RE/PRESENTING ARTFUL PEDAGOGY:
RELATIONAL AESTHETICS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
CONTEMPORARY ART EXPERIENCES

A thesis submitted to the College of the Arts of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

by

Maria E. Iafelice

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Thesis written by

Maria E. Iafelice

B.A., Kent State University, 2009

M.A., Kent State University, 2013

Approved by

________________________, Advisor
Dr. Linda Hoeptner Poling

________________________, Director, School of Art
Dr. Christine Havice

________________________, Dean, College of the Arts
Dr. John R. Crawford
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CHAPTER I
CATCHING UP WITH CONTEMPORARY ART

Overview:

Fox (2001) notes the capacity of contemporary art, “to stop us in our tracks, to break the momentum of current themes in educational research, educational practices and educational theory” (p. 33), which provides a point of departure for this research. Specifically contemporary art has the ability to stop us in our art education tracks and within contemporary art, relational aesthetics has the potential to excite new ways to look at curriculum planning, pedagogy and student learning in art education contexts. Art provides different ways of considering, imagining, and representing our lived situation (Desai & Chalmers, 2007). Contemporary art is the art of now, both a mirror and window to contemporary society, which becomes a resource through which we can consider current ideas and rethink the familiar (Art 21, 2012, www.art21.org). Relational aesthetics is an art form that takes its theoretical departure from the social interactions and relations of participants, emphasizing everyday experiences as art. The research in this
paper presents a counter-narrative of art education while acknowledging the ever-present state of flux and time of challenge in art education. To ignore contemporary art leaves us unprepared (Garber, 2003). The purpose and rationale of this research is to re-imagine pedagogy with/in contemporary art practices, namely artful pedagogy which blends pedagogy and art practice. In this research, relational aesthetics is employed as an approach to teaching and learning, however the concept of artful pedagogy can remain open ended and adapt to individual educators’ interests and areas of curiosity in contemporary art. Art education needs to catch up with the radical changes and pedagogical shifts in contemporary art. The following research is propelled by the moments of relationality which are connective threads and will be re/presented as a blurry photograph at the beginning of each chapter to illustrate the interconnected nature within this research, relational aesthetics and artful pedagogy. The chapter-starting blurry photographs are not listed as figures because they are not supplemental to the research but are rather the interconnection of text and image. Consequently the following questions guided this study: *How does relational aesthetics impact artful pedagogy, in a museum education context? How will relational aesthetics re/conceptualize and re/present student learning, teaching methods, and curriculum development as artful pedagogy?*

**Purpose & Justification**

The research illuminates, depicts and explains the complexities and ambiguities of artful pedagogy and ask readers to come to the nexus to gain an openness to new questions about art education practices and inquiry. Desai and Chalmers (2007) argue that as educators, and within education, we are in critical times. With this in mind, art educators and art education researchers have the opportunity to imagine new forms of art education and furthermore, Gude (2013) asks
art educators to imagine a form of art education in which sites of school or community-based art education are collaborative art projects, ongoing experiments in ‘relational aesthetics’ “in which teachers create spaces within which students and others in the school community can interact and create new knowledge by using artistic methodologies to experience and interpret the world in fresh ways” (p.14). This research will do just that, employing relational aesthetics as a model for art education that looks to new possibilities. Furthermore, Fox (2001) discussed how contemporary artists and contemporary educational researchers are both at a time of challenge and how researchers can use themes from contemporary art to suggest "a greater openness to what we consider education as well as more shock, deeper conflict and greater variety in the questions being asked in educational research" (p. 34). The previous statements provided a catalyst to turn lived experiences and research into a deeper understanding of the re/contextualization of art classroom learning. This research will open up conversations and open up the possibilities for me to give attention to what is seen and known and what is not seen and not known (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008).

Relational aesthetics is a form of contemporary art that brings people together and is valued by the quality of participation and interaction. This research provides a counter-narrative to current trends in art education and proposes artful pedagogy. Artful pedagogy allows art educators to turn towards contemporary art and infuse their curriculum with concepts and ideas from contemporary art as well as develop a pedagogy that looks at art education in a new way.

The learning experiences in relational aesthetics as pedagogy are potentially dynamic, layered and slippery but students respond divergently, construct diverse meanings and create unpredictable products (Richardson & Walker, 2011 in Thulson, 2013). Pablo Helguera (2011), in his book, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, notes that art practices, such as audience
engagement, inquiry-based methods, collaborative dialogue and hands-on activities provide a framework for process-based and collaborative conceptual practices which are in contrast to traditional forms of art education. Furthermore relational aesthetics is an approach to art education that resists predetermined outcomes, strict routines and can incite surprise and discovery. In using relational aesthetics as an approach to learning, contemporary art can be infused into the classroom as well as in teaching practice and in content of the curriculum. Focusing on conceptual frameworks in art education as well as relational aesthetics, the following section sets the stage for concepts that drive and add rich layers to this research.

Conceptual Framework

Ways of being exist in education but we can deconstruct and reconstruct those ways of being with influence from feminist pedagogy, whereby the notions of empowering students’ voices is a central tenet and postmodernist pedagogy in which multiple viewpoints are emphasized education (Anderson, 1997, 2003; Arnowitz & Giroux, 1991; Church, 2010; hooks, 1989; Jackson, 1997; Pearse, 1997; Smith-Shank, 1998). Postmodernism and feminism are not new to the field of art education but serve as a connection and catalyst to new ways of developing curriculum and pedagogy. More importantly, postmodernist and feminist tenets in pedagogy provide the permissions to the voice in this research and the permissions to conceptualize new ways of being as creative and relational ways of being. Within this research and as Reason (1994) notes, “[t]he most important task before us is to learn to think in new ways, thinking in new ways implies new forms of practice” (p.10) specifically learning to think in new ways with implication of new forms of art education practice. This is not doing away with tradition but rather taking a postmodern approach and acknowledging tradition but adjusting
with/in it and interweaving educational research, feminist pedagogy, and contemporary art criticism that discusses relational aesthetics.

Rethinking ways of being would be significant to art teachers because it would empower them to be artists and facilitators. Part of that reconceptualization can be illustrated by Marshall’s (2002) outline of a strong connection between contemporary art and contemporary art education. She argues that curriculum development, like art, requires a creative process. Curriculum can give form to complex ideas and concepts, and should also allow for interpretation and involvement on the part of the participant or student. Lesson plans have aesthetic qualities (order, coherence, form) as well as characteristics that are connected to contemporary art (open-endedness, improvisation, and an evolving nature). Within the arguments for artful pedagogy, it is noted that developing lessons should be similar to developing ideas for art. Therefore, art educators concerned with artful pedagogy could employ creative processes originating in questioning and observation to create curricula.

**Questioning at the Nexus**

Within this research I have been guided by an evolution of questions which are outlined throughout this section, which is similar to the concept of curricula originating in questioning. The nexus is an in-between space, the site where connections emerge. Similarly, the use of the forward slashes (e.g., a/r/tography, re/present, in/between) indicates the unfolding nature of this research and the concept of contiguity. The concept of contiguity helps to visualize “these in-between spaces as parts of an endless fold, or folds within folds or as concepts linked together” (Springgay et al., 2008, p. xxviii). The slashes double rather than separate identities and concepts within this research. The in/between space or nexus is an active site of questions.
Similarly, a/r/tographers seek not to specifically answer questions, but rather to gain understanding through an evolution of questions “[t]his active stance to knowledge creation through questioning informs their practices, making their inquiries timely, emergent, generative and responsive to all those involved” (Springgay et al., 2008, p. xxiii). In this, the questions are not a linear structure but an active way of gaining understanding and making connections between ideas. As a museum educator and artist, I am curious to discover how educators identify their practice(s). An artful pedagogy is a way to combine an art practice and pedagogy. How the tenets of relational aesthetics apply to artful pedagogy will be investigated during my classroom experiences with preschool students. Furthermore, this will be an opportunity to see how educators can blend their roles as artists, teachers and researchers. In this, I will be able to determine what connections exist between relational aesthetics and pedagogy; which will also lead into an investigation of how art has taken a pedagogical turn within contemporary art practice. Within this process of questioning, it is important to note that relational aesthetics is made up of gestures, moments and relationships which are not always easily documented or re/presented, so how the re/presentation can occur was determined. As questions evolve in the research, so too do the definitions of terms have emerging importance and should be noted as evolving as well. The term relational aesthetics is understood within the context of contemporary art and since contemporary art is the art of now, the definitions are new and potentially shifting and evolving.

Definition(s) of Terms

In the previous sections brief descriptions of the terms contemporary art, relational aesthetics and participation were presented. The following section provides a set of definitions
to add a richer layer of understanding within this research. The characteristics of *contemporary art* include open-endedness, improvisation, and an evolving nature (Marshall, 2002). As noted by the *Art 21* website, contemporary art is both a mirror and window to contemporary society, which becomes a resource through which we can consider current ideas and rethink the familiar. The website contends that the work of contemporary artists is a dynamic combination of materials, methods, concepts, and subjects that challenges traditional assumptions and definitions. Perhaps the most helpful defining characteristic is the most obvious: contemporary art is the art of today (*Art 21*, 2012, www.art21.org). Concerned with contemporary art practices and how they relate to pedagogy, I have identified relational aesthetics as an area of curiosity. Art created with a *relational aesthetic* emphasizes and only exists from participation and interactivity (Bourriaud, 2002; Helguera, 2011). The relational artist works as a catalyst to this participation, interaction and relation-building. Relational aesthetics as a possible approach to art education culminates my philosophical approaches to education including contemporary art, participatory practices and community. *Participatory practices* in museums have taken the shape of a cultural institution at which visitors can create, share and connect with each other around the important content of the museum. Furthermore, the practice of creating, sharing and connecting in museums results in visitors contributing ideas and creative expression while engaging in conversations and creation (Simon, 2009). In general, participation can be defined as “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives” (Hart, 1992, p.5). Finally the term *community* is used to describe the interaction and togetherness of the learners in the classroom that is developed through conversation and a similar process of creating, sharing and connecting.
Nicolas Bourriaud’s (2002) *Relational Aesthetics* provides a comprehensive definition of the contemporary art practice but also acknowledges the indefinable nature of the initial works of relational art. In the book, the reader is introduced to a way of judging artworks based on the relations they evoke. Bourriaud (2002) also points to artists that exemplify the theories of relational aesthetics. The following quote illustrates Bourriaud’s (2002) definition of relational art: “[a] set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private place” (p.113). This reconceptualization and perspective of art can inspire the reconceptualization of art education (Gude, 2012; Fox 2001). In Bourriaud’s definition, artworks are judged on the basis of inter-human relations. The actual relations and human interactions are the art. Bourriaud notes: “[t]he forms that [the artist] presents to the public [does] not constitute an artwork until they are actually used and occupied by people” (2004, p. 46). Helguera (2011) discusses relational aesthetics as socially engaged art; social interaction which proclaims itself as dynamic rather than static art.

Art created with a relational aesthetic emphasizes and only exists from participation and interactivity (Helguera, 2011; Bourriaud, 2002). The relational artist works as a catalyst to this participation, interaction and relation-building. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud discusses the emergence of relational art and cites it as a reaction to technology: “[...] the emergence of new technologies, like the Internet and multimedia systems, points to a collective desire to create new areas of conviviality and introduce new types of transaction with regard to the cultural object” (p.26). This alludes to the point that as a culture, we are communicating and interacting in new ways which can translate into the ways of being within art education. In context, relational aesthetics has emerged in a time when communication and interaction are occurring in new forms
and new ways as well art education is at a time of challenge. Bourriaud (2002) cites Marcel Duchamp’s idea of “the co-efficient of art” (p.41) when describing a successful artwork that goes beyond presence and becomes open to dialogue, discussion and inter-human negotiation. All of Bourriaud’s (2002) definitions and explanations of relational aesthetics point to the reconceptualization of art. He negates the idea of art being sets of objects in a narrative of art history, but rather art is now “an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects” (p. 107).

In contrast to the writing of Bourriaud (2002), Claire Bishop takes a critical standpoint to relational aesthetics. In the book Participation, edited by Bishop (2006) many writings by artists and curators juxtaposed positions on and the theoretical frameworks of relational aesthetics in the art world. She separates performance art from relational aesthetics, or art that requires participation. It is noted that participatory art collapses the distinction between the artist and audience and emphasizes collaboration and “the collective dimension of social experience” (p. 10). Bishop looks back to the age of Dada as the beginning of participatory art except she notes that current works elicited more critical thinking than these initial acts of participation. When discussing the viewer in participatory art, Bishop states that the artists’ desire is to create an active subject who is empowered by the experience of participation. As a result of this empowerment, a change for the viewer occurs: “[t]he hope is that the newly-emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality” (p. 12). Bishop notes activation, authorship and community as the main concerns of participatory art.
Assumptions & Limitations:

My interest and research in relational aesthetics stemmed from two experiences. The first was reflection on my experience practicing Reggio Emilia-inspired methods in preschool classrooms. From self-initiated research, I investigated the Reggio Emilia approaches and began to uncover ideas of relationships in education; how learning is connected to the relationships between students, student and educator and between the students and the environment/world. The powerful interactions that were subsequent from this change in my teaching approach are inspirational to this research.

Secondly, I was introduced to the theory and contemporary art practice in a graduate level art history course. I immediately was interested in relational art practice and thought about its connections to art education as it was described in this course. Also, I am admitting a bias, that of a museum education lens and I anticipate that this lens will indeed color yet inform the research in a rich way. I am a museum educator and am influenced by trends of participatory museum practices. Pablo Helguera (2011), in his book *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, notes that art practices, such as audience engagement, inquiry-based methods, collaborative dialogue and hands-on activities provide a framework for process-based and collaborative conceptual practices. He goes on to mention that artists who are interested in these practices, find comfort in the education departments of museums which is evident in the fact that my context for this research rests in the education department of an art museum. However, art museum education is not the only context in which this research will be presented.

My research is richly informed through postmodernist thought intertwined with feminist pedagogy. My own interest and curiosity with the art practice of relational aesthetics is heightened when looking at the art practice with a feminist and postmodernist lens. This is a
The story I tell in these chapters is necessarily, *my story*, grounded in *my intuitions*, influenced by *my reading* of the writers in whom I have delighted and on whose ideas I have drawn, and woven in with the texture of my life experience. But as you read it, please remember that the map is not the territory and that to fashion a myth is not to state a positivist truth (p. 16). [italics added by author]

This statement further supports my statement of limitations and assumptions. The research in the following pages is my story of art education that is influenced by my lived experiences as an art museum educator in preschool classrooms as well as my position as an artist and researcher in the context of academia in which those lived experiences are looked at with a feminist and postmodernist lens. The research is not to state a positivist truth but rather open art educators and art education researchers to new questions and find comfort with ambiguity. The research points to new possibilities, not new truths.

**Brief Summary**

This chapter outlined the definition of relational aesthetics and points to contemporary art as a way of re/imagining art education as well as raised the point that art education needs to catch up with the radical changes and pedagogical shifts in contemporary art. The following chapter presents a literature review that serves as a site of interconnections within art education literature, writing of art critics, personal experience and further educational theory that supports my counter-narrative. The role of the metaphor of blurry photographs will be further investigated. The threads of this research are intertwined, knotted but revealed through an evolution of questions and guided by the following research questions: *How does relational*
aesthetics impact artful pedagogy, in a museum education context? How will relational aesthetics re/conceptualize and re/present student learning, teaching methods, and curriculum development as artful pedagogy?
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The literature that was read helps to develop a variety of ideas regarding artful pedagogy specifically Feminism, Postmodernism and participatory museum trends. The reviews will also bring to light a variety of authors and researchers that suggest the validity and need for contemporary art in art education as well as a shifting climate in pedagogy. The literature review allowed pulling threads apart and intertwining them from a variety of sources to add to the depth of this research. Throughout, art and learning will be described not necessarily as products but rather as experiences. The role of the educator in this learning and art experience will be outlined. The implications of relational aesthetics in art education will be discussed. All will be supported by education researchers and theorists, art critics and museum professionals; these varying viewpoints and concepts will be presented alongside each other as this research finds the intersections of contemporary art and art educational research and theory.
Drawing from both historical and contemporary art education and art research it has been proven that this topic of reconceptualizing approaches is very timely. As stated in the overview, relational aesthetics as an approach to art education can affect the learning process. Additionally, the research will provide and supplement a limited number of resources that are available in regards to contemporary art and art education. The learning experiences in relational aesthetics could potentially provoke learning through critical thinking, engagement, democratic practices, and play; development of empathy; bringing new ideas to view; collaboration and reflection, all which are concerns of the art education field as a whole. The potential for a relational aesthetic approach to art education could change the way we teach, the way students learn as well as develop community and ways of being within the classroom. Furthermore, it would work to maintain the art educator as an active inquirer and creative artist using conceptual and relational practices.

Shifting Roles in the Classroom

The shifting roles of educator and student in the classroom are supported by the critical theories of Ira Shor (1980, 1992) in which he discusses participatory practice, the educator as expendable, and the fact that ordinary expectations of class structure will change. Interrupting the ordinary, which I believe relational aesthetics does, allows for critical thinking and skill development as noted by Shor. As previously noted, Bishop (2006) notes the viewer as an active and empowered individual when participating in relational art just as Shor invites educators to be responsible for converting students from passive learners to active subjects. In Shor’s (1980, 1992) writing, students are empowered and the relationship of students and educator changes. Similarly, it is stated by Claudia W. Ruitenberg (2011) that the relational artists “focus on blurring the boundary between producers and consumers of art, and transforming the passive
spectator into active participant” (p.213). The role of the educator therefore changes with student need and the role can be described as a catalyst. Just as the artist in relational aesthetics has been described as a catalyst by Bourriaud (1998), the educator can function as a catalyst. Furthermore the following diagram compares learning models that highlight the roles of students and educators in the classroom.

![Old Learning Model vs New Learning Model](image-url)

*Figure 1. Smithsonian Institute, updated learning model*

From the diagram it can be noted that the old learning model presents a situation in which the educator is the focus, presenting information to the students. In contrast, the new model, akin to relational aesthetics, shows a classroom in which students work with the educator and with each other to gain and co-construct knowledge. Additionally, there is no clear definition between educator and student, the roles are blurred. Similarly, Helguera (2011) discussed how to “moderate a conversation, negotiate among interests in a group, or assess the complexities of a given social situation” (p.xv) as skills to support activities of socially engaged art. From this, it can be noted that the new learning model supports conversation and social situations in the art classroom; a new set of skills and knowledge are therefore needed to be an educator involved in new learning models (Helguera, 2011). Shor (1992) actually lays out a framework for how to facilitate and moderate conversation and dialogue in the classroom. The framework notes the need for “horizontal” dialogue which allows for all voices to be heard. Helguera (2011)
discusses the expertise of the artist (or educator) in relational aesthetics in relation to Paolo Freire’s critical teaching theory. He posits: “[t]he expertise of the artist lies, like Freire’s, in being a non-expert, a provider of frameworks on which experiences can form and sometimes be directed and channeled to generate new insights around a particular issue” (p. 54).

The role of catalyst, whether it is as artist or educator, according to Helguera (2011) must facilitate open format conversation including everyday conversation, casual interview, brainstorming, and dialogue. As the process of learning takes place the role of the catalyst will change and oscillate in responsibility. Hannah Kaihovirta-Rosvik, a Finnish artist, discusses her role as artist and educator in her approach to relational aesthetics as an approach to education. In *Images of Imagination: An Aesthetic Approach to Education*, Kaihovirta-Rosvik similarly notes the role as a catalyst. Specifically, Kaihovirta-Rosvik (2009) states that “a teacher as well as a relational artist can be described as a catalyst for creating cultural experiences in particular social conditions” (p.49). The catalyst involves people in aesthetic experiences and the “arts coming into being” (p.47) as well as the dialogue that results from this art practice. It is also noted that in this approach, collaborative meaning making results and the outcomes evolve as the participants have dialogue. Kaihovirta-Rosvik (2009) cites Bourriaud’s argument that a relational artwork reflects cultural and social conditions in a shared world, which allows everyone involved a chance to act as part of this shared world. The catalyst role oscillates between participation and observation and involves collaboration, initiation, documentation and interpretation.

The role of the educator in relational aesthetics as an approach to art education can therefore be understood as a catalyst with oscillating roles meant to require active participation from the students. Similarities can be drawn between the relational artist and the educator
described above. At this point, a connection to critical teaching has also been drawn to relational aesthetics as an approach to art education as well as a view of the educator as a catalyst (Kaihovirta-Rosvik, 2009; Helguera, 2011; Ruitenberg, 2011; Shor, 1980, 1992). As noted in the new model for learning, the ways of being in the classroom would be dramatically shifted with the introduction to relational aesthetics as a learning framework. The next section will discuss the ways of being and moments in the classroom and how these shifts are inspired by the new forms of contemporary art, specifically relational aesthetics.

Moments and Ways of Being

Ways of working (or ways of being) have a philosophical connection to pedagogy acknowledging metacognition and metaphysics. Ways of being acknowledge and require one to understand learning as a long-term process and also learning and art as an experience, not necessarily a product. Kaihovirta-Rosvik (2009) states that when relational art is brought into education conditions, the educators and the students interpret and generate meaning from different positions. Relational aesthetics has changed and transformed the way art looks which also changes the way of looking at art. In her described aesthetic approach, Kaihovirta-Rosvik (2009) discovered that people can face themselves, their context and each other in her aesthetic approach and it creates “learning moments for people in dialogue to act on learning experiences and transformation regarding aspects of life” (p.51). The aspects of life are evident in social conversations and interactions which will be presented in the next section, highlighting literature from art education and relational aesthetics.
Helguera (2011) discusses the school curriculum connected to socially engaged art. The curriculum should have the possibility of “reconstructing and reconfiguring itself according to the needs and interests of the students” (p.86). Helen Illeris (2005) noted in, *Young People and Contemporary Art*, examples of students interacting with and being inspired by relational art. The experience of otherness and social interaction were noted by Illeris as preconditions for learning and positive response from young people. The curriculum that Helguera (2011) describes should also maintain an experiential approach toward art in the world, which offers challenges to the student (p.87). He goes on to draw comparisons to the curriculum formed in the Reggio Emilia Approach and the organic exchange of teacher and students. Helguera (2011) does however indicate that such an approach would require a “significant rethinking of how curriculum is constructed” (p.87) which was further explored in the proceeding chapters.

Anderson (2003) notes that art is about social cohesion and goes on to cite Dissanayake’s argument that people need social cohesion to survive and the ability to work in groups is increasingly important in an increasingly interdependent society. Inspired by Reggio Emilia philosophy and social constructivists, both children and adults co-construct their knowledge through interactions with people (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011); specifically art educators and students co-construct knowledge through interactions with each other. Vygotsky argued that children grow up in a social world in which both social and temporal contexts play a critical role (as cited in Kim & Darling, 2009). As noted by Anderson (2003), defining, understanding and using the aesthetic is a primary concern of postmodern art education. Elliot Eisner is quoted: “[t]houghtful educators are not simply interested in achieving known effects; they are interested as much in surprise, in discovery, in the imaginative side of life and its development as in hitting predefined
targets achieved through routine procedures” (as cited by Kaihorvita-Rosvik, 2009). Similarly, the element of surprise and in contrast to predefined targets, relational aesthetics provides the opportunity for participants to discover the imaginative side of life and learning. The element of surprise and unplanned curriculum (Brunson Day, 2009; Kirlew, 2010) has surfaced as a theme in this research in both the data analysis and literature review. The role of the educator as well as the student change when the curriculum and teaching methods change to that which reflects the process of relational art. These are compelling educational practices and relate to the larger picture of art education. I can see the benefits of this approach in that it breaks down traditional and hierarchical class structure. Critical thinking, community, new ways of seeing and thinking as well as dialogue are the byproducts and purpose of such an approach.

Asking Questions & Pushing Boundaries in Art Education

The following section will work towards a connection between relational aesthetics, postmodernism and feminism. As previously noted, this research was looked at through a postmodernist and feminist lens. Postmodernism and feminism allow art educators to ask questions and push the boundaries of the notions of art education. Furthermore the boundaries of definitions in art education become less visible and expanded within postmodernism and feminism. In jagodzinski’s (1991) postmodern image of art, participation becomes an integral part of learning (as cited in Pearse, 1997). The syllabus of art education then changes, specifically when art is seen as a form of social practice (jagodzinski, 1991). An example of social practice includes artists that work with relational aesthetics. Again, critical thought and interconnectedness are emphasized in postmodern art education (Anderson, 2003; Gude, 2004, 2007; Pearse, 1997).
In light of the vision just noted from Pearse (1997), feminism will be discussed as having a significant impact on art education. Established in the 1880’s and still active in discussions and discourses today, the term feminism is rooted in the French words for women and social movement. Most notably, Feminism has come in three waves, addressing equality, difference and multiple perspectives or pluralism. Feminist theory sought to address and celebrate those historically marginalized based on gender, race, class or ethnicity (hooks, 1989). The first wave of Feminism can be identified through the work of Suffragettes and their ideal of the vote for women, property ownership and active participation in civic life. The second wave of feminism again brought the conversation of the role of women in society. However, now the discussion concerned women’s careers as well as health concerns as demonstrated by Roe vs. Wade and the birth control pill. The third wave of feminism took a global perspective and started the conversation about inequalities with class, race, gender and ethnicity (Delacruz & Rees, 2012). Today, from my contemporary feminist perspective, I would argue that feminism goes beyond gender discussions and instead brings to the forefront, ways of being with each other, still acknowledging gender issues but with a far reaching perspective that affects all people. Feminism and feminist pedagogy can therefore challenge the status quo (hooks, 1994). To define feminist pedagogy is not unproblematic considering that the feminist perspective considers a multiplicity of theories. Jackson (1997) uses Penny Welch’s broad areas of agreement to define feminist pedagogy. Egalitarian relationships in the classroom, using the experience of students as curriculum and furthermore valuing students as individuals can be seen as the feminist pedagogical aims (Jackson, 1997).

Treichler and Kramarae (1985) used various quotes to define feminism, including a definition that notes feminism as a method of analysis as well as a discovery of new material that
asks new questions as well as generating further questions. As with this research, what might those questions be then, for art educators? Jackson (1997) suggests that these should be questions of roles and authority of educators (Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, & Knight, 2007), questions of difference and also a focus on personal experience. And furthermore, to make a personal connection to the impact of feminism on art education and to perhaps indicate it as complex and challenging, as cited by Treichler and Kramarae (1985) in a statement by Nawal el Saadawi, “[f]eminism means you have to read a lot, to understand a lot, to feel a lot, and to be honest” (p.8). Changing our consciousness as art educators then, assists us in a dialectical change in our actions (hooks, 1989).

Deconstructing and using criticality to look at the past, feminist theorists brought the “personal as the political” (hooks, 1989) to the forefront of social, political and historical discussions. This brought an era where legislations were under scrutiny, protests and demonstrations and even a whole genre of art that continues today. This genre of art put women’s issues in a new lens and also acknowledged multiple perspectives, particularly the ones that had previously been deemed in/audible and in/visible. Smith-Shank (1998) reflects on her experiences and notes that feminist art is about being heard and about agency. She notes that feminist art takes notice of non-hierarchical practices and is about making art for both personal and political initiatives. Feminist art gives power to women to name themselves as artists and to also construct culture; which Smith-Shank indicates are her educational aims for all her students, to call themselves artists who construct culture. While taking a feminist art course at the graduate level, I became more connected with the empowerment and community aspects that feminist theory had to offer art education and myself as an educator. As with many feminist theorists, hooks (1989) draws on the importance of discussion and dialogue on issues preventing
Within Anderson’s (2003, 1997) argument for art for life, it can be seen that feminism allows for transformation of self, of relationships (hooks, 1989), liberation and empowerment (hooks, 1989; Pearse, 1997; Arnowitz & Giroux, 1991). Transformation of self and of relationships can work to transform the world outside oneself (Gude, 2007; hooks, 1989; Jackson, 1997). According to Bunch (1979), feminist theory is “a way of viewing the world” and it “provides a basis for understanding every area in our lives” (p.13). How we live in the world can be considered on individual and collective relationships and point to the necessity to be aware of differences in experience, perspective, and knowledge (hooks, 1989; Church, 2010; Jackson, 1997).

The National Art Education Association, in 1976, established a Women’s Caucus which supports “diversity, pluralization, justice and the eradication of discriminatory practices...” (http://naeawc.net/mission.html, 2013). Again, inciting the “personal as the political,” the Women’s Caucus seeks to eradicate and draw awareness to practices that bring about negative social patterns and diversity attitudes; doing so indicates these practices of individuals, can negatively impact all of society. This organization works as a catalyst for positive social change which was noted by Pearse (1997) as the potentiality of feminist art education as well as a postmodern approach. As explained above, Pearse posited that education is centered in society and with this in mind, he also discusses art education in praxis which in a social theoretic context, aims to transform oneself and one’s world. The social agenda is manifested in an interest to emancipate and improve the human condition, which is a process that uses critical knowing to transform, liberate and empower people (Pearse, 1997). To give a historical perspective, Jackson (1997) draws connections between Giroux and Freire to feminist pedagogy. hooks (1989) compared her feminist beliefs to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
when she evokes the power of love when discussing transformation. In considering Giroux, Freire and hooks, Jackson indicates a connection between feminist pedagogy and an aim towards a more democratic society and social vision, arguably the same social agenda that has been referenced throughout this paper.

For this paper, it is important to point out that much of the academic writing by feminist art educators (Church, 2010; Smith-Shank, 1998) is developed in oral histories and personal reflections, highlighting experience. In a reflection on her teaching practices and experiences, Church (2010) answers the question of what feminist art education is; “[i]t's the space of reflection, questioning, problem solving and dialogue” (p.68). With a postmodern and feminist perspective, I would conclude that this space is for both student and educator to participate in these actions. Feminist pedagogy, in Church’s definition bridges and connects experiences and raises consciousness and awareness which furthermore echoes the goal of feminism and Feminist art throughout history. Flexibility, fluidity, collaboration, transformation and the valuing of multiple perspectives and voices can be noted as tenets of feminism and can manifest in feminist pedagogy in art education (Anderson, 1997, 2003; Arnowitz & Giroux, 1991; Church, 2010; hooks, 1989; Jackson, 1997; Pearse, 1997; Smith-Shank, 1998). Smith-Shank (1998) outlines her feminist pedagogy in which she introduces her students to hidden-stream and mainstream artists, specifically female, who use practices of art that are not always considered high art. In a feminist pedagogy, Smith-Shank finds her voice and gives her students the opportunity to hear the voices and narratives that have historically been unheard. Furthermore, Gude (2007) calls for empowered art making, which allows for students to use a critical lens and also “generate new insights into their lives and into contemporary times” (p.14), which draws connections to feminist theory, art for life and postmodernism.
As stated by the editors of *Feminist Theory: a Reader*, feminist theory can provide the framework for activism and action that can improve the conditions in which women live and work, but even further this framework can address how all people live and work. Feminism is viewed as a powerful movement and makes it important that we examine the way we live, how we treat each other and what we believe. Subsequently, education, and specifically art education, works for this activism and action to celebrate diversity and eradicate negative social patterns. Thompson (2003) concludes her discourse about feminist pedagogy with a note of optimism, that schools can be a site for change; a site where we can change how we think about ourselves in relation to others. Postmodernism and feminism are conceptual and theoretical frameworks for education that are intertwined and nested within each other. The previous research therefore presents and further explores the conceptual framework for this research. Adding layers of meaning to this research, the next section will explore a personal experience and highlight that experience as an integral thread to this research. Relational aesthetics has so far been discussed in text and in terms of academic definitions. The documentation of this art is not as powerful as the actual experience.

**Experience as Research**

As a result of their experience at the National Art Education Association in 2012, students in a course that I was the graduate teaching assistant for became inspired by the work of Oliver Herring. They were fortunate enough to meet the artist and participate in one of his TASK parties. A TASK party by definition is an improvisational event. The event is guided by participation by groups of people and is open-ended in nature. Herring (2012) notes that the structure of a TASK party “creates almost unlimited opportunities for people to interact with one
another and their environment” (p.6). The procedure of a TASK party is to create and write “tasks” for one another and as a task is completed, the participant is required to write a new one. The flow of such an event becomes complex, chaotic but purposeful. In February 2012, my college students facilitated a TASK party for their classmates in which I participated. The event, in my mind, broke down the traditional structure of a classroom. Student, professor, and teaching assistant were all on the same level with no leader but rather a collaborative effort. The tasks were silly, interactive and meaningful.

This experience is invaluable to this research in that I was able to participate in what I am researching, first hand. A community was created in the classroom and it reconceptualized the classroom, art, as well as the roles of student and educator. The TASK party brought new ideas to view and exemplified engagement and play which were noted as benefits of the possibility of relational aesthetics as an approach to art education. Furthermore such an event had no predetermined outcomes and the routine and procedure are in flux based on the actions and reactions of the participants. The educators and the students were co-participants in this event. As a definitive portion of this experience my position in this experience shifted. Although in a traditional leadership role, I was not the center, the participation, dialogue and interaction were the center. I was in the middle of it all, with the students. The role of the educator changed throughout and was nontraditional, which leads to the next section that discusses the role of the educator in relational aesthetics as an approach to art education. Hybrid practices in art education relate to hybrid forms of research which will be explored in the next section, where the intersection of pedagogy, research and art practice will be expanded.
Intersections of Pedagogy, Inquiry and Art Practice

Studying interactions and connections that occur within relational art practices offers ways to “rethink the language and practice of pedagogy” (Irwin & O’Donoghue, 2012, p.221). Finding intersections between pedagogy, inquiry and art practice allow art educators to understand themselves as a pedagogue who also are artists. This search for intersections challenges art educators to shift understanding of learning as well as understanding of art; finding new ways of being with students and educators as well as negotiating differences. Within their a/r/tographic research, Irwin and O’Donoghue (2012) hoped to create a material artifact of inquiry and also shift ideas of pedagogy from skill-based to a more conceptually driven pedagogy. The authors drew a distinction between learning to teach and learning to learn. The project in their research created a space that helped the authors develop a new language for preparing prospective teachers of art. In conclusion, the authors listed four commitments that can be highlighted by a/r/tographic research: a commitment to inquiry, a way of being in the world, negotiating personal engagement in a community of belonging and a commitment to practices that trouble and address difference.

The previously noted research explains an actual application of and praxis of relational aesthetics as pedagogy. Within the workshop that the teacher candidates participated in, they were able to work together to rewrite a well-established (and once experimental) text on education. They also spent much of the time in the workshop, taking walks, hiking or eating together. The authors noted this workshop as an event, or a site-specific gift to the audience and participants. The contemporary art that the candidates participated in began with a dialogue and activated a relational response. To me, this workshop and project seemed to be a sort of ‘intervention’ or an interruption of the traditional courses the teacher candidates were
accustomed too. I have begun to notice interruptions or interventions as a theme in relational aesthetics and I am curious to address this theme in terms of pedagogy. I was particularly interested in the idea that although teaching is a widely recognized career, pedagogy is often not recognized or not always visible.

**Brief Summary**

Drawing from both historical and contemporary art education and art research it has been proven that this topic of relational aesthetics is very timely. As stated in the overview, relational aesthetics as an approach to art education can affect the learning process. The learning experiences in relational aesthetics could potentially provoke learning through critical thinking, engagement, democratic practices, and play; development of empathy; bringing new ideas to view; collaboration and reflection, all which are concerns of the art education field as a whole. The potential for a relational aesthetic approach to art education could change the way we teach, the way students learn as well as develop community and ways of being within the classroom. Furthermore, it would work to maintain the art educator as a creative practitioner using conceptual and relational practices. To conclude, artful pedagogy empowers educators to have the courage to establish practices and teaching methods that are based in art.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Methodology

My thesis research methodology is qualitative which allowed me to tell the story of my research as well as the story of other educators and relational artists. Qualitative inquiry takes a look at and tells those stories as (self)examined practice. The instances and moments of relational aesthetics as pedagogy cannot readily be measured through quantitative methods. Seidman (2012) discusses research as a series of stories and making meaning of these stories. This study is qualitative in that it includes open-ended interviews that take the form of a conversation, participant observation of classroom experiences, and the examination of documents and visual data. In particular it uses gathered evidence to explore key questions in regards to blending art praxis and pedagogy as well as identifying relational aesthetics’ place in art education. Assuming the relevance and value of individual experiences of the young learners
Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, and phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials [...] that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual’s lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand” (p.2). [italics added by author]

Similarly, this research attempts to make sense of the phenomena of learning in the art classroom in terms of the meanings the students and researcher bring to them. The sense-making is presented with a variety of empirical material that describes the interactions, relational moments and further posits meaning in my lived experience of being an artist, teacher and researcher. A variety of materials will be presented to tell the story of the ways of being and the role of artful pedagogy in pointing to new directions for art education intertwined with contemporary art’s relational aesthetics. The following section will present the methods chosen for this process of inquiry that note a mode of knowing that poses different ways of sense-making.

Methods

A qualitative method that best fits this research is action research inspired by a/r/tography; the blending of artist, research and teaching identities for the purpose of academic study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Specific notions of a/r/tography such as evolving questions, blended roles and the interconnection of text and image are used in this research. However the inquiry is a process rather than a method that is based in concepts and leaves the inquiry open for unexpected and unpredictable results. A/r/tography can be defined as a mode and process of knowing through proximity and relationality and poses different ways of making
sense of the world in an on-going lived inquiry. This definition allows the role of the researcher
to be blended between artist and teacher. It additionally shows the relationships between text
and images. A/r/tography is a hybrid, practice-based form of methodology (Sinner, Leggo,
Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006). Process in a/r/tography is an act of invention rather than
interpretation where concepts emerge from social engagements and encounters (Irwin, Beer,
Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, & Bickel, 2006). In a/r/tographic research, the art becomes the
“visual reorganization of experience that renders complex the apparently simple or simplifies the
apparently complex” (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004, p.31). My research simplified the apparently
complex set of relationships, relational moments and experiences of early childhood art making
and teaching.

The previously noted aspects of a/r/tography were utilized to assist in extensive data
collection. A/r/tography defines me as artist, researcher and teacher. Furthermore,
“[a]/r/tography is a living inquiry of unfolding artforms and text that intentionally unsettles
perceptions and complicates understandings” (Irwin et al, 2006, p. 18) which is akin to the text
and images that will be intertwined in the following chapters. The living inquiry process that is
evident in this research unsettled perceptions of art education and complicated the layers of
understandings. A/r/tography looks at inquiry as living inquiry which further defines action
research informed by arts-based research as (self)examined practice. This research investigates
the lived experiences of young learners and their interactions as well as my examination of artful
pedagogy which blends relational art practice and pedagogy. An art practice was used within
the inquiry process and the resulting data is re/presented with text and artistic image which is
supported by Barone and Eisner’s (1997) definition of this practice as a re/presentation of certain
aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its text. The aesthetic elements
are pronounced throughout this research by presenting an image at the beginning of each chapter as well as intertwined throughout the data presentation. As previously noted, the blurry photographs at the beginning of each chapter are a metaphor for the moments of relationality within this research and re/present the idea that those moments are connective threads throughout the entirety of the research. The blurry nature of the photographs becomes increasingly interwoven, complicated and complex as the chapters unfold. According to my understanding, for the research to be arts-based, the chosen art has to be an integral and informative part of the process, producing knowledge otherwise inaccessible. Like an artist who seeks to analyze and construct knowledge, the arts-based inquirer searches for partial truth or a ‘new,’ deconstructed and then re-constructed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Diamond & Mullen, 1999, as cited in Suominen, 2004).

Connections Between A/r/tography and Relational Aesthetics

The purpose of noting a/r/tographic research is a response to an article that described an a/r/tographic collaboration that developed guidelines and practices from relational aesthetics (artist’s contribution), relational inquiry (researcher’s contribution), and relational learning (teacher’s contribution). Relational aesthetics considers intersubjectivity as its central objective and “the being-together” (Bickel, Springgay, Beer, Irwin, Grauer, & Gu, 2011, p. 93) as its central theme. Bickel et al (2011) cite feminist and critical theorists to stress the importance of collaboration and how as a method of art making, it can be democratic, transformative and empowering. Referring to a “relational curriculum” (p.96), Bickel et al. (2011) note a curriculum that values cooperation, collaboration and an ethic of care. Ongoing dialogue in collaborative engagement requires conscious practice. In a post-postmodern context, Bickel et al.
(2011) reconsider the individualistic modernist paradigm to an inter-relational post-postmodern paradigm that includes both viewing and listening to all perspectives and sharing of ideas.

Throughout my research I found instances of the connections between a/r/tography and relational aesthetics. Irwin and Cossen (2004) note, that blending the roles of artist, teacher and researcher means to live a life of awareness, a life that permits openness to the complexity around us, a life that intentionally sets out to perceive things differently. She notes that a/r/tography is a way of being, living and inquiring that is relational.

Description of Young Participants

The participants were preschool students that I had previously taught as part of a grant-funded outreach program. I am currently employed as a museum educator at a local modern and contemporary art museum; where I manage youth and family programs including the outreach programs that connect the museum to the community. As part of this program, I visit Head Start classrooms throughout Northeast Ohio and create and discuss art with the students. The focus classes in this research were selected based on my current employment in which I have already taught these students, so they (and their teacher) were familiar with me thus serving as a convenience sample. To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms were used for the students as well as the school; individuals will not be identifiable. Furthermore, the students come from diverse backgrounds and some are currently in foster care programs. The students in the focus classes have a variety of caretakers including biological parents and also grandparents. The scope of the Head Start program serves the needs of low-income families and students with special needs. The focus classroom had both a morning and afternoon session, so a total of 30 students participated in the focus class. The classroom is managed by both a lead teacher and an
The students in this classroom participate in art-making activities throughout the year which include easel painting and collages.

The building where the students attend school is truly a multi-use building that also functions as a learning site for adults with special needs as well as infant care and the preschool classrooms. The adults serve and prepare meals for the preschool students. Additionally, many of the classrooms at this site have “grandmas” in the classroom. The grandmothers are retired women who are hired to be an additional assistant to both the teacher and classroom aid. The intergenerational relationships in the classroom are interesting. For instance, I witnessed young students walking down the hall and holding on to the armrest of one grandma’s wheelchair, indicating an intergenerational relationship being developed.

The early childhood art education program that I manage is funded by a corporate bank’s initiative to give financial support to organizations that have programs that focus on early learners. The 3-year grant was received by the museum in 2011. The program includes classroom visits by museum staff, teacher workshops and family days at the museum featuring an exhibition of the artwork made during the classroom visit. The teacher workshops reinforce the art techniques, teaching methods, and creativity that are modeled by the museum staff in the classrooms.

Initially the program brought the museum educators to seven Head Start sites in Northeast Ohio and involved over 700 young children. The lessons for the classroom visits were non-sequential and encouraged students’ visual literacy and creativity through hands-on learning. Prior to year two, I assisted in reorganizing the program and helped to restructure the curriculum for the visits that was inspired by Reggio Emilia practices and more closely aligned with best practices in early childhood education. This change in curriculum dramatically shifted
the focus of the classroom visits and provided the students an increased opportunity to creatively problem solve and direct their learning. As an educator, these practices brought about uncertainty and created a change in the form of art education in the classrooms that became ongoing experiments. Working with practices inspired by Reggio Emilia and focusing on collaborative work, changed my pedagogy. The pedagogy became more artful, combining relational aesthetics and teaching practice. The emergent curriculum resulted in large-scale installation artworks that were made collaboratively by the students. The students also, worked to document their learning through the use of photography. This surprising change in the art works closely aligned with more contemporary art practices rather than traditional drawing, painting and sculpture in which more prescribed outcomes are expected. The program concluded in May 2013, due to the constraints of the grant and will be reimagined with future funding. The next sections will discuss how data was collected and from which sources they emerged.

Data Source: Classroom Experiences

Data has been collected from a variety of sources. Classroom experiences were audio recorded and transcribed as well as conversations with participants. As outlined in her article, Thulson (2013) discusses the use of the so-called School Art style, commonly associated with elementary classrooms, a style which product is stressed over process. Thulson brings to light a critique of art lessons that focus on the product or what can be hung in the hallways. She notes four obstacles to using contemporary art pedagogy in the elementary classroom. These obstacles include buy-in from parents and administrators as well as a fear of what students may be able to understand as far as concepts and ideas in contemporary art.
Thulson (2013) goes on to offer an alternative view that questions how the process of making art and creative thinking can be displayed in the hallways. It is noted that an art museum typically displays the finished product; however Thulson duly notes that history museums could be the model for displaying and documenting student work. The process of art as well as making learning visible can be accomplished by showing photographs and prototypes of projects. In contemporary art, there is not always a tangible product to display but rather ideas and processes. The projects that she describes are twofold: following the form of contemporary artists and also working with the ideas of contemporary art. For the classroom experiences that I conducted, I used Thulson’s article as a guide yet it was adapted to fit the needs and interests of the students in the focus classes. The following sections will discuss the planning process and inspiration for the classroom experiences as well as what happened during those experiences. Contemporary artworks and artists will be discussed to present ideas and forms of contemporary art. Each description also includes a timeline for each of the classroom experiences. Each project spanned two days and was conducted in one hour sessions. The specific projects were tailored to the students in the morning and afternoon sessions of the class.

Unpredictable Projects

As part of the classroom experience, I asked students to document the art making process through the use of digital cameras. As I will explain more fully throughout this research, when viewing the photographs, there were always blurred and out-of-focus images. I began to collect and sort these images. However, these blurred images were never shown to the students. So I decided that one approach to the classroom experience in this research would be to introduce the students to these images and gather their responses. The blurred photographs would therefore become the material and subject matter of the artwork that the students created. This approach to
the classroom experience gave the students the opportunity to compare the small scale photographs that they took to the large scale installations by the artist Katharina Grosse.

Grosse’s work and her process are known for a vibrant palette and large gestures. Her installations merge painting, sculpture and architecture and often take the form of painted interiors and exteriors of buildings. As noted by the MASS MoCA website (http://www.massmoca.org/event_details.php?id=545, 2011), Grosse uses a spray gun instead of a brush, painting directly on the walls, floors and facades of her exhibition sites. Often, Grosse’s installations incorporate a variety of unexpected objects that also get painted directly on and confuse the floor and ceiling. Her work seems like a flow of colors and rearranges conventions and habits of seeing, just as much as this research rearranges and re/presents images of art education and ways of being. Similarly, the research unfolds and emerges over time as do the fields of color in Grosse’s paintings. Akin to Postmodern perspectives, Grosse’s work and this research provide a different vantage point which will allow others to stumble toward a higher plane of perception.

In an interview for Art Forum’s website (2011), Grosse mentions how her installations function as an expansion of small experiences and she goes on to say, that by transforming something that is small into something that is large (her installations) the time and information is presented like slow motion (Art Forum, 2011, http://artforum.com/words/id=27257). The blurry photographs made by the students in the focus class are metaphors for the moments and gestures of learning which are very small experiences; however this research will make them larger, slowing down the information and giving time to reflect on this experience. With this in mind, I thought of expanding the small-scale photographs and working with the students to create a large-scale installation that would slow those moments down.
Timeline for Unpredictable Projects

On the first day, the students took photographs and were introduced to the work of Grosse. They explored their school space as well as the space outside of their building. This allowed for a variety of photographs to be taken. After this experience, I sorted through the images on the cameras. Each student held a camera so there were a multitude of photographs, some beautiful, blurry images and others were portraits or snapshots of the day. On the second day the students were shown their blurry images, some enlarged in scale and others remained 4x6 inches. Then I guided a discussion of the blurry images and the work of Grosse. The students were then asked to decide what they could make with the images. How could we create an installation that slowed down time and enlarged a small experience?

![Image](http://www.flickr.com/photos/massmoca/)

*Figure 2. Katharina Grosse "One Floor Up More Highly", 2010 Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/massmoca/*

In the *Art Forum* interview Grosse mentions the idea that she does not have a set of rules for her artistic thinking; there are no predetermined outcomes. Similarly the discussion of unpredictable projects, surprise, and emergent curriculum with contemporary art (Brunson Day, 2009; Kaihorvita-Rosvik, 2009; Kirlew; 2010; Thulson, 2013) indicate that the role of the educator as well as the students in this unpredictable project will change when the curriculum and teaching methods change.
Young Learners as Experts: Social Art

The second approach to the classroom experience was to find a contemporary artist who works with ideas and themes that were similar to the topic of interest in the focus classroom. At the time, the students were beginning to investigate growth. A number of contemporary artists use a social or relational practice to accomplish community development with a focus on agriculture and urban gardening. Additionally, the students had been studying and investigating flowers in their classroom and had plans of creating a garden in the yard around their school building. The artist, Lee Mingwei was introduced to the students for his use of flowers. Mingwei creates installations that are relational and focus on the viewers’ interaction in a personal way. The artist’s works are interactive, conceptual, participatory installations that set open-ended scenarios for everyday interaction. The interactions take on different forms depending on participants. As noted in the literature review, introducing such an art practice to the curriculum and challenging students with new concepts of art, addresses and highlights the importance of the needs and interests of the students and incites the experience of otherness and social interaction or cohesion (Helguera, 2011; Illeris, 2005; Anderson, 2003). The following image presents the artist working with others to install his exhibition.

Figure 3. image of Mingwei’s Moving Garden. Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/brooklyn_museum/
The particular artwork that was discussed with the students was *The Moving Garden*. This artwork was a long table installed in a museum that also includes a river shape down the middle. The river is filled with water first and then the artist put fresh flowers into that water. The museum visitors were invited to take one flower with them as they left. However, the artist presented two stipulations for taking the flowers. Those who took flowers needed to complete two tasks. The first task was to take a detour to their next destination and then when on the detour, they had to give the flower to a stranger as a gift. The artist did not document what happened once the flowers left the museum. The artist on his website notes, “we rarely learn how far our kindnesses extend” (Mingwei, 2011, www.leemingwei.com). The work of Mingwei, specifically this installation expands the definition of art and relates to relational aesthetics in that the art is not just something to look at but it is something to experience. Viewers of the artwork become participants in a relational experiment.

Timeline for Social Art

On the first day of the classroom experience, I guided a discussion of Mingwei’s work with the students. To gain insight into what knowledge of flowers that students had, they were asked to share what they knew about flowers. Additionally the students each made drawings of flowers on the first day that will be shown in the data. Having the students draw flowers allowed me to see what they knew, not just hear. When the students created drawings of flowers from the observation of fake flowers, this prepared them for the task of creating an installation on the second day. Next, we worked together to create a variety of small drawings of flowers. The students worked to create these small drawings to be given as gifts. A few of the older students worked together to create a sign that said ‘please take a flower and give it as a gift to someone else.’ Throughout the time of making flowers, the students also used cameras to document the
process as well as any flowers they could find in the classroom. At the conclusion of the day, the students decided to place their drawn flowers in the hallway with the sign. They went on to select the location, which made the artwork site-specific, which is a characteristic of contemporary art.

Data Source: Conversations in/between Pedagogy and Art Practice

Interviews were conducted as conversations and participants were recruited by a convenience sampling which sought higher education professionals and local art educators that have expertise in the field of early childhood education, art education, or practice a pedagogy that blends their artistic endeavors. Contemporary artists who use social and relational practice in their art were recruited as research participants. The recruitment and selection process of participants included “snowballing,” a term noted by Seidman (2012), an approach in which one participant lead to another. The recruitment initially began as a convenience sample, turning into a snowball sample. To relate the interview process to the methodology and methods of research, the term “interview” has been replaced by “conversation” and the interviews were conducted so that both the interviewer and interviewee had a collaborative conversation and reflected on practices. This connects the interviews to feminist theory and participatory inquiry as noted by Seidman. It should be noted that creating a “we” relationship during interviews, allows one to reduce hierarchical models of research (Seidman, 2012). The inquiry in conversations in this research became a means by which “people engage together to explore some significant aspect of their lives, to understand it better and to transform their action [...]” (Reason, 1994, p. 1). The significant aspect of each interview participant’s life was their pedagogy or art practice. To
research means to look and then look again, which addresses the roles of researcher and interview participant, finding collaborative ground.

During the conversations, the participants were asked to reflect on their background (Seidman, 2012) specifically their art making and teaching experiences. Furthermore, they were asked to describe what they currently do, what a typical day in the classroom looks like or a particular relational art experiment. I then worked to gather connections between art making and teaching practice. The stories and details of the interview participants’ experiences became a way of knowing and understanding, much like stories and details of the classroom experiences became a way of knowing and understanding. The conversations with the interview participants open up the possibility that the readers will connect their own stories to those presented in this study. The process of research as conversations helped to reconstruct and find something compelling in the experience of everyday life (Seidman, 2012) which has a similar focus of relational aesthetics, which seeks to find the aesthetic in everyday life.

Data Analysis: Connecting Threads and Patterns

Within a/r/tography data analysis is noted as an ongoing process in which conclusions result in further questions and “is not subject to standardized criteria, rather it remains dynamic, fluid and in constant motion” (Springgay et al 2008, p.xix). Data analysis included coding themes and key ideas drawn from interviews, field notes, and audio recorded classroom experiences. Additionally, the teaching and learning that took place during the classroom experiences was coded and analyzed. The codes are descriptive and will be explained through narrative and pictorial means. The inquiry process constantly compared the themes or threads that emerge from the data. To code observational data, I used schemes to develop into categories as the research continued (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).
Audio recordings of my teaching experiences with early learners were analyzed for patterns and codes. Content analysis was used to evaluate the artwork being made by the students. The classroom experiences are visually represented by documenting relational moments in the transcription and connecting these moments. The conversations and classroom experiences were audio-recorded and then transcribed by me. The threads of this research are revealed through the methods previously noted and the role of the researcher is ever-emerging and complex. The next section will discuss the role of the researcher specifically as a participant observer and metaphorically as a networker in the knotty nexus.

Role of the Researcher

As a participant observer my role as the researcher became complex within the multiple layers and threads of meaning, experiences and research. I participated fully in the activities that took place in the classroom experiences and facilitated relational moments with the conversation participants. I made my observation overt and provided consent forms to all participants. As previously mentioned, metaphorically the role of researcher evolved within a network which is defined as visually resembling of an openwork fabric or structure in form or concept, specifically, a system of lines or threads that cross or interconnect. Throughout this project, I have taken on a role of making connections and identifying intersections between concepts and research as well as between myself and the conversation participants. The net in which I am participating in inquiry is an openwork fabric which is open in form and concept. The research has allowed me to reveal the threads of certain ideas and note where they cross or interconnect and become knotty.

However, the idea of networking is not orderly; rather, it has become an unraveling of
knots. The data that has been collected is not organized plots on a map but rather a mess of strings, stitches and knots that must be unraveled, revealing perhaps even more knots. The knotty nexus can be illustrated through the image below. The nexus is the center of links that are connected together by some common thread or idea. Qualifying nexus with the word knotty illustrates that idea that these connections are not simple or easily seen, the reveal of the common thread or idea takes time and care to unravel. The image is the backside of an embroidered map that I created. The backside of this reveals clear loops but also overlapping, interwoven, and multi-layered strings. As my role of networker increases, the strings became more complex and interwoven and multilayered. Knotty nexus is not an object to contend with but rather a way of being as an artist, researcher and teacher. The knotty nexus brings creating visual art, writing about art experiences and scholarly articles together but at the same time reflecting on teaching and pedagogy. The knotty nexus is inherently relational--it reminds me of being introduced to a new group of people and in order to sort out all the new faces, you build relationships and keep track of the relational qualities of each of them; who is connected to whom and you remember the interactions.

Figure 4. Visualization of the role of researcher, photograph by author, ©2012
Brief Summary

Through a qualitative process of hybrid action research inspired by a/r/tography, I collected extensive data in the form of conversations, images from and audio recordings of classroom experiences, and field reflections. The data was experiential and re/presented artful pedagogy. The curriculum utilized in the classroom experiences remained emergent. The threads of this research will be presented and analyzed to contribute to an evolution of questions. The role of the researcher will be to draw connections between the threads of research and reveal the knotty nexus.
Overview

Extensive data were collected throughout the research and included transcriptions of conversations that took place between the researcher and participants. The participants included a contemporary artist working in a social process, a retired K-12 art teacher who now works with teacher candidates, a professor of art education concerned with the conceptual components of art education as well as a studio educator who works with young learners in a Reggio Emilia inspired atelier. The content of the conversations focused on the individual’s art making and pedagogy. Additionally the data included audio transcriptions of the discussions and conversations that took place during the classroom experience. To visualize the classroom experiences, photographs of student work are presented and analyzed. Specific quotes and words from the students are intertwined with these photographs.
The first section will discuss the specific experiences of the students. Using the students’ artwork and transcriptions of their conversations as well as my own reflections I analyzed and came to an understanding of the students’ experiences. The data analysis and interpretation became a blended process with the analysis of the data. Instead of two separate inquiry processes it became one process for a rich description and sharing of knowledge. The students’ artworks and the transcriptions serve as an artifact of the experience although I will never understand their experiences fully. All I can do is reflect on the experiences and try to re/present the students’ experiences. Following the first section, the conversations that took place with professionals in the field will be used to illustrate key ideas and terms that have guided my research and highlighted key terms and ideas. Finally, the blurry photographs and a shared experience with another scholar will help to visualize my interpretation of my own experience. The exploration of the blurry photographs will put forth what importance I place on these moments; I see the photographs as visual metaphors for the moments of connection, interaction and relationality in the classroom.

All of the data are presented in both visual and written forms. The written and visual forms will create a richer interpretation of the experiences. Words do not allow me to fully explain the phenomena so in combination, I hope the reader can glean meaning and interpretation of photo and text. As one interview participant notes, “no matter if we are taking photos of the objects our students are making we’re not actually documenting the relational activity because it is an impossible thing to document. Unless of course we’re given the opportunity to write about it,” (J. Lucas, personal communication, November 2012), I too have grappled with how to make the deeply embedded tacit notion of relational moments visible within traditional art education research standards as well as within the framework of this thesis.
Documentation in art education traditionally exists only in the product of the learning, not the process; however this research will attempt to illuminate the process and how the process becomes an integral part of learning. Part of the process is the relational moments that are shown throughout. Furthermore, relational artists have had to find new ways of exhibiting their artwork and propelling the cache of the art experiences that they set up. The interaction of text and image will assist the reader in gaining an understanding of the data and interpretation.

Visualizing Classroom Experiences

The following section re/presents the data that were collected during the classroom experiences. The data included reflective notes as a participant observer, images of the students’ finished artworks as well as the students’ own words. The reflective notes were written post-class and served as a reflection of what happened as well as next steps for the following session. Essentially, the post-class reflection became micro-action research. Within four hours of transcriptions key comments and phrases were extracted and used to illustrate the students’ participation in the art making process. This portion of the data will served to illustrate and make visible the experiences of the students. The nature of the interactions in artful pedagogy and relational moments were be analyzed. In art education, analyzing and interpreting student artwork is traditionally concerned with the performance level the children achieved or with coding the drawings using developmental or technical criteria (Soundy & Hyung Lee, 2013). In contrast to this traditional interpretation, I will use a process akin to the following quote, “[i]n the data analysis phase of the study, we analyzed the children’s drawings, writings and verbal expressions” (Soundy & Hyung Lee, 2013, p.72) with support from my reflections. By using my reflections as well as the words of the students, the data focused on meanings people ascribe to
their experiences and phenomena (Mukherji & Alboon 2010, as cited in Soundy & Hyung Lee, 2013). The analysis includes the elements in the image and what children say about their drawings both during and after activity. Creating opportunities for children to offer interpretive explanations during and after the drawing is crucial for understanding the child’s purpose, especially how and why the child produced the image. In light of the noted related research, I will look at not only the images and objects that the students created but also the words that they spoke from both my field notes and the transcriptions of the classroom experiences. The next session will explore the first classroom experience in which students looked at the artwork of Katharina Grosse, took photographs and then collaboratively created large-scale collages. Following that analysis, the second classroom experience will be presented and analyzed. In this experience the students looked at the work of Lee Mingwei and worked together to create a social interactive installation that focused on flowers. Throughout the analysis of the classroom experiences, findings from the conversations with professionals and research will be inserted to support the implications of the classroom experiences. Finally the discussions that happened with professionals will be analyzed and illuminated in text and image.

Reflection and Analysis of Unpredictable Projects
Above are the images of three collages that the students created collaboratively at the conclusion of the “Unpredictable Projects” experience. As a reminder from previous chapter, the students observed the artwork of Katharina Grosse and were asked to discuss and share their ideas about this work. The concept of transforming something small into something larger was the guiding concept for this project. The transcriptions of conversations and research were analyzed to show the interactions of the students and the relational moments that occurred.

During our first meeting the discussion began, with the simple question “What do you see?” When students provided responses, I used follow-up questions to get the students to elaborate on their first reaction. A trend that I noticed was that the initial responses and observations of the artwork related to memories or experiences that the students could remember. The students were viewing abstract artwork yet they assigned and interpreted specific experiences to the visual image. The initial responses were:

Jastin: “What is this? I see colors. I see colors of the rainbow”
Ella: “I see a house. This looks like a house. Because I see like a door. This looks like a hallway too”
Lynn: “This looks like a shadow of trees”
Tasyia: “It looks like a roller coaster”
Kay: “Yea! I know, it’s a roller coaster. It’s still a roller coaster. I know because...”
Audrey: “This one looks like a swimming pool. Because it looks like it has water in it. Because it’s blue, right there”
Francine: “That one looks like a tunnel. Because it looks like it has a door”

The above responses happened throughout the discussion time and exhibit the post-modern idea of “empirical spectator” (Fulkova, Straker, & Jaros, 2004). Following the notion of the “empirical spectator,” works of art become a relationship, one which is a “dynamic collection of perceptions over a time interval” (Fulkova, Straker, & Jaros, 2004, p.6). With this in mind, the production of meaning is an active and dynamic process built upon the interaction of the work and the person who observes the work. Meaning is linked to context in which it is viewed as well as the context of the viewer. “The semiotic analysis of visual art does not set out in the first place to produce interpretations of works of art, but rather to investigate, ‘how works of art are intelligible to those who view them, the processes by which viewers make sense of what they see’” (Fulkova, Straker, & Jaros, 2004, p. 6). As in the transcriptions above, the personal experience of the students permeates the responses and interpretations of the artwork by Grosse.

However, the conversation had a turning point when one student began talking about the artwork and how it looked like a mistake. The students pointed to specific areas that they observed as mistakes in Grosse’s work.

Kay: “But somebody messed this up…”
Me: “How do you know?”
Kay: “Because I saw it”
Jastin: “I see a mistake too”
Me: There’s a mistake on yours too?
Jastin: “Yeah, that.”
Me: “Oh you are pointing to where the orange is mixed in where the green is”
Jastin: “Yeah.”
Ella: “Mine is mixed too. Let me show you. Mine is mixed too because the blue is mixed with purple.”

The students’ interest in mistakes led to the overall project that they would complete. In turn, the students took pictures with kid-friendly digital cameras and I encouraged them to move
while they were taking pictures and we explored the space of their school. In the following session, the students then cut and pasted the “mistake” images that I had selected from all of the photographs they had taken. At the end of the first class session we again talked about the artist and the following discussion took place between myself and one student:

Me: “Tell me something about this artist”
Jastin: “It’s messy”
Me: “What else could we call this?”
Jastin: “A mistake”
Me: “A mistake? Oh, because you noticed where some of the colors mixed together.”
Jastin: “I think it looks like, I think it looks like dirt”
Me: “Why do you think it looks like dirt?”
Jastin: “Cause it’s dirty. And that is a mess”

From these conversations, I interpret that there is a culture of “right” and “wrong” perhaps evident in this classroom. Students are learning to be part of school and also begin to gain an expectation of what is correct and what is a mistake. However, the students did not seem upset or show distaste of the idea of mistakes. Furthermore, the concept of what is correct and what is a mistake in terms of process, one conversation participant noted the importance of an open process in her classroom (C. Gorber, personal communication, April 2013). She noted that her own art practice seeks to exhibit her non-linear process and she also allows for students to develop their own process for making art. The conversation participant noted that her assessment was process oriented and provided the students with in-progress grades so they could follow their own process without a focus on a correct or mistake process. Within my research, the young students saw contemporary art and could potentially relate it to their own messy learning process. The students perhaps saw this contemporary art as an experiment in play. Contemporary art often takes the form of an experiment in play, in art education; we can take this idea and expand what we define as art for young children. Students who are introduced to a variety of contemporary art can expand those aforementioned expectations and mimic the
experiments in play for their own learning. Furthermore, art education provides the opportunity for students to not work towards a “right” answer but rather their own interpretation.

Research in art education discusses interpretation of artwork by young learners, which is similar to the stages of artistic development. Kerlavage notes that young learners’ ideas about art, verbal responses and concepts of style as well as personal preferences develop through three progressive and sequential stages: 1) the sensorial, 2) the concrete and 3) the expressive (Kerlavage, 1995). However, recent literature refers to social ways of knowing art and has expanded the concept of art, suggesting, “[o]ur daily interactions involve learning through images and objects that represent knowledge and mediate relationships between creators and viewers” (Freedman, 2003, p. 89). I argue that ideas about art and interpretation are heavily determined by individual interests and experience rather than stage-like. The classroom that is part of this research has students of ages 3-5 years old and a variety of responses occurred and related to their experiences and was much more fluid and a dynamic group of responses than a set stage.

During the photo taking time, the students interacted with each other. Although they were not given any specific subject to photograph, they often were taking pictures of each other. They would let each other know when the picture had been taken by saying things like “I got your face” or “Let me take a picture of you” or “You’re taking pictures good. Say cheese.” “I noticed that the students often talk to each other while taking the photographs. They really liked to take pictures of each other. This interaction was a lot of ‘I took a picture of you!’ What is typical of preschool students’ peer interactions?” (April 16, 2013). I also saw a trend of the students giving directions and instruction to each other on where to stand to take the photographs
as well as how to use the cameras. However, from the classroom transcriptions, I did not notice any instances of students asking each other directed questions.

During the second session with this project, the students viewed their mistake images. Examples of the “mistake” images (throughout the previous sections these images are referred to as blurry but in this section the term mistake will be used as it was the term the students had selected):

![Figure 6 a - d.](image)

The mistake images were cut and then pasted into the collages (figure 5 a-d). From the transcriptions and my reflection on the experience, the students seemed very engaged with the cutting of the images. They worked to create a variety of shapes using positive and negative space. However when the time came to add the cut shapes into the collage the students were less concerned with this portion of the process. A discrepancy between syntheses could have occurred. The students knew what they were cutting would become part of the bigger artwork but when it came time to do that, they did not have the same vision. From this, I can deduce that perhaps the actual process needed to be more organic and lead by the students’ intuitive actions rather than the plan that I had set forth. They could have cut the pieces and then decided to manipulate those pieces in a different way than a collage. Furthermore, this indicated to me a developmental readiness challenge. Although the students knew what the process was, it should have been broken down into small sections rather than all happening at once. Or perhaps the students could have worked in teams; a cutting team and a gluing team. Changing the expectations for process is supported by one conversation participant’s suggestion that, “because
each process of making art, thinking about art, coming up with ideas for art, finding meaning in art is different for each student” (C. Gorber, personal communication, April 2013). Also in the transcriptions, I noticed that my voice was less heard during this portion of the art making. In my reflections, I noted that I felt disengaged during this process. I allowed the process with the students to emerge and provided them the opportunity to problem-solve which resulted in me having to surrender to a lack of input at this point yet I maintained my position as a guide which is akin to one conversation participant’s comment that “we have to stand back and let the process happen” (C. Gorber, personal communication, April 2013). Letting the process happen indicates a need for a high level of trust between the students and the art educator. On a literal standpoint, the ways this early childhood classroom is set up is much different than the typical art classroom in K-12. The classroom was set up in stations or centers. The centers allow for different activities, the processes are not intertwined but are rather separate. When organizing the classroom for this experience, I could have visualized stations to better meet the students where they are in their own classroom.

Throughout the two sessions spent with this group, overall I noticed that the discussions and conversations about the artwork went relatively smoothly. The students made observations about the artworks that I had not anticipated. Generally all the students had something to share. Certain instances during the discussion, I could hear students propelling forward or even finishing each other’s ideas or thoughts. For instance, one student would mention something and then other students would elaborate or provide evidence for the first student’s observation. The observation is significant because it implies that younger learners may not be as egocentric as developmental psychology asserts.
However when it came time to make the final collages, the students were not as focused. Consequently the art making took more guidance and specific instruction. This implies a need for more social interaction in art education versus isolated, individual engagement. Intentional interactions can begin at the early stages so that students are more ready to continue this practice beyond preschool. This can take the form of large or small group discussions as well as collaborative artworks.

In art education, school art typically results in one artwork made by one student. A focus on the individual is reinforced with the way curriculum is created as well as the rigor of assessment. Furthermore, student art shows award individuals. However, I have noticed through my research that each student created something, e.g. one student, one work however those works became part of the whole. Similarly, one conversation participant discussed the studio approach in early childhood in contrast to approaches to learning within art education: “[studio approach is] more about being a part of a group or part of a whole. And recognizing your value inside that but recognizing the equal value of everyone else’s ideas too” (B. Franklin, personal communication, November 2012). Within the art experiences that were set up for the students, each student contributed to the larger scale artwork and ownership of a particular photograph or part of the project was not the focus. This served, as in my opinion, a very important reminder to art education to encourage and provide opportunity for collaboration versus individualism which is supported by feminist ideal of building community in the classroom.

The students’ ideas of mistakes led to the overall concept of their unpredictable project. The individual photographs that the students took were cut up (no longer attributed to an individual) and placed in a larger work that was representative of a group effort. This research affirms the importance of collaborative and social (hence relational) artworks and experiences
created in schools. The next section will reflect on the project that took collaboration and an
expanded definition of art into consideration; and with feminist pedagogy as a concern, created a
site where we can change how we think about ourselves in relation to others (Thompson, 2003).

Reflection and Analysis of Young Learners as Experts: Social Art

After discussing the artwork of Lee Mingwei and pre-assessing what students knew about
flowers, they made drawings. The discussion of the artwork did not flow smoothly and was
strongly guided by me. However the art making seemed to be more fluid for these students in
comparison to the conversations and discussions. While the students made these drawings, it
gave me the opportunity to interact with each of them and document what they could share with
me. At one point I reflected, “[t]o be honest, this class was much more of a challenge than I had
expected. There were two students with English Language Learners and one student who has
autism and is non-verbal. This led to challenges with communication and interactions. I did
notice that when the students started to draw flowers, the language/communication barrier

Figure 7 a - n (left to right, top to bottom). Images of flowers that students drew as a preliminary part of the process
seemed to break down. Every student worked hard to create their pictures of flowers and was much more engaged in making than in talking. It didn’t make a difference what language they spoke or didn’t speak” (April 16, 2013). The flow of communication that happened visually in this research is akin to one conversation participant’s art practice in which she noted a “private language” with young participants in her art (M. Bordin, personal communication, December 2012). This conversation participant is a contemporary artist who creates abstract sculptures and then invites young children to critique and revise her artwork. In personal communication she noted that this experience allowed for a private language or a unique communication that occurred between the young children, the artwork and her. With this in mind, when listening to the audio recording of this portion of the class, the students talked with each other about their work even though during the discussion portion of the class, there was no interaction between the students. The specific interactions that the students had during the art making are further explored in the following sections.

Refer to the numbered images above to correlate the artwork with the verbal interaction. I dictated what the students said to me when asked: “What can you tell me about your work/flowers?” This gave me the opportunity to have an interaction with each student individually. Additionally, I could then gather their reaction or engagement with the ideas that had been presented and discussed as a larger group. Also, this was the opportunity for the young learners to tell me what they knew and what they were working on rather than me placing my own interpretation on the images without any input from the makers of the image. Something that I noticed while analyzing these images was that the students who drew the most details gave the least amount of verbal response when asked to discuss. For example, Farrell in reference to his image (8m), said: “Flowers can grow and you can smell them. And you give them to people;
your brother and your grandma. And you can see your grandma and grandpa get flowers.”

Farrell’s flowers are very lightly drawn and show very little details yet when asked to speak about what he knew, he gave a vivid description of a relational moment. The drawing of flowers gave no indication or illustration of giving flowers or even an image of his family members yet that was the meaning that he attached to this drawing. Furthermore this might also imply that very young students may not have as of yet developed inhibitions in their thinking.

The meaning could have been influenced by the class discussion of the artwork by Mingwei. When discussing the artwork of Mingwei, many of the students took note of the people who were in the pictures of Mingwei’s artwork. One particular student mentioned “[t]he man is putting flowers in there so the girl can be happy” in regards to the image of Mingwei’s installation that she was viewing. From this, I could deduce that showing reproductions of the installation with people surrounding it, allowed the students to notice the relational focus of the artist’s work. Showing the installation in context aided in the students’ observation of giving flowers, planting flowers and picking flowers. As previously noted, students are influenced by their experiences and the context when interpreting artworks. I would go on to suggest that students’ interpretation of their own artwork is contextual and furthermore, the students assigned meanings and interpretations to their own artwork based on the discussions that had taken place about the art of Mingwei and which is evident in Ivashkevich’s (2009) argument that children’s meaning making of art is “a sociocultural practice interwoven with discourses of childhood and gender and embedded in children’s peer interactions, daily activities, and participation in popular culture” (p. 50). Within this research, gender discourse was not necessarily the focus of the study however, it can be noted in the classroom experience transcriptions that more female students brought up ideas and suggestions than male students further study of the classroom
transcription would be necessary to discuss this discourse. Pearson (2001) requests that art educators do not overlook the contextual complexities of the art process as a lived social and cultural experience (as cited in Ivashkevich, 2009). Within my research the interpretation of students’ own artwork as well as the artwork that they viewed resulted in a contextual social practice, specifically, young learner’s artwork and interpretations should not be viewed as merely a visual artifact but rather an interwoven fabric of their daily living and experiences. I wonder if the students were to be asked about their work, days later, if the verbal response would be different.

A variety of visual themes seem to emerge from these drawings. First I noticed a trend of very long or tall stems for the flowers. Additionally there are a series of abstracted flowers that essentially show the pieces and parts of the flower but they are not located in typical positions. There were also a number of students who colored in their flowers; one student in particular seemed to spend special focus on drawing from life and worked to make her flowers look representational. The variety of visual themes indicated that the students had a range of ages and a range of developmental stages of drawing. For art education, this could indicate the need to have differentiated assessments that are adaptable to each student’s level. Not all of the students created artwork the same way, so they cannot be assessed the same way. The next images represent the final project that the students completed. The artwork was a social installation that mimicked the concepts of Mingwei’s project.
As previously mentioned, the students seemed more engaged during the art making and additionally interacted with each other more than during discussion time. “During the final session three students worked extra on their drawings and were having an interesting conversation about each other’s work” (April 16, 2013). The interactions between the students during this time took the form of compliments and asking for someone to look at their work and displaying it to each other. From this, I would deduce that the students were modeling what myself and the classroom teachers had been doing throughout the art making. The modeling of these activities shows evidence of the developmental level of the young learners, where they are learning by example; furthermore, this highlights the relational nature of classroom experiences.
Not only do the students model the adults but they also model their classmates. Furthermore, the students were connected with each other and myself during the art experience but this social or relational installation connected them to the space outside of their classroom, which further questions the notion of young learners as egocentric.

The students selected to place their installation in the hallways so that more people could interact with the artwork. The students even created a sign that asked passersby to take a flower and then give the flower to someone else. To follow up the discussion on the first day, I brought in fresh flowers for the students. Like Mingwei, I told them that they were a gift but they were to pass them on and give them as a gift to people they saw throughout the day in the school. Although I would have enjoyed witnessing this experience of the students, I decided to not know the “extent of my kindness” and allow it to happen once I left the classroom experience, paralleling Mingwei’s intention. Additionally, these experiences mirrored relational aesthetics in that the outcomes were not immediately visible to me. “I am excited that I did not see the end result of this social project. Will the visitors to the school feel comfortable to actually take a flower from the installation and then give it away?” (April 18, 2013). In line with the idea of reconceptualizing and reimagining art education, this installation had the power to have adults rethink the image of the child. This research showed that young learners can indeed think conceptually and make that thinking visible through a relational or social installation. This again goes against developmental psychology, therefore suggesting a reliance on developmental psychology could limit better teaching and artful pedagogy. Additionally, having a contemporary and conceptual installation in the hallway of a preschool was in contrast to the traditional work made by the students. The students and their work has the potentiality of being
a catalyst to have others interact as well as changing the space of their school. This point is further illustrated by an interview participant’s reflection on his experience when he was able to:

Render back to the students something that belongs to them, which is their own creativity, their own agency, their own opportunity to discover their own world and then 'speak' about their own world…the times that I have done that I have seen some of the greatest art produced in the classroom by students. And the truth is at that point it doesn’t look like student art anymore, it just looks like art (J. Lucas, personal communication, November 2012)

Similarly, the students in my research created an intervention in their school and not only participated in but also created a relational artwork which is a very different gesture to have in an art classroom than most art educators, parents, and administrators would expect or are used to viewing. As a facilitator, I rendered back to the students something that belongs to them; their creativity, agency and their own opportunity.

Limitations and Implications: Interventions

Following the idea of interventions, this section will discuss my role and limitation as an intervention. The main limitation of collecting data from classroom experiences was that I was granted only two hours with each session/project. The projects became quick and did not result in long term study or experience of the students. Additionally, as a visiting museum educator, I need to acclimate myself to the classroom and at the same time be teaching the students. Upon arriving in the classroom, I must immediately pre-asses what is going on, whether it is listening to the classroom teacher speak with the students or view what active centers are happening in the classroom. Hopefully I can tell what the students are exploring by looking at work posted as well as displayed curricular goals and objectives. Furthermore, I am unable to establish a strong relationship with the students due to limited amount of time with the students. Throughout this
research I have explored interactions and conversations of a particular durational event (this research) however, I am not in the classroom on a regular basis. This means that my interactions and conversations are much different than what the students may be used to from their own classroom teacher.

Taking a step back from this limitation, I analyzed it with an artful lens. Throughout this process, I began to view myself as an intervention. The idea of an intervention has become increasingly popular in contemporary art and being an intervention can challenge and even comment on established expectations. Contemporary artists commonly associated with an interventionist style include Harrell Fletcher who noted a project in which he had school children create performance art in unlikely spaces to enliven their community. I have thought about how my two days (or rather 2 hours) of time with the students can be most beneficial to their learning. When entering the classrooms and having conversations with the students, the projects that we end up making, usually spark new ideas or new areas of interest. However, I wanted to make my visits more seamless, not starting something new, but perhaps shedding light on something that was already happening in the classroom--an intervention, perhaps. For me, this seemed like a breakthrough for my teaching. Adding to and following some of the interests that were active in the classroom already seemed to be a beneficial experience for the students, the teacher and myself. The projects therefore had some meaning and purpose within their classroom community. Although I am a visitor, I could become the "intervention"--helping students and teachers discover a new perspective on their current projects. The resulting art projects that I work with the students on could then make their learning visible in the classroom. The concept of an intervention is a metaphor for the bigger picture of art education. The research within this paper is an intervention to the traditional sense of art education. The research shows a new form
of art education that has the classroom become a site of research and social interaction, experiments in relational art and offers a counter-narrative viewpoint.

Limitations & Implications: Interactions, Conversations, and Situations

Interactions are not always having a conversation. It could be ways of being together in the classroom or making art collaboratively. As an intervention, I have to address the strengths of each class; interactions should not always be set up the same way, evaluated the same or understood in the same way. Students and classes interact differently so I also need to interact differently too. Akin to the Reggio Emilia philosophy, I began to think about the ways that early learners can communicate; the way in which young learners are afforded the ability to think, play, listen and invent in a multitude of ways.

The image of the child is understood as a complex individual with the capacity to communicate in a variety of ways. There are essentially infinite ways that children can express, connect and explore their ideas and thoughts. Furthermore, one conversation participant who works with young learners expressed this idea of non-verbal communication that is developed through a common language and builds a community in the classroom. She noted in a description of a typical day that relationships provide students with, “a way to talk to one another that isn’t just focused on verbal language alone […] and it also gives them gesture, a way to move, it gives them an understanding that is separate from the language and more than their own” (B. Franklin, personal communication, November 2012). The participant’s observation and research of young learners’ relationships within the classroom is in line with my observations and interpretation of the interactions.
Although they are presented in linear sequences many of the conversations between the students and I were continual and were much more dynamic than what can be read in text. I was often bouncing between more than one set of ideas from the students. This challenges me to hold the ideas for each student and to be able to come back and revisit ideas when students bring it up again or ask further questions. When listening to the transcriptions the conversations never really had a clean ending or an exact closure/final answer, which illuminates a principle of a/r/tography, which challenges us to ask more questions rather than come to a finite conclusion (Sinner et al, 2006). It became on-going questions that may or may not have continued if I had more time to spend and devote to this process. From this, I would assert that young learners need time, both structured and unstructured to develop skills and concepts to explore their personal experiences. Future study of the conversations, interactions and situations of learning could qualitatively study how art educators maintain or sustain student ideas or lines of questions over periods of time. How can this practice continue? A question for further research could investigate how to sustain levels of engagement in the classroom. From this, the view of educator changes and acknowledges a complex role. The educator in the art classroom becomes a resource as well as one that participates in constant research or study in the classroom. The educator becomes an a/r/tographer in the classroom, unraveling layer upon layer of questions.

Questions and conversations become an important part of learning in the experiences set up in this research but can also be emphasized in the early childhood classrooms and even further, art classrooms. As highlighted by Dodd-Nufrio (2011) and supported by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, each young learner has the desire to connect with others, to engage in learning, and to enter into a relationship with their environment. From my study, it was evident that students interacted and connected with each other in a variety of ways including conversations.
Furthermore, one interviewee identified herself as a conceptual artist that she forms contexts and ways of working where people interact. When discussing the relationships and collaboration of her students, the conversation participant relayed a conversation between 4 and 5 year olds questioning “what do you think?” (B. Franklin, personal communication, November 2012) and hypothesized:

[...]all those ways of working together are very tiny and small and yet when it comes to collaborating in a project and thinking about how you are going to work with someone else--it starts to make sense to the children because it’s a way of being at school (B. Franklin, personal communication, November 2012).

This quote shows a moment in which a way of being in school is described, working with others and collaborating. The importance of constructive conversations with early learners is highlighted by the research of Kim and Darling (2009) and evident in the findings of my research that resist the egocentric label of young learners. The study investigated how students construct knowledge in the classroom by negotiating and debating with each other. Additionally, in both Kim and Darling’s (2009) study and my study, “the relationships between children became a context in which the co-construction of theories, interpretations and various understandings of reality took place” (Kim & Darling, p. 1). As they further elaborate,

The study described here shows how social interaction plays a role in young children’s learning processes. Drawing on social constructivist views of children’s learning and socialization, children’s discussions and interactions within a preschool learning group were examined. In this setting, children are considered meaning makers and active participants in their own learning processes. Examination of their discourse is valuable not only for understanding individual and group learning experiences but also for illuminating children’s agency and their active roles in their own learning. (Kim & Darling, 2009, p. 2) [italics added by author]
So too, the interactions and discussions in my study allowed early learners to be active participants in the learning process and create meaning. The opportunity to research the interactions and situations that were set as a framework for this study illuminate the role of the student. Throughout this teaching, I set a framework for learning. Within that framework, the students were given a situation in which they could interact. Art known as relational or participatory exhibits this idea of situations. Tsai (2011) describes this idea as:

The artist becomes a kind of stage producer who designs a project to engage active participants, or a facilitator who collaborates with them to create the work. In either case, passive spectators become active participants. The work of art unfolds over time and manifests itself in an action, not in an object. (p.11)

Within my research and the reflection on the classroom experiences, I have noted two situations which have directly related to relational art. During data collection, I began each class session with a meal with the students. Eating lunch or breakfast was an unexpected situation in which I got to take part. To begin with a meal gave me the opportunity to interact with the students and build a relationship. The concept of a meal and even more so, sharing a meal is a common theme within relational aesthetics. The artist Rirkrit Tiravanija is well known for his relational artwork that invited gallery visitors to share a meal together in an art gallery. Tiravanija created an experience for the participants. He set up a situation in which the people interacted and shared something with each other. By having the audience participate in the artwork and even eat what is being cooked, the distance between artist and audience is broken down. Similarly, eating a meal with the students broke down the distance between visiting educator and students. I became a participant in the ways of being that the students are active in each day of school. I was able to interact with students within their own context.
Additionally, the artist Mingwei who has been discussed at length, created a participatory artwork that was inspired by Taiwanese culture, called *The Dining Project*. This project sought to compensate for a lack of teahouses in Mingwei’s new location. Teahouses in Taiwan provide a way of meeting people. Mingwei publicized the opportunity to dine with him in his studio; food became a way to interact with people and learn about his new environment. Mingwei continued this studio practice into the exhibition that was known as *The Dining Project* (Tsai, 2011). Sharing a meal with the young learners that I would be teaching gave me the opportunity to learn about my new environment. From the lunch or breakfast table, I could observe the interactions within the school. The meal became the opportunity to interact with the students on an informal basis, which potentially affected and even enriched the interactions and conversations that took place in the classroom.

In a formal setting, one conversation participant had given a lecture in which he discussed art educators as participants in the discourse of conceptual and contemporary art. As a university professor, he has an artwork called “Office as Artwork” and it was a literal opening up of the office space to the community. Outside his door, a placard identified the office as an artwork and explained how a situation of conviviality was set up. Conviviality is a prevalent theme of relational aesthetics and can be defined as a festive or sociable event but more so the state of being social. Within relational aesthetics, a rethinking of everyday events occurs; everyday events and the interactions that result are seen as art. The description invited anyone to visit his office on a specific day of the week during a specific semester to split half of his lunch with him and the guest to the office was required to provide conversation. Akin to my meal experiences with the young learners, the meals were memorable. To evaluate the ‘success’ of the interactions contradicts the significance of the moment of sharing a meal and interacting with
students, I am uncertain how such an experience should be evaluated. Again, words are limiting in illuminating the interactions and relational moments of the classroom and art experiences as they take on a philosophical meaning.

Sharing a meal with my young learners is indicative of conviviality. Conviviality translates to art educators viewing everyday interactions in the classroom as art; empowering what happens as an educator. The concept of artful pedagogy is representative of conviviality and sociability within the system of the classroom. Furthermore, performing such artful pedagogy deconstructs that system. The following section will illuminate conversations that were held with various educators about art and pedagogy.

Visualizing Conversations

After highlighting the conversations and interactions of young learners, this next section will be sense-making of the conversations that occurred between me and the adult participants. It should be noted that pseudonyms for the conversation participants have been used throughout. Visual and written forms will be used as with the previous section to give a rich understanding of and illuminate the key terms and ideas. As a visual component, word clouds were used to highlight key terms and codes from the conversation transcripts. The word clouds made use of an Internet generator to visually emphasize the frequent words from the text transcriptions of the conversations in/between pedagogy and art. The emphasis and importance of individual words or ideas were used to tell the story of the participants, which is parallel to Vygotsky’s idea that, “[e]very word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness” (Vygostsky, 1987, as cited in Seidman, 2013, p. 7). The word clouds therefore are a graphical
representation of word frequency; the words that have more visual emphasis, were numerically used more often. The word clouds are therefore interpreted as visual representation of each conversation participant.

The conversations took place in a variety of modes including in-person, over Skype and via email. Each mode was convenient for the conversation participant yet affected depth and vitality of the conversation. Although questions were formulated prior to the conversations they served only as a guide or served to organize my thoughts prior to the conversation. The questions began with the participant reflection on their background, discussing a typical day in their classroom and elaborating on their own art practice. What transpired during the conversations was the opportunity for the participant as well as myself to reflect on practices and experiences of art in the classroom and with students. Moreover, the conversations gave each the opportunity to discuss education, specifically art education on a philosophical level. No two conversations took the same path and each addressed a variety of themes and ideas yet certain common threads emerged and overlapped. The conversations guided my research and are presented here as the word clouds. All the conversations holistically informed my research but not all the conversations cleanly fit within the context of this written research. Two conversation participant’s words became primary while interpreting and analyzing the collected data. From the word clouds I will extract certain key terms or ideas to further discuss. Although not all the key terms will be discussed, many such as process and time were evident in my interpretation and analysis of the classroom experiences. Specifically process was emphasized throughout the classroom experiences and time was one of the limitations that was noted in my analysis. Direct quotes from the transcription will be used to illuminate and accurately represent the thoughts of the conversation participants and to expand upon the terms and concepts that are highlighted in
the word clouds. The following figures are the word clouds generated from the conversation transcriptions:

![Word Clouds](image)

Figure 9 a - d. word clouds that are representative of conversations

The word clouds aided the interpretation of the conversations. Seidman (2013) suggests that interpretation of interview materials should seek connective threads of experience, note surprises and provide a richer understanding. The word clouds provided a visual to find connective threads among the experiences of the participants. The words are presented within a circle shape because of the notion that a circle has no beginning and no end. The action of reflecting on pedagogy and art practice is a never-ending endeavor, akin to a/r/tography. The circle also resists the idea of a hierarchy, although certain words are emphasized, the words work together to create the whole pictures. Similarly, the word clouds are presented collectively. The individual clouds, specifically the words of the individual participants, are not as meaningful to me when shown individually. This is similar to looking at the work of the young learners as a group or collectively rather than individually.
As seen in the word clouds, words such as work, think, process, time and questions are a common thread. These key words support and add to the understanding that was gathered from the literature review. A variety of themes emerged however; the specific details of the role of educator will be explored and analyzed in this section in regards to the conversations as well as tenets of relational aesthetics. This research has emerged as a philosophical exploration of pedagogy.

*Connective Events*

Although each of the participants came from a different background and participate in a variety of educational systems, they all were able to indicate a particular event that changed their conceptual framework whether for art making or pedagogy. Specifically, one conversation participant noted that as a direct reaction and perhaps even rejection of her formalist art training, she began to create abstract artworks that include a social process (M. Bordin, personal communication, December 2012). Additionally, another conversation participant discussed how criticism of her own process incited her to include process in the curriculum for art history and also affected the assessment procedures in her classroom (C. Gorber, personal communication, April 2013). As noted previously, this conversation participant also allowed her students to develop and work within their own process. The act of rethinking and reconceptualizing art making and pedagogy occurred for me as well. The discussions that took place with the participants allowed for each of us to reflect on the events that shaped our current pedagogy. For me, being presented with the challenge of teaching art to preschool students reframed my educational goals. I was no longer able to use the prescribed teaching and curriculum of K-12 education; this realization allowed me to develop the concept of artful pedagogy, emphasizing interactions, conversations and contemporary art within the classroom. Furthermore, the
introduction of relational aesthetics gave a name to the pedagogy that I was developing. Relational aesthetics provided a framework for my teaching that was evolving and will continue to evolve. The experience of rethinking one’s pedagogy or art practice (for me combining the two) was a common thread amongst the participants and myself.

Oscillating Roles in Relational Aesthetics

In both literature and the conversations with participants, a theme of the role of educator emerged. The role of the educator was shifting within the hierarchy of the classroom as well as within day to day tasks. Specifically the role of the educator oscillates between facilitation and delegation. Similarly, the role of the relational artist is in flux. The relationship between the relational artist and the audience switches back and forth as the participants become part of the artwork, experientially, and the artist facilitates interactions, conversations and collaboration. Within this, the educator can also be seen as a conceptual artist and a co-constructor of ideas in the classroom.

Educator as conceptual artist

Two conversation participants emphasized the role of art educator as conceptual artist working with/in pedagogy. Two definitions of educator as conceptual artist emerged. Firstly, the art educator is part of the larger discourse of contemporary art as well as art education. Secondly, one participant noted that she is both an artist and an educator, qualifying educator as conceptual artist. To further explain this, the participant noted: “I’m working with big ideas and large groups of people, adults, and I actually form and frame different contexts and ways of working where people interact” (B. Franklin, personal communication, November 2012). She goes on to express this as a fluid practice within the classroom. Similarly, within my research I was able to set a situation (or context) in which the students interacted and worked with big
ideas. The participant goes on to discuss, in her opinion, art education’s resistance to such an approach to art learning and she discussed how such ways of working and making, again, in her opinion, are disregarded in the larger context of art education because the learners are so young. However her comments and my research illuminate the need to have such conversations in art education and reducing resistance to this way of working is supported by The National Art Education’s Early Childhood Art Educators issues group whom prompt more attention to the process and to valuing the thinking and doing of young learners. The learning that takes place in the process of art making with young learners is connected to contemporary art practices, which reconceptualize art education.

The definition of art and the definition of the educator need to be expanded within art education. In the previous conversations, it was noted that the art educator has the potential to shift the conceptual framework of their pedagogy. Art educators are part of the ongoing discourse of educational concepts and philosophies. Specifically art educators can be active participants in reconceptualizing art education and finding new ways to guide students in art making and introducing students to the ideas of contemporary art. From this research, artful pedagogy seems to work towards a more conceptual framework for how curriculum is planned, what kind of artwork students create as well as how the process is documented. From my research, educator as conceptual artist addresses ideas within the classroom. Previously, the notion of carrying ideas for students was explained in my data analysis. The art educator guides students to develop their own ideas and concepts and become co-constructors in the classroom and from my research, I argue that young children are capable of such co-construction. Furthermore this illuminates and supports the situations and interactions that were analyzed in the classroom data. The role of the art educator can shift to one that holds ideas and facilitates
the learning within the classroom just as the role of the artist in relational aesthetics is shifted to that of a facilitator of social interaction. From theorists such as Vygotsky, as art educators, it is known that learning occurs through social interaction. Previously noted in the literature review, it was noted that the role of the art educator is oscillating.

Co-Constructor of Ideas

Co-construction of knowledge is not a new concept to art education. As illustrated by one interview participant even young students are prepared to be co-constructors within the classroom because “the student is a citizen, an active citizen already with their own memories, their own sensibilities, their own sense of taste, their own anxieties about life, their own ambitions towards invention” (J. Lucas, personal communication, November 2012). Young learners in my research were active participants in the learning and given the opportunity to exhibit expertise and elaborate on each other’s ideas. Additionally, one conversation participant noted the discourse in which students are encouraged to be more deeply involved in their own thinking and the thinking of others.

Within the classroom and this research, ideas are simple pieces all layered and interwoven, which makes them more complex. The research presented in this thesis makes visible the knotty nexus. The knotty nexus indicates that many ideas become knotted together and it is the role of the research to make this knot visible and unravel more knots. The ideas therefore are not fixed and do not stay fixed within the classroom context but rather are flexible and will change; focusing on the process. Here, I see a strong connection to the contemporary art practice of relational aesthetics. From personal communication with an early childhood studio teacher, it was found that it is apparent that the role of the educator would drastically change the structure of the classroom. Just as the role of the artist changes in relational aesthetics, so too
does the role of the educator. The educator and student are participating in a co-construction of knowledge and the educator facilitates the generation of ideas. The educator can share their experience and skills with the students and the students can do the same. However, I argue that relational aesthetics does just that. In defining the nature of relational aesthetics, Bourriaud (2002) posits, “[relational aesthetics is] a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private place” (p.113). In my research this relates to how the ideas and concepts of the artwork created by the students prompted intentional interactions and the point of departure for the projects created were based on the students’ ideas as a whole, rather than independent interpretations and collaborative and contextual meaning-making. Young learners construct knowledge in meaningful interactions and with their peers and the educators. Furthering the idea of contextual and collaborative meaning-making, the next section will discuss and present experiential data from a specific conversation.

**Blurred Images as Presentational Knowledge**

The following section will make sense of my experiences with the blurry photographs throughout my research and teaching. The collection of the blurry photographs to me is a happenstance. Inspired by the a/r/tographic study by Suominen (2004), I have saved images that have a “punctuation” volume meaning that they had a certain way of keeping me interested and the potentiality to “evoke stories that seemed significant for the process of understanding the ever-changing identity and meaning construction” (p. 28) that has happened through the organic process of research. To me, these photographs have “punctuation” because they display, in an abstract way, the details that help me better understand pedagogy and the relational moments of teaching. Visually, I was enticed by these blurry images, so instead of discarding them, I
collected them in a folder. The photographs allowed me the opportunity to attend to the details of pedagogy to teach better and in order to understand teaching (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004). These photographs have not only kept my attention and interested but also propelled my research further. To me, the blurry photographs looked like abstract paintings and as I began to reflect on them further, I began to see them as metaphors for the learning, a phenomenon.

The images will be discussed as presentational knowledge. Reason (1997) describes four kinds of knowledge, including experiential, practical and propositional. The fourth kind of knowledge is presentational knowledge which serves as a bridge between experiential and propositional knowledge. Presentational knowledge allows us to order our experiential knowledge into patterns of imagery, and then “symbolize our sense of their meaning in movement, sound, color, shape, line, poetry, drama and story” (Reason, 1997, p. 42). The blurry photographs created by young learners give me the opportunity to order my experiential knowledge of relational moments into patterns of imagery.

It is difficult to re/present the learning and relational moments that take place in the classroom, but I saw these photographs as a set of qualitative data. The photographs emerged as artifacts of relational moments and gestures in the classrooms; these printed images tell the story of the moments and gestures and allow those who did not participate to gain some understanding of what interactions occurred and the relationships that were built through relational aesthetics in the classroom. Below are examples of the blurry images that were collected and are not dissimilar from the photographs that the students used during the “Unpredictable Projects” collage.
To further illuminate the relationality of this research and pedagogy, the following section will seize serendipitous data, a result of my embracing of the emergent in data collection—another way to embrace relationality. During one conversation with a participant, we began discussing these blurry photographs. This conversation delineated from the previously analyzed conversations and became another layer of understanding. The following data emerged from the conversation and was unexpected. The relational, unexpected and emergent events that took place with this participant are akin to my interactions with the young learners.

Taking a/r/tography into consideration, the opportunity to have a participant respond to the conversation through other means than verbal interaction allowed for the same experience that the early learners were provided. As previously mentioned, early learners should be given the opportunity to express their ideas in modes other than verbal responses. The conversation participant looked at and selected blurry images that had the most punctuation for her. We discussed our reactions and reflections about these images in our initial conversation. The interview participant then kept the blurry photographs and utilized arts-based methods specifically, “photo-writing” (Suominen, 2004), to, over a period of time, reflect and write informally about both the photographs and the experience of our conversation. Specifically,
photo-writing combines images and texts with personal reflection (Suominen, 2004). This allows for a back and forth between visual and language which is a process that I have employed throughout the research process when re/presenting data. The following is a personal reflection with the blurry photographs from an interview participant, documented in the days following our conversation. Excerpts from personal communication and reflection with J. Smith are noted below:

2 Days Later (5/25)
At one point on Saturday I took another look at them spreading them out around the floor. Not certain how to begin looking at them I decided to begin where we began over coffee. As I flipped through the images, I asked myself “which of these photos did I feel pulled to look at?” I, again, found it hard to select a few of them. All in their own unique way held qualities I still found appealing. I made a few quick notes about my experience of re-examining the photographs. My notes were simple and as follows:

- There’s an almost ethereal quality to the images.
- I’m finding it hard to move beyond my original “reading” of a few images in particular the two earth-toned ones. The one with the waving streaks of color still reminds me of waving wheat or blades of grass around a gusty rainstorm. The other one with small smudges of a cream color and greyish/greenish puff like clouds, which all reminds me of images taken by the Hubble Telescope of the universe…maybe a meteor shower of sorts.
- I find myself asking why is it necessary to have to move anywhere in my interpretations. Why do I have a voice in my head saying to change, extend, or build upon the initial ideas? If I add or change my thoughts does that somehow make the idea wrong or better?

2 Days Later (5/27)
I spent another lot of time today revisiting the photos, studying their details, and playing around with them. Specifically I have played with the images by arranging them in possible configurations, spotting color connections, line linkages, similar gestures, and generally trying to find connections between them. Interestingly, my ending thought on examining the images today is 3 of the photos are actually very similar in terms of colors, lines, and shapes. [1st image below] Meanwhile, the other four still seem separate to me but interesting compositions in their own rights. [2nd image below]
I considered questions like: How might a story be told through the abstractness of the photos? How might there be relational possibilities between images? And, how do I relate to these images right now?

In the short time of engaging with these images I’m starting to think about them as not only artifacts of children’s experiences with cameras in art classrooms but also as sights of research. Doing research is like trying to foresee a puzzle while living amidst pieces. You’re engrossed in the smaller pieces of a whole trying to build up an image of something through the materials/artifacts around you.

Along this train of thought on research, I’m also reminded of Geertz’s (1973, *The interpretation of cultures*. New York, NY: Basic Books.); discussion of ethnography and how analysis, and in his case cultural analysis, gets more and more incomplete the deeper one goes into it. To illustrate his point, Geertz refers to an Indian story in which the world was balanced on an elephant’s back and the elephant stood on turtle, which stood on the back of another turtle. This story speaks to how every meaning stands on the “back” of other meanings, thus in research and analysis there is no relief from meaning; there will be “turtles all the way down” (p. 29).

- How often in academic work and in teaching do we get lost in the finding of more turtles? Is there value to just letting go of such actions and impulses?
- When do we ever allow the turtles to be as they are without additional labels or interpretations?
  - To what degree can we look at something closely without putting mental labels on it?

This last questions is what I feel, at this moment, I want to do with these images I chose. I just want to sit in their presence and observe them without the labeling of ‘this’ or ‘that’…or the construction of stories or symbolic explorations.

From the re/presentation of both the blurry photographs and the previous serendipitous data, I have allowed the viewer (J. Smith) to interpret the images and meanings themselves, and make connections themselves. The process of this inquiry has opened up ambiguity for a way of
being in the art classroom but also highlighted the ambiguity of these blurry photographs. Settling into ambiguity in inquiry and pedagogy permits the blurry photographs to not have a defined meaning but rather re/presented as an ongoing search, adding to the layers of meaning. The experience with the conversation participant added not only a layer of meaning to my research but also layers of meaning to the photographs. This experiential data can continue and be something that stops us in our tracks and gives us the opportunity to discuss pedagogy in/between art. The experience of spreading out these photographs in large groups in a public space literally stopped others in their tracks. The initial conversation with this participant took place in a public space and passersby literally stopped to look, question and investigate the ambiguity of the photographs. Further interest was created when the passersby were informed that these “beautiful and unpredictable” photographs were created by the youngest of learners.

The process and window of opportunity for collecting the photographs has expired but they are metaphors for the relational moments, experiences and interactions within the classroom. Although I will no longer collect the photographs, I can continue to collect experiences, specifically the experiences that others have with these photographs. The previous experiential data collects a relational moment and an experience with the blurry photographs. The blurry photographs are the site of further research of relational moments that happen in/between pedagogy and art.
CHAPTER V
Artful Pedagogy: Connections/Comparisons of Relational Aesthetics in Art Education

The research presented possible directions and new possibilities for revision of the conceptual framework for art education, including curriculum development and pedagogy and highlighting further questions in artful pedagogy that emerged. Throughout the curriculum that was taught was emergent and student centered learning with focus on the intentional interactions and potential for surprise. Creating and performing such a curriculum took trust. Entering a classroom with just a framework for learning created trepidation but at the same time opened the opportunity for unpredictable projects and for students to be experts in social art. I had to trust myself, the process, as well as trust the students. The end results were powerful displays of contemporary art that as noted previously, presented the potentiality of the students and their ability to interact, collaborate and discuss conceptual ideas and artworks. My artful pedagogy was developed through reading the work of art critics and contemporary reviews of relational aesthetics as well as working within the premise of early childhood art education; synthesizing
making art and educating. Artful pedagogy urges art educators to view themselves “as creative practitioners, people who are creating and co-create with our students a moment, a moment of invention, a moment of research, a moment of discovery” (J. Lucas, personal communication, November 2012) and their pedagogy as a philosophical and conceptual practice. This research has developed and emerged as philosophical and as a conceptual framework. Art education is a relational process; as a conversation participant noted, “it’s a reciprocal relationship and exchange of data, teaching styles, pedagogical moments, relationality, love and care and ethical behavior that is going to guide us forward. It’s a project that we are doing together” (J. Lucas, personal communication, November 2012).

The following sections will discuss how contemporary art’s conceptual framework has taken a pedagogical shift and highlight what art educators can glean from this reconceptualization. Furthermore, suggestions for curriculum, assessment and pedagogy will be presented. It should be noted that this chapter will not present conclusions as much as it presents interpretations and opportunity for further questions. Within this research and art education research in a broader sense, becomes a lifelong endeavor. Layers upon layers of research, conceptual frameworks, and ideas challenge our understanding of art education and being a researcher, teacher and artist. Interpretation and a/r/toography are not procedures that lead us to understanding but rather to a richer texture of inquiry and furthermore, which challenges us to ask more questions rather than come to finite conclusions.

Art, specifically social and relational art practices, have taken a turn towards pedagogical frameworks. This research was to support the idea that pedagogy can take an artful turn and employ contemporary art practices within art education. Artful pedagogy is not just about relational aesthetics; it is about educators finding their own ways to be part of the discourse of a
changing education field. One person’s example should not slip into someone else’s standardization. Artful pedagogy is a conclusion that leads to more questions. Artful pedagogy is about using contemporary art as a model for experiments in the classroom; trying something new and then trying again, participating in the on-going process of education and inviting your students to do the same. This thesis was a personal journey as an artist, teacher and researcher to investigate threads of interest and find connections between those threads. Moreover, it was to unravel the knotty nexus between/within those threads. Just as Irwin and De Cosson (2004) assert, a/r/tography and specifically artful pedagogy, is about living a life of rich meaning supported through perceptual practices that reveal what was previously hidden, create what has never been known and imagine what we hope to achieve; so too I find the unraveling is not yet complete yet is no longer hidden.

Similarly, Herring (2012) notes in regards to his TASK parties, “some absolutely beautiful and unexpected things happened” and furthermore, “Many participants, myself included, ended up doing things we hadn’t done before” (pp. 12-13). In this research the interactions, discussions and situations that took place in the art experiences were ‘absolutely beautiful and often unexpected.’ Both the early learners and I ended up doing things that we had not done before specifically the students created collaborative artworks and were introduced to contemporary art while I incorporated tenets of relational aesthetics within my pedagogy. So within art education, we need to keep an open attitude, welcoming the unknown and being comfortable with the mystery of ambiguity. Artful pedagogy allows art educators to create artwork (although not in the traditional sense), research and, “to live a life of awareness, a life that permits openness to the complexity around us, a life that intentionally sets out to perceive things differently” (Irwin & De Cosson, 2004, p. 33) and even furthermore to be comfortable to
make mistakes and try new approaches. The research allowed me to do just that, perceive art education and my own pedagogy differently. This perceptual gaze and transformation in my thinking about the field of art education as well as my own practice will next be explored.

Interpreting Relational Aesthetics with a Pedagogical Lens

Relational art sets up a situation in which participants interact. As noted above within my research as well as in relational aesthetics, a level of trust must be present for such interactions to take place (Herring, 2012; Tsai 2011). Specific artists such as Lee Mingwei and Oliver Herring do this in interactive, conceptual installations where the interactions and process of the individual participants form greater importance than an object or product. Open-ended scenarios (curriculum) for everyday interactions (school) that take different form depending on participants (students and educators) are both a practice in relational art and also a framework for structuring a classroom. Mingwei notes that his installations changed based on who participates which could suggest differentiation of instruction, curriculum and assessment in the art classroom. With this in mind, the classroom would become very open-ended and directed by the interactions and interests of the students.

Furthermore, Herring describes his TASK parties with terms such as expectations, motivations, interpret, instructions, reflecting and framework, usually associated with education. TASK parties allow participants to be engaged in an interactive process. Herring creates a situation in which participants work together creating art and provoking new experiences. With my own TASK-inspired experience as well as what happened in this research, I noted how the role of educator and student shifted. The hierarchy of the classroom was not flipped but rather became a situation in which educators and students worked together. The
parties start with an objective; the outcomes are unexpected and emerge as the experience continues. The participants perform a task and create tasks, which go beyond the initial objective. In art education, similar concepts could be used when creating curriculum. The objectives are the start of the lesson or curriculum but students and educators are empowered to work beyond the objective and see what outcomes emerge. Within the art experiences that were re/presented in this research, students were able to work beyond initial objectives. One conversation participant noted a view of objectives and standards in art education and discussed how differing definitions of standards could result in viewing standards as a starting point or a point of departure rather than an end goal. The learning experiences in relational aesthetics could potentially provoke learning through critical thinking, engagement, democratic practices, and play; development of empathy; bringing new ideas to view; collaboration and reflection. As with my teaching and Herring’s TASK party, “[a]lmost all of them [the participants] ended up doing things and engaging their fellow participants in ways that inspired and challenged them” (Herring, 2012, p. 17). The participants (students) within my research ended up engaging their fellow participants (classmates) in discussions and inspired and challenged me. As previously discussed, my role as an intervention in the classroom allowed me to be a participant in the learning as well.

LIVING: Living Inquiry, Curriculum, & Art

Throughout the research, a common thread was ‘living.’ Within the inquiry that took place, a hybrid method of action research and a/r/tography, image and text emerged and “unsettl[ed] perceptions and complicat[ed] understandings...” (Irwin et al, 2006, p. 18). Complicating the concept of art educator, Brunson Day (2009) speaks about the idea that within Reggio approaches, the teacher is a creator, not an imitator. In that sense, new creations
are made every year with every student. Projects and lessons are not repeated year after year and are not copied from colleagues which allows for unpredictable projects as in this research.

This idea asks us, as educators to grow and to be constantly changing. It is almost as if education is something that has life, something that is breathing. As Brunson Day (2009) says, “[i]t is alive and changing, making and remaking itself” (p. 54). Art education could therefore shift and be reimagined within the relationships and interactions between children, families, and teachers and in my case, museum educators too. This idea of living curriculum is supported by feminist pedagogy in the idea that pedagogy is student centered and constructed through “communities of knowers” Garber (2003). Furthermore Garber (2003) posits, “each classroom or teaching context is constructed by the people within it” (p. 60). This view of pedagogy is in stark contrast to the traditional art education classroom where curriculum may not differ from one school to another and reduce guessing, promote predictable outcomes and take the form of prescriptive curriculum. Predictable outcomes would be decreased when the expertise of the students is used as a jumping off point for creating curriculum; such a curriculum would acknowledge difference and create learning energy through togetherness, proximity and the development of a community of knowers.

As participants of the school, we are able to make it something new every year. Brunson Day (2009) challenges teachers to be empowered in the process and “to construct curriculum that builds together with the children and families in a deeply personal way” (p. 54). Capitalizing on the expertise of the students as well as their context is similar to Gude’s (2013) idea that:

In the process of collaborating with our students to identify and investigate significant content with living interdisciplinary aesthetic practices, art teachers can contribute to the reinvention of schools and invent not only a new form of art education but also a new collaborative art form. (p. 14) [italics added by author]
The idea that the curriculum can constantly be rebuilt and recreated supports this connection between teaching and art practice. Unpredictable curriculum that is living and emergent throughout, for me sustains excitement as an art educator; never knowing what will come next leaves room for ambiguity and guess work but also presents the opportunity to participate in on-going inquiry within the classroom and artful pedagogy. Furthermore, it can be noted that young children, and perhaps all ages, learn through both guided and spontaneous learning experiences. As artists we search for new understandings of process and methods, just as this research has opened up the opportunity to reconceptualize art education. Similarly, contemporary art as previously noted, can stop us in our tracks and is defined as a window and mirror to society.

Analyzing a/r/t: Threads of Practice: Connecting Art to Inquiry

While concluding this research and positing that art, research and teaching is a process, I began to reflect on the art making that I was creating outside but within the durational event of this research. Highlighting the interwoven nature of art practice and pedagogy I questioned how my art making may have informed my inquiry and how my inquiry may have informed my art making. Finally, how do both my inquiry and art form and inform one another to add to the richer texture of understanding for my teaching other and learning myself?

When I was at the beginning of my thesis research, I took a shift in my art making. For a few years I had been creating maps; finding ways to create the lines and shapes of maps from everyday experiences. I began this process by collecting leaves and then tracing the veins of the leaves to create map-like images. I then screen-printed these delicate lines and added shapes, numbers and graphics that would be indicative of a map. Slowly I moved from this process and
instead created the map lines through accidental movements. The movements were documented by suspending writing devices from the ceiling of my car and allowing them to drag and dot across a blank page. Although I could not control those movements, I still created the situation and had expected outcomes. From the drag and dot lines of the movements I then duplicated, manipulated and eventually screen-printed the lines to again create a map. The lines would overlap and be enlarged and then embellished with multiple media. And then, in my 3rd semester of graduate school, I again began with the map making. This time, I decided that I wanted to remove myself from one step of the creation. I removed myself from the making of the lines. I gave friends, peers and colleagues (collaborators) a simple prompt to create these lines. I asked them to document their movement whether it be as they were a passenger in the car or a simple walk around the block. The collaborators in this project then sent me their drawings. From there I took the drawings and stitched them onto canvas using embroidery techniques (as a novice) and paying close attention to color selection. The embroidered maps then became a souvenir of the experience of the collaborators but I had my own experience of the time it took to stitch and embellish the rather simple line drawings. Essentially the collaborators provided me with the content and I worked to develop it into a full idea, a full project. After stitching the lines, I photographed the maps to show the intricacies and give them a topographical look. I then went on to display them in a box, with the finished map on top and then all the bits and pieces in a drawer. The drawer contained the original line drawings from the collaborators, the notes that they sent me as well as the photographs that I took of the maps. It is a complete idea hanging on the wall but the most important part is that I removed myself from one portion of the project. I let others collaborate as well as participate in part of my work.
Consequently, both my inquiry and art making support the concept of ambiguity and the shifting role of artist and educator; I worked within the framework of map making but shifted my role and allowed others to collaborate, just as I had promoted in the classroom experiences. The image above is illustrative of my process within this art making, which ironically is the front side to the image of the “knotty nexus” in previous chapters. Throughout the research process, I have been unknotting the threads and making those knots visible but at the same time the understanding I have gained is representative in the completed map above. I made the reverse side of my process visible and revealed knots and interwoven threads, which is similarly how this inquiry made visible and revealed knots and threads of my pedagogy. This revelation has added to the intertwined and complicated layers of meaning within this research and given me the opportunity to see what has not been seen before and come to know and look at art education through a new window, pointing in new directions.
Documentation in Learning & Teaching:

Connections to Artful Pedagogy & Relational Aesthetics

The process of documenting is akin to Reggio Emilia philosophy as well as relational art. Within this research, documentation was continually a challenge to grapple with; I questioned how to make visible the relational moments in the art experiences as well as how to document the relational process. Furthermore the opportunity to write and re/present artful pedagogy has allowed me to use a variety of data to contribute to an ongoing discourse of art education as well as re/present my pedagogy and relationality.

The importance of documentation and inquiring to do such, in my research as well as in art education is supported by Reggio Emilia philosophy as well as relational aesthetics. Within Reggio Emilia philosophy, documentation presents young learner’s experiences, ideas and thoughts, and reveals the interactions and relational moments (Goldhaber & Smith, 1997, as cited in Kim & Darling, 2009). Documentation makes the pedagogical work concrete and visible, as a trace and a process that supports learning and teaching, making these reciprocal (Rinaldi, 2005, as cited in Kim & Darling, 2009). In addition, “documentation becomes a means for communication as it publically demonstrates children’s learning processes” (Kim & Darling, 2009, p. 3) which is evident in how the learning in the art experiences were made visible through text and image.

As noted throughout, documentation of relational moments is a challenge. The documentation of relational aesthetics takes the form of story telling. Just as this research has been a re/presentation and retelling of the experiences in artful pedagogy, relational aesthetics retells the story of the experiences in galleries. Relational aesthetics as well as pedagogy or the relational moments that happen in the art classroom can only be evaluated or truly experienced
by those who are present. However, these stories of relational aesthetics and interactions in the classroom can be propelled forward through inquiry and research such as what has been presented throughout. The means of re/presentation in this research have taken the form of text and image, intertwined to deepen understanding of an experience, which is supported by a conversation participant’s suggestion that documentation and the study of it, “builds understanding among everyone involved in that study” (B. Franklin, personal communication, November, 2012). Consequently, documentation becomes a key concept in the learning relationships present in both this research and art education. Documentation becomes both a way in which children learn and how to teach because it maintains ideas and shows the relational moments and thought processes of the young learners. The documentation becomes the way that students and art educators can communicate and tell the story of what happens in the classroom each day. In art education therefore, the display of such documentation can then take the form of “art interwoven with analyzed documentation, placed in school hallways, inside the classroom, in letters/e-mails home, in the community” (B. Franklin, personal communication, November 2012). The ways in which relational aesthetics and pedagogy are documented and furthermore displayed connect them in a philosophical and theoretical standpoint. Relational artists have taken the conceptual framework and aesthetics of pedagogy to create artwork; similarly, art educators can take on the conceptual framework of contemporary art and create a pedagogy that is conceptual and artful within the classroom.

Further Questions for Artful Pedagogy in Art Education:

My contribution to the unfinished and in flux rethinking of art education has come in the form of relational aesthetics as pedagogy. Contemporary art, specifically relational aesthetics
has stopped me in my art education tracks and revealed new concepts and process not only for art making but also pedagogy. The research presented in this research presents relational aesthetics in this sense and could furthermore stop others in their tracks, to provide the opportunity to ask new questions and think differently. Throughout this research the potentiality of contemporary art in art education has been exposed. The learning within the research has remained open-ended and was capable of making compelling learning experiences for the young learners as well as myself. The research has allowed me to “[h]onestly and fearlessly analyze the forms, functions, artistic methodologies and conceptual understandings” (Gude, 2013, p.8) in my pedagogical practice. In light of Gude’s theories (2004, 2007, 2013), my research can contribute to the reinvention of forms of art education that is an ongoing experiment and site of relational aesthetics. Supported by this, a living curriculum is grounded in the realities of the students’ expertise, experience and context as well as contemporary art. Artful pedagogy presents art educators the opportunity to explore and propose new forms and conceptual frameworks of art education. Specifically, Gude (2013) suggests how

> [the] classroom’s art education curriculum can be conceived of as an ongoing collaborative art project, as an experiment in “relational aesthetics” in which students and others in the school community can interact and create new knowledge by using artistic methodologies to experience and interpret the world in fresh ways.” (p.14) [italics add by author]

The following section presents questions that emerged and that which I am left to grapple. The learning experiences in relational aesthetics as pedagogy are potentially dynamic, layered and slippery but students respond divergently, construct diverse meanings and create unpredictable products (Richardson & Walker, 2011 in Thulson, 2013) but questions of how this manifests itself and sustains within art education is what will be presented in the following questions. Initially, some very specific questions emerged and include: *How might art educators
streamline everyday--both pedagogical and creative—tasks? How is the comfort level with ambiguity/surprise in artful pedagogy sustained over time? How is process and time conceptualized in art education?

As seen in this research, the young learners participated in art making and interactions that questioned the tyranny of developmental psychology, specifically how art teachers “use” or conceptualize artistic stages. Art curriculum based on artistic stages does not allow for students to go beyond the expectations. In the experiences in this research, using students’ expertise as a jumping off point created unpredictable projects and reconceptualized young learners’ capabilities. The curriculum emerged from this, rather than setting predictable outcomes and expectations for the students. Both I and the students had to guess and embrace the emergent nature of the projects. Art educators therefore need a more flexible set of expectations for students’ abilities to think and work conceptually and be introduced to contemporary art. The learning experiences in relational aesthetics as pedagogy are potentially dynamic, layered and slippery but students responded divergently, constructed diverse meanings and created the unpredictable; young learners are in fact capable to participate in and study contemporary art practices (Thulson 2013). Here I present the questions: How can we view children as capable, strong, caring, and full of potential? How does the art educator provide students the opportunity to be stopped in their tracks by contemporary art, regardless of age or developmental stages? How does the art educator conceptualize or use developmental readiness in the art classroom? As a “gutsy possibility” (Fox, 2001), how might young learners participate in research or a/r/tography practices?

The standardization of art learning disallows students to move past and be challenged. As previously noted, these standards should be a starting point, promoting departure from the
standards which are based on developmental psychology. Furthermore, assessment of art in a
traditional, rubric-based, outcomes oriented art education was not addressed. This research took
place in a preschool classroom with me as a visiting museum educator, so assessment was not a
focus. However a number of the smaller experiences within the larger context of the classroom
experience could relate to Ohio Academic Art Content Standards. Specifically, the standards
that suggest that Kindergarteners describe the meaning in the marks they make on paper; explore
their environments and experiences for art making ideas; generate ideas and images for artwork
based on observation, memory, imagination and experience; describe their artworks and efforts
and share their art making processes; and show confidence and pride in their artistic
accomplishments. Although these are standards suggested for the Kindergarten level, the young
learners that I worked with were preschool aged and were capable of these standards and fully
participated in the art making process because they were given the opportunity, with their agency
and creativity rendered back to them. Emphasis was rather placed on the experiences of creating
artwork and the togetherness that resulted in the classroom. The process was more important
than the product in this research. This concept of process-oriented art education could
potentially result in portfolio based assessment. Additionally, rubrics that included specific goals
or interests of students could be included. However, portfolio assessments and differentiated
rubrics further place art education as a specialization. From this I would question how art
educators conceptualize assessment and furthermore how this can relate to the larger context of
education as a whole. *How can contemporary art’s interdisciplinary nature and relational art’s
participatory nature reconceptualize assessment in (art) education?*

The previous questions posed are not exhaustive in nature but will continue to evolve and
emerge as further research continues comparing contemporary art discourses and contemporary
art education. Concluding this research provides the opportunity to ask more questions and to look at new directions or possibilities for art education. Akin to Gude’s (2013) argument I suggest that contemporary art and relational aesthetics have the possibility to not just look to new possibilities for art education but for the concept of schools as a whole. The research re/presented artful pedagogy from the viewpoint of a feminist, postmodern art museum educator but can incite and open up conversations about artful pedagogy beyond art education. Our challenge as educators is to locate contemporary works of art that make process visible and provide students with art making experiences that are powerful and use those conceptual processes and strategies while developing pedagogy and curriculum. Contemporary art prepares art educators for the shifting and challenging discourses in the context of education.
REFERENCES


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