

Understanding Adolescents' Identity Formation Through Arts-Based Research: Transforming an Ethnographic Script into a Play

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ABSTRACT

As art educators strive to promote social justice we may want to invite our students to embrace examples of art and the histories of artists who have resisted the oppressive forces in their respective eras. This article examines the role Czechoslovakian artists have played, and the works they created, in opposition to Soviet occupation in the city of Bratislava in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In addition to providing a cultural, political, and historical context for interpreting these works, the author advocates for the introduction of works of art that stem from this unique set of circumstances to high school students. The article also uses the discussion of unofficial Czechoslovakian art and artists of Bratislava to examine Conceptual and Performance Art and their implications in deviating from traditional high school art teaching practices.

PROLOGUE

People are *homo performans*, beings that perform according to social standards (Turner, 1982). He advocated that written ethnographic notes be transformed into performance script so that students can come to an experience-based understanding of the findings of ethnographic research. In this way, they can find a way to perhaps "walk-in-the-shoes" of research participants, rather than merely role-play. Role-playing is an enjoyable activity or spontaneous amusement; play-acting is pretending to be a certain identity or portraying a character in a script; thus play-acting as performing is serious play or meaning-making (Mayer, 1986).¹

Play can be a way of relieving tension by way of "fooling around." Preadolescents naturally play when they are among peers. Bettelheim (1976) speculated, "Some unconscious pressures in children can be worked out through play" (p. 55), and play relieves stress from adolescence crises. The concept of play itself can become deep and rich when it contains uncertainty, illusion, fantasy, and when it includes role exploring or risk-taking, thereby developing its own life (Ackerman, 1999, p. 288). One can play and the result can be a theatrical play (Hicks, 2005). Play, then, is a kind of performance, which can be classified in different ways: *natural*, involving a staged reading of a recorded conversation;

1 James Surls further points out that serious play includes "children pretending, playacting and loving what they do. ...They are totally engrossed in the business of self" (Mayer: 1986).

dramatic based on previous texts, *improvised* with an evolving structure, and *critical* which transforms into cultural critique and involves different types of audiences (Denzin, 1997, p. 97-101). In this study I am using the concept of play in its performance, constructive improvisational, symbolic, and social senses.

Art educators have reported on the effects of using performance (i.e. types of theater) in the classroom and in their research. Garoian (1999) challenged art educators to use critical performance, which he insists is a separate art form, as a radical teaching/research approach to explore society's complexities and contradictions. Garoian and Guadelius (2004), and Anderson and Milbrandt (2005) incorporated the work of Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco for motivating students to create critical performance. Another example, that incorporated feminist critique, explored "the beauty myth" in a non-hierarchical way utilizing a play format (Berberich, 1993). After encouraging performance work, James (2004) constructed a narrative portrait of the development of one general education student's creative thinking using photomontage and masked performance. In contrast to these previous studies, my goal was to encourage my university students to reinterpret play scripts and to consider performance arts-based research forms.²

This ethnographic study, which evolved from transcriptions of everyday conversations into a *natural performance* (Stuckey, 1993), is a kind of arts-based research upon which Zander (2007) has commented. She noted, "When we ask students to tell their stories [or write a play] about the art they make, or help them find meaning in the aesthetics of their own lives, we change the nature of classroom talk" (p. 200) and instruction. Using Barone and Eisner's (1997, p. 74-76) framework of arts-based features, I conclude that my ethnographic play as performance is:

- a virtual reality creation that pulls the audience into the story with its verisimilitude
- a portrayal of student qualities that is full of ambiguous meanings
- an imaginative use of making connections
- multi-interpretive in nature and expressive in metaphoric language
- in vernacular (student jargon) rather than theoretical language
- empathetic, in that the research desires to participate in students' lives and to understand them
- personally vocal and consolidates my ten years experience as a middle school teacher with several related research studies

2. Although these scripts are not of a critical nature, they provide scenarios on which students can reflect.

- aesthetic in its form, using dramatic tension, thickening plot, and resolution (denouement) to portray character change with no final answer
- recreative by inviting audience participation to deepen human understanding

ETHNOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE METHOD

The original methodology of this study was ethnographic, and involved data collection, content analysis, and comparative analysis. Ethnography is a systematic process of describing, analyzing, and interpreting insights discovered in everyday life (Wolcott, 1994). As both process and product, it forms a picture of a group's (*ethnos*) way of life. Since observations were of one class for a semester, the study was a micro-ethnography, an inquiry into a slice of life, based on experience and knowledge of prior research (Stokrocki, 1997a). The result functions as a text or "context for other voices to be heard" (Denzin, 1997, p. 45).

McCall (2003) offered methodological steps that I rearranged according to how my performance evolved: 1) take field notes and order them to form the plot; 2) include an introduction, literature review, and conclusion; 3) add analytic points and commentary; 4) write a script, add movements, props, and choose performers; 5) keep costumes minimal and cast performers in multiple roles so that the audience is freed from a historical position (i.e. from stereotyping a character); and 6) allow the audience to identify with the actors' power to transform themselves and their world (p. 130-131).

This arts-based piece originated as an ethnographic case study of one class, consisting of 28-hours of observations, three hour-long interviews with six students, and multiple document reviews. This case study was part of a major research grant that spanned four years of ethnographic research which involved data gathering, content analysis, cross-site analysis, and interpretation (Hafeli, Stokrocki, & Zimmerman, 2005). The purpose of the original research was to develop a framework for future study about middle school art teachers' impact on student learning and to determine students' differences and similarities. Results revealed negotiation of ideas, and processes, and information about preadolescent social culture.

EVOLUTION OF THE PERFORMANCE

I turned my field notes into a script by basing characters' lines on actual dialogue that I recorded; yet I made the school and student characters anonymous. Previously using the play format in my dissertation (Stokrocki, 1982). I learned some additional points from Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) who suggested presenting summaries of the acts as analytical asides. I

then took a risk and first presented the research and results to my graduate class, "Visual Culture Research," by asking them to assume the various students' parts and to enhance them. I was pleasantly surprised as they read their selected parts with zeal and changed the wording slightly to reveal their own emotions in teaching students. I asked them if they would consider reading the parts at our art education state conference this fall. Some students couldn't wait to perform and others complained that they were not actors.³ Additionally, I asked my graduate students, all veteran art teachers, to reflect on their experiences teaching youths, and then add comments to the script to make it simpler and clearer with added character punch (McCall, 2003). Veteran art teachers understand their students' psychological habits all too well. Casting was not a selection process, as these art teachers volunteered to read the selection and reinterpret the motions the script suggests.

PLAY INTRODUCTION

The selected class unit, based on the theme of transformation, was an example of how eighth graders interpret their identities in a lesson titled "Self-Portrait Transformation." The purpose behind the transformation unit was to have students choose what aspects of their personalities/ identities that they would reveal through expressive self-portraits. Students created a mixed-media self-portrait using a photograph. This study explored their changing identity during the class and the following years.

Identity is a person's set of characteristics that s/he recognizes as unique to her/his personality. Harter (1990) explained that descriptions of one's self change from using concrete terms to more abstract characterizations, and from physical descriptions to psychological ones (Linde, 1993, p. 3). A person's identity however is multifaceted and transforming; parts are hidden, determined by culture, and are never final (Kroger, 1996). Jagodzinski (2004) reports that media immersion offers brief transcendence from these youths' preoccupation with their own real life problems, and ways of role-playing solutions.

The ancient function of the art of transformation originates with the shaman-teacher, who evoked different natural and animal spirits for protection and strength. A youth would encounter an animal as a child that would become his/her special identity totem. Preadolescents struggle to find their identity through a variety of ways, some good and some bad. Art can help them find and transform their identity and seek powers beyond only that of beauty. London (1992) argued for a view of *art as transformation*. He used the idea of a mask not as an exotic item but for its original purpose, that of personal transformation. He

3. To calm these performers' fears, I suggested that they hold up drawings as masks and read the script. Later I enlarged and laminated the drawings and performers wore them around their necks. These props were cumbersome.

asked that readers create one mask of what they desire to become and one that represents their identity traits.

So what identities do eighth graders exhibit? To help my graduate students explore this question I altered my ethnographic study into a play. The graduate students each took one character to portray. As they read the play, using props and expressive gestures, my students connected to their own experiences as art educators to make the characters come alive. At the end of each scene, a narrator provides some interpretation and analysis. This "excerpt commentary unit" involves an analytic point, orientating information, reflections from the field notes, and additional analytic commentary (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 182-183). The play ends with a reconstructed vignette that consolidates the essence of each student's identity, so that we can "think more deeply; to move from one scene to a larger drama" (Ely et al., 1997, p. 69). After a reading of the play, the performers and the audience discussed what they learned about art education for adolescents, and the implications the play carried about mainstream American society.

PLAY SETTING

Outside of Phoenix, Arizona, the small middle school, "ARS"⁴ is located on a spacious campus with natural desert landscaping. The play concentrates on an eighth-grade art class, an elective subject; students can choose two-dimensional and/or three-dimensional design. Each class meets one hour every day for 18 weeks, and the observed class met the last period of the day.

CHARACTERS

Observed art teacher Karla Primosch explains her background, "I received both my Bachelor of Fine Arts with an emphasis on drawing and my Master of Arts degrees in Art Education from Arizona State University. I have been teaching at ARS for five years. My teaching philosophy is student-oriented. I want kids to feel successful and challenged at the same time. When we start a lesson, I am more of a facilitator. After that, I work with individuals and small groups. I try to accommodate students' different abilities and exceptionalities. My gifted students are challenged to 'go beyond the problem.' The biggest problem is their attention deficit-struggle to complete a project or choose another alternative. For these kids, art is where they excel. I found that this research collaboration with Doc has helped me become more reflective, and I think this experience will help prepare me for National Board Certification."

4 ARS is a fictional name, and the Latin word for art.

THE STUDENTS

The observed class consists of 10 males and six females, almost all Caucasian, from an eighth grade class. The girls dressed in shorts and tank tops and the boys wore T-shirts, cargo pants, and Sketcher sneakers. They have been grouped together since the first grade, so they are a tight-knit group. Only six students are characters in the play. These six students represent themselves and their class.

Phil: I play Mario's Nintendo games for fun. Some people think I'm a computer nerd, but I am a rebel.

Bob: I'm not good at art, but I like to have a good time here.

Dizzy: My friends and I are bikers. We wear helmets and tops with the logo "No Fear!"

Dori: We're not interested in school. Everything is a joke. We just want to have fun.

Katie: I'm quiet, but I love art and draw a lot at home.

Bunny: Yea, we're an apathetic group in school.⁵

Doc [Dr. Stokrocki] is the ethnographic researcher who is observing the class. Her goal is to listen to the students and learn from them about adolescent identity development. However, she may make other discoveries as well.

The Narrator sets the scene, providing context for the interaction between the characters, and ends the scene offering interpretation and analysis of what took place. To conserve space, I removed the lengthy narrative script elements, and provided an overview of each scene with selected quotes.

SCENE I. "TRANSFORM YOURSELF!"

The setting was the art room that is located in the technology lab building. The large room housed several large tables and a long distribution island that consists of four cabinets. Several masterpiece reproductions were taped to a large eraser board that students sat around. Karla first explained her curriculum sequence and the lesson. In the beginning, she stressed mostly technical knowledge, combined with self-expression, and based on resources from reading *School Arts*, *Art Education*, but especially from *Scholastic Art*. Karla stated, "I emphasize art elements and technical processes-perspective and value, and use of a variety of media including paint, colored pencil, pastel, collage, and printmaking." The third lesson, called "Transform Yourself," covers self-portrait drawing with shading and morphing two animals, symbolism, proportion, and watercolor wash (Mittler & Ragans, 1999).

⁵ The student used this expression, which surprised the teacher and researcher by the accurate characterization of the class.

Karla then introduced the lesson to her students based on Dürer's 1504 *Self Portrait*. She explained, "Dürer is the most well-known oil painter of portraits during the High Renaissance" (Scholastic Art, 2001). She added that it was a time when art was exploding in Italy from 1400 to 1600 A.D. Dürer (1471-1528) lived in Nuremberg, Germany and traveled to Italy to gain some tips. His father was a goldsmith and his family was wealthy. He was 13 when he made this self-portrait. When his family realized he was talented, they sent him to a local painter's workshop.

Students responded: "That's how old I am! Did he go to school? He looks silly, almost like a girl! He looks like Jesus with long hair." Karla clarified how Dürer used his own face as the model for Jesus and reviewed information on such art principles as focal point, symmetry, and proportion that she had covered in previous lessons. Then she announced the new project to make a self-portrait that reveals something about themselves. She invited students to "Transform yourself by combining different animal faces. For example, a lion means bravery. Choose something that is part of your identity—at least two animals that you can blend into one face. I want to see how you problem solve." Karla demonstrated an example on the board, gave suggestions, and shared her own finished example. Students responded: "Creepy! Weird! Awesome!" She also shared an example by Cesar Martinez who was from Laredo, Texas, a border town of Mexico. He liked wildlife and in sixth grade he remembers drawing animals for a contest. He combines his heritages in a charcoal drawing, called *El Mestizo*, 1987. The Mexican part is a jaguar and the Spanish part is a bull, drawn in charcoal (Quirarte, 1997). At the end of class, Karla started to take photographs of students as references for their self-portraits for the next class. Students ruffled through books looking for and sharing ideas. Students commented, "Hey, how about this one—me as a toad." "Funny, we already know that. How about a snake?" "Nah, that's too typical, a lizard is more interesting." "My sign is Leo so I'm doing a lion." "Oh no! Not that! I'm scared" [joking]. The class bell rang and the students left chanting. "Lions, tigers, and bears, OH MY!" Narrator translated that students seem amused by the assignment and spent time brainstorming, looking for pictures, and joking.

SCENE II. "I CAN'T DECIDE!"

The setting was the same art room. Around each table, several students flipped through magazines and books searching for photographs and pictures of animals. The girls put on makeup, twirl their hair and gossip about their boyfriends. Karla reminded them to find two animal pictures to combine with their photograph to make a self-portrait. Students shared their preliminary ideas when Doc asked them. Boys responded, "No clue. Maybe a horned owl. Maybe a bull—I

added horns on my head. I got the idea from the worksheet—to substitute the nose. This is hard. Art is supposed to be fun!” Girls added, “A cat—cats are cute! Polar bear. I copied snail shells from a book and made them into earrings. Bear and tiger cat. I have two cats at home.”

The narrator summarized that students spent the entire class socializing, searching, collecting pictures, and changing their ideas. Different types of cats, which included lions, tigers, and domestic varieties, were the most popular animals. Karla later reflected, “They will be incapable of making a decision. Classmates see solutions for someone else, but not their own work. Many students have attention deficit problems.” This lack of student concentration



Fig. 1
Polar bear with Sea Shells. I copied snail shells from a book and made them into earrings.

often happened because of external problems, their fear of failure (Martin, 1986), and because of limited academic choices that make freedom so overwhelming (Stokrocki, 1990). Students have freedom and space, but don't know how to use these factors constructively (Hersch, 1999). Karla explained the school's culture by stating, “Kids here do not regard art as a serious subject, but as a fun activity, so they look for easy solutions and parents do not push their children to work hard. The paradox is freedom versus failure [by conformity].”

SCENE III. “I CAN'T DRAW!”

In the art room, students are sitting around each table and drawing their self-portraits, each at different stages of completion. Karla demonstrates how to use guidelines for the facial parts as in her worksheet. She shows how to make a nose, first by making a round tip at the front and then adding two curves on either side for nostrils. Students' first attempts were simple outline drawings. They shared their woes when Doc asked them what they were drawing.

Students answered, “I drew the face first and added the rabbit nose. Oh, man. I can't get these stupid ears right! I left them off; now it's mostly an owl!”

Bunny started by making the cat's eyes slanted and smeared them. Karla showed her how to shade the eyes and make eyelids. Karla suggested, “Draw the nose by extending the cheek lines [*Shows how to draw them*]. You want to get five eyes across the page and bring the face up farther for proportion (Figure 3).

Let's see what you can do now.” The narrator summarized that Karla pushed her students to use different animals and details, such as texture and color. She also challenged her talented students to go beyond the assignment. Teachers

often push students to go beyond the information given (Bruner, 1973). Karla later admitted, "I used these more gifted students' drawings as models for students in other classes. No matter how hard I coaxed, not all students were willing or ready to add features. Readiness seems to be a persistent problem."

SCENE IV. "I'M FRUSTRATED!"

The setting was the art room again, but it was messier with papers lying around, and paints and brushes in the sink. Karla demonstrated how to paint a watercolor wash over a self-portrait and how to add details with colored pencils. She gathered students around one table to see her watercolor example of half-girl and half-tiger and to demonstrate watercolor wash techniques. Bob exclaimed, "How cool!"

Later, she began to give individuals suggestions, "I like the gray mane but if you add yellow, use the gold with a tiny bit of purple as a color accent. The lion has long hairs not short ones. Add some background color." Then students started to ask questions, "Do we have to paint the whole background? Do my colors have to be realistic?" Karla answered, "Because we are running out of time, do bits and pieces and add details in colored pencil. Some parts can be imaginary." Again students remarked about this assignment as hard work. Karla commented on the class progress, "I get lots of whining and I'll continue showing the same people the same thing repeatedly. They hate to paint but they need some skill for high school. The narrator summarized that as the project continued, background color became less important. Karla discovered acts of student resistance and negotiation tactics similar to those described by Hafeli (2000), as an example of an analytical aside. As students' solutions adjusted to Karla's painting guidelines and her assignment relaxed in details.



Fig. 2
Dragon, Brave Dragon. My portrait is supposed to represent a dragon for bravery. I added horns and a pointed, scaly tail to make it more imaginary.

SCENE V. THE UNRAVELING: "WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT IDENTITY?"

The scene opened in the teachers' workroom where a video camera is set up to record student interviews. Karla chose six students because they actually finished their drawings and had the most to say. Doc asked each student to describe her/his portrait and what it revealed about her/his identity, as being like their

personality—a combination of emotional and mental behaviors that make each person unique. She interviewed students three times during the semester. A few examples of students' descriptions of their work and interpretations follow. Phil described his rabbit-owl with heart-shaped face and thick and bushy eyebrows, like his own. He added "a 'Y-shaped' nose (to represent the rabbit). The (opened) owl eye is a focal point. He interpreted, "I am like a watchful owl and scared rabbit. I think before I do." The Narrator discerned that Phil's identity traits reveal someone who is careful and hesitant.

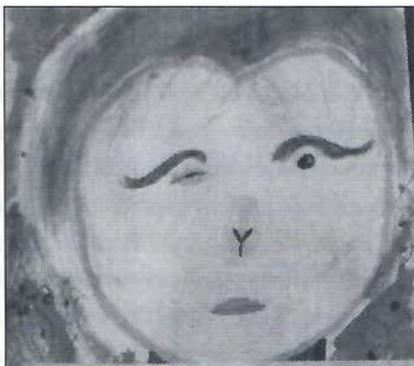


Fig. 3
Owl & rabbit.

Bunny drew a combination of three faces where two animals overlap the human face. She chose a bunny because it is her Chinese birth year, 1987, and a cat. She explained, "I like cats. Colors are blended but the animal marks are realistic. The bunny is cute and I'm quiet like the cat sometimes. The animals [figures] share the human eyes." Karla summarized her as a follower. The Narrator felt that Bunny seems both timid and assured.



Fig. 4
Bunny & Cat. I chose a bunny because it is my Chinese birth year-1987 and a cat. I like cats.

Dizzy announced his mask was “a mad cat drawing. It’s sort of a wild [cat] man with “O-shaped” lips. I slashed my paper and made marks over its face. It sucks.” The bobcat in some Native American cultures represents a loner and suspicion. The Narrator deciphered that Dizzy seemed agitated and swung on his seat for the entire interview. Students later said that he left class because he was in trouble in other classes and he couldn’t concentrate.



Fig. 5

Mad Cat I [Native American student] made a “Mad Cat” drawing. It’s sort of a wild [cat] man with “O-shaped” lips.

The students’ psychological content selections evoke nostalgia for childhood and adult concerns, since their choices are both progressive and regressive (Nathanson, 1991). The class was playful, almost silly at times. On the other hand, they were rebelling and taking risks. Life today is full of contradictions and demands; parents are on the run, no one is home, and youth need to invent their own community (Hersch, 1999). Karla reflected later that, “They don’t want to be unique; it’s uncomfortable. They also want to be free but choose the safe. They are so fixated on what others think of them.”

On the other hand, the characterization of Dizzy often left us wondering why he was angry and if his anger pointed to a deeper issue—that of a Native youth trapped in a predominantly Caucasian context. Stokrocki (1997b) explained that students were a blend of assurance and unsure-ness. This project was a way for them to explore their coming of age feelings and rites of passage; their need to be challenged, and their need for direction; their contradicting desire for support, and autonomy. They are curious about unknown dimensions of this art project, and they are afraid. Bob later told Doc that no one had ever asked such questions before, and Bunny felt that they were “a confused bunch of kinds!” The Narrator finally surmised that preadolescents are bold yet huddle together, progressing down the yellow brick road in trepidation and chanting, “Lions, tigers, and bears, Oh, My!”

EPILOGUE

In this class, most adolescents seem to exhibit a temporary bi-culturalism of shared meanings. Their search for identity involves the question of which cultural identity and values to explore and transmit. Students revealed their mostly Caucasian roots and their adolescent popular culture influences. Embedded in popular culture are gender influences that focus on the different themes and

subject matter that distinguish art works made by girls from those made by boys (Duncum, 1997). By helping students to discover the hidden meanings of their artistic intentions, art educators might help them to understand the gendered stereotypes that affect their drawings. Such forays provide “transcendence or temporary relief from the youth’s preoccupation with their own real life bodies” and perversions of violence and sex (Jagodzinski, 2004, p. 273).

What did the teacher learn about adolescents’ identity choices? Ms. Primosch was surprised that any of her students would experience frustration when using animals to represent themselves. She felt that to alleviate students’ anxiety in the future, she would ask them to choose alternative identities. “A teacher cannot force students to address their multiple identities, but rather educators should support students to make such choices as they wish” (Knaus, 2006, p. 412). In this case, the identity concept emerges as a complicated issue with several dimensions.

What did the professor learn about adolescent artists and about research? I learned that these preadolescents seemed confused about their identities and were experimenting with alternatives (Kroger, 1996). This study also revealed a culture of one specific art class, which students defined as “apathetic,” and where peers were of great influence. Perhaps this micro-culture of apathy is reflective of apathy in larger mainstream American culture.⁶ Students’ comments revealed public personae, insights that are culturally contested and/or approved. In addition, an empathetic performance can intensify this message. “Performances do not proceed in ideological innocence and axiological purity” (Conquergood, 1985, p. 2). The ethics of performance cultural studies demanded that performers and writers take responsibility for how they interpret another person’s life experiences.⁷ Such research enabled me to seek many perspectives about the play, including local Mexican and Native American viewpoints. This opportunity leads to further discussion about race in an age of school re-segregation (Tatum’s, 2007). Similar to adolescent search for identity, the search for interpretations and insightful vision spurred my persistence to continue to pursue deeper “meanings.”

6 Generation X students appear apathetic and clueless. On the other hand, they have an emerging sense of self; therefore their characterizations are inconclusive. Could it be that some students’ personalities or identities are incongruous with their socially rigid school environment (Wilson, 1998)? In this case, the community has upper class aspirations with which the middle class students cannot compete. Similar to the play, the “Wizard of Oz,” do these identities reflect the American aspirations in general (Van Cleef, & Funkhouser, 1987)?

7 Since the study consisted of the observation of regular instructional practices in a school, with no treatment nor intervention on the researcher’s part, the study is exempt from formal Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Application and Review. The teacher wrote a letter to the Institutional Review Board stating that the research was part of her curriculum. Students were aware of the purpose of the research and performance and their voices were not altered. The research thus falls within the institutional research guidelines, according to Johnny Saldaña, Professor of Drama and editor of *Ethnodrama* (Saldaña, 2005) (personal communication, June 12, 2006).

What did graduate students as performers learn through this research?

After the performance, I asked the graduate students to summarize what they learned about adolescent cultural identity, about translating research into a performance, and about performance as a teaching tool. Graduate students enjoyed the experience and offered a few suggestions. They discovered that the majority of selected animals were some form of cat, such as a lion or tiger. Identity traits varied with gender differences. They felt that most male adolescents were risk-takers and expressed some individuality in their work—bravery and independence. However, the graduate students surmised that female adolescents mostly reacted to their own physical appearance, wanting to be pretty, in association with their chosen animal. They felt that female students therefore were inclined to choose animals and details that were based on gendered social acceptance.⁸ A reviewer of this article however noted a persistent bias in regards to gender identity, for example the belief that boys are braver than girls (Butler, 2004). We all missed another innuendo regarding a student's remark about the artist Dürer "looking silly, almost like a girl." Primosch noted that she should have asked students "Haven't you seen guys with long hair?" She should also confirm that all the students are free to express their individuality differently as related to their physical appearance and emotions.

Graduate students proposed that preadolescent choices seemed superficial and peer-related. They felt that preadolescents are not asked to make self-reflections on their identity choices, especially about what they learned about their identity. They recommended that preadolescents need experience using self-reflection questions and possibly even opportunities to write narratives about themselves.

Graduate students discovered that research in general involves negotiating, in this case with students whose impressions of themselves a researcher wishes to elicit. It also involves negotiating with participants in the performance, cooperating with others who are interpreting the text of the dialogue, which constitutes data and analysis of it within the study. Research can be expressed through the multiple opinions of participants, through performance of what participants had to say, and the oral presentation of a study can be creatively formatted. They also discovered, as one student suggested, "the difficult task of making the clearest and richest sense of the script."

Finally, graduate students became excited about the possibilities of performance as a teaching tool. One student wanted to try the script with his high school students; another student suggested that the university senior field experience be written as a play or story, which would be a more inviting format to read. A final student summarized, "While we think of the teaching act as an

8 Tuman (1999), for instance, compared the drawings of male and female students, ages 7-12, and found that girls tended to choose gendered feminine content such as social and caring experiences and concern for physical appearance, nature, and animals. Whereas boys were inclined to select images of power and humor.

oral presentation, the potential of a reader's theater performance by an array of voices is exciting in comparison."

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

Transforming the ethnographic script into a performance presents several challenges and possibilities. Remaining authentic to the ethnographic script is one challenge. Karla felt that I portrayed her students' behavior and identity accurately. She confessed, "You got to know my students better than I did." Another problem were the changes suggested by graduate students. One graduate student interpreted the title meaning of scene III, "I Can't Draw," not in the sense of the student's original statement, that she couldn't draw at all, but that the students couldn't draw the nose in proportion. In exploring the student's statement that she couldn't draw, my university students realized adolescent art students who have never drawn before would be threatened by the realism part of the assignment. As noted earlier, Zander (2007) has argued, "When we ask students to tell their stories [or write a play] about the art they make, or help them find meaning in the aesthetics of their own lives, we change the nature of classroom talk" (p. 200) and instruction. Such a challenge leads teachers and students beyond their comfort zone.

Furthermore, how can university professors assist graduate students to understand interpretation in relation to the students who are the source of the script? More emphasis on the context is needed. Readers need to understand the context of the original script to know why students responded the way they did. Identity thus seems to be related to contextual circumstances—local, national, and generational (Anthis, 2002). What conditions foster such attitudes? What kinds of questions can teachers give students to help them work through such confusions about identity? A performance should consider alternate interpretations of the event, such as social class and political climate. Performers, for example, need to understand that nature of preadolescence as a time for vision quest, a search for one's identity (Martin, 1986). Then the resulting script would include the changing interpretations of teaching as well.

Teenagehood is a media construction as seen in students' attraction to the *Wizard of Oz* movie. A reviewer of this article also noticed a shift in the discussion of the concept of identity, which can be considered as the function of the different contexts in which the theories are applied (secondary education to higher education). Adolescent identity and vision quest is now global, with all its online growing pains (McNally, 2008). The field of art education also must undergo its own "vision quest" with cyberspace components.

I have found that the script alone does not carry a sense of genuineness, but the actors' performances and the audience's emotional reactions, especially the

performances and reactions of veteran art educators, give authenticity to this arts-based performance. The play, similar to the concept of identity, is multi-faceted, shifting, full of tension, and improvisational. Thus, seriousness and playfulness merge in “a productive and dynamic interaction” (Hicks, 2005). The mask-making identity construction might transform into perverse avatar play and identity transformation in cyberspace (Jagodzinski, 2004). Researchers will need to focus more on these different media forms of student identity and communication—the languages and visual cues, a tendency called codeswitching (Timm, 1993).

Such research requires much risk-taking and problem solving as performers negotiate the evolving event that transforms itself each time the play is performed. This ethnographic study, summarized and disseminated in a play form, also acts as a form of advocacy for visual art in schools, educates art teachers in methods to guide youth in creating art with meaningful content by discovering themselves, and acts as a catalyst for dialogue about how art should be taught.⁹

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