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*Brigham Young University*

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Creativity & Religion: A Self-Study of  
Mormon Mindset in the Art Classroom

Shon Scot Feller

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### Creativity & Religion: A Self-Study of Mormon Mindset in the Art Classroom

Shon Scot Feller  
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Master of Arts

A high school art teacher investigates the relationship of his religious beliefs with his notions of what it means to be creative. This Mormon teacher examines his religious and experiential life through self-study, by drawing from autoethnographic and hermeneutic phenomenological strategies. He believes that everyone, including himself and his students, has a creative potential. He also analyzes how his Mormon religion affects his view of creativity and how creativity has affected his behavior as a Mormon. The conclusions he reaches uncover the need for balance between his creative self and his Mormon self and outlines several ways to merge these two aspects of his life.

Keywords: self-study, autoethnography, Mormon, creativity, religion, art education

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who has helped me in the process of writing this paper because it would not have been possible to complete this study without other people.

Thank you to Dr. Barney, Dr. Graham, Dr. Gray, and my friends in the cohort for inspiring me to be a better educator and to think about my creative practices with a new perspective. I will be forever changed because of my association with all of you. Dr. Graham and Dr. Barney, thank you for never giving up on me, even though others in the same situation would have.

Thank you to all of my colleagues at Woods Cross High School who have been involved and supportive through this entire process. John and Shauna, specifically, thank you for motivating me to get finished. Thank you Melanie Swann for your expertise and for helping me during your off hours. To my friends Roger and Lise, thank you for being creative examples my entire life and for constantly pushing me to finish.

Thank you James Best IV for always being online and available to chat when I have been stuck. Your edits and comments were a guiding star on my journey to Thesis Land. Thank you Robin for being a support at the most inconvenient times. Thank you Steven W. Hopkins for being there for me for over a decade as I have come to understand both the spiritual and the creative.

A very big thank you to my dear children, Scoty, Rylee, Mac, and Jo, who have put up with my absence. The biggest thank you goes to my beautiful wife, Vinnie, who put up with the kids while I was away, and who has always encouraged me to keep going.

To my mother, who has always inspired me to continue in my education. To my dad, thanks for your legacy that you left, and the impact it has had 23 years later as I finish this thesis. Thank you to my Heavenly Father for support and guidance, for being the Supreme Art Teacher, and for providing a creative Savior to save us all.

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## *Chapter I: Introduction*

I am a Mormon. I am an art educator. These two aspects of my life have the most influence on who I am. This thesis is a study into how my religious beliefs have influenced, and continue to influence, my own creativity and my work as an art educator. In this study, I also examine how my beliefs as an art educator have influenced my religious beliefs and practices. I use autoethnography and hermeneutic phenomenology as strategies to illuminate how my religious perspectives are interrelated with my artistic identity and my pedagogy. I began with a strong intuition that my creative and teaching identities were closely linked to my religious beliefs. This study explores this relationship through an examination of my religious and artistic experiences.

This study is located within a body of literature that deals with the history of creativity in art education and the spiritual dimension of art, art making, and art education. In particular, I review my personal understandings as a Mormon and how these understandings influence my own ideas about art and creativity.

### *How I Arrived at this Study*

To set the stage for this study, it would be important to outline the events that helped me arrive at this investigation, which started long before I was born. In 1947, my great grandfather, Parley J. Feller, started a meat packing company in Syracuse, Utah with the help of his family. Eventually that company moved to North Salt Lake and was named Feller's Precooked Meats. As Parley got older he passed the charge of the company over to his son Carl. Carl employed his sons as soon as they could handle the responsibilities associated with packing meat. Jack, the oldest; my father Scot, the second; and Kelly, the youngest, spent their days, when not at school, slaughtering cows, cleaning kill floors and slicing meat.

When the time came for Jack to leave the house he chose to study orthodontics and has since established a successful orthodontic practice in Rock Springs, Wyoming. With Jack out of the



picture, Scot and Kelly were left with the responsibilities of the meat plant notwithstanding their own desires to pursue other careers. Scot was interested in computers and carpentry, and Kelly was fascinated by psychology. Eventually Carl passed the affairs of the company over to Scot with Kelly as an assistant manager. Scot was good with people and often acted as a mediator if problems arose among employees. The company was taking strides and developing several new products that were quite successful.

In January of 1993, Scot suddenly collapsed as a result of cardiomyopathy, a disease affecting the muscles of the heart. He was revived but comatose. He sustained brain damage and died two weeks later on February 5th. Carl and Kelly tried to continue sustaining the business, but little-by-little the company failed. In 2002 the company declared bankruptcy and shut its doors for good.

As a boy, I spent many days cleaning the various parts of the plant. As a third grader, I would ride my bike to the plant after school and clean bathrooms and offices. Some weekends I would work cutting the nerves and excess fat off of strips of chicken. Prior to my dad's death, I thought that one day I would take over the family business. I later had other responsibilities, such as designing labels for various meat products. I grew up anticipating a career working at the plant.

It was during my first year of college when the company went under. With the pressure of continuing the family business lifted from my shoulders, I was free to pursue any career I wanted. Graphic Design was an ability that I learned in part from the design work I had done at the plant. I chose to study it at Brigham Young University-Idaho, a university privately owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormon Church). I was fascinated by the connections I found between the doctrines of the Church and the principles of creativity and art I was learning in my art classes.

The first time I really dove into what I believed about creativity was during that freshmen year. I was assigned to write a basic paper on anything art related for my Intro to Visual Art class, which was prerequisite for other classes. Many of my classmates were an amalgamation of majors,

and most took the class solely for the credit. Many wrote their papers on Picasso and Rembrandt, but I remember feeling like I needed to look deeper at the myriad possibilities for creative research. I chose to research creativity and what it meant to me in my Mormon religion. It was then, during that basic art lecture class, that I understood more about what I believed as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and I began to understand what it means to be creative.

What I felt was similar to what J. Hunt presented about social work (2012):

During my undergraduate education I was growing and being nurtured spiritually while simultaneously being educated as a helper and change maker in the field of social work.

I found myself grappling with these two parts of myself and wondering how to reconcile them in my future work. They seemed, for the most part to complement each other, while there were areas that challenged me. I was perplexed as to how to integrate my personal and professional selves.

The paper I wrote as a freshman was a good start to studying creativity and to connect it to what it meant for me as a Mormon. However, it left me wanting to understand more about the relationship between my beliefs as a Mormon and what I was practicing as an artist. In that initial paper, I drew specific relationships between my Mormon beliefs and my thoughts about creativity. I was able to find a connection between the two because of my understanding of my relationship with God. This thesis is a continuation of that study. Through the process of this study I have also arrived at how being an art educator has also influenced my behavior as a practicing Mormon, and I will highlight some of the art education practices that I have implemented as a teacher in my congregation.

In chapter two, I explore literature relating to the subjects of creativity, the spiritual dimensions of art education, and Mormon writings on creativity.

In chapter three, I discuss my inquiry process and the strategies I employ. These include self-study, with influence from autoethnography, of myself as a Mormon art teacher, and some aspects of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Chapter four discusses how certain beliefs and doctrines of Mormonism have influenced my own views of creativity. Included in this chapter are experiences that I have had in my life as a Mormon that have affected how I think about art and art education.

Chapter five discusses some of the conclusions I have made because of this study and possible applications to my teaching practice.

## *Chapter II: Literature Review*

### *Spirituality vs. Religion*

Conducting research that relates to religion or topics of a spiritual nature can be difficult because the terms “spirituality” and “religion” have multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings. As such, it is important to define the terms “spiritual” and “religious.” Campbell (2006) defines both of these terms: “Spirituality can be understood as a concern for nonmaterial issues, relating to the deepest part of the self, where one senses a regard for things or feelings for which one has a higher than average valuation” (p. 30). Campbell’s definition of religion more closely resembles how I view my work within this thesis, “Religion can be defined as institutionalized practice among a community of believers, with rule, rituals, and beliefs set forth in written and artistic forms” (p. 31).

One example of teaching spirituality comes from the Caucus on the Spiritual in Art Education (CSAE). Dr. Susan Nakao, the chair of the CSAE, says this of the spiritual:

Art educators have a sacred responsibility—to awaken and elevate the consciousness of our students through the recognition of the relationship between art and the spiritual. Spirit is commonly defined as that which ‘animates’ or breathes life and vitality into all existence. The spiritual in art manifests as the creative impulse, the origin of all artworks. We know of its existence through our dreams, imaginings and visions. It has been the realm of knowing and creating for artistic prophets in all eras. Thus, the spiritual connection between the inner life and the divine has provided sustenance to art making for more than 25,000 years. (Nakao, 2011)

This type of approach does not fully encompass the definition that I will use for this study. Rather, this study is an examination of religious influences on creativity and art education that are the institutional practices of believers, as defined by Campbell (2006). Many religions teach some form of spirituality, but this study will analyze spirituality within the specific religious practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and their relationship to creativity, art, and

education. It will also be an investigation into my beliefs in the doctrine and teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and how they relate to my creative practice.

### *Where I Am Headed*

My goal with this thesis is to study my beliefs as a Mormon and how these beliefs affect my creative and educational practices. Also, I will observe how my educational and creative practices have affected my behavior as a Mormon. I want to carry out this investigation in order to try and understand the relationship between two different parts of my identity, that of being Mormon and that of being a creative person/art educator. In my opinion, these various parts should not be considered as individual entities, rather parts of a whole.

Coleman (1998) discusses this distinction:

A supposedly religious person who proclaims his creed but does not act accordingly is a hypocrite; and a so called artist who gives only a part of himself is a craftsman in the worst sense, i.e., a mere mechanic. Correspondingly, art appreciation calls for the engagement of all of the beholder's powers—spiritual, intellectual, and affective. Of course, this sort of commitment renders one quite vulnerable, but no more than an artist who devotes her whole being to a project. (pp. 40-41)

The vulnerability that Coleman refers to is something I have felt at times as an art teacher. I want to understand my beliefs, both as an art teacher and as a Mormon, and find out where they overlap.

This study is an inquiry into those two aspects of my life.

Like the work of Grubbs (2010) who explored the relationship between faith and art because of internal conflict between the two, I was led to conduct this study of my own.

### *A Brief History of Creativity in Art Education*

The following is brief summary of how creativity has been viewed in a few different periods of art education in the United States as outlined by Zimmerman (2010).

#### *The Lowenfeld Era*

The Lowenfeld Era was an influential time for thinking about creativity and creative freedom. Viktor Lowenfeld published several books on art education, including two on creativity: *The Nature of Creative Activity* (1952) and *Creative and Mental Growth* (1948). The books discussed the need for “freedom of the individual” (Saunders 1961, p. 9). This mentality was embraced by a world recovering from a war caused by disrespect for individual differences (Saunders, 1961). As summarized by Efland, by way of Zimmerman (2010):

The purpose of art education for Lowenfeld was to develop creativity so that it could transfer to other subjects and spheres of human activity (Efland, 1990). He viewed the role of art education ultimately as a means for development of students’ creative self-expression and not necessarily as an end in itself. (p. 3)

This philosophy was a child-centered approach, allowing the child to discover for themselves and to have very little teacher intervention. Children were believed to be naturally creative, and this child-centered creativity was encouraged without imposing adult models of art making.

Lowenfeld’s contributions to art education have been praised by many (Saunders, 1961; Burton, 2009). He reshaped the way the world viewed creativity and especially how educators used creativity in their practices. Using creativity as a tool for learning, not only in art, but other subject areas, was an important contribution to education. As Zimmerman points, out, Lowenfeld opened the doors to:

All students, not just those who were artistically talented . . . to have their creative abilities unfold over time. His focus was on creative self-expression as a form of individual personality

and identity formation as well as development of relationships with others. In any art program, interactions between art teachers and students were of prime importance. Little teacher intervention was required or expected in the early stages as students built skills through their own experiences with materials. (p. 3)

This self-expression taught children to stand on their own two creative feet, allowing them to find ways to be creative in other aspects of their lives, “circumventing what Lowenfeld saw to be the corrosive conventions of the commercial culture” (Burton, 2009).

### *DBAE*

Another take on creativity in art education came by way of the Getty foundation and was called Discipline Based Art Education. This movement was a way to organize a comprehensive art curriculum. Lowenfeld’s ideas became misinterpreted, and creativity was misconstrued in the art classroom. Creativity standards became loose. Discipline Based Art Education, or DBAE, was created as a way to bring order to the art curriculum. In lieu of privileging the child’s discovery of art and creating for themselves, DBAE emphasized content.

DBAE was organized around four areas of art discipline, namely, aesthetics, art history, art criticism, and art production. This organization into four disciplines led art education to more closely resemble other areas of academia.

Disciplined Based Art Education set up structure where structure was needed. In place of free-flowing, non-articulated, creative self-expression, DBAE was sequential and articulated. It was funded by the Getty and offered workshops and professional development. Inherent in the system was an argument that art was a necessary part of general education because art had always been a serious discipline. DBAE drew from then-current theories about how students can learn authentically within a disciplinary practice at their own level. This was seen by many as a much

needed step in art education. The four disciplines of DBAE ensured that students would receive a balanced education.

With the introduction of DBAE, set standards could be applied school-wide, districtwide, statewide, and even nationwide. Zimmerman challenges this push toward a rigid set of disciplines:

Underlying DBAE's assessment initiatives is a mistaken notion that student progress should always be measured by achievements of other students and pre-set goals that affirm a program's ability to meet rubrics and other forms of conventional outcomes set forth by outside experts. (p. 7)

The pressures of trying to cover the material as outlined by Discipline Based Art Education had the potential to stifle one's ability to be creative. As Wilson (1997) observed:

The evaluators became concerned that the preoccupation with the art disciplines actually drew attention away from the works of art. The works of art that students were supposed to create, understand, and appreciate were given short shrift through excessive attention to the disciplines themselves. (p. 86)

Because of the large scale influence of both Lowenfeld and DBAE, both were subject to misinterpretation across the country. Both theories assisted in the creative process, but because of the evolution of society, culture, and technology, both theories were outgrown.

### *Amalgam of Ideas*

Following DBAE's influence over art curriculum across the country, and with a change in social, political, and technological influences from the previous decades, the place for creativity in the art classroom was in flux. Most books and studies on the subject of creativity in art education range from the 1950s until the early 1980s and then vanish until the end of the first decade of the 2000s. Creativity, as taught in art education, evolved through different stages of art educational focus.



In recent years, ideas about creativity have received renewed attention. Zimmerman (2010) describes the nature of this renewal: “Creativity from all these vantage points is being reconsidered with less emphasis on self-expression as in Lowenfeld’s days and more focused on development of cultural identity, technology, good citizenship, and economic entrepreneurship” (p. 14). This “new” creativity is more applicable to more subjects and seems to merge the child-centered approach of Lowenfeld and the content-centered approach of DBAE.

As Alexander (1981) has said: “Creativity never seems at rest,” and after a hiatus from specific inclusion of creativity in art education, the landscape evolved and was prepared for a new way of thinking about creativity. The ideals that have emerged in the past several years have married the important aspects of Lowenfeld’s self-expression with the more practical and applicable parts of DBAE.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychologist, has discussed this current approach to creativity. Discussing what Csikszentmihalyi has said on creativity, Burton (2004) summarizes the following:

To say that a child or adolescent is creative, [Csikszentmihalyi] argues, is much too simplistic; nor, [Csikszentmihalyi] suggests, is creativity a commodity that can be taught explicitly. Creativity arises from a synergy, an interaction, produced by deep knowledge of a symbolic domain, personal gifts, dispositions, and insights, and the recognition that is accorded by experts in the field who acknowledge and validate creative efforts.

[Csikszentmihalyi] argues that creativity is a fundamental capacity without which human culture would not have emerged and without which it will not survive. (p.557)

Creativity has evolved from the student-centered and content-centered ideals of years past. It is no longer just part of one’s self, nor is it a rigid structured activity that can be produced with a formula. Creativity has become essential (Burton, 2004).

Lowenfeld’s freedom and the structure of DBAE seem to have merged to create these new thoughts on creativity. The amount of freedom of expression versus structured instruction has swung

back and forth, and has been finely tuned, like the dial of a radio, to find the suitable frequency. In chapter four, I will address ways in which the relationship between these two eras of Art Education draw similarities to several points of Mormon doctrine including the interdependence of justice and mercy.

### *Mormon Literature*

This thesis explores my influences as an art educator in two ways: first, I explore my understanding about creativity as it relates to art education and art practices, and second, I explore my understanding about creativity as a Mormon. The following is an exploration of citations from discourses from the General Authorities of the church (the members of clergy that make up the governing body of the church).

Before I begin, it would be important to briefly discuss Mormon belief on the Godhead (referred to in other Christian religions as the Trinity or the Holy Trinity). The Godhead is comprised of three distinct beings, God the Father (2 Corinthians 1:3, KJV), known and referred to as Heavenly Father or Father in Heaven; the Son of God (1 John 4:15, KJV), known as Jesus Christ, Jehovah, The Savior, or The Messiah; and the Holy Ghost, a personage of intangible spirit that is omnipresent and can visit people to inspire and comfort them (Luke 3:22; John 14:26, KJV).

Like most religions in the world, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) believe in ancient texts written by holy men called prophets. These religious writings, known as scripture, are believed to have been God's way of communicating with men. Mormons believe in the Bible, similar to the majority of Christian religions. They also believe in the Book of Mormon, as well as other texts comprised of modern revelation and other translated manuscripts.

Mormons believe that God continues to speak to a prophet today, similar to the people of the Bible and Book of Mormon. In the Mormon church, there is a prophet who has two counselors that comprise what is called the First Presidency of the Church. Members of the first presidency are

referred to as “President.” The presidency is supported by twelve men, called apostles, organized into a group called the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who act similar to the apostles spoken of in the Bible (Matthew 10:2; Mark 6:30; Luke 6:13; KJV). The members of this quorum are referred to as “Elder” (e.g. Elder David A. Bednar). There are other groups of men organized in quorums called the Seventy (also referred to as Elder). There are other governing organizations that include men and women: the general Relief Society presidency (an organization for women 18 years and older), the presiding Young Men and Young Women’s presidencies (for youth ages 12-18 years old), the general Primary presidency (for children up to age 12), and the presiding Bishopric of the Church. Each local congregation, known as a ward or a branch, has leadership that corresponds to each of these governing bodies. All of these presidencies who lead the Church are known as the General Authorities.

Mormons believe that God still speaks to his children on Earth and that each person who acts in one of these leadership positions has been called of God by revelation. The Mormon Church has a lay clergy, in other words, no one who is in a position of leadership has been trained in a professional seminary. The people who make up the leadership in the Church come from varying backgrounds and professions. They have had occupations ranging from attorney to heart surgeon, professor to stay-at-home mother. Some have had professions and hobbies dealing with art and creativity. These varying circumstances and points of view from the General Authorities are very beneficial to the membership of the Church as they are instructed by leaders with varying experiences like their own.

Twice a year, once in April and again in October, the General Authorities of the Church instruct the entire membership of the church via a two-day, worldwide broadcast known as General Conference. During these conferences the leaders of the church prepare talks or presentations (some might refer to these as sermons). These talks are prepared with much prayer and preparation, and Mormons believe that the words spoken by the General Authorities, especially the prophet, are

inspired messages from Heavenly Father. Similar to the writings from the Bible and Book of Mormon, the words spoken by the prophet and apostles are revered as scripture and are studied alongside the ancient texts.

Over the last few decades there have been several talks given during General Conference that have enlightened me in relation to creativity. The following citations, listed chronologically, come from talks given during General Conference by various General Authorities concerning creativity and from articles written by General Authorities and published in two church publications called *The New Era* (a church publication geared toward the youth of the church) and *The Ensign*.

#### *Mormon Citations on Creativity*

Elder Dean L. Larsen, who was a member of the Presidency of the Seventy, wrote an article for *The New Era* in 1991, titled “Building Creativity.” This article talks about the ability we all have to be creative and encourages the youth to develop these abilities:

I believe a capacity for creativity is inherent in our natures. Perhaps it is one of the godlike attributes we inherit as our Heavenly Father’s children. This attribute finds different expressions in each one of us. In many it remains largely dormant because it is never given an opportunity to emerge. It is likely that each one of us has creative powers that can be developed and that can add significantly to the joy and satisfaction we experience in our lives. Larsen’s purpose is to instruct the youth to understand that “while some creative gifts become apparent early in the life of an individual, others may not develop without considerable conscious effort and purposeful training.” He is encouraging the church membership to develop their creative abilities because “it may well be that this aspect of our development in mortality is as important in the eyes of a creative Heavenly Father as many other attributes that receive greater attention and emphasis.” Elder Larsen suggests that it might be as important to put just as much emphasis on creativity as other virtues that are normally talked about in religious settings.

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who was a nuclear engineer by trade, wrote a similar article in *The New Era* in August 1995. “If hearing the word creativity causes you to think, ‘No, that’s not for me; that’s for the gifted,’ then this message is for you.” He also instructed the youth, or anyone reading the article that “the satisfaction and growth creativity generates is intended for each of us, not just for the most gifted.” This attitude is very applicable in an art education setting. If students understood this attitude they would be more willing to apply themselves. Scott also adds that “Doubt destroys creativity, while faith strengthens it.”

Three years later in the September 1998 issue of *The New Era*, Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who served in the army and as the President of the University of Utah, directed his words to the youth in a similar fashion to that of Elder Larsen and Elder Scott. His article titled “Start Making Chips” referred to the hesitant wood carver. Maxwell went more in-depth about the process of creativity. He said “creativity involves both a process and a result. It springs out of our seeing possibilities we have not seen before, seeing connections between patches of truth and beauty, and responding to them in ways we have not done before.”

Maxwell also adds that appreciation is another aspect of creativity:

Indeed, appreciation for the world (and all in it) which God has given us is but a prelude to adoration of the God who has so gloriously displayed His creativity for us. Creativity permits us to see the wondrous order of things, their infinite beauty, their scope, but also their incredible detail.

As the article continues Maxwell infers that there is a structure to creativity. “True creativity, as it reflects our capacity to see or produce something in a new way, represents a restructuring that carries our individual imprint and uniqueness.” Like God creating the world, creativity stems from organization. “Creativity, therefore,” Maxwell continues “is not simply innovation but organization. Self-discipline is required as part and parcel of that self-discovery which is paralleled by the discovery of the universes, vast and small, of which we are a part.”

Sister Mary Ellen Smoot, who was Relief Society general president from 1997 to 2002, a stay-at-home mom, and a former PTA President, gave a talk to the entire membership of the Church in the April 2000 General Conference titled “We Are Creators.” She says of the creative nature of God:

I marvel when I think of this world so rich in beauty, so perfect in function. This world was created by Jesus Christ under the direction of our Heavenly Father. Creation is one of the characteristics that defines God. He takes matter without form and molds it into stars, planets, and solar systems. ‘Worlds without number have I created,’ He tells us.

Her take is that “Creation isn’t drudgery. Creation flows from love.” Similar to some of the aforementioned articles, Smoot includes creativity (creation) with other virtues.

Elder Robert D. Hales, former fighter pilot and business executive, addressed the youth of the church in yet another *New Era* article concerning creativity (2004). He said “We have the ability to produce creative works in our daily activities. Creativity can also be used to find solutions to everyday problems by developing new ways of approaching the problems. I have seen such creativity during my lifetime.” It is apparent that the leadership of the church has made an effort over the last two decades to help the youth understand the spiritual nature of creativity and instruct them on how to hone and enhance their own creative abilities.

The most recent talk given on the topic of creativity was given in a General Relief Society meeting the week before General Conference in October 2008 by President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, former commercial airline pilot and second counselor in the First Presidency. The title of this talk was “Happiness, Your Heritage” and the premise of the talk is that people can find the greatest kind of happiness, God’s happiness, by engaging in two activities in which God participates: creation and compassion. Through creative and compassionate acts, he posits, one can find peace and balance.

Uchtdorf continues “The desire to create is one of the deepest yearnings of the human soul. No matter our talents, education, backgrounds, or abilities, we each have an inherent wish to create

something that did not exist before.” He reiterates what has been mentioned in the previously cited articles. “Everyone can create. You don’t need money, position, or influence in order to create something of substance or beauty.”

Uchtdorf emphasizes our creative lineage:

Remember that you are spirit [children] of the most creative Being in the universe. Isn’t it remarkable to think that your very spirits are fashioned by an endlessly creative and eternally compassionate God? Think about it—your spirit body is a masterpiece, created with a beauty, function, and capacity beyond imagination.

He compliments God on his ability to create the masterpiece of the human race, but then offers that, if we want to be truly happy, we must also participate in the creative process:

But to what end were we created? We were created with the express purpose and potential of experiencing a fullness of joy. Our birthright—and the purpose of our great voyage on this earth—is to seek and experience eternal happiness. One of the ways we find this is by creating things.

If people believed that creativity would bring happiness, more people would engage in creative things. Sometimes creativity is viewed as only drawing or painting, but President Uchtdorf outlines other ways to be creative:

The bounds of creativity extend far beyond the limits of a canvas or a sheet of paper and do not require a brush, a pen, or the keys of a piano. Creation means bringing into existence something that did not exist before—colorful gardens, harmonious homes, family memories, flowing laughter.

These examples of the doctrinal belief of the Mormon church have impacted me as a creative person and as an art educator. All of these examples have influenced how I think about art and creativity. Understanding that creativity deals with more than just drawing or painting makes it easier to fulfill my need to create.

The lessons learned from the leaders of the church offer some important lessons for my views on creativity. Words like “creativity” and “creation” go hand in hand with “compassion” and “love,” words that are not frequently heard in the art classroom. All of the speakers expressed confidence that anyone can and should be creative in order to find true happiness. Perhaps this is why some students are frequently engaged in the art process. They find happiness in creation and want to continually feel happy. These citations help to outline some of my beliefs as a Mormon in relation to creativity and art, and set the stage for this study.



### *Chapter III: Methodology*

I remember specifically the day when I discovered the power of art: As a toddler, I was in the kitchen sitting on one of our ugly brown barstools with a ripped vinyl cover. I had been drawing, though I do not remember what. My mom looked at my paper and told me what a good job I had done. I remember being fascinated at the thought that I could make marks on a piece of paper and someone else would be impressed with what I had created.

Later, when I was five years old and working at the same barstool, I felt a similar feeling. I had constructed various “ventions,” as I used to call them, out of Legos. My mother filmed me this time as I explained to her what each of my simply constructed inventions was capable of. Again, I was overcome by the amazing feeling of being able to think of something in my mind and then make a tangible facsimile.

Throughout the rest of my life many more people have called me creative. Sometimes people throw around that word as if it means something trivial, but in my exploration of creativity, I have found that it means much more. This was the start of my lifelong fascination with creativity and with what it means to be creative.

This study is an attempt to understand how creativity overlaps another big aspect of my life: being Mormon. I have been both creative and Mormon my whole life, but I have never studied the overlap and what effect each aspect of my life has on the other. When deciding on the appropriate approach to this study, I was inspired by several methodologies. Mainly, this is a self-study, but I have been influenced by autoethnography and hermeneutic phenomenology.

#### *Methodologies*

##### *Self-Study*

Self-study is a methodology that educators can use to understand their teaching practices and improve their teaching. In this study I am using self-study as a way to gain understanding of how

two big aspects of my life, being Mormon and being a creative person, are related. According to Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) “Who a researcher is, is central to what the researcher does” (p. 13). In this self-study, I examine my journey to becoming an art educator through narrative, starting as a child and ending at the present day. This journey of discovery is an attempt to understand myself better in order to understand my teaching practices better. As Feldman (2003) says:

An existentialist orientation leads us to focus on who we are as teacher educators, the decisions that we make and the actions we take that construct who we are, and the acceptance of our responsibility for who we are. This leads us to study ourselves, not as navel-gazing, but to understand the way we are teacher educators and to change our ways of being teacher educators. (p. 27)

This study is unique as it tries to find meaning in my teaching practices by using narrative to study past experiences. A self-study is a systematic reflexive process (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2014), but in this study, my reflection reaches beyond my teaching practice and examines my religious beliefs as well to understand how those beliefs affect my practice, and also how my creative perspectives have influenced my religious views. Through this process I hope to gain new understandings about myself and my religious and creative beliefs.

Approaching research using intimate scholarship (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2014) is allowing me to use my life experiences as data that I can examine and use to change and improve my teaching practices. While I consider this a self-study, it does not explicitly follow rules outlined by various researchers (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2014; Feldman, 2003; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), and instead draws from two other methodologies to create a self-study that examines my religious culture and my background and experiences (see Laverty, 2003). Mayes & Mayes (2002) points out the importance of this type of introspection: “It is important that teachers understand the personal and political dimensions of their calling and practice, yet it is equally important that teachers whose calling and

practice has a spiritual side should not only be allowed but encouraged to reflect along these lines as well” (p. 130).

Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) claim that the aim of self-study research is to “provoke, challenge and illuminate rather than confirm and settle” (p. 20). These principles have helped steer how I have conducted this study.

### *Autoethnography*

In this self-study, my approach was influenced by two other methodologies, the first of which is autoethnography, or the analysis of one’s own experience in his or her culture. When participating in an autoethnographic study, researchers reflect on moments of inspiration they have had as they relate to their cultural identity (Ellis, 2010). By analyzing my experiences in my specific culture, I anticipate finding meaning in my role both as artist and as art educator.

When doing autoethnography, “researchers . . . retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity” (Ellis, 2010). Being a Mormon has had the biggest influence on my understanding of creativity. My aforementioned five-year-old experiences are part of my sources. And the road from there to here is riddled with epiphanies stemming from my Mormon roots.

Many of the experiences that I have had have come from finding meaning in my Mormon culture, in the important writings and teachings of the Mormon church, and in expounding on seemingly trivial aspects of my life (e.g. the paper I wrote for my Intro. to Visual Art class as a freshman in college). Hermeneutic phenomenology also fits with this study because it

is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. The focus is toward illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding. (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991)

Neumann (2010) asserts that “autoethnography is a methodological choice for researchers who place their philosophical ontological wager on themselves being an inseparable part of the world.” (p. 1053). In this self-study I cannot remove myself from my research. Many of the questions that brought me to this study arose because of the life that I have lived and the experiences that I have had. I will examine my life and reflect on the complexities of teaching through examinations of my experiences (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2014).

### *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*

Another methodology that has influenced my research is hermeneutic phenomenology. Edmund Husserl is often referred to as the father of phenomenology (Lavery, 2003). Husserl started his studies in mathematics and eventually changed to philosophy, with an emphasis in the study of phenomenology, or the study of lived experience or the life world (van Manen, 1997).

Phenomenology is different than psychology because it concentrates on experiences as they are lived and not simply reactions to external stimuli. For example, psychology would want to determine how behavior is affected by regular exercise, but phenomenology would try to understand the events that an individual has experienced in his or her life that caused him or her to exercise.

The word hermeneutics is derived from the Greek god Hermes, who was the messenger god and who acted as a liaison between the gods and mortals. Ancient hermeneutics dealt mostly with the interpretation of religious texts, or the interpretation of communication between god and humans. Hermeneutics evolved to include the interpretation of more than texts, and now includes the interpretation of music, drama, and, in this case, lived experience.

Martin Heidegger was a contemporary of Husserl and worked at the same school. Husserl taught Heidegger in the ways of phenomenology and Heidegger eventually took over Husserl's professorship. Eventually, though, Heidegger disassociated himself from Husserl's teachings (Lavery, 2003). Heidegger instead concentrated on hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is similar to phenomenology in the sense that both are based on lived experience. The difference is that with hermeneutic phenomenology, “meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences” (Lavery, 2003, p. 8).

According to Lavery, Hans-Georg Gadamer furthered the study of hermeneutic phenomenology and was influenced by both Husserl and Heidegger. He evolved hermeneutic phenomenology “not as developing a procedure of understanding, but to clarify further the conditions in which understanding itself takes place” (p. 10).

Approaching this self-study using both autoethnography and hermeneutic phenomenology will create a meaningful study of my cultural and religious experiences and how they overlap with the beliefs of my teaching practice.

### *How Am I Going to Do It?*

This study looks at my life as a member of the Mormon church and how my lived experiences have contributed to my evolution as a creative person and art educator. I have included many of the doctrines and writings of the Mormon Church concerning creativity in chapter two. These writings influenced me in college as a prospective art educator and are the backdrop for this study. In Chapter 4, I narrate my life-long journey to becoming an art educator and I outline interactions I have had with other creative Mormons. As I consulted with these fellow church members for this study, they have helped me understand how my Mormon beliefs overlap with my creativity. The narrative of my life allows me to find the nodal moments in my life and offers new perspectives (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

*Why Am I Doing It?*

As an educator I cannot remove who I am from my teaching practice. All of my life experiences affect how I approach my teaching, including my religious beliefs. Because of my life experiences and beliefs, it is disheartening to me when people say they are not creative. One of the major principles taught by the Mormon church is that we are all God's children, literal sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father (Romans 8:16; King James Version), who has chosen for Himself the title of "Creator." The word "creator" means someone who creates; someone possessing creativity. If I truly believe that I am a spiritual offspring of God, then I must also believe that I inherit some of his traits, with creativity being one of them. According to my beliefs in Mormon doctrine, we all have the potential to be creative.

*So what?*

Creativity is an enormous part of my life. It is not a coat that I take off when I get home from work and leave in the closet on nights and weekends. It is a part of who I am as a teacher, a parent, a husband, a Mormon, and as a member of my community. If I am going to be a complete person, I cannot leave my Mormonism at the door when I show up for work. (Though I am aware of the separation of church and state, and I will not be preaching to anyone.) However, to be a complete person also means that when I go to Church I cannot leave my creativity in the car. Mormonism has helped me to understand creativity, but creativity has also helped me to understand Mormonism. So when I show up for Church I also take every opportunity to continue preaching the gospel of creativity. I am very serious about being an art educator in my Mormon culture.

I truly believe that creativity is embedded in every human being. This study is my attempt to analyze the culture from which I come and to find even more creative connections in my Mormon life to better understand myself and creativity, and also to help understand my Mormon beliefs because of my practices as an art educator.

### *Data Analysis*

While dealing with qualitative research, especially as it relates to human experience and belief, it is difficult to define exactly what my data is and how it is to be analyzed. Human lives and religious belief cannot simply be cut up and divided into numbers and then categorized into percentages and inserted into spreadsheets (though this might simplify many of my relationships). Consequently, the process of analyzing data must remain open to interpretation and, as the researcher, I must come to terms with the fact that my study may not be conclusive and that the results might simply lead to further investigations.

As a researcher it has been hard to fathom that my beliefs and every experience I have had are open for me to examine and include in my data. With hermeneutic phenomenology “meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences” (Laverty, 2003, p. 8). It is my goal to understand two different parts of my life: being Mormon and being a creative person. As I do this I hope to construct a new understanding of the relationship of these two parts. The data, therefore, will be a collection of information gathered from my experiences as a Mormon/creative person, conversations with fellow Mormon creatives about my study, and the conclusions I glean from both my experiences and interactions.

### *Me as a Mormon*

As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there are many beliefs that I have. As part of my analysis, I will concentrate mainly on the teachings and doctrines that apply directly to creativity. These doctrines come from the scriptures and sacred text studied in the Mormon Church and from the teachings and writings of the clergy (past and present) of the Mormon Church.

*Me as a Creative Person*

By creative person I am referring to the fact that I am involved in a creative line of work and I regularly participate in creative activities. The data that comes from this part of me will be collected from personal experiences that I have had as a teacher and as a Mormon.

Similar to the experience of Hunt (2012), being unfamiliar with the relationship between two of the most important aspects of my life, my Mormon beliefs and my creative beliefs, is disconcerting and the purpose of this study is to explore connections between these two parts of my life. Again, as Coleman (1998) discusses, it would be important to make this connection.

Some might question the validity of this study because most of the data and the interpretation of that data comes from the researcher. They might ask: Why is that valid? What is the purpose of a self-study? Why will the conclusions be important? Seidman (1991) proposed “that we be satisfied with local, pragmatic rationales for our conceptual [interpretive] approaches.” The only outcome of this study might be that I understand myself better as an art teacher and Mormon and it would still be a successful study. The process, in this case, is just as important as the result.

Frequently, I reflect on all of the experiences that have shaped who I am and what I am doing, and it makes me wonder what might have happened if any one of these variables were different. It is quite possible that I would not have become an art educator and in turn I would not be writing this. The order of events that took place were vital, and if any one of them had changed, I might not have arrived at these life-changing conclusions. If Uncle Jack had not chosen to leave the company to pursue orthodontics, perhaps the family business would still be alive and I would still be working there. If my father had not played in that basketball game, perhaps his heart would not have given out. If I had not applied to BYU-Idaho, a Mormon school, perhaps I would not have had the motivation to explore the relationship between God and creativity. All of these different experiences build on one another, and each of them have become “background and experience” as referred to in Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Laverly, 2003).



#### *Chapter IV: Creativity & Religion (Mormon Belief and Creativity)*

In this chapter I relate six narratives that act as nodal points in my study of myself as an art educator and a Mormon. Each of these examples has contributed to my understanding of these two parts of myself. Losing my dad reinforced my commitment to spirituality and Mormonism and helped me comprehend my beliefs concerning my relationship to God. Writing the essay on creativity opened up the possibilities of squaring my religion with creativity. Making the decision to study art education is when I first saw the potential of combining my spiritual and creative selves. Sharing “Feller Facts” opened up an opportunity for me to incorporate meaningful spiritual principles into my art classroom. As a teacher in the Mormon church, I incorporated creative principles into my Mormon worship and service. Finally, collaborating with my Mormon coworker and fellow art educator has shifted my paradigm regarding the two parts of myself to bring them into closer alignment. As I have identified these important events in my life I have started the process of resolving the disequilibrium between Mormon me and creative me. The following narratives trace this trajectory.

##### *Losing My Dad*

It was an unusually warm day for a January. The sun was shining and the snow had sunk into the shadows out of reach of the sun. I loved Saturdays because it meant I got to spend time with my dad. At that time, my dad was running the family meat packing business with his dad and his brothers, and he was also the Bishop, or leader, of our ward. He stayed busy most days, and my mom, my sisters and I did not see much of him. That particular Saturday, though, was special because I got to go with my dad to his church basketball game.

I sat on his bed anxiously watching him put on his basketball warmups. They were heather gray with black and turquoise accents on the sleeves and legs. As a nine-year-old wanting to be just like his dad, I could not wait for the day I could have my own set of basketball warmups just like his.

We drove to the church house in my dad's rusty old Honda. He would let me shift gears as he pushed in the clutch. We pulled into the lot and I climbed the short wall, instead of using the stairs, like I usually did. We entered the gym and I immediately started looking for friends I could sit with to watch the game.

The game was a typical church ball game: aging men from the same ward running up and down the court, wishing they would have kept themselves more in shape. I watched the game in between sessions of hide-and-go-seek or tag that we played on the stage overlooking the basketball court.

At half time, the other kids and I snuck onto the court and shot (or attempted to shoot) baskets as our dads caught their breath and hydrated themselves at the drinking fountains. When the game recommenced, so did our games on the stage.

When the final buzzer sounded and my friends began leaving, I headed down the wooden steps to where my dad was sitting on the bench. He was talking to one of his teammates about his performance in the game like he usually did after each game. In the middle of his rant about his shot or the refs, he suddenly stopped talking, went limp, and crumpled to the floor in a ball.

His teammate, Randy, laid him out flat and lightly slapped his face. "Scot . . . Scot, can you hear me?"

No response.

Randy yelled a little louder, "Scot! Scot, are you okay?"

My dad continued laying lifeless on the floor.

As they tried to revive him, I wandered around the gym still not understanding the gravity of the situation. I eventually made it to the foyer where another basketball player was on the phone explaining to the dispatcher how to get to the church. He hung up and I followed him back into the gym.

Soon the paramedics rushed unto the gym and huddled around my still unconscious father. They took his pulse and tried talking to him, but to no avail. I watched as they flung open his warmups and cut off his jersey. One of them readied the defibrillators.

“Clear!”

Check for a pulse. . . nothing.

“Clear!”

Check for a pulse . . . nothing.

One more time, “Clear!”

Check for a pulse . . . hesitation . . . slight pulse.

They moved my dad to the gurney and rushed him to the ambulance. I followed everyone outside just as my mom pulled into the parking lot. She followed my dad into the ambulance and they pulled away. I watched until I could not see the flashing lights anymore and then I started playing on the wall outside of the church.

At some point I got into someone’s car and we went to the hospital. We walked into the emergency room and we were immediately greeted by half a dozen family members and friends. A close family friend took me to the cafeteria to get me some breakfast. After I had a few bites of a muffin and some chocolate milk, my uncle came to tell us that they had to transfer him to another hospital. They took me home.

We sat on my neighbor’s front porch enjoying the sun. She pointed up the mountain to the hospital and we watched the helicopter take my dad to a different hospital in Salt Lake. My sister came to take me home. I walked in the back door and was welcomed by a large fruit basket someone had already sent us.

The next two weeks were a blur. My little sister and I were handed off every day to a different friend or relative. My mom and older sisters spent most of their time at the hospital. I would visit

every few days, but there was not much change to my dad's comatose state. My mom would sit there and hold his hand or find a razor and shave my dad's face.

One night, after spending the evening with my aunt, we were dropped off at home and I fell asleep on my sister's trundle bed. I slept unusually well that night. I woke up slowly to a room filled with a warm, gray light. I blinked awake about the same time as my sister and saw that my mom was laying in between us. She saw us stirring and proceeded to tell us that they had taken my dad off of life-support and he had passed away. I did not feel sad and I did not even cry. I just started thinking about what it would mean to live without a dad.



*Figure 1.* Various images of me with my father. The relationship I had with my father was imperative in understanding the relationship I have with a Heavenly Father and that we all have the potential to be creative.

Growing up without my dad was difficult, but not because I did not have anyone around to teach me how to shave. It was difficult because my dad had set a high standard for me to live up to. He was a smart man and was well-liked in the community. Losing him only made me want to be even more like him.

After he died, I became instantly attached to anything I thought my dad liked. I grew up wanting to be good at basketball and computers, two of my dad's interests. I did my best to represent my dad in public and to anyone who knew him. I tried to think like him and act like him.

As the years passed by, the memories of my dad started to become fuzzy. It was harder to remember what he sounded like or his personality. After having spent only nine short years with my dad, time easily deconstructed the image I had of him.

Of all of the aspects of my father that I tried to emulate, the one that has stuck with me has been that of being a faithful member/practitioner of our church. Many people looked to my dad as a religious figure for advice. As I came to know and understand the doctrine of the church it helped me not only get to know my dad, but it helped me on my path as an art educator.

### *Study of Creativity*

The paper I wrote as a freshman (referred to in Chapter 1) was a simple essay on the correlation between my beliefs about God, my Mormon beliefs, and creativity. Because of that essay, I discovered many realizations that have influenced how I view creativity, one of the most profound of which was that God is creative.

Throughout the Old and New Testament, God is referred to as the Creator (Isaiah 40:28, Ecclesiastes 12:1, 1 Peter 4:19; King James Version). This caught my attention because, having been immersed in the study of art and creativity, I was interested in the relationship between the word "creator" and "creative." Creator can be defined as: a person or thing that creates and creativity is:

having the ability to create. This relationship was fascinating to me. I came to believe that God was the ultimate creative Being.

I spent many evenings during that freshman year watching the sunset and marveling at the different color schemes splashed across the sky. I was more aware of the beauty of the snowfall and the amazingness of the human hand. I came to realize that anything we make falls short of what God has created.

At first this thought was depressing because looking at art made me realize that anything that artists or myself tried to create was just a cheap imitation of what God has already created. I spent some time trying to figure out what art was and what creativity was. At the end of my freshman year I was assigned to write a paper about any artist or art subject that I desired. I decided to delve deeper into the subject of God being creative.

Through the process of writing this paper I discovered some exciting new information that allowed me to overcome the doubt I had felt about being an artist. While studying my relationship with God I came to understand that, according to the teachings of the Mormon Church, everyone on Earth is spiritual offspring of Heavenly Father. “And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . .” (Genesis 1:26, KJV). “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God . . .” (Romans 8:16-17; KJV).

Growing up without a father present was a vital part to me understanding my relationship to my Heavenly Father. As I have grown, there are things that I do or say that are very similar to what my father would do or say. I possess many of the same mannerisms. Our voices are similar. Some of this had been learned, but much of it has happened because we share the same DNA. Possessing the same spiritual DNA as God would allow all of his children (everyone on Earth) to possess and develop many of his characteristics, including that of being creative. Many people have informed me that I look like and act like my father. In the same way that I have inherited traits from my father, both physical and learned, we, as children of God, have inherited traits from Him. Also, if we are all

His children, as taught by the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, then we all have the ability to be “creative.” This was exciting to me because it meant that art was not a phony imitation of the Master Creator. Rather, engaging in the creative process is an exercise in developing traits handed down to us from on high.

### *Career Selection*

This understanding I gained as a freshman stuck with me as I continued with my degree. I was studying Graphic Design as a major, but as a junior I realized that my life did not feel balanced. I wanted to be more involved in religious education. This was the beginning of this feeling of having two distinct aspects in my life: being creative and being a Mormon. Both very important, and at the time very separate. I enrolled in religious courses that would train and certify me to become an instructor in the church’s Seminary. Simultaneously I engaged in the study of my Mormon-self and my creative-self, as I also continued in my major.

Studying two separate programs seemed very healthy for me at the time. I was exploring the two most important aspects of my life and taking great strides in both programs in developing my understanding of each. This lasted for a year and then the time came to decide which program to choose as a career. After much thought and discussion with my professors, I decided I could marry the two programs and, as I was starting my senior year, I changed my major to Art Education. This allowed me to teach and be involved in creativity. It seemed like the perfect union of Mormon me and creative me.

### *Being Mormon While Being Creative*

As I started teaching, I had the same struggles that most first year teachers experience: classroom management, developing curriculum, staying sane. After a few years, I started feeling comfortable teaching creative content to students and I started to feel successful as a teacher, but a

feeling of unbalance started to creep into the back of my mind. I was doing a good job satisfying the creative side of me, but Mormon-me was being ignored. I was ignoring half of who I am, similar to what Hunt (2012) felt in her career. I needed to find a way to include Mormon-me into my career without preaching my religion. How could I teach principles of self-improvement without teaching specific religious principles? As Grubbs (2010) stated “finding out how specific beliefs impact particular educational intentions or outcomes can pave the way for improving the quality of education.”

In the fall of 2011 I decided to share with the students what I call “Feller Facts & Life Lessons.” I began to brainstorm lessons from my life that would benefit students in theirs. I made a list of everything from traffic laws to etiquette to budgeting to being a good father. I started sharing one Feller Fact at the beginning of class each day to the students. I was not explicitly sharing my Mormon beliefs but it was a way for me to share important aspects of my Mormon life with my students. (Examples of these Feller Facts can be found in the Appendix, Figures 8, 9, and 10). As I shared these facts it was more comfortable as I felt I was appeasing the need to include the Mormon-me in the creative part of my life.

### *Being Creative While Being Mormon*

In April 2012, I was called by the leaders in my ward to teach once a month in the Elder’s Quorum, which is a group of men roughly 20-40 years old. As I embarked on this new assignment, I made it a goal to employ many of the creative practices I still use as an art educator. At the time, I did not realize that these efforts were in direct relation to my study, and it has only been recently, now that I have finished my assignment over two and a half years later, that, whether consciously or not, I was trying to find a relationship between Mormon me and creative me. It felt natural to me to try to teach more creatively.



As mentioned previously, the leaders and teachers of the Mormon Church are not professionally trained clergy. Each assignment or calling is filled by regular members of the congregation who are called by the leaders of each ward through revelation (communication from God to the leaders). Since the age of 1, I have been receiving instruction each Sunday from these teachers that have been assigned from members of the congregation. From my experience in my Sunday school classes, typical behavior for teachers is to teach by lecture and discussion: reading aloud the assigned scripture or passage and then asking questions and discussing. In some cases, teachers have used other methods, such as a video or multimedia presentation or music, but for the most part in the classes I have attended, most instruction has been given through lecture and discussion.

As I started my calling as a teacher in the Elders Quorum, I decided to try and teach in a more comfortable and creative way that more closely aligned with the way I taught professionally. As an art educator, I approach teaching from a hands-on perspective and very rarely lecture for the entire length of a class. Rather than approach teaching in a manner that was similar to the classes I had experienced, I used various methods to try and teach: the men colored pictures with crayons, or cut out and glued paper cubes together (Figure 2). I asked them to come up with scenes that they acted out, or to participate in a fake talk show. During one class I asked them to draw what a righteous “Priesthood Man” looks like and label the drawing (Figure 3). This was done on a life-sized board with the outline of a man drawn on it. These approaches to teaching in a religious setting had been completely different to what I had experienced throughout my life, but were an attempt to include more creativity in a Mormon aspect of my life.

Whether or not these lessons were effective would be a topic for another study, but I noticed two things: first, I felt more comfortable teaching in a way that drew from my creative background, and second, as I felt more comfortable using teaching methods more familiar to me, I think the participants in the classes I taught felt more comfortable discussing the topics at hand. These

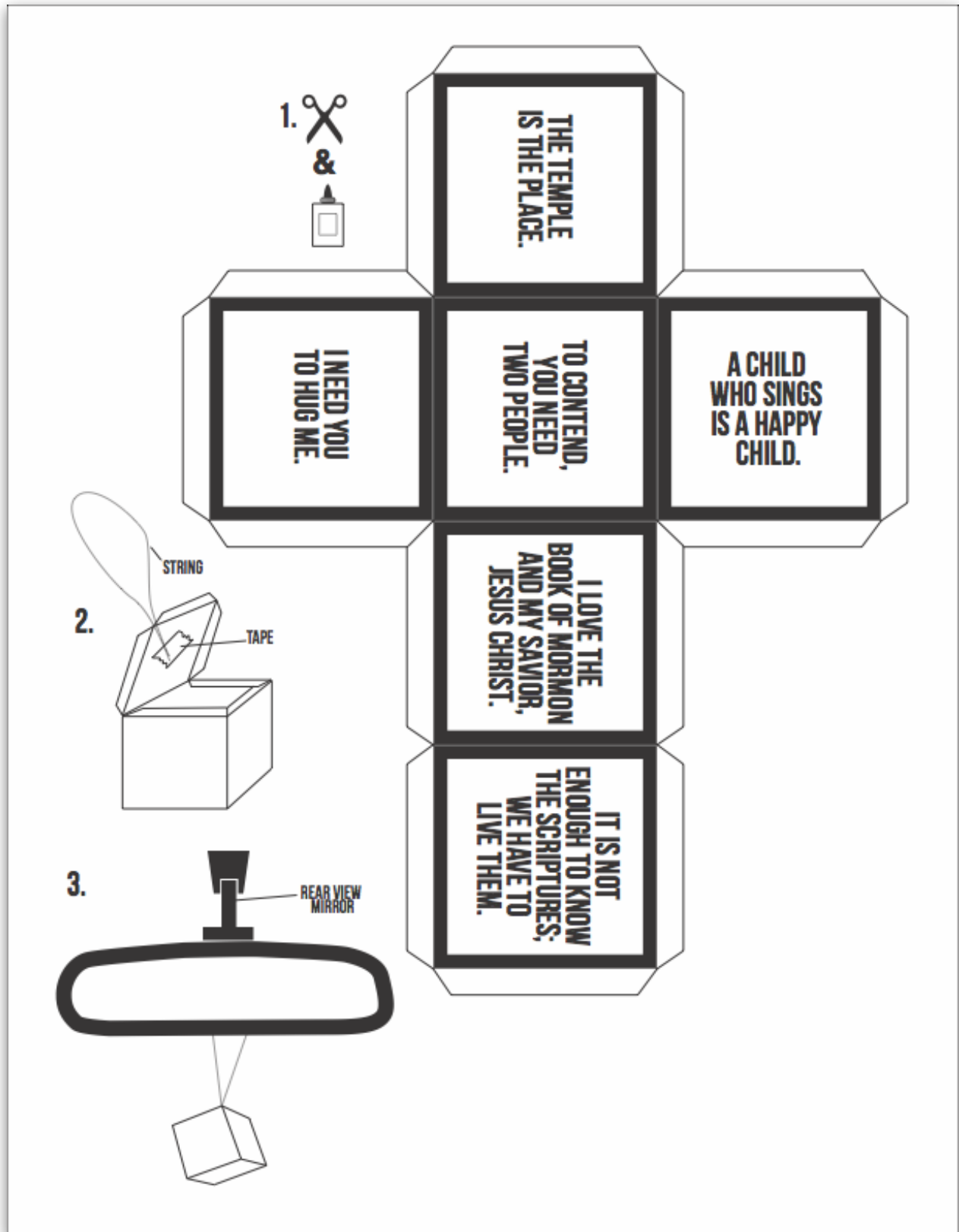


Figure 2. A handout from one of my “creative” lessons. Participants were asked to cut out and glue this cube together.

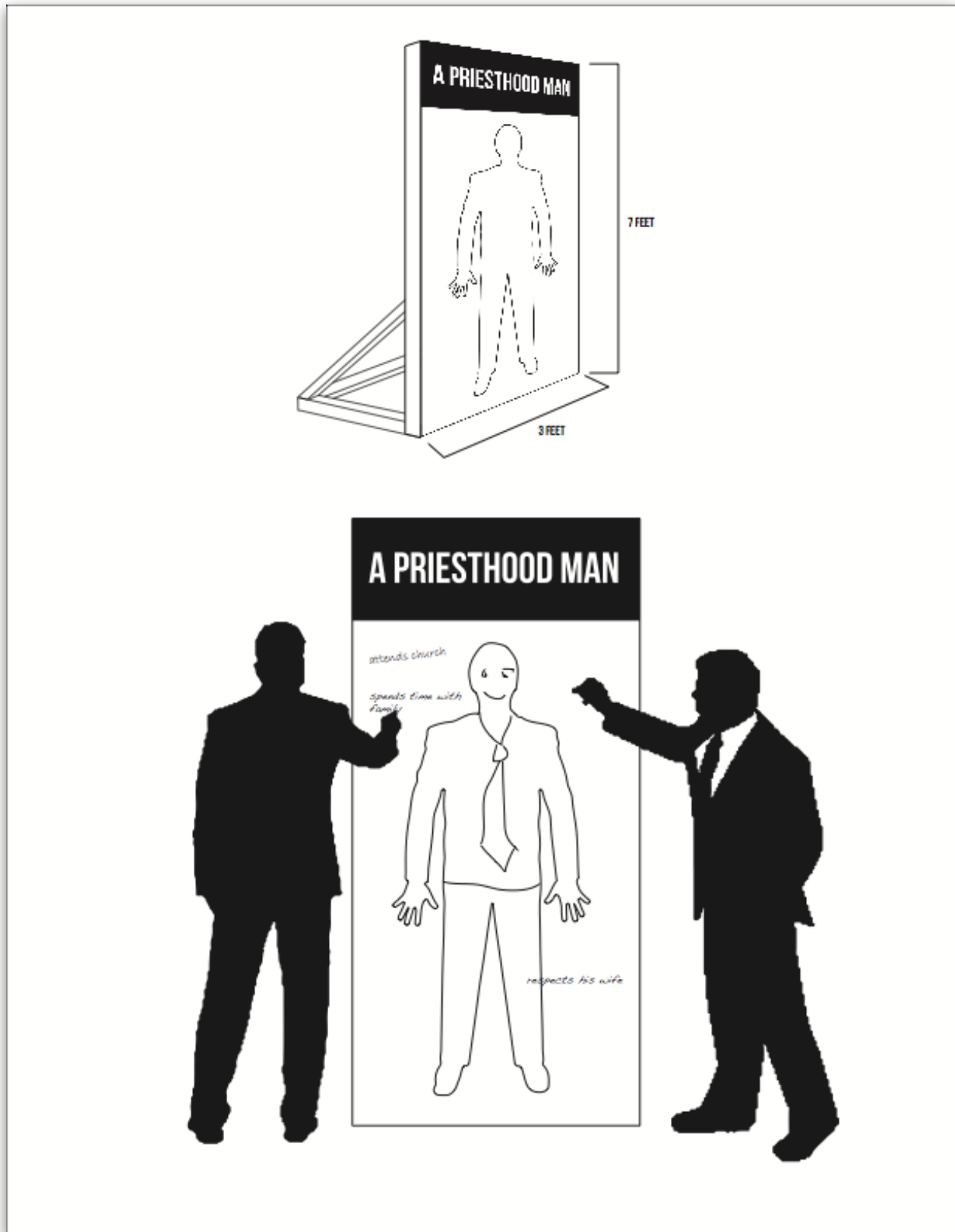


Figure 3. A diagram of the board on which class participants were asked to draw and label what a righteous "Priesthood Man" might look like.

attempts to use creative means to teach in a religious setting are a direct result of this examination of my religious and creative beliefs.

### *Similarities between Art Education and Mormon Religion*

Examining the influence of my Mormon beliefs and creative beliefs on each other has led me to believe that in many ways there are similarities between the two. As I have examined these two aspects of my life and my experiences surrounding my arrival to this study, I am led to examine the similarities to the history of creativity and one of the major points of doctrine in the Mormon Church, the Atonement.

According to Mormon belief, the plan that God created for his children to come to Earth to live and experience joy (2 Nephi 2:25, Smith, 1830) is known as the Plan of Happiness (Alma 42:8, Smith, 1830), the Plan of Salvation (Alma 42:5, Smith, 1830), or the Plan of Redemption. Before the world was created God presented this plan to all of His spirit children. The plan was essentially to give all of His children the opportunity to come to Earth and experience life, with the goal of living in such a way that we would be worthy to return to Him after we die. According to revelation, God's purpose is to "bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39, Church, 1989). God created this plan in order to allow His children to have eternal life, and to experience joy (2 Nephi 2:25, Smith, 1830). However, God sent His children to earth knowing not all of His children will be able to make it back to live with Him, as nothing unclean can return to live with God (1 Nephi 10:21, Smith, 1830) and all men will sin (1 John 1:8, KJV). This part of the plan sets up the standards and laws that make it possible for men to return to God, but it also introduces a conundrum: all of God's children are sent to Earth to be tested so they can return to live with God, yet all people sin, and nothing impure can return to live with God. This is known as justice. Justice alone cannot help men attain eternal life because of sin.

As part of His plan, God provided a savior or redeemer to come and pay the price of sin (Matthew 1:21, KJV). This sacrifice allows men to repent and become clean again so that they can meet the demands of justice and return to live with God as worthy beings. The Savior, Jesus Christ, is God's son who was sent to Earth to make this great sacrifice known as the Atonement (Alma 34:9, Smith, 1830). The Atonement would pay the price and allow men to be made clean. This is called mercy. Mercy (also known as "grace") fulfills the requirements of justice, but mercy alone does not make it possible to return to live with God. Men must also make an effort to live the commandments and rules outlined by the justice of God.

Both mercy and justice are required in God's plan to make it possible for His children to return to His presence. There is a balance between both mercy and justice that allows the Plan of Salvation to fairly serve all of God's children and give them a chance to be successful at achieving eternal life.

This principle of Mormon doctrine, of the interdependence of justice and mercy, is particularly interesting to me as I have engaged in this study as an art educator. It appears to parallel the two different aspects of my life that I have been examining in this thesis: my religious beliefs and my creative beliefs. Religion in my life is an organization or system of rules and commandments in place to help me live my life. My religion gives me structure and organization. It can be compared to justice.

My creative endeavors have given me more freedom and a way to express myself. Being creative helps to keep me spontaneous and messy. It releases pressure and fills in the gaps. It is comparable to mercy.

If religion is equal to justice and creativity is equal to mercy, and I were to employ the use of each to mimic that of the Plan of Salvation, then it would be important for me to discover how both facets of my life could serve each other in order to benefit me.

As depicted in Figure 4, the history of creativity in art education, outlined in chapter two, shares some similarities with the concept of justice and mercy. My initial thoughts suggest that the structure of DBAE is comparable to the rigidity of justice, and the freedom of Lowenfeld shares some of the same traits as mercy. Similar to what I discovered while researching the evolution of creativity in art education, balance is necessary. The expressionistic qualities of Lowenfeld and the structure found with DBAE, the freedom and the rules, have to be in harmony for the system to be successful.

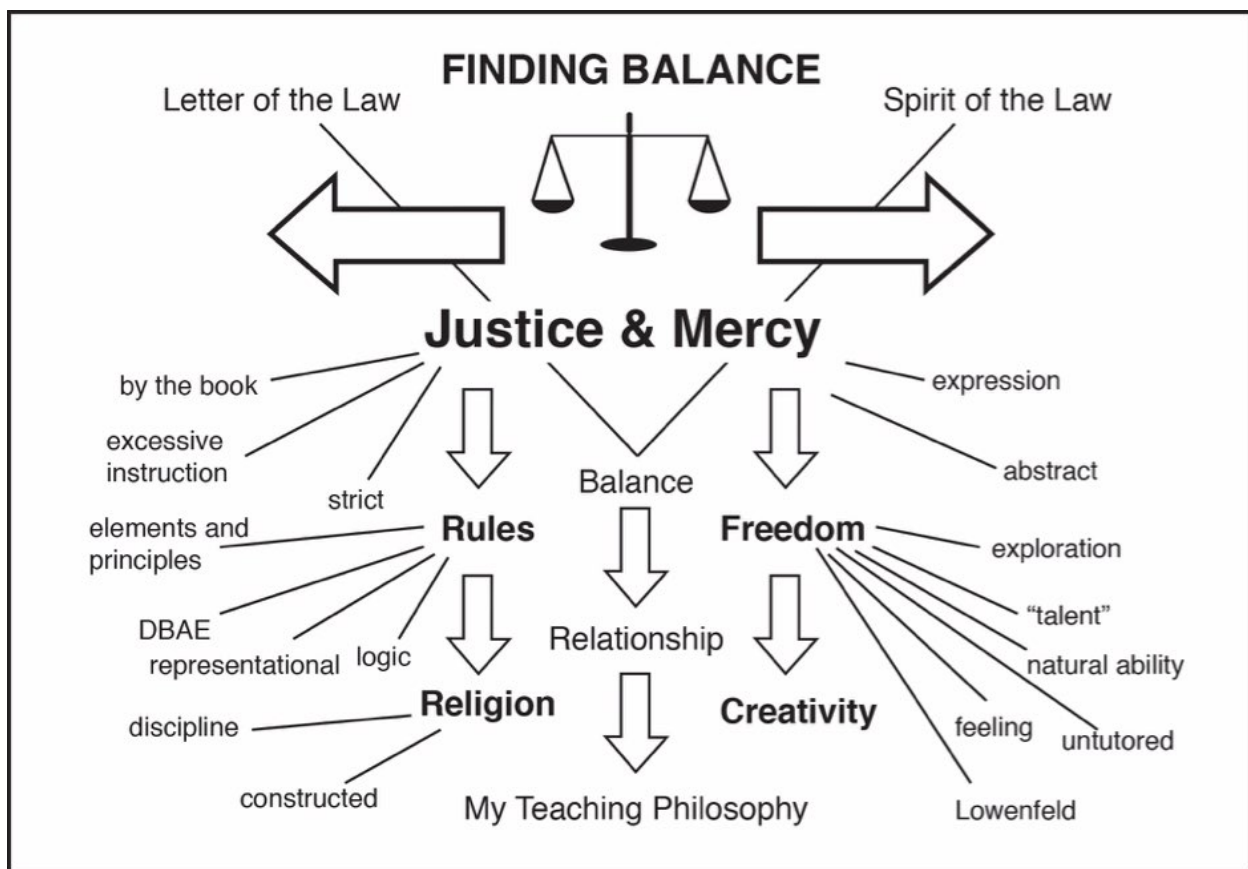


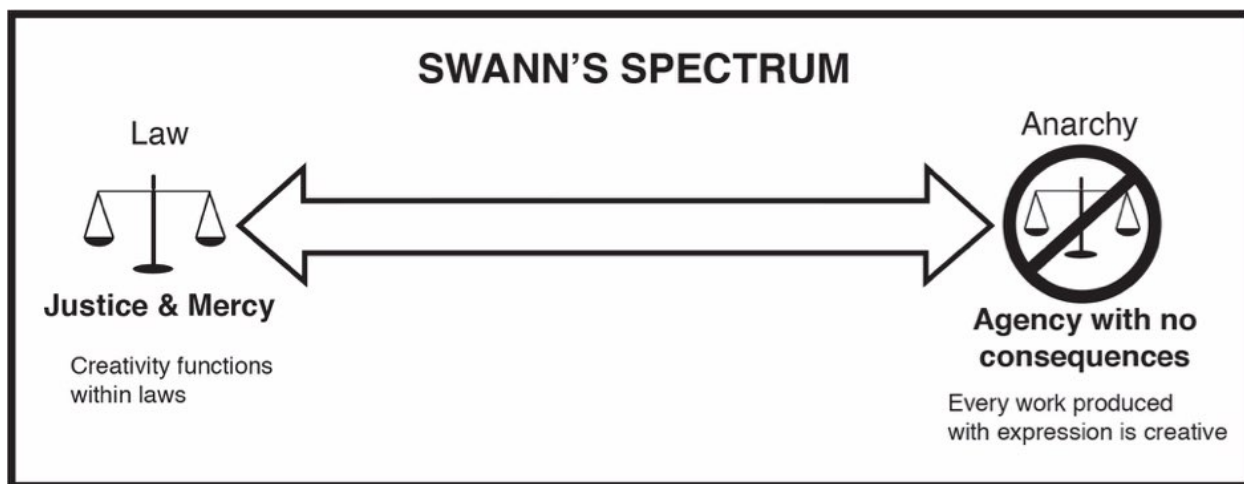
Figure 4. Initial diagram representing my interpretation of justice and mercy compared to creativity.

### *Swann's Feedback*

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) argue that, to ensure quality in self-study research, the study should “ring true and enable connection” and “promote insight and interpretation” (p. 16). As a way

to check my understandings of these principles, I asked my co-worker to review and submit feedback on my comparison of these Mormon principles to art education. Melanie Swann, my coworker, is a ceramics teacher of more than 20 years. She was similarly raised in the Mormon church and brings a fresh perspective to my study.

After reviewing my diagram and explanation of justice and mercy, Swann argued that justice and mercy belong together on one side of a spectrum and that opposite of them is anarchy or disorder/chaos. (Her complete feedback can be found in Appendix B). Her diagram is represented in Figure 5.



*Figure 5.* Swann's reinterpretation of how justice and mercy relate to creativity.

Swann's insight made me analyze the different parts of myself, creative-me and Mormon-me. As I had understood it before her feedback, the two different parts of myself were struggling to find identity. However, according to Swann's Spectrum and her insights, justice and mercy (structure and freedom) have to exist together; they cannot work independently of each other. My thoughts on creativity were also incorrect. Swann states "According to your definition, creativity has structure and governing laws. For example, creativity does not exist without a 'deep knowledge of a symbolic domain.' It also does not exist without, 'recognition . . . of experts.' Creativity then is structured by obedience to laws – laws of creativity."

I was incorrect in thinking that creativity existed without structure. Creativity must have structure in order to be effective, otherwise it is chaotic and disorganized. Likewise, there must be an aspect to religion that is unstructured and based on feeling, not just on rules and commandments. The crossover between both creativity and religion is less defined than I had originally described.

Just like how my examination of justice and mercy relating to religion and creativity was inaccurate, the notion that I was comprised of two parts (Mormon-me and creative-me) was also incorrect. Through this analysis I have come to realize that I am not two different parts struggling within me. I am one being. Mormon-me and creative-me exist together. It is just me. I can teach art and still be Mormon, and I can attend church as a creative person. I have been fixated on the idea that two different parts were existing together but independently, but in fact they are not two distinct parts, but parts of a whole.

### *Moving Forward*

This new understanding, that Mormon-me and creative-me are parts of a whole, has made me analyze other aspects of my life in which I am dividing myself rather than unifying. The first part of my life that I have unknowingly divided is the use of my sketchbook. Prior to this study, I had a creative sketchbook that I took to work and sketched ideas for lessons and projects, and one church sketchbook, a sketchbook I used to take notes at church meetings. Once I identified that having a sketchbook for each of the two main aspects in my life was causing a separation between the two parts of me, I immediately made the decision to merge both sketchbooks into one. Now, rather than taking one sketchbook to church and one to work, I take one sketchbook everywhere. This has allowed me to think about my entire life's experience together as being complete, not two separate parts (see Figure 6). When I take notes at church I often come up with ideas that relate to the creative side of my life, and I can include them with my religious notes. The same is true at work, when I am writing or sketching about creative things I can find connections to spiritual things



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**RUTH**

National Portrait Gallery and Smithsonian American Art Museum  
 WALKER 51

stuff that I LIKE.

- Benjamin Lay by William Williams
- Pocahontas
- David Rittenhouse by Charles Peale (description)
- Benjamin Franklin by Joseph Siffred Duplessis
- Robert Morris by Robert Edge Pine
- Andrew Oliver by John Singleton Copley
- John Singleton Copley (self)
- Margaret de Lafayette (sculpture)
- Thomas Paine by Laurent Ouby
- John Randolph by John Wesley Jarvis
- Thomas Paul by Thomas Badger
- Andrew Jackson by Ferdinand Petrich (war)
- Thurlow Weed by Chester Harding (war)
- DeWitt Clinton by John Wesley Jarvis
- Thomas L. McKimsey by Charles Loring Elliott
- Anne Catherine Hot Greek by Charles Willson Peale
- Patience Wright by Robert Edge Pine
- William Lloyd Garrison
- Frederic K. Douglass, Lemuel Shaw, William Seward, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay
- Edwin Forrest by Frederic Styles Agate (actor)
- H. H. Richardson by Hubert von
- Langfellow by Thomas Burgham Reid
- John James Audubon (self)
- John Greenleaf Whittier
- Joseph Smith by Adrian Lamb

use this exhibit to start a photo assignment of portraits

Selfie assignment for photos

show good and bad (this is bad) with photos

Stephen A. Douglas (sculpture of nail)

Jan Brown by Ole Rasmusen

Samuel Clemens by Tim White

Continued →

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13<sup>th</sup> ward (8<sup>th</sup> branch)

David Christensen  
 801-294-5035  
 801-

Family History

- came to our house and do the program  
 - just need some money for printing or ink and binders

Forewell of Sister Rachel Finkler - Building of temples has been important to the history of the church. Sometimes we solve the serious problems in life. Satan does not have a temple recommend. I wasn't sealed to anyone and it bothered me. It took my man a long time to come around. It doesn't normally work out that way, usually the kids have to wait until they are 18.

Brother Wood. We're most likely to receive revelation as we study revelation (scriptures, patriarchal blessing, words of prophecy). The temple will give hope to the hopeless. The temple answers questions. The faith of life, the real stuff happens in the temple. Exaltation is a family affair.

President Geleman - the temple is for all time periods of the earth.

Forewell of Parker (Porky) Murray  
 Dexter Murray - Invite others to come unto Christ. Riverside. Someone (Willy) learning English. Inviting others is awkward.

Parker Murray - Who, what, why of missionary work.  
 "Good man, it's a good man. You have all made up/influenced who I am. You don't speak Korean."

Matt Roberts - Alms 37-6-7 small and simple things. Coolness doesn't rub off. Giving thanks to god. "mymightymeridian" Mormon Matt at the standard summer camp

01016

8<sup>th</sup> Branch Conference

President Shafer - what is our purpose for being on this earth?

WHAT IS IMPORTANT? vs WHAT IS NOT?

we must **think** and think. It's easier to serve the Lord when the flesh and spirit are **ONE**.

HE WHO IS WITHOUT SIN LET HIM cast his stone

READ the SCRIPTURES TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT JESUS

President Hill - the way you lead it will make the difference in the hearts of the people.

Doctrine of endurance. Serving others brings wisdom (that's why HT & VT is such an integral part of the gospel)

TRUST THAT ENDURING WILL YIELD FRUIT

ENDURING MEANS YOU REPENT. ENDURING MEANS YOU TRY.

13<sup>th</sup> Ward Conference

Bishop Anderson - Living a Christ-centered life. what is one thing you can change.

President Han - And the corn could save the farm. High water prayed... sunshine for days...

President Hill - In Nephi 4:6 → it's better for one parish than for a nation to dwindle (little by little)

TEACHING YOUR KIDS TO DRIVE

“WILL YOU COME PRAY WITH THE KIDS?”

“I CAN'T, I'VE GOT A CHURCH MEETIN’

{well I hope you're not talking about the doctrine of prayer}

041016

President Monson - we must guard and protect the priesthood. Are you standing in holy places. The Priesthood brings responses, blessings, and blessings. Friend shot down. in life raft. Holy Ghost prompted him to use the Priesthood to command the vessel to come and rescue them.

Church

President Hill - Being junior companion is the most important calling in the church. If the junior companion wants to work, you work.

Sunday School - wholesome recreational activities. why? it's a chance to bond with your kids. your influence won't last long - in Junior High their friends take over.

Being a couple is important - cuts go to the temple - having a ward family is beneficial

IDEA - include in inviting everything - place for - get friendly - work bench project center

High Priest Quorum Meeting -

President Hill - 1839 Joseph Smith was in Liberty Jail. Extermination order... Saints moved to Quincy, population 1,500 and 5,000 people showed up. They fed, clothed, and found jobs for the Saints. In 2002, Norman Tabernacle choir sang in Quincy and gave the money to the city.

Elder Keaton (ap) - 60,000,000 refugees in world provided with supplies. Being a refugee does not define them. This moment does not define them, but it does define us.

Brother Anderson -

The Sabbath Day - Marriage and Family Walk by Faith Moroni 7: 32-33

HAVING FAITH IN CHRIST STRENGTHENS YOU

“Believe that your faith has nothing to do with your appearance because it does.”

ANTIQUES ROADSHOW THINGS ARE ALWAYS BETTER UNDERVALUED

Figure 6. Pages from my merged sketchbook. The various pages contain ideas about church, art, and projects. It is a combination of my creative sketchbook and my church sketchbook.

because they are not separate, but all parts of my life experience.

The merging of my two sketchbooks was one result of what I learned through this self-study. Further findings and conclusions will be discussed in chapter 5.

### *Chapter V: Conclusions*

Perhaps the reason behind wanting to conduct this examination into my life was because I had observed that people use identity to make sense of their conduct, to justify moral positions, and to defend educational practices (see MacLure, 1993). I have studied various aspects of my life and have tried to understand more about creative-me and Mormon-me, including the importance of merging the two. The findings that have come to light as a result of this self-study have led me to several findings and conclusions outlined in this chapter.

#### *Creativity and Religion Are Similar*

While examining both creativity and religion I have come to conclude that creativity and religion are similar in many ways. Both have laws or rules that govern their processes. Both require a certain degree of interpretation. Many people interpret the various types of creativity and religion differently based on personal experience and bias. Both creativity and religion require a certain amount of practice. Wuthnow (2001), who interviewed dozens of artists about spirituality in recent years concluded:

If there is a single key to artists' perspectives on the spiritual, it is this: spirituality, like art, must be practiced to be perfected. The way of the artist involves doing rather than only believing in the possibility of doing. It requires training, discipline, and a considerable investment of oneself. (p. 4)

Analyzing my life through this study, I have become aware of the ebb and flow of being dedicated to one aspect of my life or the other. Currently, I have dedicated more time to the religious side of me than the creative side. I am less comfortable with being an artist than I am with being religious. As I move forward, I plan on dedicating more time to creativity, as this will also help me understand my religion. Thinking of my past experience, I realize that I have never felt entirely

comfortable with the creative part of me. Dedicating more time to creating will hopefully help with this feeling of discomfort.

### *God is Creativity*

Buckenham (2011) says “human creativity is being looked at anew, as a divine spiritual power given to us by God” (p. 59). I have spent most of my life thinking of creativity and religion as being separate, but perhaps they are the same thing. There is not God/religion and creativity existing separately, but rather, God is creativity. Buckenham continues:

Whether God is understood as Creator – as in Genesis – or creativity itself, the divine creative energy that forms the universe is the life-force that also flows through human beings made in the image of God. Co-creating with God not only applies to artists, but to all of humanity. Every person is born as a creative being, as co-creators with God in the image of God, and all have the need as well as the responsibility to create. (p. 62)

If this is true, then we all must create. It would be even more important for me to teach my students to create and to teach and learn about creativity in my congregation.

In my experience growing up in the Mormon church, I have learned about creativity, but perhaps it has not been emphasized enough. Weiner (2000) gives an explanation of why this might be:

Although religion is arguably the single most important source for creativity in the world, it is also often a major obstacle. While almost all the world’s religions have been major patrons of education, the arts, and in some cases, the sciences, the express intention has been to have learning and the arts to serve the higher purposes of the religion. However, as the stories of the Tower of Babel and the Golden Calf make clear, the biblical God is a jealous one and will not tolerate certain creations. What is more, it would seem that anyone who is seriously

committed to a religious tradition—Biblical or otherwise—would have to place certain values (such as devotion, obedience, love, enlightenment, or justice) above creativity. (p. 224)

This study, which has been an examination of my life and the teachings of my religion and of creativity, has led me to believe that creativity should be explored as a value to be understood both in the art classroom and in religious settings. One should not separate creativity and religion, as I had done up until this study.

### *We Are All Creative*

We all have the potential to be creative. The experience I had examining Mormon doctrine relating to creativity and remembering the relationship that I have with my father is important to remember as I move forward with my educational philosophy. Looking at creativity this way is not new. According to Funk (2000), studying creativity in a transpersonal perspective is more comprehensive.

Understanding that all of my students have the potential to be creative because of my belief in spiritual lineage from God will help me in facilitating the creative process with my students. Deciding before the first day of each semester that every student that enters my classroom has the potential to be creative will help facilitate the creative learning process.

### *Thesis Writing as Inquiry*

For me, the process of writing a thesis has been a form of inquiry in and of itself. I have learned a lot about myself and my teaching philosophy because I have engaged in the thesis writing process. I have learned that when it comes to feeling and logic, most of my life I have relied on feeling to complete assignments. It is difficult for me to flex the muscles in the critical writing sections of my brain, but it is easy for me to write a church talk or lesson plan by following what I

am feeling. It would be important for me to develop the logical as I endeavor to undertake more studies.

Through the process of this thesis I have learned a lot about myself and about what I believe in both religiously and creatively. Despite any shortcomings I may have as a writer, I have explored myself and my life and I have arrived at conclusions that will influence both my professional and religious practices and this thesis is a culmination of that experience.

### *Creativity in Life*

People need creativity to survive. We do not expect trials in life. I never expected my father to die so young and I was forced to deal with life's problems. Creativity is one way to deal with these problems. Godlivitch (1999) found a correlation between artistic creativity and the creativity that helps us deal with life's problems:

Just as artistic creativity is but one strand of human creativity, so human creativity is a species of a larger genus. Not only may we model many aspects of human creativity on natural creativity, we have good reason to do so. What we identify as creative in our own activities is reinforced by our seeing nature as creativity. (p. 22)

When students learn how to be artistically creative, it can translate to creatively dealing with problems in their personal lives. It will be important to make this evident as I am teaching students the creative processes.

### *Teaching Ethics/Social Responsibility*

For me, being an art educator is unique because the curriculum I teach more closely ties in with design education, an aspect of art education that I have not completely explored in this study. When teaching design there is a necessity to teach design ethics and social responsibility. Aside from teaching mini-lessons on social responsibility, it is important to teach students how to deal with

ethics in design, not just copyright issues, but designing for clients or companies that align with one's standards and beliefs. D'Anjou (2010) said "The designer acts in bad faith whenever he/ she regards him/herself as object, with a fixed identity, instead of as a free person" (p. 102). The design student must be able to identify who they are in order to make design choices. D'Anjou (2010) continues, "A designer defines him/herself by choosing and acting in a certain way, but at any moment he/she is free to choose and act differently, and this regardless of the past" (p. 102).

Design is a powerful tool that can help improve society. In many of my design classes as an undergrad, we participated in projects for the community and assisting non-profit organizations with their work. I have tried to teach students to do likewise and this aspect of design education ties in with both aspects of myself that more closely resembles a marriage of each of the two parts that have been explored in this thesis. Moving forward, I will pay particular attention to this aspect of design as I am structuring my curriculum.

*Epilogue: July 2016*

During the course of this study there have been events in my life outside of the realms being a Mormon and being creative that have impacted me. While this study involves these two particular areas of my life, it also ignores several of the most important aspects of who I am: a husband and a father. My studies have been impacted dramatically by occurrences in my family life. Over the last three years my life has been affected by miscarriage, sickness, surgeries, promotions at work, house flooding, and other events typical to having a family. These are important parts of my life and further study on these lived experiences would also benefit my development as a creative person/art educator.



*Figure 7.* Me with my family. Being a husband and father is an aspect of my life I ignored in this study.

The years during which this study took place were, perhaps, three of the hardest years of my marriage. As my wife and I approached the challenges in our lives, creativity came into play to get through each obstacle. Creativity became a tool for us to deal with life.

This study was difficult as well because of the unbalance in my life as a result of spending more time examining my creative and religious beliefs. It is necessary to have equilibrium as a person



and I found that not spending enough time developing all of the parts of me equally created discord in my life with family, occupation, and social relationships.

It was also difficult to study myself. I have conducted various quantitative studies prior to this paper and it would have been easy for me to work with quantifiable data. This type of qualitative research was more difficult than anticipated but it was beneficial to try to find understandings about myself in order to teach students more about themselves.

This study allowed me to deconstruct myself as a person and examine several aspects of my life. After this study I feel less sure of who I am, which is both scary and exciting because I used to feel more secure with my identity. This new uncertainty is both unnerving and exciting because as I take the time to reconstruct my identity, I can do so knowing what I know as a result of this study.

This study has also informed me that all students of art and creativity need to understand their identities. I plan on structuring part of my curriculum to allow my students to examine their identities and enable them to understand themselves more completely.

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*Appendix A*

Samples from my presentation of Feller Facts & Life Lessons

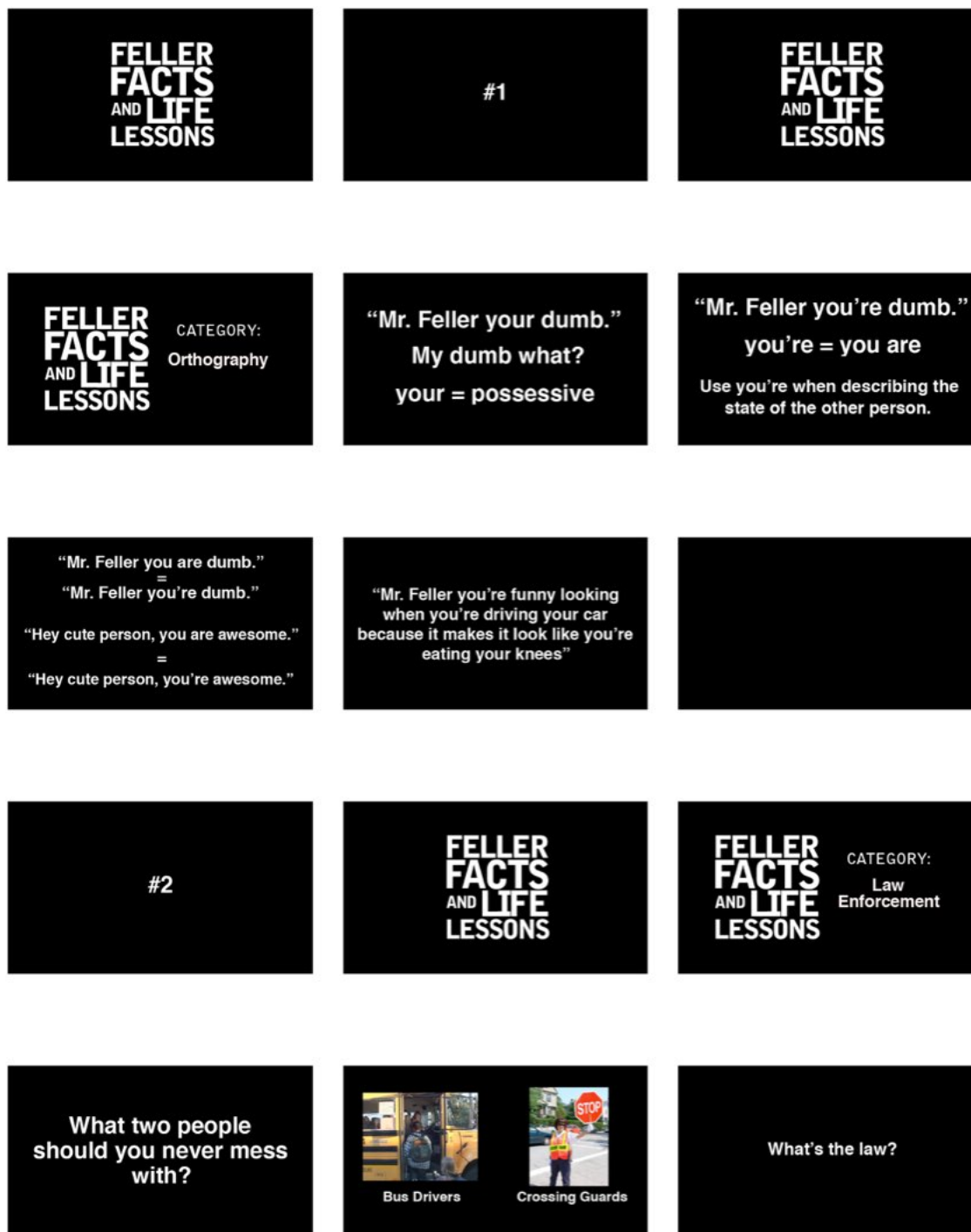


Figure 8. Slides from Feller Facts & Life Lesson presentation (Feller Fact 1 & 2: The correct use of "you're" and safety with bus drivers and crossing guards)

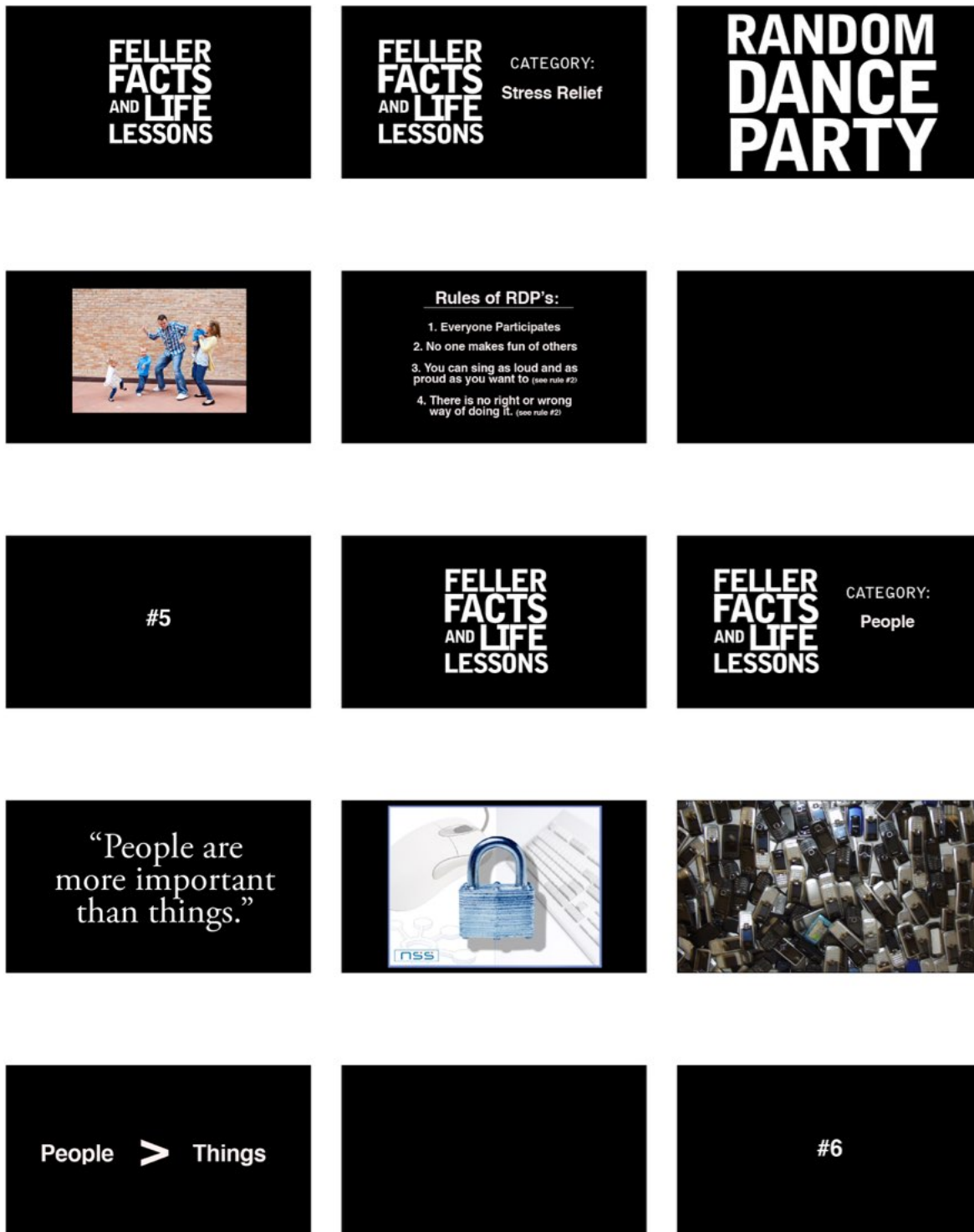


Figure 9. Slides from Feller Facts & Life Lesson presentation (Feller Fact 4 & 5: Random Dance Parties and The Importance of People)

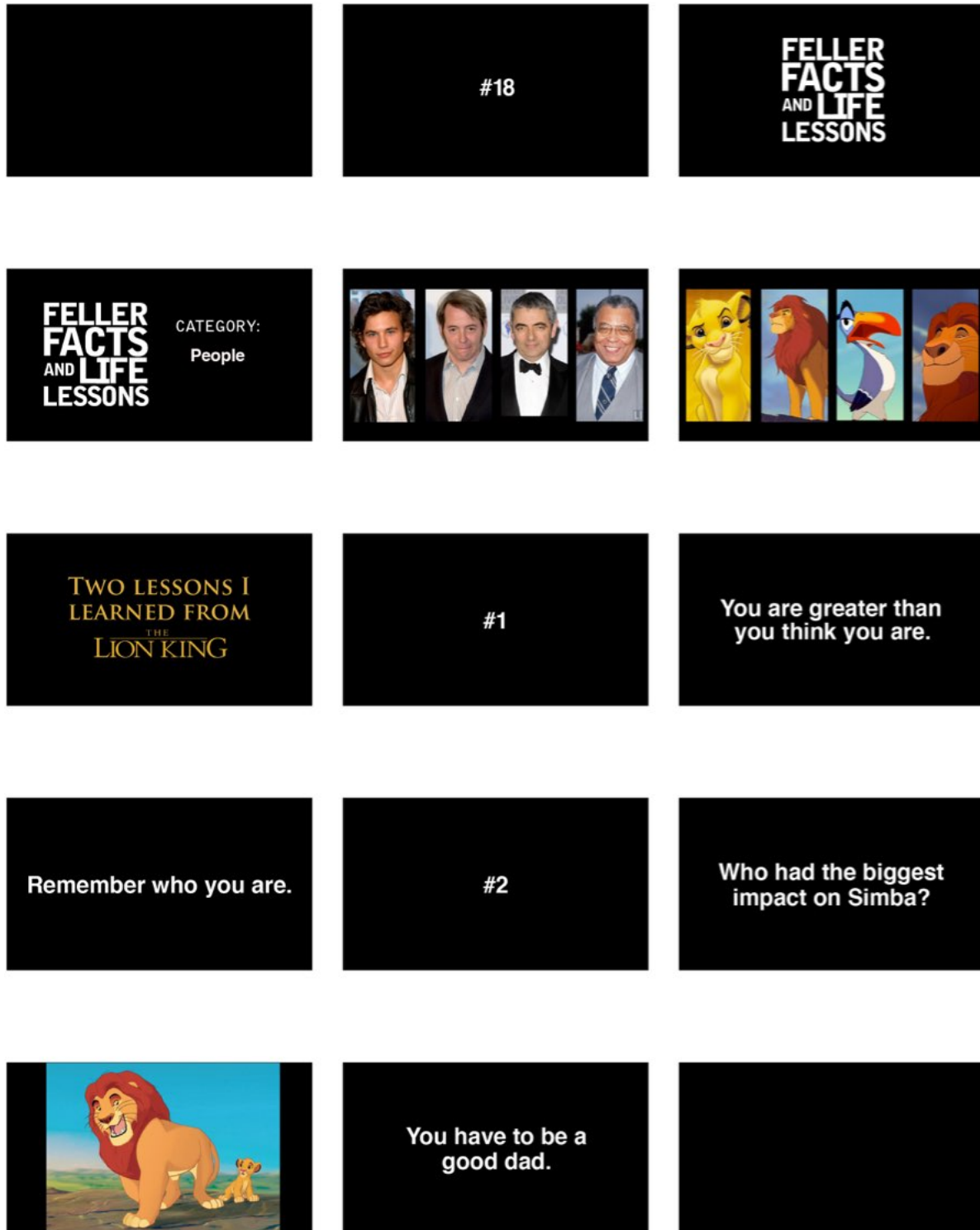


Figure 10. Slides from Feller Facts & Life Lesson presentation (Feller Fact 18: Lessons from Disney's The Lion King - you are greater than you think you are and dad's need to set the example.)



*Appendix B*

Written feedback from Melanie Swann, June 2015

On page 12, you define the parameters of creativity. According to your definition, creativity has structure and governing laws. For example, creativity does not exist without a “deep knowledge of a symbolic domain.” It also does not exist without, “recognition . . . of experts.” Creativity then is structured by obedience to laws – laws of creativity. In creating the world, Jehovah waited for obedience before recognizing that the efforts creation were “good” (Moses 2:31). Hebrew translation of “good” means the result fulfilled his purposes. Another translation of good is obedient.

Mercy, like creativity, also has and is governed by law. For the law of mercy to be called into effect for the children of men, there must be a savior. This is the first law of mercy. The savior must be perfect - he must have the omniscient knowledge of the Father. He must “recognize” the power, will and authority of the Father. This is the second law of mercy. Those wishing to be “saved” must “recognize” the authority of the savior and promise to obey and follow. Thus, the laws of mercy are just as confining as the laws of justice. The benefit of the law of mercy is that it allows for failure.

We do not possess all of the knowledge and wisdom of the Father. Nor do we possess all of the knowledge of any one domain. So in our attempts at creativity will be messy. Some will fail. Mercy gives another opportunity to try. If there is freedom to be found in mercy that is different from the freedom found in justice it would be the freedom to fail and try again.

Mercy is a creative solution within the domain of the laws of God, that allow His children to return. Mercy is a true principle. Creativity only works as a viable solution to a problem or expression when it is grounded to truth or doctrinally (knowledge =truth),

Thus mercy is the ultimate expression of God’s love and creativity and satisfies the demands of the law of justice.

Truth is things as they were, are, and will be. Therefore, truth can be circumscribed into one whole. All of God’s laws exist as a whole. Justice and mercy must exist together.

If the comments I've placed on your paper cause a paradigm shift for you, then it could be argued that this experience also needs to be included in your paper.