Mapping Creativity: An A/r/tographic Look at the Artistic Process of High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Mapping Creativity: An A/r/tographic Look at the Artistic Process of High School Students

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A high school visual art educator, along with 20 students enrolled in this teacher/researcher’s Advanced Placement (AP) studio course, investigated the processes involved in creating artwork. Understanding artistic processes beyond skills and techniques is significant for curriculum development, but it is also key in conceptualizing art as a way of knowing. The arts based research strategy utilized in this study was a/r/tography, which focuses on the interconnectedness between artist, researcher, and teacher/learner. This highly reflective form of action research allowed the researcher and students to uncover new understandings of what it means to be an artist-researcher through a combination of knowing, doing, and making. Student-researchers learned several arts based forms of inquiry by analyzing the processes of contemporary artists. They were invited to record and reflect upon their own processes in a research journal as they generated artworks. The teacher-researcher also kept an intensive reflective journal concerning artmaking, but also included pedagogical concerns, questions, observations, and insights. At the conclusion of the semester, students were taught to analyze their own artistic process via their sketchbook entries by creating two visualizations: a mind map and an artwork as a data visualization of their process. Several important understandings are drawn from this study that transform this educator’s practice as an artist-educator. These include the following concepts: not knowing as an artist, researcher, student and teacher; anxiety may be a necessary factor in artistic creation and pedagogy; and pretending is a strategy that allows one to productively move through uncertainty, ambiguity, and anxiety.

Keywords: art education, A/r/tography, creative process, artistic process, creativity, Advanced Placement, arts based research
Acknowledgements

I would never have been able to finish my thesis without the guidance of committee members, help from friends, and the support of my wife and family.

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor and mentor Dr. Dan Barney for his support, generous guidance, nurturing patience, and productive prodding. He has helped me reimagine what is possible and for that I am truly grateful. Dr. Mark Graham has also been a huge influence and help throughout this thesis. His thoughtful questions and quite confidence helped me push myself not only in this thesis but also in my teaching. Dr. Sharon Gray also deserves many thanks for her constant encouragement and support over the several years I have known her. Without this help I truly would have missed out on some truly career changing opportunities. I am also grateful that Sam Steadman decided to join me at BYU to share in this process. His continued support, example, and sense of humor really helped me throughout the process.

Finally I would like to thank my family. Many of them provided positive support and guidance. I am especially grateful for my mom and the many long conversations we shared as I struggled with ideas and just needed someone to listen. My wife was a rock of constant support and encouragement over these last few years. Without her love and patience I could never have finished. I do not know how she managed to look after our four small children as I spent countless hours at the library, but she did and she is awesome. I love her and am eternally grateful for her sacrifice.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study sets out to investigate artistic processes through intense reflection on my own artmaking and that of my High School Advanced Placement (AP) studio art students. Understanding artistic processes beyond skills and techniques is significant for curriculum development, but it is also key in conceptualizing art as a way of knowing. According to Patricia James (2000), one’s lack of understanding about the origin of artistic creation can serve as a creative block for some students. In order to broaden students understanding of artistic processes and the origin of ideas, students were introduced to contemporary artists’ artistic processes. Studying the methods of artists served not only as a model of how students might reflect on their own processes but also as a way for them to contextualize their practice within contemporary artistic discourse, and at times overcome creative blocks. In an effort to better understand these processes, students were invited to keep intense reflective journals throughout the course of one semester describing their artistic processes as they created artwork. I also kept a detailed reflective journal of my artmaking drawing upon a/r/tographic methods described by Rita Irwin (Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, 2008), and Stephanie Springgay (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). In this journal, I also included pedagogical concerns, questions, observations, and insights regarding the ways my role as artist, researcher, and teacher interact and inform my artistic processes.

Personal Creative Narrative

As long as I can remember, I have loved to create. Whether it was designing the next car for my pine wood derby with my dad or making a papier-mâché Medusa headdress for my 4th grade Halloween costume, I have always enjoyed the act of creation. Seeing an idea actualized in
physical form is personally rewarding for me. Despite a lifetime of making things, creation and creativity still hold an element of mystery for me.

Enid Zimmerman (2010) has noted that, “many authors writing about creativity refer to ‘a creative process’ as if there is one means by which students or artists can demonstrate imagination and innovation” (p. 5). Zimmerman goes on to observe that “there are numerous creative processes and real world applications as befit the nature of creativity itself” (p. 5) The following is an effort to understand my own artistic process. I analyzed my process in the creation of a series of sculptures in light of what has been written about creativity preliminary to extending my investigation to my classroom. It is important to note that this investigation is limited and incomplete due to the inherent messiness of the creative act, the passage of time, and the worldview I possess.

After attending my first day of a graduate sculpture course offered at Brigham Young University in the fall of 2009, I was given the assignment to write up a proposal detailing what I would like to create during the course. At first, I was completely overwhelmed with this freedom. When given that much freedom, I was uncertain in which direction I wanted to go. According to Olivia Gude, “anxiety is a necessary component of a truly creative experience,” (Gude, 2010, p. 36). This anxiety was present throughout the entire project as I wrestled with trying to physically create what I envisioned in my head. With this freedom, the only thing I really knew was that I wanted to do something that was personally meaningful. Creativity is based on interests (Csiksentmihalyi, 1997; Freedman, 2010). I needed to find something that I really felt motivated to create. Kerry Freedman (2010) said it well when she stated, “creativity is fundamentally based on desire” (p. 11).
In order to help me identify a personal desire, I started brainstorming by creating a mind map, or visual web of interconnected ideas, centering around an aspect of my life that I enjoy exploring; my childhood family. This conceptual web included the Vietnam War, compulsive hording, memories of building my house with my family, t-shirts, the trailer I grew up in, the number ten (the number of people in my family), and the words enduring, eternal, and crowded. These ideas were then visualized in my sketchbook. From this list, I focused in on the idea of compulsive hording. Growing up I always had to work around my Dad’s compulsive need to save everything. This coupled with the facts that I have seven younger siblings and lived in a single-wide trailer equated to a very crowded living experience. A possible sculpture idea consisted of taking junk and collected objects from my parents’ house and organizing them into geometric forms. For me this was about making order out of chaos, which is what I felt like I had to do growing up. This idea was soon set aside, however, due to the travel constraints involved with traveling back and forth between my childhood home and my current residence; a six hour round trip drive. So with no concrete idea, I retired to bed hoping that some sleep would help me find an idea for my class the next day.

The idea came to me during the night. As I struggled to find sleep, I was inexplicably reminded of the work of contemporary Korean artist Do-Ho Suh. The ideas where fuzzy at first but as I woke up and got ready for the day, ideas started to solidify. The repetitive nature of Suh’s work has always been appealing to me. In several of his pieces, Suh uses multiple small figures to hold up large objects. I liked this idea. For me, these sculptures deal with the idea that many small and weak things can be strong when unified and magnified in purpose as a support system. After looking at Suh’s work, I started looking at my family as a system of support. I quickly connected this idea to that of community. A community serves as a support system that
allows individuals to work together to sustain and support the weights life places upon each of its members. I brainstormed other objects I could create and use to symbolize this idea. After going through several ideas, I finally decided to use tree branches (see figure 1).

![Figure 1: Synergistic Embrace (2010) detail](image)

This picture shows how the cast bronze tree branches were used to create a support system

Next, I needed to find a way to convey the idea that these tree branches were part of a support system where individuals worked together to accomplish great things. As I reflected on support systems and how to represent them, I narrowed my focus on the small southeastern Utah community I grew up in. Growing up in this community helped me understand how important and powerful support systems can be. As a community, we celebrated, worked, and mourned together. I finally decided to use sandstone as a means to convey this idea. The concept was to slice several sandstone boulders into sections and then insert hundreds of cast bronze tree branches in-between each section as a means of support. Both the use of sandstone and aspen tree branches seemed like the perfect fit because they have become personally symbolic of my
hometown and community. As I reflect on the process I went through, I realize the ability to make new connections and synthesize information is a major part of my creative/artistic process.

Richard Florida (2002) points out that creativity “is a matter of sifting through data, perceptions and materials to come up with combinations that are new and useful” (p. 31). For an artist, what is useful is in large part subjective as both the audience and artist make personal judgments on whether or not the artwork is successful. The connections and new understanding continued to occur throughout the process even after the works were completed.

I also discovered another interesting phenomenon, the process of creating the sculptures also required me to rely on personal support systems. For example, the size and weight of the sandstone for one artwork, a six hundred pound boulder (see figure 2), required me to ask for help to even move it. This added another layer of meaning as the artworks became symbols of not only a community’s ability to uphold and sustain but also of my dependency on others for assistance.
help from a fellow classmate and members of my neighborhood just to move it. I have never been a person that asks for help when I am creating. In fact I consider myself a hermit when it comes to my artistic process. This project required me to rely on others in order to complete it. This fueled the meaning of the work and added another layer of significance. In the end, the works became symbols not only of a community’s ability to uphold and sustain but also of my dependency on others for assistance.

Many researchers have identified four steps of the creative process: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (Florida, 2002; Lubart, 2001; Wallas, 1926). Each of these steps manifested itself during my artistic process. Preparation happened when I studied the problem out in my mind through brainstorming and the creation of mind maps in my sketchbook. Incubation transpired during the unconscious hours of sleep followed by illumination or the “Eureka!” step” (Florida, 2002, p. 33; Gude, 2010, p. 36) when I was reminded of the work of Do-Ho Suh and made the connection between his work and support systems. Finally, verification involved the carrying out of the idea. What I found interesting was that these steps weren’t like a checklist that I checked off and never came back to. I found that my mind was constantly studying out the problem and ideas were incubating. Before the project was done several other illuminations presented themselves. The process was less linear and far more complex than this four-step process outlines. Perhaps further research will show that there are times that I follow a different process for creation.

To further explore this process, I continued this introspective dialogue drawing upon a/r/tographic methods within my art classroom. I also expanded this dialogue to include my students’ reflections on their own artistic process within the confines of my Advanced Placement Studio art course.
Creativity, Artistic Process, and Teaching

Despite all the research that has been done, the creative/artistic process still largely proves to be a mystery for both those observing and for the person participating in the process. As an artist and art educator, an understanding of the artistic process is incredibly important. Knowledge of this process informs how and what I teach in my class. It also empowers students with insight into their own artistic process as they help one another progress. Patterns and formulas for success can be identified and shared in an effort to help the creative community of the class move forward with their artistic efforts.

An understanding of artistic processes also helps frame how I teach. Having an understanding of the processes my students go through in creating significant artwork and responding to assignments can help me generate lessons and instruction that facilitate creativity. Embarking on this study, it was my hope that an understanding of what my students do to create would help me assess where I come up short in my instruction and address their individual needs.

Many art educators have pointed out that creativity is one of the most important things the arts teach (Zimmerman, 2009). With this belief, how can we teach the creative process without an understanding of how it happens in the lives of our students? Sydney Walker (2004) states that “substantive knowledge about this process is needed to guide effective planning for artmaking instruction” (p. 6). Once students are more conscious of how they personally create they will be able to make informed decisions as to what to do next in their process of creation.

Students also benefit from a greater understanding of their artistic processes. By tracking their processes, students can recognize patterns in the way they work. It can also help them
recognize problems in their process, thus giving them the opportunity to alter the process in order to be more successful. Formulas for artistic success can also be identified from students analyzing their creative processes in order to help students overcome creative blocks or identify these blocks as an essential precursor to creative success. Walker (2004) observed that when students reflect about their artistic process they gain “an awareness of the conceptual nature of the artmaking process that would most likely have been lost” (p. 8). I also suspect that students tracking their own creative process will both de-mystify the creative act, and heighten the sense of awe associated with their own act of creation.

An additional aim of this research study was to help students understand the nature of creativity and its relationship to their own work. While it is true that some ideas do seem to come out of nowhere, in what has been referred to as an “ahah” moment, many are the result of countless hours of research and investigation, and it is not until one has paid this price that a creative idea presents itself (Johnson, 2010). In other words “a vast amount of preliminary conceptual formulation may precede a work of brief genius” (Mace, 1997, p. 272). It has been pointed out that one of the few universal characteristics of the creative/artistic process is decision making (Mace, 1997, p. 267). Many of my students seem unwilling to make these crucial decisions. It was my hope that exposing my students to multiple and diverse artistic conceptual processes would allow them to make modifications to their own practice in order to be more successful.

My major goal in this study was to help my students and myself as artists make new and insightful connections that would lead to new understandings of what creative/artistic processes may be. This study is not as concerned with discovering concrete answers to what these processes are as it is with striving to “open up conversations” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 118)
on how these processes both inform and are informed by the roles of artist, researcher and teacher/learner.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

As a visual art educator I feel my job is to help my students understand and use artistic processes in order to create artifacts that are personally meaningful. Understanding these processes are important because they provide strategies for solving and discovering personally meaningful artistic problems. Throughout my time teaching I have noticed that many people, including myself, find it hard to describe the artistic or creative process. In an effort to understand the nature of this process, I, along with my students, tracked our process of artistic inquiry. This research study is contextualized by first, looking at what has been said regarding the artistic and creative process, then comparing and contrasting artistic inquiry with other methods of inquiry, and finally analyzing contemporary arts role in art education.

Artistic and Creative Process

Monitoring an art classroom of thirty emotionally charged adolescents is a tricky job. Hands are raised, my last name is blurted out pleading for assistance, and the chatter of the classroom lulls me into a trance. I look over the class knowing that something is not right. I search the room and, with a discerning eye, focus on a student who is obviously not working on the new assignment. When I approach the student to ask if he needs any help he just shrugs and replies that he just does not have any ideas. He goes on to say that he is not creative and that he is just waiting to be inspired. His response is not unique, I have heard it many times, but for some reason this time it makes me stop and think. What is it that he believes creativity to be? I get the impression that many students feel that creativity, like their eye color, is something you are born with; you either have it or you do not. Other students think of it as a sudden spark of inspiration whose fleeting nature is akin to lightning striking; it is unpredictable and comes and goes as it pleases.
Taking a few steps back, to help provide perspective, I analyze this experience from a new angle. I must ask myself what I presume creativity to be. There has been much debate regarding how to define creativity (see Freedman, 2010; Milbrandt & Milbrandt, 2011; Zimmerman, 2009). In fact, after reading numerous articles on the topic of creativity, the only consensus that seems to exist is that there is no consensus on how creativity can or should be defined (Zimmerman, 2009, p. 387). One definition that I find generative defines creativity as a “meaningful response to any situation which calls for finding a problem and solving it in one’s own way” (Wakefield, 1992, p. 13). According to Patricia James (2000), one’s understanding about the origin of creativity can serve as a creative block for some students. James continues, pointing out that this block interferes with the creative process and contributes to a student becoming “confused, conflicted, or stymied in his or her work” (p. 121). Many of my students might need help in overcoming this creative block or inhibitor before they can begin to think they can create. One possible misconception about creativity, I see among my students, is it “is something you should not have to work too hard at” (p. 123). Thoughts like these seem to cause many to give up once things become challenging. Costa (2008) asserts that students “don’t get ideas; they make ideas” (p. 22). Many of my students seem to miss the idea that creativity is an active and constructed process. So what are the processes artists go through in order to make ideas?

Creative Process Past, Present, and Future

Much has been written on the subject of creativity and the creative process especially in recent years. Two complete issues of Art Education have been dedicated to the topic and the 2011 National Art Education Association annual convention in Seattle had as its theme “Creativity, Imagination, and Innovation.” The topics discussed in these forums provide a
glimpse into the role creativity plays in art education today as well as perspective on how it has been addressed in the past.

One of the main issues associated with creativity lies in the lack of consensus as to what exactly it means. Kerry Freedman (2010) points out that, “the term [creativity] and its products have been appropriated and re-appropriated so often and by so many social sectors that it has lost meaning (or lost power by having too much meaning)” (p. 9). Melody and Lanny Milbrandt (2011) agree stating that “creativity remains an elusive concept” (p. 8). In an effort to demystify what is meant by creativity, Milbrandt & Milbrandt (2011) highlight three major categories of creativity definitions: domain-changing creativity, creativity as self-expression and meaning making, and creativity as problem solving. I would like to focus on the first two.

Domain-changing creativity was perhaps best championed by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the development of his systems model. He defined creativity as “any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 28). In order for something to be deemed creative it must pass the scrutiny of experts within the domain for which it belongs. This “necessitates in-depth understanding and skills within a field in order for creative acts or products to be recognized” (Milbrandt & Milbrandt, 2011, p. 9). Under this definition of creativity, “children and youth would not be considered creative because they will not be likely to nor expected to change any domain or discipline” (p. 9). Although this definition seems unproductive within art education as many educators consider children capable of being creative, “many art teachers subscribe (consciously or not) to the domain criteria for creativity” (p. 9) when they require students to obtain basic technical skills before providing them with opportunities to experience “expressive
or open-ended assignments” (p. 10). Perhaps a shift from domain change to “classroom-change” would prove helpful in guiding art educators teaching, curriculum, and evaluation (p. 10).

For the influential art educator Victor Lowenfeld, “creativity was intimately associated with an openness to individual experience and exhibited freedom, playfulness, and uniqueness relative to individual purposes” (Burton, 2009, p. 323). Lowenfeld placed a premium on self-expression and a child’s search for meaning. “He argued that creative practice contributed to the development of a harmonious personality at the heart of which was a flexible mind able to empathize with and be sensitive to the needs of others” (p. 324). Art served as a means for understanding self and others. Rather than placing emphasis on the technical abilities possessed by artists, Lowenfeld felt that art education should focus on “the continuing need of all young people to make sense of a complex and confusing world, of the need to empower young minds with aliveness and flexibility, to harness their inherent creative capacities to this end” (p. 335).

Domain-changing creativity and Lowenfeld’s claim for full and complete self-expression seem to be at opposite ends the creative continuum. One emphasizes the acquisition of artistic skills and an understanding of an artistic domain while the other focuses on artistic freedom and personal meaning making. I question why we cannot do both. Why can we not teach skills through concepts that are personally meaningful for students and in a way that allows students to express, interact, and understand the world in which they live in new ways?

Although some debate as to the difference between the creative and artistic process exists, in the context of this study the two terms will be used interchangeably and will be defined as “decisions and actions that are both purposeful and not predictable . . . It is an individual and a social process during which materials, forms, and cultural conventions are fused
with the artist’s personal history and emotions. Something is created that has never before existed in exactly that form.” (James, 2000, p. 115). One of the most prevalent ideas about the nature of this process is that the process is universal for everyone. The psychologist Graham Wallas was one of the first to present such a model for creativity. Wallas (1926) explained the creative process in terms of 4 stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Preparation involves defining and setting up a problem. In stage two, incubation, information obtained in stage one is unconsciously organized and elaborated. Illumination occurs when an idea emerges. Finally, stage four is verification where the idea is evaluated, elaborated, and refined. Although written over eighty years ago, Wallas’ stages of the creative process are still referred to and used today by researchers and art educators (see Lubart, 2001; Marshall, 2010).

While these stages present a good place to start in our understanding of the process artists and scientists go through, there has been the argument that Wallas’ stages provide a linear, simplified, and superficial view of a much more complicated process (see Cawelti, Rappaport, & Wood, 1992; Eindhoven & Vinacke, 1952; Getzels & Csiksentmihalyi, 1976; Guilford, 1950; Lubart, 2001; Mace, 1997). Studies have pointed out that the creative process especially for artists, consists of several processes occurring simultaneously (Cawelti et al., 1992). In their study of the process undertaken by painters, the psychologists Eindhoven and Vinacke (1952) pointed out that the creative process “is a dynamic whole in which the processes which have been labeled “stages” are interwoven in complex and continuous fashion” (p. 164). Getzels and Csiksentmihalyi (1976) added that “in a creative process, stages of problem definition and problem solution need not be compartmentalized” (p. 90).

Research has also pointed out that the artistic process changes depending on the task being completed and on the individual completing it (see Cawelti et al., 1992; Eindhoven &
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Vinacke, 1952; Lubart, 2001; Mace, 1997). For example, Mace (1997) observed that “the nature of the medium that the artist uses influences the art-making process itself” (p. 273). Not only does the process vary from person to person (see Cawelti et al., 1992; Eindhoven & Vinacke, 1952), but there can be more than one creative process for the same individual (Lubart, 2001). Recognizing the complexity of this process, some researchers have argued that looking for a universal process is reductionist and could actually be detrimental toward our understanding of creativity because “such models misrepresent the multifaceted, highly complex, unpredictable activities required to create” (Cawelti et al., 1992, p. 93; see also Eindhoven & Vinacke, 1952; Guilford, 1950).

Even though psychologists and art educators have undertaken much research, many have argued for the need to conduct more research on the artistic process from the point of view of the artist. Mary-Anne Mace (1997) from the University of Canterbury said “there is little research into the details of the creative process based on the observation of creative production by those involved” (p. 266). Graeme Sullivan (2006), echoed these thoughts when he stated, “what artists do in the practice of creating artworks, and the processes, products, proclivities, and contexts that support this activity is less well studied from the perspective of the artist” (p. 26).

It is within this framework and context that this study positions itself, understanding that the process is diverse and individual. For these reasons, this study does not aim to ascertain a standardized method of creation. Instead the hope is to gain individually meaningful insights and understandings as participants reflect on the processes they use to create and the contexts in which their processes emerge.
Artistic Inquiry as Research Method

Brent Davis, Dennis Sumara and Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2008) point out that “every act of knowing is partial” (p. 7). Knowledge’s partiality is twofold. First, all knowledge is biased (pp. 7-9). Whether we are aware of it or not we all perceive the world in a particular and unique way. Our individual world view serves as a filter in helping us understand life experiences. Life experiences in turn help reshape our individual world view. Where we grew up, how we were raised, and the people we interact with all help shape this world view. It’s not a matter of nature versus nurture, but a combination of the two that really informs how we see the world. Our knowledge is selected and interpreted using the world view we possess. These biases aren’t necessarily all bad, but they are important to identify and acknowledge. As a teacher these biases present themselves in what I decide to teach and what I decide to leave out, how I present the information to my class, and how I react to what my students produce and give back.

Second, all knowledge is partial because it is incomplete (pp. 7-9). It is a small part of the larger whole. No matter how much we study, memorize, and explore we will never have a complete understanding of everything. Even supposed facts can change. Think of the western world’s view that the world was flat. This “fact” was accepted as truth until it was shown to actually be incomplete and wrong. So it is with all information. The more we know the more we know how much there is left to learn.

With this understanding, art provides another view to understand the world around us. This view is not better or worse than those obtained through other forms of inquiry, just different. It is in this differentness that the true value of arts based research is found. It has been said that sometimes in order to understand something you just need to see something from a new angle. Arts based research serves as just such a lens to view occasions in a new way.
Educator Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) has noted that “some knowings cannot be conveyed through language” (p. 156) and as such invite us to “acknowledge the existence of forms of knowing that escape the efforts of language to reference a ‘consensual’, ‘literal’, ‘real’ world” (p. 156). In order to access these forms of knowing, alternative modes of investigation/inquiry might need to be used. Elliot Eisner (2006) points out that, “the arts provide access to forms of experience that are either un-securable or much more difficult to secure through other representational forms” (p. 11). I believe that the visual arts provide unique access to these other forms of knowing. Art making is a form of inquiry comparable to other research methods in its ability to produce new understanding and transform human perception. Much has been written regarding art’s role as a research method, with particular emphasis on how it can help explain educational phenomena (Eisner, 2006; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; O’Donoghue, 2009; Sullivan, 2006). Understanding how artistic processes of inquiry compare and relate to more traditional forms of disciplinary-based scientific research is important in order to position the process of art-making as a legitimate research method.

Graeme Sullivan (2006), from Penn State University, has stated that “research is a transformative act that has an impact on the researcher and the researched” (p. 22). Through the research process both the researcher and the researched are changed because “creative and critical inquiry is a reflexive process” (p. 28). Sullivan went on to point out that this change can occur through an encounter with an art object or a research text “as prior knowledge is troubled by new possibilities” (p. 28). This ‘troubled’ state creates new spaces for understanding as “meaning is constituted between beings” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 108). As artists and viewers find themselves “in-between” (see Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005) space they are invited to make connections with the “adjacent possible”
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(Johnson, 2010). The meanings created in these “in-between” spaces of prior understanding serve as the impetus for the creation of new knowledge. Sullivan (2006) has pointed out that this is one of the major tenants of all research (p. 22).

Teaching and Contemporary Art

The influential art educator Arthur Efland (Efland, 1976) published a landmark article in which he defined what he called “the school art style.” According to Efland, what was taught in the art classroom differed from what was happening outside of the classroom. Efland argued that unlike “core” subjects that address skills and issues that are necessary for students success outside the classroom, art was used as a release valve to help make the “school culture bearable through providing a somewhat mindless release. At the same time, through producing art that looks good, school art fosters a false sense that creative and humanistic aspirations and pursuits are the centering concerns of art education” (Anderson & Milbrandt, 1998, p. 13). Art taught this way takes on certain characteristics according to the art educators Tom Anderson and Melody Milbrandt (1998). School art is “free from cognitive strain” (p. 14). It becomes primarily a studio activity in which students focus on manual skills. “Skills such as mastering the elements and principles of design and manipulation of media become the focus rather than framing art instruction as creative, cognitive, conceptual activity in which students develop skills and techniques to solve art and life-centered issues” (p. 14). Art taught this way puts a premium on ensuring that art “looks good without being too conceptually and manually taxing” (p. 14). I, like other art educators (Anderson & Milbrandt, 1998; Barney, 2009; Sullivan, 2006; Wilson, 2003), envision an art curriculum that is more than just messing around with media but that also messes around with ideas connecting with students life’s in meaningful ways.
The “school art style” can still be seen within art classrooms today (Anderson & Milbrandt, 1998). Teaching contemporary art is one way to ensure that the art classroom moves away from the school art style, and back to more authentic practices found in the visual arts. The art educator Brent Wilson (2003) points out that there is a gap between what is happening in the contemporary art classroom and what is happening in the contemporary art world. Jeff Adams (2005) points out that if this gap is not addressed it could affect the legitimacy of art education as a whole. He states, the that there is a “necessity to demonstrate that the practices that are found in the classroom may be seen as part of the wider contemporary art movement, and not merely an obscure adjunct operating within a proscribed institutional pedagogy that often prohibits both legitimacy and autonomy” (p. 24). Desai (2002) also contends that the “epistemological shift in contemporary art, calls upon art teachers to begin a critical dialogue with students about the nature of art today” (p. 319).

Olivia Gude (2009) stresses the importance of incorporating contemporary art and practices into the curriculum in her Lowenfeld Lecture given in 2009. She stated, “we cannot hope to understand the present, or the past in its fullness and complexity, without attuning ourselves to our times through contemporary art and related theoretical perspectives” (Knowing and Not Knowing as democratic responsibility section, para 2). She goes on to point out that, contemporary art and theory enables us to create interdisciplinary mental models of the psychological, the spiritual, the social, the physical world. In challenging outmoded world views, contemporary art prepares people to engage, to shape, (and sometimes to preserve) aspects of our ever changing world (Knowing and Not Knowing as democratic responsibility section, para 3).
I endeavor and aspire to create just such an environment within my classroom. As part of this study, we as a class focused on artistic processes of contemporary artists (see Chapter 3).
Chapter 3: Research Methods Used in This Study

A/r/tography

A/r/tography is a form of art based research. Mel Alexenberg (2008) summarizes much of what a/r/tography is, stating:

a/r/tography is a hybrid form of action research that creates rigour through the exercise of continuous reflexivity, discourse analysis and hermeneutic enquiry. A/r/tographers search for new ways to understand realms of learning at the interface between their own art making, research and teaching through attention to memory, identity, reflection, meditation, storytelling, interpretation and representation (p. 232).

A large part of this methodology looks at the complex and interwoven relationship between artist, researcher, and teacher. It also focuses on the space created in-between these roles. “Artist-researcher-teachers dwell within ‘in-between’ spaces, spaces that are neither this nor that, but this and that” (Pinar, 2004, p. 9).

Rita Irwin and Stephanie Springgay (2008), both major contributors to a/r/tographic inquiry, point out “Whereas many forms of research are concerned with reporting knowledge that already exists or finding knowledge that needs to be uncovered, action research and a/r/tography are concerned with creating the circumstances to produce knowledge and understanding through inquiry-laden processes” (p. 111). For teacher-researchers, these “circumstances” are developed within teaching practice to allow both teacher and student to “produce knowledge” and uncover new understandings.

Irwin and Springgay (2008) also point out that whereas for disciplinary-based scientific research “theory and research serves to find answers to questions” (p. 109), practice based
researchers and a/r/tographers “are interested in an ongoing quest for understanding, a questing if you will” (p. 109). This questing is carried out using three forms of thought “knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poesis)” (p. 110).

A/r/tography combines visual art and writing as a way of uncovering new understandings. Arts based research is grounded in the belief that the certain ways of knowing cannot be understood through traditional forms of inquiry (Eisner, 2006). Art presents an alternative and complementary approach to obtaining insight and understanding pertaining to educational phenomena. The coupling of art with writing creates new ways of experiencing and understanding the world around us and the difficult subject matter that any one method of research would prove incapable of representing.

I was drawn to a/r/tography because I wanted to explore art making on a personal level. I have always lacked a certain amount of confidence with respect to my own art. I have always and continue to reconsider my role as artist. Am I an artist? How does one define an artist? A/r/tography provides a way for me to understand this role in my life and how it interacts and relates to my roles as teacher and researcher while also allowing me to revisit my artistic self through artistic production.

A/r/tography also allows me, as a teacher, to enlist my students as fellow artist-researchers for this study. The curriculum theorist, William Pinar (2004) describes what a/r/tography does and the effect is has on students:

A/r/tography provokes questioning, wondering, and wandering that brackets the everyday and conventional as artist-researcher-teachers study and perform knowledge, teaching,
and learning from multiple perspectives, enabling students to emerge from submerged realities and to see themselves and art, as if for the first time (p. 23).

My hope was that the “submerged realities” of my students art making would present themselves as we researched together the processes we use while creating art.

**Project Overview**

This study took place at Mountain View High School in Orem, Utah. Study participants were Juniors and Seniors enrolled in the Advanced Placement studio art course I teach. This class was chosen because class participants had demonstrated intrinsic interest and dedication toward the visual arts. This level of dedication was desirable to help facilitate thoughtful and meaningful artistic introspection.

In an effort to make the private process of artistic creation public, students along with myself recorded our creative processes. These recordings included decisions, changes, and insights obtained by reflecting on our art-making process during the creation of one artwork. Students were given a new sketchbook at the beginning of the year. At the end of each class period students would take a few minutes to reflect on the processes they engaged in during that class period.

Throughout the unit, students were exposed to contemporary artists’ artistic processes. These processes served not only as a model for students to reflect on their own processes but also as a way for students to contextualize their practice within contemporary artistic discourse.

At the end of the in class assignment, students analyzed their process journals by creating a mind map of their process. It was important to me to have the students analyze their own process. The mind map served as a visual diagram of the process each student went through and
as a way for my students to (re)search the process of their own doing. This mind map also served as a resource to help both myself and other students understand the processes each student used. In other words, students created a visualization about the process they went through in the creation of an artwork or series of artwork.

This unit concluded with an art show in which each student displayed their in-class artwork and the mind map that was inspired by their personal artistic process. Each pair of artworks was accompanied by an artist statement.

Data collected for this study consisted of the following: process journals (both the students and mine), mind maps, conversations and observations I recorded in a daily reflective journal, and student artwork.

**Artists Highlighted as Part of this Study**

The following contemporary artists are excellent examples of artist-researchers. Their work serves as both evidence of research and as research itself. They were among several artists students were exposed to during this study to help them reimage what artmaking might be.

**Walton Ford**

Walton Ford is a contemporary painter who does large scale watercolors of animals using traditional natural history artistic techniques. His work has become more widely known and appreciated due to his inclusion in the second season of the Public Broadcasting Station’s series entitled *Art:21 - Art of the 21st Century* (*Art: 21 art of the twenty-first century - Season two,* 2003).

As an educator I am always looking for artwork that will connect with and interest my students. Many of my students come in to class with the mindset that in order for something to
be art it must look like something, meaning life-like or representational. Walton Ford’s artwork caters to my students’ aesthetic sensibilities by providing representational, mimetic paintings of animals finished with extreme attention to detail. However, more importantly to me for this research study, Ford’s art also offers an element of conceptual engagement that may help my students make the transition from thinking of art as merely messing around with media to thinking that art also messes around with thoughts and ideas (Sullivan, 2006, p. 30).

Ford’s openness about his artistic process provides an opportunity to gain insight into how it is a process of inquiry/research. He has described his process as research. “I am doing the kind of research that legitimate natural history artists do” (Sollins, 2003, p. 124). His artistic mode of inquiry/research serves as “a process” for understanding and his paintings are “a product” of this understanding that provide “opportunities for others to come to know” (O’Donoghue, 2009, p. 357). Dónal O’Donoghue (2009) from the University of British Columbia has pointed out that we should think about arts-based research in such a way: as both a process and a product.

Walton Ford’s artmaking process consists of extensive research both of historical events and the traditional processes used in creating natural history artwork. This research also involves drawing as a form of understanding the subject matter that he is painting. He spends hours sketching from images or dioramas in an effort to understand the animal he is going to produce. He uses animals as a metaphor for mankind. He uses history to subvert history. In order to do this he has to understand history. For example, in his painting *Falling Bough* (2002) Ford depicts the demise and extinction of the passenger pigeon. A giant tree branch covered in writhing passenger pigeons seems to almost hover as if caught in slow motion as it plummets to the barren landscape below. These “were the most numerous birds that ever lived in the history of the
planet,” Ford recalls, “billions upon billions of birds” (Sollins, 2003, p. 130). After extensive research and reading Ford discovered accounts describing the birds as “repellent” these stories included “the fact that they would eat enormous amounts of food, regurgitate and then keep eating. They could clean farmers out, and there were times when they were a menace” (Hanley, 2006, section 6, para 2). From these accounts he decided to depict the passenger pigeon’s extinction as a natural consequence of their vile actions rather than a malicious act carried out by man. This subverted view of the historical fact that man did cause their demise confronts the viewer with information that he or she will then need to reconcile with what he/she already knows. This reconciliation is transformative. The viewer is no longer the person they were before they encountered the painting. They have changed. As has been mentioned, this transformative quality is one of the central aims of all research (Sullivan, 2006). Ford’s paintings are meticulously drawn and every effort is given to ensure that it looks like an authentic Audubon field study. He rewrites history to make us confront the past in a new way which leads to the viewer being changed. He is not concerned about creating paintings that are so straight forward that there is no room for viewer interpretation. In fact, he wants there to be multiple interpretations for each of his works.

**Mark Dion**

Mark Dion’s artwork is hard to describe without seeing it. He creates installations and sculptures that are often interactive. When talking about his artwork he has commented that his artistic process involves “shadowing a methodology.” These methodologies include zoology, archeology, and biology. Much of his art deals with ecological issues. Although he used many of the same methods accepted by these various scientific disciplines, he is one the first to point out the differences between what he does and what scientists do. “Well, one of the fundamental
problems is that even if scientists are good at what they do, they’re not necessarily adept in the field of representation. They do not have access to the rich set of tools, like irony, allegory and humor, which are the meat and potatoes of art and literature” (Dion, 1997, p. 11).

Dion’s work was chosen for this study because it presents a clear connection between traditional research and artmaking. By examining Dion’s work, students were able to see in very clear ways how the research Dion undergoes prior to creating an installation informs how and what Dion ultimately creates. Dion’s work also introduces to students the genre of installation art. For many of my students this is a completely foreign concept that really pushes the limits of what they consider art.

**Tools for Analysis**

Data collected from the students’ process journals and my reflective journal was analyzed using data visualization. Data was visualized in two ways. First, I along with my students created a mind map of the process(es) used in the creation of one artwork or series of artwork. Then a separate artwork or visualization was created that reflects insights and understandings gained through this process. A mind map is a diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks, or other items linked to and arranged around a central key word or idea. These forms of visualization come with certain advantages, disadvantages, and risks. A mind map is valuable at showing “complex set[s] of relationships” (Gray & Malins, 2004, p. 146). This was particularly useful within the context of this study because the artistic process is often nonlinear and complex. Connections and sources of inspiration in the artistic process were also easy to identify as lines signifying connections are drawn between various ideas and concepts. By mapping out the process undertaken in the creation of an artwork, insights came to light that might have been overlooked. Visualization can also promote and “encourage discussion” (p. 107) because
information can be accessed quickly and is open to some form of viewer interpretation. This openness toward interpretation can also be looked at as a disadvantage as information intended to be communicated by the mind maps might be missed or misinterpreted.

I framed my interpretations of the data using a/r/tographic renderings. Rita Irwin and Stephanie Springgay (2008), both best known for their work in a/r/tography, define renderings as "concepts that help a/r/tographers portray the conditions of their work for others" (p. 116). Irwin and Springgay go on to describe six examples of renderings: contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor and metonymy, openings, reverberations, and excess. Contiguity helps us understand "ideas within a/r/tography that lie adjacent to one another, touch one another, or exist in the presence of one another" (p. 116). This includes for example the relationship between artist, researcher and teacher. This rendering also looks at the connection between art and "graphy" or writing. "Living inquiry is a life commitment to the arts and education through acts of inquiry" (p. 116). This life commitment looks at life and living as a form of inquiry. By using metaphors and metonymies as a form of analyzing and interpreting data, new connections and understanding can and will be made. A/r/tographers look at research as a means of "open[ing] up conversations and relationships instead of informing others about what has been learned" (p. 118). This is what is meant by the rendering openings. The rendering reverberations refers to a "dynamic movement, dramatic or subtle, that forces a/r/tographers to shift their understandings of phenomenon" (p. 118). The last rendering Irwin and Springgay highlight is excess. Excess refers to "that which is created when control and regulation disappear and we grapple with what lies outside the acceptable" (p. 119). I will use these renderings as lenses from which to describe, interpret, and draw conclusions from my collected data, generating new understandings about the artistic process itself.
Chapter 4: Results, Discussion, and Excess

I Am the Process of My Own Doing

One day while parked on the freeway due to an accident, I happened to grab one of the many books scattered upon the passenger seat of my car. I was flipping through it when I stumbled upon the following poem written by Alex de Cosson (2004) that seemed to encapsulate the entirety of my research project.

I am
(researching)
The process
Of my own doing (p. 132)

This small poem served as a personal credo for what I was doing on a daily basis. I am defined by the processes and actions I undertake daily. What I do becomes me. This serendipitous moment highlights how unpredictable insights and inspiration can manifest themselves throughout the course of both research and art making. While the purpose of this study was to shed light on the processes artists, specifically high school age artists, experience while creating artwork, I was surprised at how much of what I was doing seemed self-referential. Rather than a study of my students artistic processes this became a study of “my own doings” which in turn define me.

I will first look at how art making and teaching can lead to feelings of uncertainty, doubt and anxiety. These feelings if kept unchecked seemed to lead to inactivity and stifled creativity. I will then discuss how the concept of pretending was used by me and my students to respond to these feelings.
Not Knowing

Not knowing is an important part of my teaching and art making. There are so many times as an artist and teacher where I am uncertain about what is going to happen. Whether it is when I introduce a new lesson or start a new project, I have found that often I do not have a clear picture of what will occur. This uncertainty can lead to feelings of anxiety which I will discuss latter.

These feelings of uncertainty and not knowing presented themselves several times throughout this project. For example, for one of the projects we did in class I invited a former student into class to help instruct students how to make felt finger-puppets. She had expertise in this genre, making and selling several soft sculptures over the Internet. I thought it would be fun to try something new with my classes so I asked her if she would be willing to teach me along with the class how to sew. Shortly after we started this project in class, I reflected, “One of the things I love about this project is that it removes and disrupts the traditional relationship between teacher and student. I have never made one of these before. In fact I have only sewed a few times in my life. So instead of instructing the class on something I know, we as a class are discovering solutions together.” Plunging into the depths of the unknown along with my students was frightening, but at the same time exhilarating and it reminded me of my first few years teaching, “It is exciting to learn along with the class. This is what I had to do the first few years teaching and I think it made me a better teacher.” Why is it that not knowing made me a better teacher?

At first glance, it seems counterintuitive to regard not knowing as helpful rather than debilitating. As I reflect on my own schooling, I cannot really think of a time where I was rewarded for not knowing. I was expected to know the answers for a test for example. As soon as I was out of school and started my first year teaching, however, I seemed to be put in countless
situations where my not knowing was made manifest. The classes I taught were many and varied. I had six different classes ranging from Ceramics and Art Foundations to Painting and Advanced Placement Studio Art. My personal studio experience was based heavily in sculpture and ceramics. I had the least amount of experience in painting. This was the class that I was the most nervous about. How could I teach something I did not even know myself? Not knowing forced me out of my comfort zone as I attempted to teach myself everything I could about how to paint. It was stressful and hard but things happened in that class that I could never have expected. I learned along with my students. Not knowing forced me to research and learn things that I probably would not have if I only taught things I had already felt comfortable with. In other words, not knowing forced me out of my comfort zone.

Being comfortable is one of my biggest fears. One of the things I love most about my job is that it forces me outside of my comfort zone. I am forced to learn new things with my students. When I am comfortable as a teacher, I feel as though I am stagnant. When I am not growing, I become stale. Not knowing also is important for me as a researcher and as an artist. As a researcher, it seems entirely pointless to research something you are certain you know everything about. Not knowing leads to questions and these questions lead to research which can in turn lead to new questions. As an artist, to feel comfortable can also be dangerous. If I am playing it safe and not taking risks, am I pushing myself to grow?

As I reflected on the importance of not knowing in my teaching and artistic practice, I wrote, “Stepping out of my comfort zone keeps me fresh as a teacher and artist. It’s a balancing act though. Too big of a step can lead me to frustration and disappointment where as with too little of a change I remain stale.” However, not knowing is uncomfortable and can lead to anxiety.
Anxiety

One of the things I've noticed about art is that all truly creative acts seem to carry with them, some form of anxiety. As an artist, I experience moments of uncertainty throughout my process of creation. This uncertainty brings with it anxiety. Olivia Gude (2010) has pointed out that “anxiety is a necessary component to a truly creative experience” (p. 36). Making art is scary; it's uncomfortable because there are so many times where you are uncertain where you are going to end up. For example, in my own art, there have been times where I have had an idea of a really interesting sculpture but I am completely unsure on how to actualize, or physically create this artwork. There's no one right answer. In fact, sometimes art is not about finding answers at all. It's about discovering new questions. This anxiety manifested itself many times in my students’ process journals. One student, Helen, considering the difficulties associated with a particular class project, reflected that the hardest part was “thinking of how to portray what I want to portray on the paper. In fact, my initial idea has altered again and again. I am still not exactly sure how it’s going to turn out.” The uncertainty of not knowing how a project will turn out presented challenges to other students as well. Monica commented to me after class one day that she was afraid to start a portrait assignment because she “did not want to mess it up.” I encountered this sentiment time and time again throughout this study. Students were overcome by fear of failure to the point where they did not do anything. Another student, Sam, put it this way in her process journal: “Today so far all I’ve done is think. I want to start today but I am nervous. This project is hard . . . I am second guessing my idea. It’s not a bad idea; it just might not turn out well.” Sam’s anxiety seemed to lead to doubt which in turn led to inaction. However, I propose anxiety can be overcome by pretending which facilitates risk taking and production, as
demonstrated by Kelsey who both felt “fake” as an artist and continually produced artwork throughout the semester (see figure 3 and appendix A).

Figure 3: An example from Kelsey’s artistic series

Although Kelsey expressed feeling of doubt and of being a “fraud,” she pushed through them creating a conceptually engaging and visually dynamic series of artwork centered on the concept of individuality.

**Artist and Teacher as Pretender**

While talking to one of my students, Kelsey, after school one day, she confided in me that she just did not feel like an artist. She went on to explain that she felt many of her ideas were unoriginal and she was simply playing the part of a “fake” artist. Her feelings surprised me.
Kelsey is one of the most creative and inspired students I have taught. In fact, this year she was selected to represent our school’s visual art department in a state wide-student scholastic competition based on her artistic merit. For the three years I have known her she is constantly filling sketchbooks and scouring the Internet for anything and everything related to art. Many of the ideas she finds this way manifest themselves in her artwork. The idea that she did not see herself as an artist was curious. How many of my other students share similar thoughts and feelings of being “fake” artists?

With this question on my mind I reviewed my own reflective journal and noticed and I too experienced and at times continue to experience similar feelings of acting like something I am not. I feel like I pretend. To pretend is “to allege or process, especially insincerely or falsely” ("pretend," n.d.). I am pretending to be a researcher, a teacher, an artist. At first, I considered these feelings of pretending as something to be hidden and kept private. One day I wrote in my journal, “. . . [there is a] part of me that feels like a fraud. There are many times that I feel that if people only knew me better they would realize I am not a real artist or a good art teacher.” I also could not help but feel ashamed for feeling this way. The more I interacted with my students and caught a glimpse of their process the more I realized that many of them were struggling with these same ideas of pretending.

Perhaps pretending is not something to be ashamed of or something that secures the fact that you are not an artist, but instead something that is part of what being an artist is. As I have pondered this, I realize that I pretend to be all sorts of things throughout the course of my day. There are times that I pretend to be a teacher. Through the course of my research I have definitely felt more than a little unsure about my role as a researcher. On one particularly trying day I reflected in my journal, “I am discouraged as to what I am doing as a researcher. This
intimidation and nervousness is debilitating. What am I doing and how does it relate to
a/r/tography? I do not know where I am going with this research. What will happen next?” In
many ways I was playing the role of researcher. These occasions of pretending allowed me to
suspend disbelief in myself and overcome the anxiety associated with not knowing and continue
to produce, teach, and research. In this sense pretending becomes a positive descriptor.

These feelings of intimidation, nervousness, and not knowing what would happen next,
were not exclusive to my role as researcher. These feelings overlapped and highlighted
connections between my teaching and art making. As a teacher, I am continually put in situations
of uncertainty. I remember as a first year teacher feeling more than a little unprepared to teach a
painting class. In college, I had had very little experience painting, spending the majority of my
time working in three-dimensions. As I attempted to prepare what I might teach in my painting
class, I felt extremely ill-prepared and unqualified. How could I teach something to my class that
I did not know or feel confident in? One day while expressing these feelings of doubt to a
colleague, he suggested that I just act like I know what I am doing. If I played the part of teacher,
students would assume the part of students and we would both learn. I took this advice to heart
and as I reflect back on this I realize I was pretending to be a painting teacher. I did not know
what would happen. I simply showed up and gave my class the best I had at that moment.
Pretending in this case enabled me to teach something that I felt unqualified to teach. The best
thing about it was that it worked. My students learned how to paint along with me. This insight
has impacted my teaching practice as I look for more opportunities to teach alongside my
students. Moments of self-doubt continue to creep into my teaching practice but pretending
seems to be one way I have at coping.
Apron of reflection

Recognizing that these feelings were widespread, I was convinced that many of them felt as alone as I did for having these feelings of self-doubt and inauthenticity. I strongly desired to share with my students my thoughts and feelings in an effort to help make sense of these complex and potentially detrimental emotions. Olivia Gude (2010) seems to agree stating that “as fellow travelers in the creative process we must acknowledge the dilemma, the potential for suffering, and provide a calm witnessing and emotional acceptance that allows students to manage their anxieties and move forward in the process” (p. 36). She goes on to say, “Discussing and sharing these to-be-expected emotional consequences of creative activity prepares students to accept the complexity of emerging feelings with the self and as manifested by other members of their creative community” (p. 36). One day I reflected on what could happen if I shared these ideas with my students. Perhaps confronting these negative feelings publically will bring about new understandings and help me overcome them or be more patient with myself knowing it is part of the process. I knew after reading my students art journals that many of my students have similar thoughts about their own art. “As a teacher, it is intimidating to share with them that I have similar thoughts and feelings. Will sharing these personal insights with them make them look at me differently? Will it help or hurt them?” In the end I decided that it would be unfair of me to not share with them my insecurities. “The more I think about it the more it almost seems unfair for me not to share with them what they are sharing with me. How can I expect them to be honest and sincere if I am not willing to be honest and sincere with them?” This was a critical turning point in my research. My notions of what it meant to be a teacher were challenged as I reflected on why I was so nervous to share with my class. I realized that unbeknownst to me I had adopted the notion of a teacher as infallible. This definition is as constraining as it is flawed.
As a way of confronting my insecurities, I created the Apron of Reflection. This served as a way to make public my private although not unique feelings of pretending.

These thoughts lead to the creation of an artwork called the Apron of Reflection (see figure 4). I wanted to share these ideas with my students making my private insecurities as artist, researcher, and teacher public. To this end, I sat down and attempted to create a list of all of these thoughts and feelings. This in and of its self was therapeutic. In my process journal I reflected, “I think that it will be important for me to face my fears and come to grips with the negative thoughts that we all have at times. I mean we all wear these fears and insecurities all the time. They are, however, hidden from view for the most part.” Ironically many times due the fact that they are insecurities we feel like everyone can see them and are aware of what is wrong with

Figure 4: Apron of Reflection

As a way of confronting my insecurities, I created the Apron of Reflection. This served as a way to make public my private although not unique feelings of pretending.
us. The list I compiled was used to create the design that was screen printed on an apron I wore to class while I taught. I loved the analogy that the apron created as I wore my insecurities, claiming them, and truly owning them. The act of wearing these in front of my students was significant. What would happen? How would my students react?

Wearing the apron has proved empowering. Pretending to be an artist and teacher has shifted from an insecurity and weakness into a strength. The apron facilitates conversations with students about the insecurities I and many other artists and teachers share. Many of these things are topics that I have never before talked about with my students and as a result I feel like the dynamics of my class have changed. I look at my role as teacher differently. Rather than being the all-knowing sage on the stage, I am a teacher who is continually learning with my students as I reflect on what it means to be a teacher and artist.

**Curriculum considerations for not knowing and anxiety**

Understanding that anxiety and discomfort are important parts of the artistic process I reflect on how this might affect my teaching. It’s tempting as a teacher to remove feelings of not knowing and anxiety from the classroom by supplying a prescribed list of instructions that are fail-proof. There is comfort in knowing what students’ final artwork will look like. This method ensures that all students are successful in producing a product, but removes the anxiety that authentic creation carries with it. Teaching in this manner, am I really preparing my students to be an artist if I haven't provided them with opportunities to feel anxiety and discomfort?

As a teacher that's what I try to help my students experience: the uncertainty of authentic artistic creation. Rather than eliminating anxiety from the art curriculum it seems more beneficial to allow students opportunities to experience it and then discuss ways of dealing with
it. It is uncomfortable to teach this way because there is uncertainty as to the success of a project.

However, the best lessons I teach are the ones where I do not know exactly what my students will produce. Where I am uncertain what will happen because of open ended possibilities. Teaching this way is not necessarily easy.

**Contiguity between Artist, Researcher and Teacher**

This study helped me reconsider, rediscover, and reexamine my roles as an artist, researcher, and teacher.

For example, the feeling I had of not knowing led me to consider a potential conflict between being a researcher and teacher. I reflected, “There seems to be an ethical dilemma regarding how I separate my researcher and teacher self. How do I reconcile the way I have traditionally defined who a teacher is, someone who takes an active part in helping students alter behavior, with the role of being a researcher that is not meant to be involved but to just observe and then collect data. Maybe I need to re-conceptualize my definitions of what teacher and researcher are?” I was unsure as to what my role actually was. As a teacher, I continually look for opportunities to help my students. Many times this requires me to intervene when I see something headed in a potentially wrong direction and help a student make necessary course corrections. For this project, I was uncertain whether I should do this when I read through my students’ process journals. The researcher part of me at first wanted to take a step back and purely observe and record what happened. This disconnectedness conflicted with my teacher self who wanted to give constructive feedback in order to help my students. In the end, I tried to create a place between teacher and researcher for me to inhabit. I had to try to be both a researcher and teacher.
I also noticed a connection between my artist self that my teacher self. One day while I was reflecting about my process while working on a ceramic sculpture I recorded the following insight, “I start with an idea [of what I want to create] but that idea changes a lot from the initial idea. In some ways so much so that it would be hard to see the original idea at all. For me, planning beforehand was minimal. There was a starting point with a fuzzy idea of where I was going. The destination changed several times as part of my process.” Sometimes I follow this same process in my teaching. I have a general concept, a “fuzzy idea” idea if you will, of what I am going to teach but it is not solidified. In my journal I put it this way, “I really did not know where this project was going when I started but I adapted as I went. In this way it is similar to the way I make some of my artwork. Taking an idea and going with it. I am impulsive and do very little formal planning as a teacher.” This presents challenges and problems as a teacher because so many times I feel I am told to be less impulsive and more structured and planned out. Many of my administrators, for example, when they come in for a classroom observation want detailed objectives written out for what I will be teaching that day. Sometimes in my classroom this just isn’t how I work as a teacher. There are times I have a general idea of what I want to teach. A starting point so to speak. The ideas might come from an artwork I saw over the weekend or a seemingly random idea that came to me in the shower. Often, I do not even spend a lot of time fleshing out that idea before I present it to students.” I went on to expound on how this process makes me feel. “The excitement of this process is refreshing and I think my students can tell when an assignment is fresh or when it is stale and has been around the block a few times.” As I looked at my own art I realized that this idea of staleness presented itself there as well. I have many ideas for projects but many of them never leave the idea stage or I forget about them. As I
reflected on why this happens I realized that, “Sometimes this is due to fear of failure, time constraints, or just that the moment has passed and now I am on to something else.”

Reflecting about why I teach like this I noted, “I do not always feel like this a good teaching strategy but it’s the way I have worked. The freshness of the idea is important and many times trumps traditional planning. Sometimes if I let that idea sit it takes a long time to come back to or I forget about it and never end up coming back to it.” I have noticed that this also happens in my art making. I have so many ideas for artwork but very few of them are ever actually made or produced. As I reflected on why this happens I realized that, “Sometimes this is due to fear of failure, time constraints, or just that the moment has passed and now I am on to something else.”

**Tracking One’s Process**

For this project, students took on the role of student researchers exploring the processes they followed while creating artwork. In order to make sense of this complex experience, students recorded their observations, reviewed those observations by reflectively analyzing them, and then created visualizations of their findings. As students analyzed their process journals they created mind maps outlining their process (see appendix B). This visualization served as a way for them to make sense of their process. Finally, students were asked to create artwork about their process. Student’s then wrote a brief statement describing their experience and what if anything they learned by tracking their process.

One of the lingering questions I had as a prepared to present this project to my class was how they would respond to the task of visualizing their process. The apprehension of not
Knowing added to my excitement as I began seeing each student’s process explored through an artwork.

**Difficulty of the task**

Upon review of student’s journals and visualizations it became apparent just how difficult tracking ones process was for many of my students. Helen, for example, pointed out how hard it was for her to track her thoughts. She wrote, “I cannot remember what I even thought about, the thoughts just flow.” Perhaps this nonlinear “flow” of thought is what made another student, Elaine, state that “it was hard to pin-point what [her] process is.” She went on to explain “there are so many distractions and goals and things that are needed that go into my art. I’ve learned that art is about focusing and balancing all of these different things and making something beautiful.” Elaine’s artwork is about her process, which tries to address this complicated process.

![Figure 5: Elaine’s Visualization of Her Artistic Process](image)

The left hand side depicts the complexity of thought that she filters through for her art.
of balancing (see figure 5). The simple three letter word “art” is balanced by a complex tangle of thoughts, feelings and decisions that go into its creation.

Another student, David, also addressed the complex nature of turning thoughts into ideas. For this artwork, David drew a light bulb (see figure 6) using only what was written in his process journal. The effect seems to suggest that at least part of his artistic process involves filtering thoughts in order to come up with an idea, symbolized by a lightbulb in this artwork. This process can be time intensive for David. He put it this way, “When I was in junior high I took half of my time finding an idea. I believe I have improved and that I will continue to get better if I keep examining my own process patterns.”

Figure 6: David’s Visualization of His Artistic Process

All of the thoughts David recorded in his process journal went into the creation of the light bulb symbolic of his ideas.
**Pinterest.com and making connections**

Several other students decided to enlarge and expand upon the mind maps they created. In Jane’s mind map (see figure 7) she pointed out that she initially got the idea for her current artistic series while browsing the webpage pinterest.com. Jane’s personal series is a combination of the ideas she gained from images on pinterest.com, the use of cut paper and coffee staining, and her own desire to create art that carried with it personal meaning. Jane suffers from Rheumatoid Arthritis a long-term disease that leads to inflammation of the joints and surrounding tissues. It can be very painful and requires her to take medication daily. Jane

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**Figure 7: Jane's Mind Map of her Process**

Jane’s idea originated while browsing images on the photo sharing website https://www.pinterest.com
decided to explore her relationship with this disease through a series of artwork (see figure 8 and appendix C).

Jane was not alone in going to the Internet for ideas, Kelsey and Christina both shared with me several ideas they received for artwork while doing similar activities online. Webpages such as Pinterest.com seemed to foster moments of insight for my students as their ideas serendipitously collided with other ideas and as a result new ideas were formed. The author Steven Johnson (2010) points out in his book *Where Good Ideas Come From*, “the Web, as a medium, has pushed the culture toward more [of these] serendipitous encounters” (p. 121). Understanding this, perhaps there are ways that I could foster more of these types of encounters for my students.
Sally and a focus on technique

While students like Jane, David and Elaine strove to highlight the conceptual processes of their artmaking, Sally, instead, focused on the physical processes she followed while creating her artwork. In her artwork about her process (see figure 9), Sally completely leaves out any thoughts or ideas she may have gone through prior to the physical construction of her drawings. She has instead simplified her process into a step by step list of what she does to actually draw. Her drawing is divided into five sections, each one illustrating a step she goes through while drawing. When I first saw this artwork I was troubled by the lack of conceptual engament she reveals that goes into her art. It seemed to raise more questions than it answered: Why was she drawing shoes? Was art for Sally just a five step process? As I pondered these questions, I was confronted by memories of former art teachers I have had and how they too simplified drawing in such a way. Drawing was about technique and not about ideas. At least that is what I was inclined to believe based on how they taught. I too have taught lessons this way, eliminating or minimalizing the conceptual engagement artists have with what they are drawing focusing
instead on the techniques used by artists for the artwork’s physical construction. To teach this way is to discount how many contemporary artists work. The art educator Graeme Sullivan (2006) points out that, “Messing around with thoughts has joined messing around with media as the primary artistic practice that shapes studio processes” (p. 30). In recent years, I have strived to alter my teaching practice spending more time allowing students opportunities to mess around with ideas. In this sense Sally’s artwork served as a metaphor of how art can be taught removing any conceptual engagement by focusing completing on art making techniques. Her artwork also reminded me of how much more I want my students to experience in my art class. Sally herself seems to agree that art is something more that just technical skill. She stated, while reflecting about her own artmaking, that “art is about finding more meaning in the world and putting your own personality into an artwork.” Based off of this statement, it is clear that for her, art is more than just messing around with media but does indeed include some element of personal ideation.

Excess

Throughout the course of this study, I was continually made aware of the untidiness of the research process. Research is messy. Not everything that happens is easily organized and contained within the realm of the acceptable or predicted. For a/r/tographers, this is referred to as “excess” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 119). In essence, this excess is everything left over and is not easily contained. This last section highlights several insights I gained from such occasions. The insights gained from excess are no less significant as they forced me to grapple with the unexpected.

Monica’s journal

While reading through my students journals it became evident that some students were including things that had little to do with their artistic process. The book came to be more than
just an assignment; it became a part of them. I first noticed this when I started reviewing the process journal of Monica. I would describe Monica as a respectful student who enjoys participating in class discussions but is at the same time not at all outgoing. She loves to sketch in her sketchbook and has expressed to me many times how important art is for her in her life. Monica is also a student that I know suffers from depression. Last year her mother made me aware of this and we looked at ways I might be sensitive in helping her through the issues she was dealing with. At one point this year she stopped coming to class and was absent for almost a month and a half. I was extremely concerned for her well-being. One day she surprised me by coming into class with her process journal in hand. It was the first thing she gave me. It was clear to me that this book was extremely important to her and she wanted me to read it. Shortly after reading her journal I reflected, “The process journal is her way of communicating. She writes much more than the majority of my other students. Reading it almost feels like I am allowed into a secret world of hers. It is intimate, private and I am a visitor.” She wrote about personal things that were happening in her life, many of which had little or nothing to do with art class. The personal nature of such entries made me “feel uncomfortable and like I was reading something and I probably shouldn’t.” This troubled my notions of what this process journal could be. For Monica the process journal provided a forum to share with me what she was going through. This is what she needed and she took advantage of the opportunity the process journal provided. Many artists, like Frida Kahlo, have also kept personal journals like this. Shortly after Monica gave me her journal she withdrew from school in an attempt to obtain further assistance in helping her deal with her depression.
Different artmaking processes

One of the things that I learned from tracking my own artistic process is that I do not always follow the same process. It seems that my process changes depending on what I am working on. For example, as mentioned in chapter one, I really planned out what I was going to do when preparing to create a series of sculptures exploring the interdependentness of support structures (see appendix D). These sculptures all used large sandstone boulders sliced into sections and then reassembled inserting a variety of metal support structures in-between each section. Due to the nature of working with bronze, stone and steel I really had to have a firm idea of where I was going and what I wanted the sculpture to look like. These materials are difficult to alter once an artistic decision has been carried out so I needed to a solid plan of what and how I was going to produce the artwork in order to avoid mistakes. As I tracked my process while working on a clay sculpture I found that this wasn’t the case at all.

I noticed that while working in clay (see figure 10) I was much more impulsive with what I was making. I started out with a general idea and then went from there, continuously rediscovering what the sculpture would end up looking like. Most of the decisions I made throughout this process were made in the moment and not planned out beforehand. This might have something to do with the ease in which one can alter and fix a project made in clay. In fact, taking too long to work on a project can be its own problem because the clay can dry out, which can hamper productivity. I am sure that the impulsivity that I demonstrated on this particular non-objective organic sculpture is not always present while I work in clay. Perhaps different projects will require a different process. Although the use of different materials did have an impact on the process I used, my conceptual engagement with my artwork also seemed to play a factor in how I interacted with the media. For example, my bronze and stone sculptures had a
I discovered that the process I followed for creating art changed, at least in some part, based on the media with which I worked.

strong idea behind them. The way they ended up needed to reflect my desire to explore the interdependentness of a community. My initial idea of how to accomplish this changed very little throughout the process. My concept set constraints on what the final sculptures looked like. In contrast, my ceramic sculptures are much freer. I am less interested in conveying a specific idea. They are more akin to three-dimensional doodles. I let my subconscious escape through these sculptures. These observations about my art making seem to support Lubart’s (2001) claim that an individual can have more than one creative process.

A question of ownership

At the beginning of this project I decided that I wanted to have students keep their process journals in the classroom. My reasoning was twofold. First, I was worried that if I let
students take their journals home they would inevitably forget to bring them to class. My thought
was if they do not bring them to class chances are they are not using them out of class. My
second reason was to provide accountability for student participation by reading them each day.
Having them stored in my classroom would ease by ability to access them allowing me to read
them more often.

Figure 11: Example from Kelsey's Personal Sketchbook

Kelsey’s personal sketchbooks were full of visuals, thoughts, quotes, and experiments. Her
inability to take her process journal home made her feel like she lacked ownership of it and led her
to leave out much of what made her personal sketchbooks so interesting.

Shortly after preceding with this plan it was clear something was not working. My first
hint to this was when I noticed that a few students were keeping separate sketchbooks, one in
class and one outside of class. Kelsey was one of these students. Kelsey loves to work in a
sketchbook. Her sketchbooks gain a lot of attention from fellow classmates as they thumb
through their contents discovering the visual splendor contained therein (see figure 11). I was excited to see what she would do with this project and was surprised when her process journal looked nothing like the sketchbooks I had grown accustomed to seeing her create. Her process journal contained very little in it. She had written a few entries but the book was completely devoid of wonderfully creative visual experimentation that I knew was an important part of her process. One day at school I pointed this out to her and asked why she wasn’t including this inside her process journal. She responded that it was because she could take it home and that it felt like it was not hers.

This idea of ownership forced me to reconsider how I was going to continue to proceed for this project. I asked a few other students if they would like to take their journals home to work on and the answer was almost unanimously yes. With this feedback in hand I decided to allow the journals to leave the class. This made it harder for me to read them but students also displayed an ownership of the project that they lacked previously.

**Helen and a place to remember**

Unlike Kelsey, Helen had never really used a sketchbook. She had owned a few sketchbooks but they only included drawings or sketches. This project introduced her to the possibility of using her sketchbook to record her thoughts, insights, and ideas about her art. She confided to me one day that before this book she never wrote in her sketchbook and that this was the first time she had recorded reflections about her artwork. Halfway through the year Helen and her family moved and she was therefore forced to transfer to a new school located around thirty miles away. When she informed me of this I asked her if I could borrow her process journal for a little while to allow me time to finish reading some of her entries. She consented but expressed concerned about being separated from her sketchbook. I was impressed by how
attached she was to it and that she wished to continue using it even after the study to record further artistic reflection and insights.

These reflections really helped me understand what she was doing for her personal series in class (see appendix E). For her series she decided to explore and reconnect with her childhood vicariously through her younger siblings. As part of this project, she shared fond experiences she had as a child with younger family members. As part of the retelling she would actually recreate the experience for her siblings as accurately as possible. These included favorite foods as a child, collecting leaves, and being around horses. For example, she remembered collecting leaves as a child examining their various colors and textures, so for her artwork she took her siblings in the back yard and collected leaves. These experiences provided, in a very real sense, her brothers and sisters with opportunities to relive her childhood while at the same time providing her new insights on what it was like for her to be a child. After this was carried out, Helen invited these

Figure 12: An Example of Helen's Personal Artistic Series exploring her childhood

Helen collaborated with her younger siblings to relive memories from her childhood. In this example, she revisited how she drew herself as a child asking her younger siblings for help.
same family members to assist her in creating an artwork about this childhood memory. For example, for one of these artworks Helen wanted to revisit the memory she had of drawing pictures of herself as a child. She asked her younger brother and sister to assist her in this. After telling them how much she loved to draw self-portraits when she was younger, she invited them to both draw a self-portrait on her artwork. She then worked with what they had drawn and added to it, drawing a self-portrait that combines how she drew herself as a child with how she would draw herself today. Helen described the significance of the red bow in her hair in her journal, “As a child when I drew myself, I always put two big bows in my hair.” The resulting artwork (see figure 12) serves as a record of the collaboration Helen experienced with her siblings and between her past and present selves.

The complexity of her process would have been lost to me had she not recorded it in her process journal. For me the process of this artwork is what was exciting. The artwork is found in her interactions with her siblings. The drawing serves as a visual record of this experience. I am so glad that this project allowed her to record these personally meaningful experiences. At one point in this study I asked her what her thoughts were concerning the process journal. She replied that “sometimes it is a pain but I like writing about what my plans are because it helps me not forget.” How appropriate, that while she was exploring her own childhood memories she was also able to turn her process journal into a repository of new ones. In this respect, this project opened up new possibilities for what a sketchbook could be for Helen providing a new forum for remembering.
Chapter 5: Ending in the Middle

For me research always finds itself somewhere in the middle. When I started this study I jumped into the middle of ongoing conversations concerning the nature of creativity and the artistic process. In essence Chapter 2 served to help the reader know some of what has already been said in this conversation. Just as I started in the middle, it is important to point out this study still finds itself somewhere in the middle. Many other individuals will add to what I and others have already said concerning these topics. I purposely did not title this chapter “Conclusion” because the inquiry has not concluded. As an a/r/tographer I look at research as a means of “open[ing] up conversations and relationships” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 118). This idea of opening rather than closing is significant. This research project opened up new ways of interacting with my students. This opening is still there as it continues to inform my practice. In fact there are many aspects of this study that will continue to live in my classroom. Students who participated in this study also have had conversations opened up to them that I hope they will continue to reflect upon and add to. With this in mind, this chapter is meant to serve as a forum for discussion on what will live on after this study and what conversations might need to be explored further.

Reflections on student process journals

One of the main components of this study was the use of a sketchbook by students to record the processes they went through while creating their artwork. This book was called a process journal. Although at first almost all class participants participated, by the end of the study there were several students who appeared to have abandoned the journal adding few if any new entries. Although this was disappointing, it did raise questions as to why some students found it a generative process while others did not.
With this in mind, I decided to have students evaluate the use of the process journal in class. I expressed to them that I desired their feedback as I contemplated the possibility of doing something similar in subsequent years with my students. I also was curious if anyone other than myself learned from this process and if so what were their insights. The responses I received surprised me.

**Kelsey**

As one might expect, many of the most thought out responses came from students that kept a prolific journal full of reflection and visual data. As has already been discussed in Chapter 4, Kelsey is one of these students. In answer to the question of what she had learned by keeping this journal she stated that the journal “helps me visualize my ideas more. It has been able to help me brainstorm and see my ideas down on paper. I’ve been able to gather up my thoughts and gain new insights through new connections.” She went on to point out that one of these new insights and connections was gained specifically through tracking her process. She wrote:

I like keeping track of my process. It’s almost as if it’s a diary of an ulterior life, like, I am leading two people through life instead of one. And tracking the process is almost like holding onto memories, reminiscing and learning from your past (aka your old mistakes) keeping track of my process has helped me a lot to grow and develop more ideas behind the artwork.

For Kelsey the journal provided her with a forum to explore her “ulterior life.” I have had the opportunity this year to witness this firsthand. She seems much more confident than the “fake” artist she described herself as at the beginning of the year. I was really pleased to read that this project helped her in many of the ways that I had hoped prior to commencing this study. For
students like Kelsey who, already loved to keep a sketchbook, perhaps using the sketchbook as a way of researching one’s process is the most predictably beneficial. The project added upon what she was already doing, refining her view of what it meant for her to be an artist by helping her understand her “ulterior life.”

Jane and David and a focus on process

Like Kelsey, Jane already kept a regular sketchbook in class prior to beginning to receiving her process journal. She provided strong evidence that she benefited from participation in this project. She wrote in her assessment of the project,

I really enjoyed this project because it was nice to focus on the process instead of just the art. When I am making art I do not usually think of what I am doing. I focus more on what I want the finished project to look like. So it was nice to pay attention to the process I use.

I was particularly pleased to read that she “enjoyed the process instead of just the art.” Tracking her personal process added a new conceptual engagement with art making that was missing before. She no longer just worried about what her project will “look like,” but instead she noticed what she was doing to get there. Put another way, for Jane it seems that art became a journey rather than just a destination.

Our class’s focus on process led another student, David, to remark that “the best part of this experience is that I can be proud of my work because I realize how much work I put into some of my projects. I love art.” By keeping track of his artistic process, David was able to more fully appreciate his effort and thought that went into the creation of each artwork. In Chapter 2, I hypothesized that keeping a journal might “heighten the sense of awe associated with one’s own
act of creation.” Considering David’s response provides evidence that this did in fact happen at least for one student.

**Surprises and disappointments**

I feel that it is important to point out that despite the many successes that came out of this study the study was far from completely successful. As I reviewed the personal journal I kept throughout this project I was struck by how many days I was completely certain that nothing was going right and that many students were not even interested in participating. Out of my AP class of nineteen, three dropped out, one moved, and at least three participated little or not at all in keeping a process journal. Considering this information, I was surprised by how students evaluated their experience in class.

I had three students, Jerry, Sadie, and Katie, who rarely if ever tracked their process in their journal. Jerry and Sadie also struggled with the workload of the class, failing to complete many of the art projects assigned throughout the year. Katie on the other hand, was sporadic with her artistic performance producing several artworks one term and then completing only a few the next term. Currently she is once again producing art and is completely caught up in class. Katie was the most engaged in class by far. She participated in class discussions and enjoyed talking with me after school about art she had found outside of class. Jerry and Sadie both kept to themselves and very rarely talked. In fact, I cannot remember even one time in which they actively participated in class. When I asked my class to reflect about what they had learned from tracking their process and to provide an assessment of the project, both Katie and Jerry submitted responses. I was disappointed but not surprised when Sadie failed to submit her assessment of the project. I was, however, surprised by what Jerry and Katie had to say.
Jerry provided more of a summary of the process that he follows while creating artwork. Writing about his process Jerry stated, “I begin my process by using the things that I know that I am good at and I DO NOT try to use other things to experiment with.” This significant insight was the first time I had received any insight from him into his personal process. Perhaps, his apprehension with taking risks and experimenting with new things carried over to keeping a journal tracking his process. The journal would have marked uncharted territory for Jerry, a journey into the unknown and for him that was too uncomfortable to explore. I wonder if Sadie also suffered from this same fear.

Katie, who had struggled from time to time with producing any artwork and who kept a very limited process journal, really surprised me when she submitted the following reflection on tracking her own process:

Art is nothing without life. As an artist we need to know how to give life. My process is simply that. First, I need to come up with an idea. Then I need to hack it apart. Analyze every piece, get in deep, and give it personality. Breathe life into it. After I do that, I forge it back together; figure out the relationship between each piece. It’s all in the details. After I have figured out every aspect, I look at the life I created. It fills me with hope to know I can create whatever I need to cope in this twisted world.

This statement seemed so at odds with the reflection I had seen up to this point in her process journal. After reading about his, it was clear to me that while she might not have been keeping track of her process in her journal she had clearly been thinking about it throughout the course of the semester. Perhaps there could have been another forum for recording her process other than a sketchbook in which she would have excelled.
As I have thought about this, I am curious what would have happened if I gave my students a choice for how they wanted to share their process with me? Would I have still had students who failed to record or share any insights? Probably, but it might also have eliminated some student’s lack of ownership of the project and provided different insights into the processes they use.

**Tom**

Of all the responses I received from students I really only received one negative review. I was surprised when this review came from Tom. Tom is a student who reflected at length in his process journal about the artistic struggles he encountered. He recorded several insights into the process he used to overcome these struggles. For example, to overcome a time when he was struggling with coming up with ideas Tom researched on his own the mental state of flow proposed by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow is a mental state of operation in which a person is completely and fully immersed in what they are doing and has often been used in describing how artists work (Csiksentmihalyi, 1997). Tom reflected in his journal, “Flow is my high. I have researched it more and figured out ways to increase my ways to getting to flow.” He went on reflecting that “one cannot force oneself to enter FLOW.” Not only did Tom record his process in his journal he also created a wonderfully thought out visualization of his process (see figure 13).
Based on these examples, I would have expected a positive review of the project. His assessment of the project, however, pointed to an apparent disconnect he had with the project. He put it this way, “I found the assignment to record my process a challenge. In my opinion it did not really help at all.” The second half of Tom’s assessment seems to contradict his claim that the journal did not help at all. He went on to state,

I enjoyed the opportunity to be able to show off and explain my art ideas. It helped me to look at my art in a deeper perspective. It was hard to explain the whole “process” but it was helpful to be able to explain my motives.
In an attempt to reconcile these two apparently opposite ideas I asked myself what exactly did Tom expect to learn from this project? Tom obviously wanted this project to provide more help to him but not sure exactly what that help would have been. Perhaps his first impression was that the journal did not help him but upon further reflection he realized that it had in fact been a benefit to him. Tom concluded his review, “Overall, even though I gave a negative review, I suggest continuing to have this assignment.”

**Patterns of process and recognition of problems**

On the outset of this project, two of the outcomes I hoped would happen were that students would be able to recognize patterns in the way they work and the potential shortcomings their process might have, devising strategies to be more successful. Two students seemed to touch on these in their project evaluations.

For Sam, the “journals were a good idea. It helped [her] realize [her] weak points.”

Another student, Anne, added to these comments in the following:

I thought that doing the process journal was actually really helpful. It showed me a lot about myself as an artist. It showed me that I overthink things a lot, and that I take forever to do an artwork. It also showed me that when I think too hard about an artwork, it doesn’t turn out as good as when I am just having fun. The process journal was like another thing to worry about, but it gave me some time to really create some new ideas.

Both of these students were able to identify artistic weaknesses. Anne discovered that she overthought many of her assignments, spending the majority of the time in class stressing about what she was going to create. In the end she also discovered that when this happens she doesn’t enjoy what she is doing and that her work by consequence suffers in quality.
Final Thoughts and Implications to My Practice

Several significant ideas about how my students and I create and how these ideas define us as artists/teachers/learners were brought to my attention through this highly reflective a/r/tographic study: not knowing is important as an artist, researcher, student and teacher; anxiety may be a necessary factor in artistic creation and pedagogy; and pretending is a strategy that allows one to productively move through uncertainty, ambiguity, and anxiety.

At the outset of this study, I hoped students could overcome potential creative/artistic blocks as they came to better understand how they create. This happened for a few students, but I learned that perhaps some blocks, such as anxiety, are necessary components in truly creative acts. Students were also able to identify personal patterns and formulas for artistic success as well as potential stumbling blocks that they might want to avoid in the future and gained a heightened understanding of the conceptual nature of artmaking. It was my hope that students would help one another by sharing their personal insights with each other. Although this happened as I shared insights I gained with the class, peer to peer sharing appeared to be limited at best. In the future I plan to develop better ways at facilitating this sharing of personal artistic processes between students.

I was pleased that so many students provided such a positive assessment of the time we took as a class to investigate the artistic process. As I personally reflect on the project, I can identify several things that were successful and that will impact my teaching practice in the future. For example, I will continue to use some form of journal to have students reflect about and record their process. This helped me understand where my students were in their process and adapt my teaching to their needs. The journals were also extremely popular among my students; many of whom expressed a desire to use them again next year.
This study was transformative in several ways. I now openly talk with my class about the anxiety of not knowing and the role that plays in artmaking. I have become a more confident artist and educator through my increased understanding of the important role pretending plays in my artmaking and teaching. Pretending helps me as an artist, researcher, and teacher work through artistic uncertainty, ambiguity and anxiety. I now recognize that artmaking often involves these feelings and strive to provide opportunities for my students to experience this discomfort and develop strategies to move forward.
Appendix A

Kelsey’s Personal Artistic Series
Appendix B

Examples of Student Mind Maps

Helen’s Mind Map
Jane's’ Mind Map
Anne’s Mind map

Concentration and fantasy

The first idea I got for drawing was to do a fairy tale theme. Having to do with Peter Pan.

I really like the dark fairy tale idea but I didn’t think I could draw it well, and I had never done anything that dark.

I was scared I couldn’t pull it out well.

Then I wrote something about America but it didn’t remain per what that was.

The next idea I got was to draw super close-up versions of animal eyes, but I just drew pictures I got off the Internet. I wanted to draw them because I love animals and eyes are my favorite body part, and I think animals are important just like humans.

I drew the first one using ink, and I thought it looked too realistic.

My new idea was to draw natural disasters like men or humans causing havoc, because natural disasters are interesting and scary.

But some things that I also wrote were random concentration ideas I had, but they weren’t even full ideas.

My final concentration idea was given to me by Audrey. She gave it to me along time ago before I even started the project. But I didn’t like the idea at first. Then later on I gave it a try, so now my current idea is drawing band names, illustrating them to be literal, and deciding on the animal eye thing.

The first band I did were the blue-eyed peas, and it turned out well. I used ink and watercolor and decided I would use these mediums for all of them.

The second band I illustrated were the kooks. I drew four band members in off-the-cuff. It turned out great.

I liked the blue-eyed peas, and Audrey gave me the idea to do them.

I decided not to do this because I didn’t think I could draw them well enough.

Then Mr. Franks said it was copy writing, and that if I wanted to do that idea I would have to change it some time.

So I tried to make the eyes. I was drawing a squid’s eye into a cub’s eye, and I didn’t like it. So I gave up on the animal eye thing.
I decided to do bands that I really like or have meaning to me, like a certain song of that band.

My third one I chose to do the Killers. I drew three guns and a body outline. The guns looked good, and I like the finished product. I also like the Killers.

What I did first is look online for a reference. This is what I do for all of the drawings. Now actually I draw a border first then look for a reference.

I wanted the guy to have his hands out in front of him catching his tears which I was going to turn into nickles.

So I decided to make my own reference, so I took a picture of my cousin treen.

Then I drew it onto the watercolor paper. It took me forever to draw him and I haven't even finished. I still have to draw his hands.

The first time I heard it was when me and Audrey went to see twilight. It was I think the third day the movie was out.

And I also decided I don't want him crying anymore. So I turned the nickles into rain. And he is going to be catching the drops.

And I think the next band I am going to do is the black keys. And the song was one of the first ones that played and I loved it, I still do.
Sam’s Mindmap
Appendix C

Jane’s Personal Series
Appendix D

My series of sculpture exploring the interdependentness of support structures
Appendix E

Helen’s Personal Series
References


