and exploring, expressing, envisioning, understanding community, and persisting within their students (Hetland, et al., 2007). These may not appear as tangible or measurable outcomes, but are intrinsically related to the process and concepts of aesthetic development and understanding. Although it is important to showcase the art products of our students, it does our teaching a disservice to be evaluated on mere tangible art outcomes, especially when the evaluator may not have a background to understand the aesthetic meaning of such artifacts. However, many art teachers may feel the need to have their students learn about and produce conventional pieces using traditional media in order to please a community within the school, rather than explore other authentic and personally meaningful avenues because they might run the risk of being misunderstood. To go the conventional route is to paint ourselves into a corner. Sadly, many art teachers feel that their hands are tied when it comes to teaching lessons that the “parents and administration will like” (survey results, 2013).

The lack of differentiation between the evaluation of teachers, regardless of their subject, raises the question: what person or group of people would be the most appropriate assessors of visual art teachers? Based on my
findings, these evaluators would ideally be people who understand the criteria, philosophy and aesthetic meanings and approaches in art teaching and learning. These evaluators would have better resources and background knowledge to inform formative and summative evaluations regarding how an art teacher performs in their classroom and teaching practice, as supported by documentation of student learning and outcomes.

Teacher assessment and evaluation is a complex and, at times, emotionally charged aspect of the educational system in the United States. Though teacher evaluation reform is currently in the forefront of discussions held by stakeholders and policy makers, more research must be conducted that connects the voices of educators in content specific subject areas and non-tested subjects and grades. Art teachers who responded to my survey expressed a fundamental desire to be evaluated by those who understand the arts. This uncomplicated appeal is a natural response to convoluted, yet perfunctory evaluation systems that appear to value only that which they can measure.

*Figure 1.* (top) Art teachers perception of their assessors understanding of the arts.

*Figure 2.* (bottom) Importance of assessors understanding of the arts to art teachers.
Appendix A
Q1. Are you currently a high school visual art teacher in the state of Virginia?
Yes, No

SECTION I: HOW ARE YOU ASSESSED IN THE CLASSROOM?
Q2. How are you assessed in your teaching practices? (Please check all that apply).
Observation (administration), Written feedback (including email), Peer evaluation, Student feedback, Parental feedback, Self-evaluation, Other
Q3. How often are you assessed in your teaching practice?
Very frequently, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never
Q4. Do you feel that you are provided with criteria to understand why and how you are assessed?
Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never
Q5. Do you understand the criteria on which you are being assessed?
Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never
Q6. Do you agree with the criteria on which you are being assessed?
Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never
Q7. When was the last time you were assessed?
Q8. How were you assessed? Please list assessment tools/methods.
Q9. Who assessed you? Please list.
Q10. How did this assessment go?
Extremely well, Well, Fair, Poorly, Very poorly
Q11. Was there feedback regarding this assessment?
Yes, No
Q12. Please describe the form of your assessment feedback. Check all that apply.
Verbal formal (ie: Meeting), Verbal casual (ie: Hallway conversation), Written formal (ie: report), Written causal (ie: email/memo), Other
Q13. What did your assessment feedback focus on? Check all that apply.
Classroom management, Standards, Learning goals, Art outcomes/products, Curriculum implementation, Professional development, Housekeeping (paperwork, grading . . .), Extracurricular duties
Q14. What do you think are the most important areas to receive feedback on after you have been assessed? Check all that apply.
Classroom management, Standards, Learning goals, Art outcomes/products, Curriculum implementation, Professional development, Housekeeping (paperwork, grading . . .), Extracurricular duties
Q15. Please describe the quality of your assessment feedback.
Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Negative, Other
Q16. Are you able to provide feedback regarding your assessments?
Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never, Other
Q17. Are all faculty in your school/district assessed in the same way that you are?
Yes, No, Not sure

SECTION II: WHO ASSESSES YOU IN THE CLASSROOM
Q18. Who assesses you? (Check all that apply)
Administrator (within the school), Peer, Self, Student, Evaluator (outside of the school), Other
Q19. Do you feel that the person or people assessing you have a good understanding of the arts?
Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never, Other
Q20. Do you believe the person/people assessing you value the same criteria for education that you do?
They agree completely, They agree most of the
time, They agree some of the time, They do not agree often, They disagree, Other

SECTION III: WHY ARE YOU ASSESSED?

Q22. What are the purposes of your assessments? Please give three.

Q23. What do you think the purposes of your assessments should be? Please give three.

Q24. What is your preferred method(s) of being assessed? For example: observation, peer evaluation, self-reflection, a combination of, etc. If you have experience and a preference using a particular and/or specific type of evaluation tool, please briefly describe this method.

Q25. Why is this/are these your preferred method(s)?

Q26. Are you aware of national assessment standards for art educators?
   Yes, No, Not sure

Q27. By what standards do you feel you are held accountable in your teaching practice? Please list three.

Q28. Are you aware and informed of professional development opportunities?
   Yes, No, Not sure

Q29. Are professional development opportunities made available to you?
   Yes, No, Not sure

SECTION IV: WHAT NEXT?

Q30. Do you feel your assessments accurately reflect your teaching practice? In other words, do your values/standards mirror the values/standards you are being assessed upon?
   Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never, Other

Q31. Please explain your reasons for your previous response.

Q32. Do you feel your assessments are useful for administration?

Q33. Please explain your reasons for your previous response.

Q34. Do you feel your assessments are useful for your own professional development?

Q35. How satisfied are you with your job?
   Very satisfied, Satisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Unsatisfied, Very unsatisfied, Other

Q36. Please give three reasons in order of importance (one being the most important reason) why you ARE satisfied with your job.

Q37. Please give three reasons in order of importance (one being the most important reason) why you are NOT satisfied with your job.

Q38. Please tell me how you feel about your assessments.

Q39. What suggestions can you make regarding other areas of concern that I should ask about?

SECTION V: DEMOGRAPHICS

Q40. What category below includes your age?
   17 or younger, 18 – 20, 21 – 29, 30 – 39, 40 – 49, 50 – 59, 60 or older

Q41. What is your gender?
   Male, Female, No response

Q42. What is your ethnicity?
   American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Island, White, Other

Q43. What is your educational background?
   Check all that apply.
   High School or GED, Associate Degree, Some College, Bachelors Degree, Some Masters, Masters Degree, PhD, Other

Q44. How long have you been teaching art on the secondary level?
   0-3 years, 4 – 7 years, 8 – 11 years, 12 – 15 years, 16 – 19 years, 20 – 23 years, 24 + years, Other

Q45. Do you have other art teaching experiences? Check all that apply.
   Art on a cart, Camp, Museum program, Continuing education program, After school program, Private tutor, K-8th grade, University
level, Service learning and/or Charitable volunteer work, Other

Q46. What type of school do you currently teach it?
Public, Private, Charter, Other

Q47. What is your annual salary?
10,000 – 20,000, 20,001 – 30,000, 31,000 – 40,000, 40,001 – 50,000, 51,000 – 60,000, 61,000 – 70,000, 71,000 – 80,000, 81,000 – 90,000 – 90,001 – 100,000

Thank you for choosing to participate in this survey.

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Bob Sweeney, *Scanscape IV*, 2014, Mixed-Media, 8”x 8”
(Un)ChARTED Cartographies: Mapping Networked Avatars

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(Un)ChARTED engages assessment by redefining and expanding the boundaries of the chart or checklist to the charting of a networked path through de-territorialization/re-territorialization. This article discusses cartography as the creation of learning maps of a networked territory by the performance of networked avatars. The term avatar is expanded beyond the concept of the digital avatar and into the realm of any incarnation of the virtual in visualized/tangible form. Through analysis of video reflections as student avatars, the learning map reveals growth over time. Specific examples of student and teacher avatars are analyzed as a way of engaging in the process of becoming through the creation of a network of learning that is ChARTED through engagement.

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Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come. -(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.5)

Uncharted is a video game series that follows the journey of a contemporary treasure hunter. In the game, the player as the avatar Nathan Drake travels to uncharted islands in search of historical treasures. In video gaming, game characters or avatars allow players to interact with the digital world; however, the term avatar can be more broadly defined as a performable embodiment of self. The term avatar (avatara or incarnation in Sanskrit) already exists within the collective cultural consciousness. In fact, any manifestation of an understanding, concept, or idea in a visual, verbal, and/or tangible form and its performance is an avatar. In Uncharted, the player, traveling around the world as the avatar Nathan Drake, charts a journey. The charting performed by the player as Drake does not mimic the experience of following a predetermined path on a map as he or she travels across a literal landscape. Instead, the landscape is created through its charting. This is cartography, a process in which each choice made adds a new dimension to the map’s representation. The game Uncharted creates a lens through which we as educators can examine the concept of education in relation to maps, territories, cartographies, and avatars that both produce and can even become the maps in question. 

(Un)ChARTing poses both problems and possibilities for the explorer and educator. Rather than urging the creation of a linear curriculum that focuses on assessing a preformed final outcome, this article proposes the concept of (un)CHARTED cartography which moves beyond visualization of data into performance of the data. Performance (not pre-formance) allows teacher and learner to learn together. The task for teacher and learner as explorers is to allow for territorialization/deterritorialization/re-territorialization as real life circumstances and experiences impede or open up possibilities. For Drake, the video game protagonist, the final assessment of his success is whether or not he retrieves the treasure. In teaching and learning, multiple treasures can be discovered along the way that are often undervalued by educators, treasures such as student observations, reflections, and newly formed connections between the student and the larger network of the world. These treasures or avatars can be assessed in order to provoke and engage learners in the process of creating their own learning networks. Avatars as a performance of self produce formative instances as fragments of understanding and summative measures as a big picture map of these instances over time (Naughty Dog, 2007; Britt, 2008; Coleman, 2011).

Networked Curriculum

In Uncharted, Drake has an unmapped territory to explore. He can go in a variety of directions based on the formative decisions he makes as he traverses the territory. For education, the concept of a territory serves as a metaphor for disciplinary ways of knowing. Instead of placing the onus of assessment solely on the shoulders of the teacher, we can promote forms of peer and self-assessment. These measures of peer and self-assessment become formative points along acharted path.

Curriculum becomes the path created between these charted points as individuals and groups traverse the territory. Art educators such as Efland (1995), Keifer-Boyd (1996), Carpenter and Taylor (2005; 2003), and Sweeny (2008; 2013) re-image the linear curriculum through lattice, hypertext, and networked models of
curriculum structure. Networks, according to Sweeny (2013), consist of nodes, links, and hubs. Nodes are elements within the network that are distinct. Links are the connections between nodes, and hubs are nodes that have multiple links. Paul Baran’s (1964) version of complexity theory describes the architecture of networks in three separate ways: centralized, distributed, and decentralized or scale-free. Centralized networks are those networks clustered around a single node. In education, time and efficiency are contributing factors in the belief that the curricular network should be centered around the teacher. All information must pass through the teacher as a means of verification. The negative aspect of such a system is that the students are vulnerable to experiencing complete failure. If the central node (teacher) fails in the performance of his or her job, the whole system can crash. A centralized network requires the teacher to know every aspect of the concepts being discussed and be capable of evaluating students’ understanding of these concepts objectively. Distributed networks, however, connect all nodes together in a non-hierarchical structure. They can continue to function even if nodes are removed. If nodes within a system fail, a greater number of transfers are required before all information is received by the system. In a decentralized network a few hubs distribute and evaluate the information. Although not every node is connected to every other node, decentralized or scale free networks have two major advantages over centralized and distributed networks: 1) nodes are evenly distributed and therefore allow for efficiency in the transmission of information and 2) the network is able to withstand shock because the system can continue to function regardless of the failure of one node (Baran, 1964; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Sweeny, 2013).

In educational assessment, nodes serve as waypoints of formative understanding within the learning network; the teacher, the student, and the student’s peers as hubs can track both individual and collective growth through a visualization of the network. Each node or hub can be magnified to reveal another network with further connections on each layer. This model of the learning process requires a decentralized network architecture in which new experiences of the individual link up at various points to form hubs of understanding that can be both individual and collective. When this model is applied to assessment, the teacher serves as a guide for the understanding of assessment practices. The teacher, however, is not the sole evaluator for every measure of assessment. Alternate routes and multiple hubs in the learning process can therefore be assessed as students, their peers, outside assessors, and the teacher chart the map/network.

Cartography

Like Drake, educators and students must chart their journey through the learning territory as a path between nodes. This is a process of cartography. Cartography (carte or map and graphy or writing) allows us to write the map of the territory with its changing or developing contours and boundaries. This map is not the territory; although it will resemble the territory, it is
incapable of representing all the territory (Korzybski, 1990).

Cartography in relation to students’ personal understanding and learning is about student construction of maps that are both individual and collective and speak to the illumination of the path rather than the dictation of a path. One can use a map in order to speak about a map. If we think of the map as language or creation, words or objects in and of themselves are not the thing, feeling, fact, situation, relationship, or learning that might or might not be taking place. As such, words and objects are unable to express every aspect of our virtual understanding of the world. We leave footprints or evidence of our learning along the way, but we are unable, in that moment, to interpret or understand it. Language and creation are, however, self-reflexive. We can talk about our words and creations. What this property of language and any other form of re-presentation allows is the ability to create feedback loops. Through feedback loops, the map is self-reflexive and can be revisited in order to create and discover new meaning. As we move across different aspects of the terrain, adaptation must occur. Each node in a networked construction of curriculum and assessment is a point of territorialized knowledge that can be revisited based on the context of a given learning situation. Knowledge and assessment, therefore, become dynamic rather than static and are arranged as a network rather than a straight line, spiral, or lattice. The network that is formed becomes a macro view of the micro territories formed by individual nodes (Petersen, 2005; Davis & Sumara, 2006; Ling, 2009).

**Territorialization/Deterritorialization/Re-territorialization**

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari discuss territory as a metaphor. They define territorialization as the creation of borders or boundaries; deterritorialization as the process by which one traverses those boundaries; and reterritorialization as the process by which new boundaries or borders are created.

The processes of territorialization, deterritorialization, and re-territorialization are integral to complex systems. Cartography allows us to “write” the map of our evolutionary territorialization in the sea and our deterritorialization in the movement to land. Our emergence from the sea through the formation of legs, development of oxygen breathing lungs, and the growth of opposable thumbs becomes a form of re-territorialization of the body which enhances our survival in our new territory. This deterritorialization and re-territorialization is not a hierarchical scenario; it is a performance that is context specific and dependent on the needs of the organism (Petersen, 2005; Ling, 2009).

**The Cartography of Rubrics**

Metaphorically, rubric (from *rubrica* Latin for “red earth”) is the land as material for creation and communication through the processes of territorialization/deterritorialization/re-territorialization. Rubrics, as currently used in most educational settings today, act as maps with predetermined routes that are utilized in assessing curriculum, teaching, and student learning. A rubric as a chart akin to a star chart or network architecture can, however, promote exploration of the educational landscape rather than dictating a predetermined course (Coil & Merritt, 2011).

In medieval illuminated manuscripts, red letters (or rubrics) served as instructional guides for readers, hence the connection between the word rubric and the red pigment used to grade papers. The rubric provides landmarks or guideposts without dictating
Performance

In terms of assessment of student understanding, we should be looking for performance rather than pre-performance or a predetermination of the network structure. The most recent iteration of the National Standards for Art Education removed the area of performance from the standards because it was believed that it did not directly relate to visual arts education (Stewart, 2013). To understand performance only in its most literal interpretation as a musical or theater performance is to limit the possibilities of what performance can be for visual arts education. The player in the game Uncharted performs Nathan Drake and becomes him through his or her actions. The students in the learning situation perform their understandings of the content in order to internalize that content and construct meaning for themselves. Butler (1988) describes performance as a discourse of “acts.” In her discussion of John Searles, she references “speech acts,” which refer to the act of speaking as well as the bond that occurs through dialogue between speakers. As art educators we can begin to see ideas and concepts performed as avatar through dialogue, artwork, writing, video, audio, mapping, and a variety of other incarnations. Butler (1988), quoting Simone de Beauvoir, states that “one is not born, but, rather, becomes woman” (p.1). This understanding of performance introduces the concept of time into the constitution of self-identity. One is not born an artist; one becomes one through performance.

Deleuze uses a literary reference to Alice from Alice in Wonderland to illustrate the process of becoming. Alice becomes both bigger and smaller when she drinks from the bottle marked “Drink me.” Each moment she is larger than she was and smaller than she will be; she is becoming. In deconstructing this process, we can see that Alice moves in two directions simultaneously through the creation of a network. Network creation is a process that involves de-territorialization and re-territorialization through stratification or classification of immanence/possibility; Alice both gains and loses nodes or strata in this process. Each passing increment provides a performance through movement and each stratum is a new node in the networked Alice. Like Alice, as students engage in the performance of new concepts and creations, they are formulating their own understandings through the creation of networked selves that both add to and subtract simultaneously. Such a network constitutes “world formation” through an ever-changing state of becoming. It
encompasses both growth and decay (Deleuze, 1990; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Nancy, 2007; Sutherlin, 2010).

Learning is less about achievement and more about growth over time or the process of becoming. A tree or plant continually expands, getting larger as time progresses. The tree or plant does not grow without losing leaves and sometimes must be pruned to allow for new growth. Students’ assumptions that prove invalid to their current understanding of the world atrophy and provide a space for new understandings to grow. Invalid assumptions are examples of atrophic nodes, those aspects of the network which “fail” or become non-essential to the process of network formation. When a student or teacher “fails,” he or she can begin to evaluate those aspects that caused the “failure” and/or those aspects that are no longer essential to the creation of the learning network.

This model of thinking turns the concept of failure into success because learning becomes an ever-evolving process. Assessment adds to the complexity of the network. In the decentralized network architecture described previously, node failure can be redirected to another hub as a continuation of the process of becoming. Instead of relying on a single authoritative method of creating art, avatars allow us to think differently through iteration. Understandings can be made visible and interpreted to gain new insight through self-reflection and outside critique.

According to Deleuze & Guattari, the birth and rebirth of an avatar is a performance of arrangement that both territorializes and de-territorializes as it moves. This movement as performance flows from the virtual to the physical and back again. As the avatar moves between strata, it accumulates and creates new avatars; it both is and becomes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983).

As avatars, students have the opportunity to critique assumptions held about the binary logic of right and wrong; the concept of the truth becomes a truth that shifts with context. The arts depend upon this type of thinking because they are not subjects that promote the assessment of a right answer. Instead, the arts are an exploration of larger themes that embody what it means to be human. The embodiment of these themes exists as dialogue, object, and/or action that are simultaneously representation and action. Dialogue, objects, and/or actions become avatars or incarnations of a truth and a documentation of the student learning process (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; Britt, 2008; Ulmer, 2012).

Performing Student/Teacher Avatars

In the following section, student avatars serve as methods of formative and summative assessment of student understanding and my own teaching in a graduate course I teach entitled Educational Theory: Teaching and Learning in the Arts. Each week students record three one-minute performances as reflective pieces to help them synthesize and embody their learning. The goal of these one-minute presentations is to document the student’s learning process, both implicitly and explicitly, over the course of the semester. This means that what students say and do (the content) is as important as how they say and do it (the form it takes). When students create desire lines, or routes created through use rather than intention, they match their own interests. Concepts and skills emerge from student interest and necessity of use rather than connection to

a specific teacher generated outcome. In terms of the one-minute video/audio reflections, students choose what content to discuss and how that content is utilized and synthesized. The prompt for these reflections requires them to reflect on some aspect of their learning either inside or outside of class over the course of the week. While the example given is specific to an exploration of theories, desire lines can be applied to a student-centered form of curriculum in art education that defines outcomes and assessments reflexively. These digital footprints create a record of students’ individual journeys. Furthermore, desire lines produce a map of the territory from the inside out. They are a set of possibilities rather than the totality of the territory in question. In a practical sense, this means that students explore theories and acquire skills and knowledge through exploration of themes (Myhill, 2004).

Themes become points of entry for student exploration. Students respectively decided the format of these performances. Some students chose to use audio only. However, many students videoed the performance of an object as their avatar, while others utilized their own image in the video. Figure 2 shows how one student chose to speak through an object. Performing through an object allowed this student the opportunity to open up through performance and provided a comfortable level of anonymity. Two students are highlighted to demonstrate the development of avatars, Tom and Danielle.

Danielle was reluctant to begin recording her thoughts. In her first video she begins with, “Huhhhhh! All right. . . . So, reflection number one. Ok, so this feels incredibly strange and unnatural. . . . Wow, I am already at 20 seconds.” (D. Klim, personal communication, October 17 2013). She is taken off guard by how quickly the time passes and proceeds to finish up her comments. In her second video, she is more comfortable with recording herself as she discusses Design Thinking, a process utilized by designers to empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test concepts out. In this reflection she begins to connect her art making practice with her teaching practice.

Ok, so this is my second reflection this week. I just had my meeting with Lily about Design Thinking, and we had the most amazing conversation that I have had recently. It was unbelievable just the things that surfaced and just how we are both connecting to this way of thinking. It is just, I don’t know. It is so refreshing. I feel like I am finally starting to find a way to bridge my academic and intellectual pursuits with my creative pursuits through Design Thinking. (D. Klim, personal communication, October 28, 2013).
Through recording, Danielle is able to create avatars of her own thoughts and conversations with others. These conversations are interpreted and synthesized through Danielle’s perspective as a designer, illustrator, researcher, and teacher. By the time we get to her third and fourth reflections, Danielle has found an avatar format that she continues to utilize throughout the remainder of her reflections. She designs playlists that can be played to embody her mood and thoughts in relation to course content and fieldwork. These playlists become avatars within avatars that allow the viewer to perform Danielle’s associations by finding and listening to the song.

In Figure 4, Tom begins his first video with a description of his interaction with my online avatar in the form of a learning module. Learning modules for Education Theory are online lectures, part of the flipped classroom format that provokes students to think deeply about a variety of learning and curricular theories through reflection and classroom experiences. The flipped classroom allows the teacher to place lecture/discussion-based material online and opens up the face-to-face classroom for experiential learning. Like the videos, the asynchronous nature of the module allows Tom to stop it part way through in order to process some of the information that he has encountered.

I just got finished with half of module three and I thought I would take a break for a second and reflect on what has happened so far in the module. . . .I found it really fascinating to hear you discuss this rhizomatic structure and more of these non-linear organic crossing points for disciplines and knowledge and situations and experiences all culminating in one unit for reality. But [I am] also finding it really interesting that you are talking about Arthur Efland’s Lattice structure as something that ivy can grow on as a way of describing underlying structure. I was thinking about what does the rhizomatic structure grow on and is it part of the root structure or is it what the root structure is growing on? (T.
Doyle, personal communication, October 17, 2013)

Tom discusses his understanding of complexity theory and the rhizome from both his readings and his viewing of the online module. This avatar serves as our point of entry into our discussion with one another and with the class as a whole. Tom ends with a question about underlying structure. He states, “I was thinking about what does the rhizomatic structure grow on and is it part of the root structure or is it what the root structure is growing on?” I wrote back the following to Tom on our social networking site:

Tom, this is a really interesting question. In terms of the rhizome, it grows on what is termed the plane of immanence. It is described as a smooth space that allows movement in all directions. . . . When you think about the creation of curriculum or a situation, you want to make a map, not a tracing. In relation to your question about the situation, I would say that the situation facilitates the growth. In the case of teaching, it could become the map by which students could territorialize and deterritorialize their knowledge. In other words, performance allows for the creation of a rhizome and growth in all directions. . . . (X, personal communication, October 17, 2013).

In reflecting on my own avatar, I can see that it took the route of efficiency over exploration. Instead of allowing Tom to discover on his own, my desire to see Tom arrive at a particular conception inhibited the process and limited the learning that may have been possible. What if I had given a series of links that allowed Tom to explore his own point of view in relation to this concept of structure? This hypertextual and exploratory method of teaching is one that requires a significant amount of time and patience from both parties.

In Tom’s next video, he returns to the concept of complexity theory in relation to the feedback loop. He talks about reflection and iteration in relation to the artistic process. He asks the following question:

Is it simply a reflection of something . . . different . . . like the dual mirror image? Which . . . seem[s] kind of strange . . . the image is alternating . . . but . . . is ultimately stemming from the same origin rather than branching off . . . you are not doing again but you are doing with something else in mind.” (T. Doyle, personal communication, October 17, 2013)

In a later video in the series, Tom talks about a field visit to the Greenmount School in X,X.

So we were at the Greenmount School today visiting Mr. X, and it was so amazing. We were talking with Mr. X and asking him about the importance of leaving Greenmount with a set catalogue of facts and figures; in his case, historical facts and figures. He kept reiterating this point: that he did not care about dates, but it was what was behind the date, and why that event happened that was so important . . . We were all
kind of startled . . . and curious about how a child could go through his or her education at Greenmount, and they would get the theme of, let’s say . . . colonialism or maybe it is something about the Civil War in kindergarten, and since it is the whole school, kindergarten is tackling it in their own way and so is the opposite end of the spectrum age-wise which is 8th grade. So they are learning different pieces of it [the Civil War] and maybe getting the same feeling, but eighth grade is certainly getting more of these facts and figures and more . . . base knowledge. What we were . . . hung up on was that, what if you were that kindergartner who was . . . learning the Civil War . . . and you went to high school, and you would not have those facts and figures . . . (T. Doyle, personal communication, November 4, 2013)

Tom’s description of his experiences at Greenmount exhibit not only his understanding of the theory in practice, but also his hesitation with some of the ramifications inherent to such a construct. He discusses both his and his classmates’ shock and curiosity in relation to the lack of base or structure, such as facts and figures, upon which something is built. This is a return to his first video reflection as a form of feedback loop. Whether or not Tom was aware of this connection when he recorded this video is unknown. However, the connection to his discussion of the lattice based structure is apparent.

At the end of the day it seemed like Mr. X was seeing the Civil War kind of like we see an art material, where it is more than just its base. You know paint is not just a fluid medium that can be used, that . . . [can be] moved around with color and texture, and it means so much more innately. And that we use paint not to just show what paint is, but we use it as a means to get somewhere else and that seems to be the way that the Civil War is used at Greenmount. (T. Doyle, personal communication, November 4, 2013)

In relation to his statement about iteration in his second video, you can see that Tom is able to apply his understanding of artistic medium to his phrase “doing with something else in mind” to his analogy of paint and the Civil War as a medium. Each of Tom’s avatars or incarnations of understanding adds a new dimension to his own personal learning process.

**Conclusion**

Through the use of cartography, networks, avatars, and performance as part of the assessment process, we can begin to make the invisible visible and at the same time perform that visualization. Utilizing networked cartography in the form of avatars allows educators, students, and peers to begin to document and assess growth over time as both formative and summative measures. Like Nathan Drake, we can begin to see the map of our charted curriculum.
Performance and visualization can take a variety of forms that extend student artworks. The videos in this article are but one iteration of how the learning process can be embodied as an avatar. Charts are often thought of as checklists rather than star charts or network architecture. Charting, as defined here, is about un-charting traditional notions of how curriculum is developed. Instead, it is a process of actively charting or mapping the paths taken, as students engage with a concept, idea, theory, process, etc., through exploration.

Students layer each of these learning fragments into a cohesive image that can be both interacted with and performed as a network as the evidence of their process. For art education this has tremendous implications. Instead of focusing solely on the art product as a way of understanding what students have learned, the process becomes an embedded part of the assessment. Performance and conceptually based artists have long understood the importance of process to the creation of artwork (Bourriaud, 2002). The recording of student avatars as blocks of reflection for revisitation creates a map of student growth over time in relation to artistic and teaching practice and philosophy.
Bob Sweeney, *Scanscape V*, 2014, Mixed-Media, 8”x 8”
Inoperative Art Education

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“...we may suspend the final destination of art education under economic rationales so that we might studiously play with its norms.”

Increasingly, assessment has encroached on art education, inextricably linking visual arts learning to standardized performances wherein, art educators are becoming technicians accountable to the neoliberal state of education. Under these circumstances, the authors’ hearts and minds are understandably heavy for a postponement of art education as usual, proposing the question: Given the permission to escape art education’s current workings, what might art educators abandon, and how might they undertake this? In order to delve into this provocation, the authors propose a limbo space of deferral in relation to art education that might inspire any predetermined usages inoperable. From this paradoxical zone, the final destination of art education under economic rationales may be suspended so that art educators might studiously play with its norms. The authors offer poetic and sculptural forms that misuse aspects of art education to explore its possible im-potentialities going against the grain of neoliberal logics.

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There is certainly a lot to keep educators busy within art education these days. For example, as art educators wind down another year, they might partake in professional development workshops to ease into implementation of the latest national visual art standards, consider the impact of the Common Core State Standards on the visual arts (Wexler, 2014), review how art education programs endeavored to meet their learning objectives for the past year in time for internal and external audits, and/or possibly fine-tune their execution of edTPA reforms to art teacher certification. It is clear that standards and evaluation are increasingly encroaching on art education, inextricably linking art learning to standardized performances, wherein art educators (both in K-12 schooling and progressively more within institutions of higher education\textsuperscript{1}) are becoming technicians accountable to the neoliberal state of education (Giroux, 2012). This leaves art educators with reduced time for intellectual, artistic, or scholarly pursuits (let alone teaching), associated with the profession of art education. Art educators are in, what jagodzinski (2010) terms, a \textit{fundamental antagonism} in their adherence to audit culture (Apple, 2005). Many explain this obedience to accountability in the teaching profession as atonement and solution for educator guilt related to teacher-blame/responsibility (Kumashiro, 2012) for current crises in education, and the increasing achievement gap (Biesta, 2009; Fujiwoshi, 2013; Taubman, 2009) in the United States. It remains largely unclear if this compliance is yielding the results for which art educators and others might hope. The one thing that is certain, is we can always do better, for as Gielen (2013) states, neoliberalism is always calling

\textsuperscript{1} For a discussion on the implications of this trend, see Kalin and Barney (2014).
for change for the sake of change, movement for the sake of movement. As long as we move and stay busy we don't have time to pause, to think about what really could and should matter. Creative capitalism's call for mobility may have no other intention then [sic] diminishing reflexivity and self-reflexivity. (pp. 94-5)

Under such limitations, the authors’ hearts and minds are justifiably heavy for a postponement of and withdrawal from art education as usual, proposing the question: Given the permission to escape art education’s current workings, what might art educators abandon, and how might they undertake this? We wish to starve the neoliberal state of art education out of our consent, albeit, ephemerally. In a retreat from what art education has become, we enter into more confrontational intellectual and artistic work that might enable the perpetual reconstruction of art education, even in the face of an all-consuming need for art education to become calculable instrumentality alone.

We delve into this provocation to propose a limbo space of deferral in relation to art education that might inspire us to render its predetermined usages inoperable. From this paradoxical zone, we call for dismeasure (Virno, 2012), time-out, non-complicity, and other possible exit strategies from art education’s status quo that increasingly de-professionalizes the profession. We seek out spaces that do not count, existing under the radar of art education as deterministic potentiality. In so doing, we may suspend the final destination of art education under economic rationales so that we might studiously play with its norms. Relying on Agambenian notions of study, play, and im-potentiality, as well as Tyson E. Lewis’ writings on the educational implications of Agamben’s scholarship, we lay out how art education might be

suspended and reclaimed through playful study. Here, art education is no longer art education, but whatever we might imagine it to be without predetermined destinations. We embrace poiesis (we develop this notion of poiesis further on in the section titled Poiesis as Studious Play below) in lieu of praxis to intervene into the present conceptualization of art education learning by offering poetic and sculptural forms that misuse aspects of art education, in order to explore its possible im-potentialities that go against the grain of neoliberal logics. We start with a consideration of im-potential art education.

**Im-potential Art Education**

Students of art within the learning society (Jarvis, 2000) are viewed as having infinite potentiality that must be actualized
and assessed repeatedly. This perpetual assessment is justified in its promotion of never-ending growth and progress towards meeting the economic needs of the state. Education identifies, trains, tests, and maximizes competencies in ways that are never efficient enough. Yet, competencies, assessments, and tests are utilized in order to determine a learner’s role within the economy under the current vocationalization of education (i.e., Giroux, n.d.; McCarthy, 2011). To this end, the fulfillment of potential is now synonymous with the business of education, and a key facet of global economic competitiveness. In the business of art education, this is often referred to as the creative industries.

Lewis (2014b, 2011b) invites us to think through potentiality separate from the capability and talent to be reached within education. Predetermined potential (or generic potentiality from Agamben’s [1999] use of Aristotelian potentiality), once fulfilled, is destroyed. However, potential does not have to be actualized (Aristotle, 1986). It can resist giving itself over to action in an experimental space of incongruity between “I can” and “I cannot” (Agamben, 1999, p. 177), amounting to a whatever ontology (Agamben, 1990/1993) that resists the demands of learning in the knowledge society. Here, we enter an inoperative zone between to do or not to do, wherein, we have the potential to bring our knowledge into actuality or not as im-potential (Agamben, 1999).

As art educators, the authors of this essay have art education knowledge, and are therefore in potential, which means we have the potential to art educate as well as the potential to not art educate. We have the skills to art educate—implement, create, and assess art education processes and products—but if we choose to conserve our potential, delaying its implementation by exercising our ability to not art educate, our potential as art educators becomes im-potential. To not do art education and keep it as im-potential, even though we know how to do art education, is a paradox. We hold back, desist from actualizing our potential, preferring to “develop proficiency through sustained reflection, planning, speculation, imagination, and so on” (Lewis, 2012b, p. 385). This decouples potentiality from execution, allowing us the freedom to choose to be our own lack through the withdrawal of potentiality. There is a certain freedom to give in to our own im-potentiality, to choose not to do and to realize the contingency of our doing, so that we can turn back onto ourselves in the possibility of becoming other than what we have become (Agamben, 2009/2010).

We recognize the impossibility of sustaining this paradox, yet that does not stop our dalliances to this space of contingency. Im-potentiality in the knowledge-based economy (see Powell & Snellman, 2004) is suspicious, a bad habit, an irritant, waste, willful behavior, a dis-objective, daydreaming, and the like. As educators, it is the very excess we are trained and expected to be increasingly vigilant in eliminating. Therefore, this incapacity is elusive and vulnerable as it stands in opposition against “the fundamental ontological assumptions of neoliberal school reform” (Lewis, 2012a, p. 102), which demands that we sacrifice and excise im-potentiality from education (Lewis, 2014b). This is not the version of art education most of us signed up for.

Bartleby’s Im-potentiality

Perhaps there is nothing more radical than when a student proclaims ‘I would prefer not to learn.’ Such a statement should not be read as mere apathy or laziness, but rather as a political rejection of the very logic of learning within capitalism. To prefer
not to learn is equally a struggle to study—to remain faithful to the remnant of our profane stupidity that always interrupts our knowledge, our certainty, our willful resolution, the perceived necessity of our decisions, and the fulfillment of our potentials.

(Lewis, 2014b, p. 346)

Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street is a short story by the American writer Herman Melville (1853/1987). The central character of Bartleby has been cited by several theorists such as: Deleuze (1993/1998), Hardt and Negri (2000), Rancière (1998/2004), and Žižek (2006). Poore (2013) claims Bartleby, “has arguably become the avatar for leftist political resistance” and the unofficial mascot of Occupy Wall Street (para. 2). Agamben (1999) cites Bartleby as a figure of pure potentiality who, when asked to do his job, replies that he would, “prefer not to”—neither refusing or acquiescing to his employer’s requests in conjunction with his job as writer/copier. De Boever (2006) has suggested that Bartleby is a living dead character, whose job of copying and checking the accuracy of his own copies\(^5\) has given him no other choice but deactivation from his duties.

Through this deactivating gesture of *unworking* (De Boever, 2006), Bartleby removes himself from power structures, rendering himself inoperative in relation to the state’s machinery into aporic indeterminability and contingency of the moment. By embracing im-potentiality without demands or outright denial, power becomes bewildered and does not know how to defend itself. In an act against exploitive labor, Bartleby conserves potentiality, thus “making labor freely available for reconstruction or re-creation outside of capitalist alienation and surplus extraction” (Lewis, 2012b, p. 361).

We might find ways to bear our complicity in art education under cognitive capitalism and the knowledge, learning, and creative economies by removing ourselves from art educating in order to declare ourselves inoperative and embrace our im-potentiality. With respect to the machine that is art education running as business as usual, this opting out challenges the field as rational, rejecting current common sense and practice in order to explore different potentialities not yet realized. For, we rarely question the necessity of getting on within the system in which we are already precariously immersed—we need to complete the next lesson plan, get that grading done, fill in the standards we are...
meeting, attend another professional development about standardized testing, make room in our schedule for the art test that determines our merit pay, pilot the new assessment product, be accountable to parents for our evaluations of art students, implement the new standards, and get it done more efficiently with less resources and time. Here, learning has been put to use for neoliberal logics. However, im-potentiality invites us to reclaim art education use for other possibilities, so that in studying and playing with current structures, we might devise different uses (Agamben, 2005/2007). The increased bureaucratization and vulnerability of the field of art education keeps us very busy and thankful for the employment, but it also takes time and effort away from thinking through alternatives, or what could have been if we had made other decisions as a field.

What does studying therefore give us if not progressive development, improvement, and measurable outcomes? It gives us something very simple: the experience of potentiality as such. Freeing potentiality from the demand to actualize itself in socially, economically, or educationally measurable forms means that we are able to give potentiality back to itself; potentiality becomes im-potential. (Lewis, 2014c, p. 114)

Studying Art Education

The experience of studying, not as the acquisition of competencies to do well on a test, but without an endpoint in mind, is an experience of I can/I cannot, amounting to the paradoxical embrace of potentiality and im-potentiality concurrently. Studying, in Agamben’s (1996/2000, 1985/1995) view, is an inoperative activity, a means without an end, eluding measurable and preset outcomes for success that are held in suspension. This gives rise to the following question and answer:

Lewis (2014c) has termed studying as “the improper or unsanctioned use of learning as an ‘unproductive’ means” (p. 115) that escapes the logic of

Figure 4. Norms and Anomalies: Newsie Flatcap Forms; Daniel T. Barney, 2013; installation; denim, interfacing, cotton batiste, thread, and metal hooks.
instrumentalism. As a form of learning, it refuses to be managed and commodified, for, “[t]o study is to undo the knot tying learning to the aims of schooling and the modalities of measure that transform our potentiality into abstract data recognizable only to the Machine of standardization” (Lewis, 2011b, p. 598). Nevertheless, while ends may be suspended in study, activity is not. As the status quo is deactivated, we may now risk the chance for art education, for example, to be something other than it currently is. Study is a space of musing, conjecture, creativity, and play. It does not have to be pragmatic, practical, assessed, or verified by putting it into execution towards standardized objectives.

**Studious Play with Art Education**

Synonymous with schooling, standardization has become a totalizing ritual, depleting, out of necessity, any activity regarded as useless, such as play. Bourassa (2011) finds the deprivation of play from schools devastating as the significance of play resides in its transformative capacity to redefine the educational experience and activate new theories of value. … Here, play attains a subversive character in the terrain of neoliberalism. Not only does play violate the educational activity of testing, but it also opens up the possibilities of enunciating values that are antithetical to the logics of the market. In this context play inherits the status of a tactic. (p. 11)

However, Agamben’s (2003/2005) *studious play* (p. 63) suspends without destroying, which throws something like art education into an alternative ontological status. This allows for its reconstruction away from accountability regimes and teleologies so integrated into art education within the knowledge society. Studious play may reanimate art education with im-potentiality. As studious play, art education becomes deactivated from its current use and value matrices and repurposed for “reinvention, radical experimentation, and radical abandonment” (Lewis, 2014a, p. 210). We are not calling for this space to make our practices better or more efficient within existing criteria, instead, we are imbuing art education with a “sense of potentiality or whateverness brought forth through studious play without knowing what this potentiality is destined for” (Lewis, 2014a, p. 210).

Those who participate in studious play become tinkerers playing with and transforming what is overlooked, undervalued, immeasurable, stupid, dysfunctional, and useless within the current priorities of art education, so that they may become something else. We are not asking to destroy art education—it can carry on just fine without us for a moment, and we do want it to carry on! We are just suspending its efficacy, leaving idle its drive to determine and measure, deactivating its rules of operation, and suspending it into a time-out or limbo (Lewis, 2011b, p. 595) in order to, “studiously play with its remnants” (Lewis, 2012b, p. 364). These laws, signs, rules, standards, principles, best practices, and objectives become available for free use (Agamben, 2005/2007) as they are wrested from their routines, roles, and functional guidelines. Thus, norms are inoperative during studious play, “opening up the studier to the potentiality of the world to be rather than it has become” (italics in original, Lewis, 2014a, p. 203). Here, art education loses its *art education-ness* and becomes, “indeterminate without destination” (Lewis, 2014a, p. 209). We are using art education differently through manipulating it, proposing other ways to do it and reanimating it without normative pressures for definition and accountability. As a result, its usefulness is deferred, making it...

Disordered and rendered inoperable within its preset confines.

These instances of potentiality through studious play unlock our present as art educators to as-yet-undefined and uncertain futures. In order to embrace this betrayal of the current construction of art education, one has to view the ends and means of art education as irrational, over-determined, limited, or illogical at some level. An art educator has to see his/her profession as problematic and ripe for destabilization. S/he must be willing to challenge traditional art education notions in order to place the norms and current arrangements of art education under the disruption and possibility of potentiality brought about by studious play. Potentiality occasions such a moment of critical pause and suspension of application. This is not meant to cause a destruction of the field, but a deactivation, a disavowal of our customs, and a provocation at points of failure, contradiction, and non-critical conformity within the symbolic order that is art education as usual.

As the art education machine perpetuates, the maintenance of a withdrawal is fleeting and scary as our roles, labors, and usefulness as art educators are deceived and resisted. We have to be willing to withdraw from measuring, accounting, standardizing, and carrying on within art education today, in order to enter a space of indecision and inaction where we risk uselessness. To stop the perfunctory deployment of art education under neoliberalism, we need to freeze its logos and be disloyal to its rationality. We understand this is not a risk all art educators are willing to take. Nonetheless, we again inquire, if given the opportunity, what of art education would art educators abandon, and how might we undertake this *decreation* (Agamben, 1999, pp. 270-71)?

**Poiesis as Studious Play**

Lewis (2011a) claims learning is like a poem in that it, “resists its own end, its actualization as a measurable quantity fully
mastered by the ‘subject who knows’” (p. 253). Likewise, studious play engages poetic processes in lieu of praxis. Praxis’s current hold over art and its education prioritizes effects and does not allow for a resting within our problems as a generative de-completion without end. According to Agamben (1999), poiesis destabilizes and suspends its mode of (de)creation through the freedom of im-potentiality that does not rush to fulfill a premade potentiality and its associated subjectivities. Therefore, poiesis involves reconfiguration, re-appropriation, and rule breaking, with ends postponed indefinitely. In this, both poiesis and studious play break from “the logic of necessity which orients learning towards specific ends (these skills are needed for economic survival) and predetermined measurements (these standards must be fulfilled)” (Lewis, 2014b, p. 341). This betrayal of art education offers us both an interruption from the existing state of affairs and a lure to mess with its scraps.  

Agamben (1999) maintains that only when we succeed at “experiencing our own impotentiality do we become capable of creating, truly becoming poets” (p. 253). Indeed, art, even apropos to art education, may open fissures into inoperativity (De Boever, 2006, p. 157).

**Art Education Limbo**

Art education limbo is a term that could be used to describe a site “where the injunctions to learn, to produce, to maximize outputs, are deactivated indefinitely” (Lewis, 2012b, p. 368) into an inoperative space for thought to play and tinker new possible uses out of old, and not so old, ways of art education. We offer impotent spaces of studious play within this article. The poem (see poem) and sculptural forms created by Nadine and Dan respectfully, embody a poiesis and impotency that refuse to participate in the status quo of the field, resisting praxis, thereby deactivating aspects of art education in its present circumstances. We are still using art education, but differently, through manipulating it, proposing alternatives, while taking it through different modes, and resisting preset ends. Yet, in moving art education to the side, we extract it from its usual use within current value systems so that it might become other than its present-day manifestations.

Dan’s works, displayed throughout this essay, explore processes of studious play and the bringing together of materials in unconventional relations, unleashed from present objectives and the logics of necessity aligned with today’s educational norms. These sewn textile forms are separated from their traditional functions as clothing items, rending them invalid, ill-measured inoperatives, and deviant designs. As manifestations of poiesis, they exist adjacent to Dan’s practice as an art educator, providing Dan a time-out from the status quo. The free use of design tropes such as made to measure, form fitting function, and meeting the needs of the client are uprooted and recontextualized within art education as studious play. In this regard, art education customs of measurement, standardizations of form/content, education as social corrective, acceptable ranges of behavior and functioning, as well as notions of pattern, scale, expectations, and models within learning, growth, and assessment are repurposed and tinkered with. Careful measurement here proves inoperative. It does not capture norms, but materializes exceptions. Here, form does not function to pre-set ends; form is dysfunctional.
I prefer not to art educate
I prefer not to perpetuate the existing possible
I prefer not to use the rubric
I prefer not to rank and be ranked
I prefer not to put art to neoliberal use
I prefer not to provide feedback on standards
I prefer not to follow Bill Gates’ teaching advice
I prefer not to turn means into ends
I prefer not to learn
— I Prefer Not to Art Educate

This suspension of art education limbo offers a period of free use. We do not know what use studying, tinkering, playing, and/or (de)creating might lead to as we deactivate and suspend productivity and efficiency by “giving potentiality back to itself” (Lewis, 2012b, p. 361). In this, we do not claim to change everything or anything, but rather, we offer a pause from what art education already is, so that we might think and do differently. This is a stupid practice, not aligned with the current grammar of art education.

In theorizing and creating around our work as art educators, we delve into the impotentiality of study for we already know how to assess and measure so-called learning in visual arts education. We have cultivated these capabilities. In this knowhow, we are in potential. We know the means to the end, how to reach goals, fulfill potential, and, yet, we wish to rest in a more obscure and perpetual tinkering with the tools of the game of visual arts education in a, “pure means without end” (Lewis, 2014c, p. 114) so that play or study of these conditions dodges the measurements of efficiency. We are playing outside the rules, dealing in an inoperative art education. Despite their proficiency, we “prefer not to” engage with our field as it is currently operating. Capabilities are suspended as incapable, where they are stupefied by the state of our field, longing for a respite, and in the process of, “looking away” (Rogoff, 2005, p. 133) from art education as usual.

We know how we are supposed to participate; we just would prefer not to participate in measurable ways while we study, tinker, and recreate. This looking away is a disobedient experiment in contingency freed from the verification of hypotheses (Lavaert, 2013).

(To No) End

Neoliberalism, the creative industries, and creative capitalism all employ calculation that tries to eradicate excess, critique, disruption, and error through
setting out mechanisms of control that funnel us towards certain measurable limits (Gielen, 2013, p. 94). There is no denying that art education today is synonymous with its destinations, but given the permission to escape art education’s current policing mechanisms, what might art educators abandon or leave idle? What might be resisted? How might the field be repurposed for unconventional or inefficient uses? How might art education unlearn (see Baldacchino, 2013b; Desai & Koch, 2012; Spivak, 1993) what it is has become? Under such a betrayal, would art educators embrace an inoperative art education neutralized from its usual metrics? Could art educators defy their inclinations toward praxis? How might the disruptive acts of withdrawal within this essay threaten, deceive, expose, or throw into doubt the profession?

The story of Bartleby has been our inspiration for a radical im-potentiality, wherein, art educators can assess and cannot assess simultaneously—it is a choice. Art educators may choose to conserve themselves from enacting potential for instrumentalist use, so that they might rehabilitate the profession of art education away from neoliberal mandates, albeit temporarily. In preferring to take a time-out from actualizing and maximizing our art education capabilities calibrated with pre-established use values, we embrace the reclaiming of art education for other uses. For to not art educate, even though we have the skills, might allow us to return to operating as usual in modified states. Through betraying the forms of praxis art education has become, we reconsider what may be imaginable for our futures.

We provided singular gestures of impotence in relation to art education that do not amount to much beyond the therapeutic, unless they are joined by other studiers and players in collective and public gestures (Lewis, 2014c, p. 115). Our longing to not operate art education as usual is a Bartlebian provocation. We hope that it might reverberate with others and help us to get some distance, to make a clearing or gap to see through and start constructing an alternative art education community (Žižek, 2006). We wish for all art educators the time, space, and freedom of suspension from the profession’s current imperatives and teleological arrangements, so that together, through studious play, we might deactivate the rationalities of art education from within.

References


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The parallax view. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

1 The corporate incursion into higher education of Pearson, Inc.’s edTPA stands out in this regard. edTPA’s assessment of teacher performance within teacher education programs claims to professionalize the field of education. Art education programs have not been immune to this professionalization as many states now require this form of standardized assessment. Colleagues across the US have been grappling to adequately pilot this within their programs, because their programs’ viability relies on performing well on this standardized assessment. Recent (January and February, 2014) postings on the National Art Education Association Higher Education Division listserv under the discussion title ‘Navigating edTPA’ speak of ‘DeadPTA,’ ‘disastrous’ results, ‘MIND-BOGGLING’ portfolio assessment protocols, ‘time-consuming’ evaluation, ‘extraordinarily long’ training, and overall ‘[scathing] disgust of the test.’ This is an example of art education under the current accountability fetish (Dorhick & Dunn, 2009) in education long forewarned by the writings of art educator Laura H. Chapman (i.e., 1982).

2 Here, education is succumbing to the “learning to learn” (Simons, 2006, p. 537) loop.

3 For further exploration of the term ‘creative industries’ and its impact on art education, please see Baldacchino’s (2013a) essay ‘What creative industries? Instrumentalism, autonomy, and the education of artists’, along with Geilen’s (2013) book titled Creativity and Other Fundamentalisms.

4 Atkinson (2011), Baldacchino (2012), and Siegesmund (2013) have also written about contingency and art education.

5 There are strong parallels here to the profession of teaching and the self-perception of teachers in the wake of what Biesta (2011) refers to as “the disappearance of teaching and the demise of the role of the teacher as someone who has something to say and something to bring” (p. 364) under the impact of constructivism.

6 See Marc James Léger’s (2010) articulation of the non-productive role of the artist in the context of the creative industries in Canada.

7 For other recent perspectives on play and art education, please consult Garoian (2013), Siegesmund (2013), and Walker (2014).

8 Léger (2013, November 21), in his unpacking of the theme of the 2013 Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art – “Play! Recapturing the Radical Imagination” counters this embrace of play with the caution that, “Play may be part of a prolonged effort to avoid the anxieties and pressures associated with the social rules that structure reality, or at least an effort to ‘screen’ such processes, leading us to a moralization of reality as an alibi for the more traumatic Real of our fantasies. Play therefore operates paradoxically as a fantasy that masks the basic facts of social antagonism and the contingency of the Real – traumatic irruptions into the field of one’s perception. Because the loss of such illusions can lead to illness, play functions as a coping mechanism though [sic] which we negotiate our relationship to social demands. Play is a psychic resource through which we both deceive ourselves and resist the rules of art. As a common feature of the brave new world of creative labour, precarity and austerity, and as part of the breakdown of the division of work and leisure, play, or ‘playbour,’ as Andrew Ross calls it, compels us to better understand the intersubjectivity that defines our true position in the game. The paradox is that the rules of the game – in our case the rules of art – although played as real, do not concretely exist. Play provides us with a certain distance from such a realization – a modality that today contributes to our collective dispossession” (p. 21).

9 We consider this to be in harmony with Žižek’s (2006) notion of “Bartleby politics” (p. 342).

10 Wallin (2010) following Agamben, also notes the need for creative powers to “be mobilized to allay the exertion of biopower over life. This is a crucial question facing contemporary curriculum theory in that it suggests that task of private curriculum thinkers be oriented to creative practices of hollowing out” (in reference to Deleuze & Guattari’s [1980/1987] holey spaces) (p. 131). Also working through a Deleuzian perspective, jagodzinski and Wallin (2013) discuss poiesis and praxis in relation to art education in their volume titled Arts Based Research: A Critique and Proposal.

11 This alludes to Agamben’s (1996/1999) work titled The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics, in which the end of the poem is examined and proposed as a condition of possibility. It also evokes the tragic paradox of Melville’s Bartleby starving to death in prison. While Bartleby’s resistance wasn’t sustainable, as a mode of potentiality as contingency, he continues to inspire the question, “What would a practice of inoperativity look like?” (De Boever, 2006, p. 160).

12 As Berardi (2012) explains, “[p]oetic art, by which I mean art as poetry, as the creation of imaginary worlds of possibility, can be conceived as a therapeutic act. Poetic art is a technique for the reactivation of the sensitive body and the sensible mind, beyond the techno-alienation and de-sensibilisation that precarity, digitalization and info-acceleration have induced in the psychic sphere” (p. 99).

13 Many in the field of art education would identify this very journal and the Caucus on Social Theory & Art Education, an Issues Group of the National Art Education Association, as sites of gathering for such a community.