Un/Doing Spirituality: Contemporary Art, Cosmology, and the Curriculum as Theological Text

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Un/Doing Spirituality: Contemporary Art, Cosmology, and the Curriculum as Theological Text

Clark Adam Goldsberry

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

Un/Doing Spirituality: Contemporary Art, Cosmology, and the Curriculum as Theological Text

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Master of Arts

Talking about spirituality can be uncomfortable. The topic is especially precarious within the sphere of education. Despite the discomfort and precarity, many scholars argue that there may be room in the postmodern curriculum for safe, open, and generative dialogue about religion and spirituality as cultural phenomena. These curriculum theorists (see Slattery, 2013; Doll, 2002; Huebner, 1991; Noddings, 2005; Whitehead, 1967a/1929; Wang, 2002) propose a sensitive critique of spirituality and religion that can lead to cultural healing, re-membering, re-integration and re-collection (Huebner, 1991). In an increasingly fractured world (Slattery, 2013), where spiritual and religious underpinnings cause an array of conflict, this study works toward critical dialogue in a secondary level public school art classroom. Through art-making, writing, and class discussions, the teacher and student researchers explored, critiqued, and de/constructed their own spirituality—with the aim of aggregating, accommodating (Rolling, 2011) and appreciating ways of thinking, being, and practicing that were different from their own. The project adopted A/r/tography as a qualitative research methodology, which views art-making, writing, and conversations as generative pools of data that can produce new understandings, meanings, and potentialities (Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, 2008).

Keywords: spirituality, contemporary art, curriculum theory, a/r/tography
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Mark Graham has encouraged me to critique and transcend institutional borders. He has been a mentor and friend in muffler shops, on rock walls, in art museums, hiding under boulders during hail storms, sipping milk tea in mud huts, and sitting in remote monasteries, listening to young Buddhist monks chant mantras by the light of yak-butter lamps. The questions that arose as we walked together in the Himalaya created entry-points into this research, and continue to propel my wonderings / wanderings. His itch for things remote and his reverence for Nature is enlivening, both personally and pedagogically.

I feel indebted to a whole community of artists, educators, and scholars who have been generous and wise friends. I thank Tara Carpenter Estrada for her thorough and thoughtful feedback and mentorship; Jethro Gillespie for his warmth and encouragement; Bart Francis for his enthusiasm and energy; and Ashmae Hoilland for being my personal writing coach and helping me to feel like a capable writer. I am also grateful for my students, who always surprise me with their creativity, depth, humor, and insight—I am glad to know them.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

*Artists today?*

*They are couriers,*

*they accompany people on the true adventure,*

*a journey into the inner self.*

Marina Abramovic (1992b, p. 235)

---

Figure 1. Cosmological Mandala with Mount Meru, Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368).
In a rusty prop plane, I stuff cotton balls into my ears. The loud engines on each wing sputter to life and rattle the entire cabin. I grip the threadbare seat as we lift off in Kathmandu and fly toward the Himalaya mountains—hoping to land at one of the most dangerous and remote airports in the world.

Our goal was to visit schools and monasteries in the Khumbu region of Nepal, in the shadow of Mt. Everest. While there, we would study religious iconography and holistic
education. In particular, I was interested in the cross-pollination of art and spirituality in the context of these Eastern traditions. Along the trail, however, my questions changed.

My definition of spirituality is always changing, but perhaps it could be something like boarding a rusty prop plane. There is so much unknown, and so much mystery—a complicated, sometimes gut-wrenching combination of hope and fear. As we barreled into the clouds, I listened to the flight attendant give instructions, or possibly reassurance, in a foreign tongue. I had no way of understanding her. But nonetheless we were together, and I was listening, through the cotton balls in my ears. Perhaps that, too, relates to my understanding of spirituality—something unintelligible, not-knowable, potentially precarious.

I have wrestled with questions of spirituality for as long I can remember. When I lost my mom at three years old and then my father at eighteen, I found comfort, peace, and community in religion. I hung on to the seat in the rusty prop plane, and I found hope in the dream of being with my family in a bright, perfect space. I was barreling toward something, although I couldn’t tell exactly what, and I hoped it would be a safe landing in the mountains.

Curiously, it was during my service as a Mormon missionary that I experienced my first waves of turbulence. I realized that my belief system had gaps and holes, and I began to notice cracks and dings in the engine that was carrying me. I was shaken by questions that resisted easy answers. I became fascinated with other faith traditions and belief systems. During my two years in Connecticut, I suddenly became aware of the infinite varieties of healing, hope, and happiness that existed within the vast landscape of spirituality. I met Rastafarian ministers who invited me into their homes for dinner. I met Baptist preachers who prayed for me and my family. I met professors from the Yale Divinity School who asked me questions that I had never even considered—and their questions remained poignant and productive even after returning home.
After my mission service, I spent time in Jewish synagogues, Islamic mosques, Hindu temples, and Yoga ashrams. I have been nourished by each of these belief systems, and I have been stirred by the life they invite me to live. I have stopped assessing these systems in binary terms of right or wrong, true or false. Instead, my experiences have shown that each system has affordances and limitations. Each engine has dings, and each engine requires maintenance—yet each engine is capable of doing important work.

I caught my first glimpse of the snowy Himalayan mountains through a small porthole. The 15-passenger plane was being tossed in the wind, and a curious blend of fear and excitement filled the cabin. I reflected on the work we had done to get there and the tasks we planned to accomplish. I was on a field study with a team of art teachers led by Dr. Mark Graham from Brigham Young University. We had spent the previous months writing grant proposals, submitting visa applications, and reading Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist texts. We already felt like we knew the culture, the customs, and the terrain. We didn’t.
I am reminded of Kevin Kumashiro’s (2004) warning that knowledge which is partial—meaning biased and fragmentary—can be extremely problematic. And the knowledge we think we hold is often in most need of unsettling (Barney, 2009, p. 90).

The plane banked around a mountain slope and descended toward a short runway perched on a cliff. With a plume of smoke, our wheels screeched onto the narrow landing strip, and our trek began. From that point onward there would be no cars, buses or trains to carry us. We would be walking for the next two weeks.

We walked through the rhododendron forests and the steep mountain passes, and we were welcomed into small schools filled with uniformed children. They greeted us with warmth, and called out to us in Nepali as we approached. They treated us like long-time family friends. The young children climbed on us while the older children asked questions in broken English about cars, Hollywood movies, and fast food. We drew pictures with them, helped with their math homework, and played soccer in dusty fields. On the jagged slopes of their villages, they taught us about the Yeti, and what it was like to be a porter. Just being together was an education.

Figure 4. Children at the Lukla Primary school, Nepal.
As we walked past stone walls and prayer wheels covered in snow, we were welcomed into monasteries by Tibetan Buddhist monks. They invited us into their holy places without reservation. They recited ancient mantras about mindfulness and presentness, and beat drums with bone mallets. They offered us steaming milk tea by the flickering light of yak butter lamps. We sat with each other in silent, mutual incomprehension.

Figure 5. Young Buddhist monks, performing puja, a meditative ceremony.

I was already further away from home than I had ever been, but these moments called me out of myself and made me feel even further displaced. These moments stirred, unsettled, and disturbed me. They complicated my notions of what had once been foreign, and pulled me toward new understandings that were more nuanced and tangled than I had expected. I realized how similar we were, and how curiously different we were. Most importantly, I realized how generative our mutual strangeness was. I developed a deep appreciation for new ways of thinking, being, and practicing. These curious experiences helped me to look more quizzically at my own patterns of thinking, being, and practicing.
I wanted to share this strangeness with my students. Parker Palmer (1993) describes the ideal classroom as “a place where every stranger and every strange utterance is met with welcome” (p. 74). I began thinking about how I could invite students into uncomfortable spaces in order to look more quizzically at their own patterns of thinking, being, and/or practicing. Further, I wondered how we could look at strangeness, both without and within (Aoki, 2005), with generosity and openness. Ted Aoki (2005) describes the pluralistic nature of strangeness, and observes that “each one of us is both self and other; each subject is inhabited by both self and other. In each one of us there is always a part that is a stranger to the self—other than self” (p. 288). He notes that there is a reciprocal relationship between caring for the stranger without and the stranger within, and we must be comfortable with both entities, or we will be comfortable with neither.

I teach art at a public high school where a particular religious majority dominates the school culture. I wanted to enter terrain that was disorienting and disconcerting for all of us, to see where it leads and what new understandings could emerge through a critical unsettling (Barney, 2009, p. 241). Like Ishmael, a character described by Herman Melville (1851) in Moby Dick, I had developed “an everlasting itch for things remote” (p. 1), and I wondered what implications that itch could have in my teaching.

My education had been marked by several unsettling teachers. Like traveling, their classrooms pushed me into new ways of thinking, being, and practicing. The classrooms were disorienting places where everything was subject to re-evaluation. These teachers and spaces in which we learned together helped me to embrace complexity, and invited me to sit with questions instead of trying to immediately defuse and dismiss them. They introduced me to contemporary artists who explore big questions and challenge societal norms (Ross, 2018). They
taught me that being an artist means to be alive in a process of unfolding—never complete, never finished, but vibrantly sufficient (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008). They also taught me that learning is not about absorbing a stagnant pool of information, but about making connections and building a network of shared and negotiated, or even contested, understandings.

In the Himalayan mountains, I began finding parallels between monastic life and contemporary art. As a practicing artist I find it helpful to create arcs between disparate communities and practices. These arcs, although they are sometimes obscure, motivate my studio practice and generate new conceptual relationships. This endeavor also informs my teaching practice. By looking for parallels or curious intersections between disparate communities, time periods, and/or practices, we build networks of negotiated and sometimes contested understandings. This process enables my students and me to do so much more than absorb stagnant pools of information—we occasion learning and create new meanings together.

For some reason, the rugged snowy slopes seemed especially fertile for building arcs and creating obscure connections. By conceptually overlapping the disparate communities of contemporary art and Tibetan Buddhism, I began noticing unexpected similarities—and the curious similarities helped me to generate new understandings and framings of each community.

For example, when I saw monks sitting in quiet meditation, paying attention to the present moment, I remembered Marina Abramovic’s performance piece, The Artist is Present (2010), sitting with strangers in a moment of strange and beautiful availability.

When I saw Buddhist monks spend days creating sand mandalas, only to sweep them up and throw them in a river as a meditation on Impermanence, I remembered John Baldesarri’s Cremation Project (1970), where he cremated all of his work from 1953-1966. I also remembered Michael Landy’s Breakdown (2001), where he catalogued and then destroyed all
7,227 of his possessions, including his car, his art collection, and his passport.

As I followed Buddhist monks on narrow mountain trails, with hands clasped behind their saffron robes, I remembered Richard Long’s performative, site-based installations (1967) and Hamish Fulton’s *Walks* (1972). Both artists have endeavored to reframe walking as art (Tufnell 2007, p. 39).


As I sipped hot milk tea and tasted embers, soil, and rain, I remembered Rirkrit Tiravanija’s *Pad Thai* (1990) and Alison Knowles’ *Proposition #2: Make a Salad* (1962). Both artists create relational experiences by sharing their food as a new form of art and artistic practice.

As I watched Tibetan pilgrims circumambulate the Dalai Lama temple, spinning prayer wheels along the way, I remembered William Lamson’s *Hydrologies* project (2014), where he ceremoniously watered a patch of desert soil in Chile for months, waiting for rare pink wildflowers to bloom. They never did.

When I saw young Buddhist monks practicing their prayers and mantras, stumbling awkwardly over the ancient Tibetan script, I remembered Janine Antoni (2002) stumbling awkwardly in her studio, as she practiced tightrope walking for a performance piece called *Touch.*
These curious arcs between disparate communities continued to stir my thinking. I realized that many of these spiritual practices could be reframed as contemporary art practices, and similarly, these artworks could be contextualized as spiritual practice. However, I also realized that it may be a stretch to pull these differing worlds together. Perhaps overlaying my art sensibilities onto Tibetan Buddhist rituals was arrogant, insensitive, appropriative and colonizing. And likewise, perhaps mining these contemporary artworks for elements of spirituality was misguided and unsound, based on fantasy and conjecture. Perhaps these artists never intended, if artistic intention matters at all (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946; Barthes, 1967), to create work with a spiritual subtext. Perhaps my spiritual inclinations were biased and incongruous. But also, I thought, perhaps it was possible to create new openings for generative dialogue by tinkering with these communities of practice, and perhaps each genre of work could generate new understandings of the other. Perhaps art and spirituality could be entry points into each other, for my own musings, but also in a curricular space—potentially leading to more awareness, sensitivity, and nuance.

Upon returning home, I continued finding parallels that connected the bodies of spiritual practice and contemporary art practice, and I created art that helped me explore these questions further. I produced an art exhibition, including photos, videos, sculptures, and a large installation that helped to visualize my process of questioning and connecting. Chapter four offers a more detailed account of the exhibition.

I will unpack A/r/tography (Bickel, 2008; de Cosson et al. 2005; Gouzouasis, 2006; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Sinner et al., 2006; Springgay, 2008; Springgay & Irwin, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005; Springgay et al., 2008; Springgay et al., 2007), my research methodology, in chapter three, but it is important to mention here that I am
working to embrace the complex relationship between my life experiences, my art-making, my teaching, and my research. Each facet is interdependent and intertwined. My experiences in the Himalayas evolved into art-making—which helped me to ruminate and re-consider the things I had heard and seen. My art-making spilled into my classroom—where I produced artwork with my students as a form of inquiry into our own lives and the lives of those around us. Making art with my students began to propel this lived inquiry—opening new questions and uncovering new problems. Ultimately, the process of my research generated new opportunities and experiences—which led to more curricular experiments and art-making. Each component provided valuable data from which new meanings, interpretations, and understandings could emerge.

As a researcher, I began exploring the literature surrounding religion and spirituality in public schools. This terrain is fraught with obstacles, dangers, and difficult, depressing histories. If addressed, I realized these topics had to be approached within specific legal boundaries, and with certain precautions. As many historians note (see Carter, 2006; Hitchens, 2007; Dawkins, 2006), the combination of public education and spirituality can be extremely oppressive and volatile.

However, I also discovered a group of scholars who argue that religion and spirituality are powerful cultural phenomena (Whitehead, 1967; Marty, 1984; Wald, 1987; Toffler, 1990; Kimball, 2002; Wallis, 2005; Slattery, 2013) that permeate nearly every facet of our lives (Maguire & Fargnoli, 1991; Kesson, 2005), whether we see them or not (Huebner, 1991, 1993), and they should be identified and critiqued (Cox, 1984; Taylor, 1984; Griffin, 1988; Noddings, 2005; Slattery, 2013). They believe this is an urgent task (Moran, 1981), and we ignore it at great peril (Slattery, 2013, p. 79). These scholars note that an array of global conflicts are caused by cultural and religious mis-understandings and mis-representations (Glock & Bellah, 1976; Arons,

Taking all of this into consideration, and acknowledging the potential discomfort of these conversations, I wanted to step into dizzying, disorienting terrain with my students in order to collaboratively re-evaluate our ways of thinking, being, and practicing—and in order to move toward new understandings and appreciations about alternate, even opposing, ways of thinking, being, and practicing. I wanted to navigate my own discomfort, and enter these complicated spaces with my students for the purpose of a collaborative critical unsettling. Further, I wanted to see what new understandings could emerge by framing art and spirituality as entry points into each other, and I wanted to see what new meanings could be generated with my students by de/constructing and un/doing our own spiritualities—simultaneously constructing and deconstructing our perceptions and understandings of spirituality.
Initial Questions

While I walked in the mountains, my research questions changed. My questions became more complex and nuanced. My preliminary questions were broad philosophical, anthropological, and theological questions, but they spun themselves into specific questions about myself and my pedagogical positionings—questions that I could spend my whole life contemplating. When I returned to my classroom, the questions evolved again. Within this qualitative research, the tangents and interruptions are a vital part of the inquiry (Irwin et al., 2006a, p. 75). This research endeavors to trace the shifting iterations of these questions as they emerged in my art-making and my classroom.

The following questions provided the initial motivation for this investigation: What are the spiritual dimensions of art education, and how can they be framed through the diverse lenses of spiritual traditions and cultures? What role has religion played in education? How has it
oppressed, indoctrinated, silenced, and assimilated communities? How has it nourished, healed, helped? What role has religion played in art education? What is the difference between spirituality and religion? How have artists approached spirituality through premodern, modern, and postmodern paradigms? If, as some scholars propose (Phenix, 1975; Purpel, 1989, 2005; Smith, 1988; Moore, 1989; Doll, 1993; Huebner, 1993, 1999; O’Malley, 2003, 2005; Shapiro, 2005; Kesson, 2005; Zinn, 2005; Noddings, 2005; Slattery, 2013), there may be room in the postmodern curriculum for a discussion of spirituality and theological texts, how can such texts be explored? How might the spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning be incorporated into my high school art curriculum? Perhaps most importantly, what meanings, conversations, experiences, and artifacts might emerge by framing art and spirituality as entry points into each other, and what can each body of practice teach us about the other?

This project follows these questions as they shift and change in my classroom at a public high school. I do not attempt to answer all of these questions. Some of these questions are too big for the scope of this research. Others became eclipsed by better questions. Many of the questions simply led to a string of more questions. Instead of defusing and answering each question, I have adopted a method described by the German mystic Rainer Maria Rilke (1903), who begs, “Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves” (p. 35).

Together with my students, we dove into delicate conversations about religion and spirituality in public education. We discussed the symbiotic and/or discordant relationship between art and spirituality. We had curious conversations about the limitations, difficulties, and oppressions of talking about religion and spirituality in the public sphere, as well as the affordances, opportunities, and potentialities. We researched contemporary artists, and made work that de/constructed our notions of spirituality. We worked toward “healing, re-integration,
re-membering, and re-collection” (Huebner, 1991, p.1) through art-making with the aim of aggregating and accommodating (Rolling, 2011) ways of thinking, being, and practicing that were not our own.

Figure 7. Two young Buddhist monks above Namche Bazar.

A Brief Summary

Chapter two provides a review of the literature and pulls together non-traditional scholars and thinkers from seemingly disparate disciplines. These pages contain thoughts from an Italian Marxist, a Vietnamese Buddhist Monk, a Jesuit priest, an Irish clergyman turned poet, His
Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, a German mystic, a Mormon philosophy professor, a Muslim social activist, a controversial psycho-analyst, and an array of educational scholars. Their work will be viewed through the lens of critical post-structural theory, and I will deliberately (mis)use the French Post-structuralist Jacques Derrida’s system of Deconstruction. Their thoughts will collide, overlap, and coalesce to form an intentionally chaotic bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) that tangles and complicates notions of spirituality in order to open spaces for dialogue in contemporary art education.

Chapter two will also address many of the historical challenges, as well as future potentialities, of exploring spirituality in public education. First I will provide an incomplete historical survey of the perils in combining spirituality and education. Then I will introduce a growing community of contemporary educational scholars who are examining their classrooms as research sites for considering the uncomfortable, but potentially generative, spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning. In particular the scholars Patrick Slattery, William Doll, and Dwayne Huebner provide reframings of the curriculum as spiritual/cosmological/theological texts that have shaped and propelled my thinking.

Chapter three will introduce A/r/tography, my research methodology, with its affordances and limitations. I will discuss the framing of data within this project, and I will also introduce the spiritual concept of sinning, or getting off-track, as a curricular strategy.

Chapter four will present the data—the curious conversations in my classroom, the curricular tangents and interruptions, and artistic artifacts from my students and me. Small portions of student writing will help to illuminate their thinking and art-making.

Chapter five will provide some closing observations. These thoughts, precautions, and potentialities will underscore a few of the affordances and limitations of this inquiry.
What is this for?

In the midst of this research, I have had many opportunities to ask myself hard questions about what this is for. What does talking about spirituality in a secondary public art classroom actually do? The prolific performance artist Marina Abramovic (1992a) provides a helpful perspective here. She identified the arts as an anecdote to the harsh rationality of our educational system. She says:

In our ‘civilized’ world the non-rational capacities which we still possess as children are completely destroyed within a rational education system. Bit by bit we are pushed into a rational pattern, losing our non-rational abilities and instincts. Our society is constructed entirely upon rational patterns. Everything which is not rational is treated with a certain secrecy [...] Our rational way of thinking demands proof, evidence, but this is only one element in our perceptive capabilities [...] Art is a field in which the non-rational may sometimes be tolerated, where it is creatively employed. I want to introduce the non-rational into our society. (p. 235)

I view spirituality as a non-rational capacity. The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty (Lamott, 2006). The aim of spirituality, it seems to me, is to sit at the fringes of our understandings and “call our certainties into question” (Slattery, 2013, p.6). I frame spirituality as admitting our inability to understand much of anything, and celebrating our not-knowing. Perhaps, as Huebner (1993) observed, “[t]here is more than we know, can know, will ever know” (p. 403).

With Abramovic, I believe that the arts can be a vehicle for critiquing educational systems, subverting our emphasis on rational patterns, and returning to a childish sense of non-
rationality. Abramovic’s statement questions our allegiance to proof and empirical evidence, and emphasizes our non-traditional, often suspect, perceptive capabilities.  

Like Slattery (2013), I believe teaching can be a “cosmological enterprise directed at understanding the universe” (p. xx). Of course ‘understanding the universe’ is an impossible task. However, I want to believe that our ‘non-traditional perceptive capabilities’ may be able to help us discover something about the universe and/or our place in it. I have attempted to adopt a pedagogy of presentness (Hanh, 2009), which involves attentiveness to life in the present moment. After all, as John Dewey (1916, 1938) famously stated, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself” (p. 239).

Brushing up against the unknown, or perhaps being swept away by it, is an essential facet of my pedagogy. Huebner (1991) stated, “[e]ducation happens because human beings participate in the transcendent” (p.1). I am interpreting the transcendent to mean the obscure, undefined, or the not-realizable (see transcendental in the Oxford American Dictionary, 2003). The scholar Hongyu Wang (2002) expands a similar thought about transcendental education:

[E]ducation, by its essence, is a spiritual quest, a quest for transcending and transforming current forms of life, a quest for imagined possibility, a quest for dynamic connections with something larger than the self, others, and the world through a journey of opening to the strangeness both inside and outside the self. (p. 287)

 Seeking strangeness, both externally and internally (Aoki, 2005), is a task I endeavored to undertake in this research. As a teacher, I want to inhabit spaces of risk and difference (Derrida, 1976). I want to be uncomfortable, and I want to sit with strangeness at the fringes of my understanding. I want to invite my students to do the same. I believe that the purpose of education is to be stirred and unsettled, and that discomfort can be a catalyst for growth (Boler &
Zembylas, 2003). By disturbing and collapsing old structures, new structures can emerge (Derrida, 1976). I view this type of sensitive unsettling as a form of civic engagement (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008).

By seeking strangeness and unsettling, we re-write and re-consider our assumptions about others and ourselves (Rolling, 2011). We suspend our suppositions in order to look more critically at the systems we are a part of (Freire, 1968). Spiritual and religious systems form a social fabric within and through humanity, even when they are not seen (Huebner, 1993, 1999). These are the systems that I attempt to address and critique, since, “[m]any global conflagrations are rooted in religious conflict and theological misunderstandings, and this must be examined by scholars and teachers who desire to ameliorate tensions and advance justice” (Slattery, 2013, p. 75).

I present these philosophical underpinnings to form a teaching rationale. Ultimately, I aim to contribute to the literature surrounding spirituality, art, and education by approaching the conversation from a unique research site—a high school art classroom in American Fork, Utah. As a secondary educator in the arts and humanities, my approach will weave questions of religious hegemony, contemporary art, and art-making into the already complex conversations surrounding the spiritual and holistic in education.

The structure of this thesis could be compared to a Rube Goldberg machine. Goldberg was an artist who created unnecessarily complex machines to perform simple tasks. His machines are characterized as “comically involved, complicated inventions[s], laboriously contrived to perform a simple operation” (see Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1992). There is joy in the impracticality of it all, but in the end the value of the entire machine is dependent on whether or not a simple task was accomplished. If the water pail empties, the mouse trap snaps,
the golf club swings, the balloon pops, the seesaw drops, the bowling ball rolls into the TV, and then the light switch is turned on—the machine worked (Miller, 2012).

The simple task of this thesis project was to explore spirituality in a high school art classroom. If this research enabled me to enter spaces of critical dialogue with my students and create artwork in an open, inquisitive, inclusive classroom climate—the machine worked. If we moved toward “healing, re-integration, re-membering, and re-collection” (Huebner, 1991, p.1), even in small ways, in my rural secondary art classroom—the machine worked.

The rusty prop plane lifted us off the ground and carried us, despite the turbulence, the rattling cabin, and the dings in the engine, to a surprising new place. Thankfully, for us—the machine worked.
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review + Theoretical Framework

Figure 8. Young Buddhist monk learning to read ancient Tibetan mantras.

This chapter offers a glance at the existing terrain surrounding spirituality, education, and art. The collisions of these histories and paradigms produce an infinite array of meanings, interpretations, implications, and potentialities. This chapter is incomplete, and it will leave many holes for the reader to fill in.

First, I offer a brief introduction to the complex history surrounding spirituality and education, including premodern, modern, and postmodern movements. The legal parameters separating church and state in the United States of America are explored. Then, I introduce the concept of cultural/religious hegemony and two models for generative dialogue.
The second section presents the work of Jacques Derrida, the controversial French Poststructural scholar who crafted the Deconstruction movement. His process of Deconstruction provides useful strategies for the theoretical framework of this research. I (mis)use his strategies to suspend suppositions about the terms and paradigms that will be explored hereafter—pushing toward new understanding and applications.

The third section renders three curricular ideologies—Slattery’s notion of Curriculum as Theological Text, Doll’s vision of Curriculum as Cosmology, and Huebner’s vision of Curriculum as Spiritual Journey. Each ideology is expanded through the work of scholars and non-traditional scholars to expand and problematize these terms and paradigms. Due to the subjective nature of these topics, there are experts everywhere, and I will be deliberately gathering thoughts within and without academia to form a chaotic bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) of definitions that will overlap, collide, and coincide. I will also be pulling contemporary artists into the discussion of each curricular framework to see if their work can provoke further understandings.

It ought to be mentioned that the very notions of explaining, defining, and untangling are problematic within poststructural thought (Derrida, 1976, p. lxxxix). In fact it may even be said that poststructuralism is more about tangling, complicating, and ‘inhabiting structures in order to turn them inside out or upside down’ (Derrida, 1976, p. 24; Kamuf, 2011, p. 36), than it is about explaining, defining, or untangling. As we discuss these complicated terms, we will not be endeavoring to reduce them to their essential meanings. We will be challenging the very notion of essential meanings by adding, troubling, and stirring the terms to see what else they may become. Theology, cosmology, and spirituality are notions that deserve our special attention.
The fourth section introduces contemporary art. I outline a brief history of Premodernism, Modernism, and Postmodernism in the arts, and provide a fluid definition of contemporary art—and what makes it valuable for creating entry points into discussions surrounding spirituality.

The fifth section deals with strangeness. I frame acquaintance with the strange and the stranger (Palmer, 1993), both within and without (Aoki, 2005), as the ultimate aims of this inquiry, and this section explores a few ways that strangeness, otherness, and moreness have been theorized.

**An Incomplete Survey of Spirituality in Education**

Some of my initial questions were: What role has religion and spirituality played in education throughout history? How has it oppressed, indoctrinated, silenced, and assimilated communities? How has it nourished, healed, and helped? Answering these questions is not the aim of this research, and an appropriate response would require volumes. Patrick Slattery (2013) provides a thorough summary in his book *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era: Teaching and Learning in an Age of Accountability* (see the chapter *Postmodern Schooling, Curriculum, and the Theological Text*, p. 75-116).

For our purposes a broad, incomplete, and broken survey of history can be condensed into a few sentences. Throughout educational history, curriculum has been used as a spiritual, religious, and “cultural bomb” (Slattery 2013, p.77; Freire, 1976) to assimilate minority and immigrant communities, effectively eradicating and destroying their culture. This is precarious territory, and the combination of public education and spirituality has a terrible track record of oppression and violence.

An array of global conflicts are caused by cultural and religious mis-understandings and mis-representations, including efforts to indoctrinate, proselytize, evangelize, and assimilate

There are educational scholars who acknowledge the societal ruptures caused by attempted integrations of spirituality and public education, but they are yet hopeful that, when integrated in the right ways, spiritual topics may serve to unify rather than divide (Huebner, 1991). They believe that the spiritual and religious underpinnings of society (Taylor, 1984), ought to be observed and critiqued (Rorty, 1982; Taylor, 1984) so that we can collectively move toward cultural healing (Whitehead, 1929; Purpel, 1989, 2005; Smith, 1988; Moore, 1989; Huebner, 1991, p.1) and re-integration (Phenix, 1975; Doll, 1993; O’Malley, 2003, 2005, 2007. See the Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Winter 2005 for further discussions on the topic from scholars Svi Shapiro, Kathleen Kesson, Howard Zinn, Nel Noddings, and many others).

Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern Paradigms in Education

Educational theorist Nel Noddings (2005) identifies three primary paradigms regarding spirituality in secular education: The first group believes students and educators should be praying together and reading religious texts in school. Patrick Slattery (2013) calls this the Premodern Paradigm, defined by fundamentalism, dogmatism, and the mantra “God is above” (p. 105). Historically, this dangerous ideology has caused harmful societal ruptures and oppressions, even if the initial motivation was to unite or assimilate disparate communities. Here, education easily becomes indoctrination, evangelization, and initiation.

The second group believes that religion and spirituality are just too complicated and too delicate to address in a public school, so it’s best to avoid these topics altogether. Slattery (2013) calls this the Modern Paradigm, defined by positivism, certainty, and rationality, with the mantra
“God is dead” (p. 105). It is easy to understand this perspective when considering the terrible history of acculturation, oppression, repression, indoctrination, and colonization that has occurred throughout educational history in the name of religion and spirituality—primarily through the Premodern paradigm. The Modern ideology is a direct response to the Premodern paradigm and attempts to heal the cultural damage of Premodernism by rejecting anything resembling spirituality altogether.

The third group, however, believes that spirituality and religion are complex cultural phenomena that permeate nearly every facet of our lives, whether they are seen or not, and we have a unique opportunity to address, critique, and explore them—but these spiritual dimensions of pedagogy and praxis must be approached in a generous, open, and sensitive way. Slattery (2013) calls this the Postmodern Paradigm, defined by interdependence, relativity, and the mantra “God is ahead” (p. 105), or, ‘God as-yet-unrealized.’ The Postmodern paradigm is a direct response to the Modern paradigm, which can be restrictive and oppressive in its own way.

Noddings (2005) continues; “More than 2,000 years ago, Socrates argued that one’s life should be examined if it is to be worth living. This examination—a continuous round of reflection, analysis, and discussion—should certainly include religious, existential, and moral questions” (p. 15). These religious, existential, moral, and spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning are being explored by a group of educational scholars, and this research is an attempt to join that conversation.

This inquiry is heavily influenced by the scholar Patrick Slattery, who has written extensively about the potential value of theology in the postmodern curriculum. For Slattery, his interest in theology is connected to a desire for equanimity and justice. He writes, “Religion can alienate or inspire… [I]t is a powerful cultural phenomenon that must be examined carefully [...]
by scholars and teachers who desire to ameliorate tensions and advance justice” (Slattery, 2013, p. 75).

**Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern Implications for Teaching**

It is important to note that the Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern ideologies are not necessarily historical time periods. Each paradigm is active, in its own way, in the current educational landscape. Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2008) underscore the problems in the Premodern and Modern ideologies, and push toward a Postmodern conception.

First, they note that many western religious-mystical traditions, which could fit in the Premodern category, begin with the assumption that mankind is inherently bad and/or prone to wrongdoing. Thus, educational systems are “conceived not in terms of drawing innate goodness out of the learner, but as drawing the learner into belief and social systems that are deemed to be good. The words *induction* and *indoctrination* are used to refer to the teacher’s task within this sensibility” (p. 163). This teaching frame produces the terms rector, master, doctor, professor, and lecturer—“all of which presume a pregiven truth that is external to the knower” (p. 163). Thus, this Premodern framework encourages the notion that the teacher’s task is to draw learners into knowing, rather than to provoke or stir toward becoming.

The rational-empiricist conception, or the Modern framework, emphasizes the triumph of science and reasoning over mystical-religious knowledge. In curriculum, this ideology supports pedagogy that is “linear, incremental, carefully sequenced, and punctuated by frequent testing to ensure individuals are keeping pace and drawing appropriate conclusions” (p. 165). This frame encourages ‘telling, instructing, directing, training, and conditioning’ (p. 165).

I prefer a more participatory conception of teaching, or a Postmodern paradigm, where teachers and students view themselves as co-learners and collaborators. Again, Davis, Sumara,
and Luce-Kapler (2008) point out that this field of inquiry is young, and a popular set of synonyms has yet to emerge. A few suggestions include improvising (Martin, Towers, & Pirie, 2006), occasioning (Davis, Sumara, & Kieren, 1996), conversing (Ashton-Warner, 1963), caring (Noddings, 1984), and a critical unsettling (Barney, 2009). These frameworks encourage ‘emergence, flexibility, contingency, and expansive possibility’ (Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 171).

**Religion and spirituality can be detrimental to education.** Religion and spirituality are already woven into many facets of the standardized school curricula—with some far-reaching and detrimental implications. The spiritual, religious, and cultural underpinnings of community school boards determine what is taught in classrooms, and therefore form the “hidden curriculum” (Apple, 2004). Religion and spirituality are often a subtext of curricular controversies, including how educators can approach sex education, teaching abstinence-only in many schools in the United States, censored literary works involving LGBTQ+ themes, and repeated proposals to teach intelligent design in the science curriculum. Since religion and spirituality already determine so much of what we teach, we need to be more aware of the ways we are influenced by these cultural undercurrents. Slattery (2013) concludes, “We ignore religion and theology in our curriculum conversations at great peril” (p. 79).

**Some find no value in religion or spirituality.** Considering the volatility of the subject, and the centuries of conflict associated with organized religion and varied spiritual practices, many have struggled to identify any redeeming qualities in faith communities (Dawkins, 2006; Hitchens, 2007). Karl Marx (1883) famously declared that, “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (p. 2).
In 1955 the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (H.H.XIV), the political leader of Tibet and the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, was invited to Beijing by Chairman Mao Tse-tung. Mao was trying to convince the young Dalai Lama to join the Chinese Cultural Revolution (CCR), which involved “modernizing” Tibet by abandoning many tenets of Buddhism. Mao concluded, as recorded by the Dalai Lama (1962), “Religion is poison. It has two great defects. It undermines the race, and secondly it retards the progress of the country” (p.117-118). The Dalai Lama did not agree, and later asserted that religion was medicine, not poison (p. 237).

Regardless of where we find ourselves in this landscape, it is important to understand and appreciate all of these perspectives.

Figure 9. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, during a teaching in Dharamshala, India.
The Separation of Church and State is Vital

The 1971 US Supreme Court case *Lemon v. Kurtzman* ruled that government law or practice in relation to religion was constitutional if it met all three of the following tests: 1) the government act that bears on religion must reflect a secular purpose; 2) it may neither advocate nor inhibit religion as its primary effect; and 3) it must avoid excessive government entanglement with religion (*Lemon v. Kurtzman, 1971*). Basically, “teaching about religion in a non-coercive manner that does not advance or inhibit religious beliefs is constitutionally protected” (*Slattery, 2013*, p. 83).

Later, in the 1999 *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe* US Supreme Court case, it was ruled that student-led prayers at football games were unconstitutional. The prayers being offered in the small town of Santa Fe, TX were Evangelical Christian prayers, and became exclusionary for the religious minority. These prayers could also be considered evangelizing or proselytizing, and were clearly unconstitutional. Sadly, the small town of Santa Fe, TX suffered a school shooting in 2018. Many members of the community remembered the court ruling, and suggested that the shooting may not have happened if prayers had not been ruled unconstitutional. This obviously raises some complex questions. I discussed this with my students, and our curious conversation is rendered in chapter four.

While I believe that there is room in the curriculum to critique and explore spirituality, it must be done in the right way. I am not a proponent of evangelization or proselytizing in a public classroom. Pushing denominational values and ideologies in the public sphere is irresponsible, oppressive, illegal, and culturally noxious. Even a casual acceptance of societal norms, when they incorporate elements of religion and spirituality, can be damaging and incapacitating to minority groups. Small acts of ignorance and intolerance in classrooms and communities are not
unrelated to large scale persecutions and genocides, and we cannot allow prejudice to go unchecked (Slattery, 2013, p. 85).

Former US President Jimmy Carter (2006) wrote a book called *Our Endangered Values: America’s Moral Crisis*. He warns that blurring the lines between church and state are threatening to our democracy and our civil liberties, and that the confluence of the two is one of the most dangerous developments in the world. I wholeheartedly agree.

Simultaneously, I also believe that attempting to avoid, ignore, or suppress the religious and spiritual components of society and people is harmful and destructive (Wallis, 2005; Slattery, 2013, p. 76). With Slattery (2013), I believe that:

[I]n order to fully appreciate and understand art, music, literature, history, science, and social studies, the school curriculum must find a way for students to legally and appropriately study religious imagery, mythology, allusions, metaphors from sacred texts, philosophies of science, church patronage for the arts, political theocracies, ethical debates, historical empires, and a host of other related topics and to do so in the spirit of the Supreme Court ruling in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*… I am on a search to balance these two aspirations—separating religion and government while at the same time embracing the spiritual and the theological. (p. 84, 76)

* Cultural / Religious Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci (1965) was an Italian Marxist philosopher. He identified a condition later coined *cultural hegemony*, where a culturally (or spiritually) diverse community is ruled by a dominating class who manipulates the culture of the society by imposing their values, ideologies, and perceptions on the entire community. The dominant class perpetuates their status by justifying their behavior as beneficial for everyone, even when it only benefits themselves in a
cycle of self-sustained oppression (p. 22-23). Gramsci’s aspirations were political, and he sought to challenge systems of governing, but I believe his theory could simultaneously examine religiously-dominant communities, such as American Fork, UT, where I teach high school.

This curricular research project is an attempt to address, critique, and dismantle the oppressive systems of power at play in my classroom. Specific demographic data is included in chapter four. Elements of religious hegemony permeate nearly every facet of my school experience, and leave many minority students feeling ostracized and isolated—continually being invited to assimilate into the majority. These pervasive power structures cannot simply be ignored.

The history of education in the United States is fraught with terrible examples of religion being used to indoctrinate, coerce, and assimilate immigrants and minority groups. By identifying these elements of cultural and religious hegemony, my students and I will begin the difficult work of creating a truly safe place where a variety of perspectives, beliefs, and practices can peacefully coexist. Slattery (2013) poignantly states:

Democracy and theocracy are incompatible. Rigid ideological denominational proselytizing in anathema to my thinking… [But] attempting to ignore or suppress the religious, spiritual, and theological dimensions of cultures and individuals is equally dangerous and destructive. [...] So how do we appropriately include theology and cultural diversity in the curriculum without establishing religion in the public sphere? Many contend that it is very difficult to embrace religious diversity while still keeping church and state separate—an impossible quest, according to some—so it is best to leave all discussion of religion and spirituality to religious communities and families. I agree that prayer and worship are very personal matters and that proselytizing in the public sphere is
destructive. However, we must find an appropriate way to teach theology, textual hermeneutics, cultural diversity, and critical analysis without crossing the line of separation between religion and government (p. 76, 81).

I, too, am searching for a way to explore the terrain of spirituality that deconstructs religious hegemony, resists evangelization, opens sensitive conversations, and enables my students and I to create an environment of generosity, wonder, appreciation, and inclusion.

**Two Dialogic Models**

The Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh struggled for peace in his homeland during the Vietnam War. He worked to promote productive dialogue between the communist and non-communist regimes in his country through a movement known as *Engaged Buddhism* (Hanh 2007, p. 2-4). His efforts were recognized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who nominated him for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1967. His efforts were also recognized by North and South Vietnam, who have since banned him from the countries. He currently lives in exile at a monastery in Southern France, working to promote peace through mindfulness, meditation, and meaningful dialogue.

Hanh (2007) writes:

> People kill and are killed because they cling too tightly to their own beliefs and ideologies. When we believe that ours is the only faith that contains the truth, violence and suffering will surely be the result. The second precept of the Order of Interbeing, founded within the Zen Buddhist tradition during the war in Vietnam, is about letting go of our views: “Do not think the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to receive others’ viewpoints.” To me, this is the most essential practice of peace. (p. 2)
In a classroom filled with diverse ideologies, values, and opinions, cultivating a climate of deep looking, deep listening, receptivity, and nonattachment will be a difficult but vital task. Hanh (2007) goes on to say, “Learning to touch deeply the jewels of our own tradition will allow us to understand and appreciate the values of other traditions, and this will benefit everyone” (p.90). I am reminded of Parker Palmer’s (1993) description of the ideal classroom as “a place where every stranger and every strange utterance is met with welcome” (p. 74).

The Dalai Lama also modeled this type of nonattachment when he said, “If science proves some beliefs of Buddhism wrong, then Buddhism will have to change (Tenzin Gyatso, HHXIV Dalai Lama, 2005).”

Slattery (2013) observes that we live in a time when major conflicts are rooted in spiritual and religious differences, where each side claims to know for certain that the universe is on their side. Slattery points to the French Poststructuralist Jacques Derrida, who reminded us that “religion does not always give clear meaning and certainty. To the contrary, the great religious traditions call certainty and secularity into question” (p. 6). These petitions for the value of suspended suppositions help me to generate a framework for my classroom conversations and art-making.

(Mis)Using Derridean Deconstruction

The theoretical framework for this research project has been colored by Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), a polarizing French philosopher within the poststructuralist movement. The research borrows strategies from his system of semiotic analysis, called deconstruction. By adopting deconstructive approaches, we are challenged to remain unsettled, to resist easy definitions, and to sit with questions instead of snuffing them out.
To appreciate this system of semiotic analysis, and thus apply it while generating a theoretical framework for this research, it will be vital to briefly survey the work of Derrida. Because of his preoccupation with *multiplying the detours* (Derrida, 2002, p. 353) and resisting simplification (Reynolds & Roffe, 2004, p. 1), he became extremely controversial. As a result of his *abstruse-ness*, many believed he could not even describe the very movement/moment he was championing (Kandell, 2004). One critic (Smith, 2003) even suggested:

Derrida is not now, nor has he ever been, a philosopher in any recognizable sense of the word, nor even a trafficker of significant ideas; he is rather an intellectual con artist, a polysyllabic grifter who has duped roughly half the humanities professors in the United States into believing that postmodernism has an underlying theoretical rationale. History will remember Derrida, and it surely will, not for what he himself has said but for what his revered status says about us.

Yet another writer (Royle, 2003) asserts the contrary:

[W]e live in the Derridean epoch. Because, more than those of any other contemporary writer or thinker, Derrida’s texts have described and transformed the ways we think about the nature of language, speech and writing, life and death, culture, ethics, politics, religion, literature and philosophy. More than any other writer or thinker, Jacques Derrida has defined our time. (p. 8)

Derrida stirs deep emotions. As described by the New York Times reporter (Kandell, 2004) who penned Derrida’s obituary, “[Derrida was] one of the most celebrated and notoriously difficult philosophers of the late 20th century… [and] the target of as much anger as admiration.” While some viewed him as a ‘latter day Socrates, others viewed him as a veritable hemlock to thought’ (Reynolds & Roffe, 2004, p. 1). The curious cacophony of responses to Derrida’s work lures me
in, rather than steers me away. This dissonance seems to necessitate further investigation and exploration, through firsthand experience with his texts. Derrida himself suggested a guiding axiom for understanding any text, which is, in effect, do not judge until you have read (Reynolds & Roffe, 2004, p. 1). According to this axiom, we must allow ourselves to be called upon, addressed, overtaken, surprised, and overwhelmed, and then “we must respond, and so be responsive and responsible. Endlessly” (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 23). This injunction to be responsive and responsible has implications for my teaching and learning as well. It reminds me that I am an active participant in the learning that occurs in my classroom, and my teaching methods must endeavor to open emergent dialogue rather than present a stagnant monologue.

Poststructuralism, as the name suggests, is a response to structuralism, which was a philosophical, intellectual, and critical movement that began in the early 1900’s. Structuralism sought to divulge and uncover hidden structures within texts. Texts, in these terms, could mean anything that is read or interpreted—including, but not limited to, words on a page.

Many philosophers, critics, and linguists have explored the act and art of interpretation, but we will only focus on two, who were especially influential among the structuralists, and therefore poststructuralists. The first thinker who motivated structuralist thought was the Swiss philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a pioneer in the fields of linguistics and semiotics (Robins, 1968, p. 201; Chapman & Routledge, 2005, p. 241). Saussure (1959) proposed that any sign (which could mean any text, or any human artifact which carries meaning) was composed of the signifier (an object or symbol) and the signified (an idea or interpretation). Saussure (1959) further concluded that the only way for a sign to gain meaning is by comparison to other signs in a system of opposites, sometimes referred to as a network of binary pairs (Fourie, 2001). For example, a Saussurean argument may assert that we can only
comprehend and appreciate daylight when we have seen the dark—we can only value sweetness after tasting the bitter (Lacey, 2000, p. 65). Thus, semiotics is a method (Piaget, 2004) for studying signs, symbols, and design elements of visual texts that work together to produce meaning (Slattery, 2013, p. 311). In other words, through the lens of semiotics, everything is ripe for interpretation. And thus, through interpretation, structuralists purported to discover invariant, non-changing structures in society, the human psyche, history, consciousness, and culture (Slattery, 2013, p. 304). In short, structuralists endeavored to decipher and untangle the world around them, and they believed the sum total of their labors would unveil meanings and truths that were fixed, stable, and unchanging (Sturrock, 1979).

The second philosopher who motivated structuralist thought was German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who, along with other scholars (see Edmund Husserl, for example), theorized the act of interpretation through the lens of hermeneutics. The name hermeneutics is derived from Hermes, the Greek god who overlooked trades, transactions, border-crossings, and, most-appropriately, the delivery of messages (Slattery, 2013, pp. 300-1). Heidegger (1990), applying hermeneutic theory to literary criticism, believed that texts could be viewed as windows into deeper, concealed meaning—providing glimpses into the social contexts of the writer, unveiling alternative narratives and uncovering truths about culture, community, and human relatedness (Sturrock, 1979). This idea rang especially true to the structuralists, who sought to uncover hidden meanings and structures in texts. In particular, they believed that they could use a combination of disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, and anthropology, to interpret and divulge deeper structures, meanings, contexts, intents, and concrete truths (Sturrock, 1979).
Structuralism embraced rigid, brittle thinking that often excluded perspectives through its determinative interpretation processes. Structuralists clung to the idea of universal truth, and sought to overlay their truths on top of others. As a small tangent, it should be mentioned that Heidegger was a member of the Nazi-party, and his actions and scholarship have caused tremendous harm.

Poststructuralism, however, rose to challenge the core tenets and assumptions of structuralism. It may be helpful to note that structuralism and modernism are often used interchangeably; and likewise the terms poststructuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism are often used synonymously as critiques of modernity or structuralism. Poststructuralism, in tandem with the movements/moments of deconstruction and postmodernism, “[take] seriously…the fact that a text does not have clear boundaries or rigid forms” (Mazzei, 2007, p.62). While structuralism sought to uncover systems that create meaning, poststructuralism “sought to dismantle the system in order to expose the variable and contingent nature of systems” (Slattery, 2013, p. 304).

Poststructuralists argued that any interpretation is always local, partial, fragmented, relative, and half-framed. Within poststructuralism, meaning is not absolute or fixed, and interpretations are not concrete. Multiplicity, variability, impermanence, flux, and instability are admitted, explored, and embraced. “[M]eaning becomes a site of departure, a place where reality is constructed, truth is produced, and power is effected” (Slattery, 2013, pp. 304-5). As referenced earlier, scholar Lisa Mazzei (2007) admits that, because of her exposure to poststructuralist writing, she is left “uncertain as to the question of what it means to mean and how to mean” (p. 7). But this does not mean she gives up on meaning. Rather, she says:

[It means] (I think) that I do not naively claim meaning, completeness, or understanding
found in the spoken words and printed text. It means that I seek the limits, the
boundaries, and the seeming “thereness” of my methodological history in an effort to
engage the silent voices of the specters that have much to say in the “not said.” …It
means that I engage methodological strategies that push me beyond the comfortable
limits of what is known, what is knowable, and what is accessible. (p. 7)

Thus, instead of *untangling* in search of a solitary, concrete truth, poststructuralists work in both
directions to *tangle* and *untangle*, always “contextualizing, evoking, troubling, historicizing,
challenging, analyzing, and interrupting” (Slattery, 2013, p. 298) in order to consider new
possibilities and multiple truths. Scholar Mark Taylor (2004) made an important observation
about the ethical dimensions of poststructuralism:

> There are moral implications of Derrida’s deconstructive process as well:
> When responsibly understood, the implications of deconstruction are quite different from
> the misleading clichés often used to describe a process of dismantling or taking things
> apart. The guiding insight is that every structure—be it literary, psychological, social,
> economic, political, or religious—that organizes our experiences is constituted and
> maintained through acts of exclusion. In the process of creating something, something
> else inevitably gets left out. These exclusive structures can become repressive—and that
> repression comes with consequences… Mr. Derrida understood all too well the dangers
> of beliefs or ideologies that divide the world into diametrical opposites: left or right, red
> or blue, good or evil, for us or against us… By struggling to overcome patterns that
> exclude the differences that make life worth living, he developed a vision that is

Thus, both morally and philosophically, deconstruction provides valuable tools for this terrain.
Three Curricular Frameworks

The following frameworks have shaped and propelled my thinking about curriculum in relation to spirituality. Slattery’s (2013) “Curriculum as Postmodern Theological Text,” Doll’s (2002) “Curriculum as (New) Cosmology,” and Huebner’s (1999) “Curriculum as Spiritual Journey” all illuminate differing potentialities within this framework. Further, I have looked to the work of contemporary artists to add another dimension to this theory pool. In keeping with my overarching thesis and my research methodology, I have found contemporary art useful in developing, expanding, and building theory. The following three sections are supplemented by artist statements, as well as poems, to provoke additional understandings.

Slattery’s “Curriculum as Postmodern Theological Text”

“Earth's crammed with heaven,

And every common bush afire with God...”

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1856, p. 54)

Patrick Slattery argues that the study of spirituality and religion are a vital element of K-12 and higher education. “Religious zealots and extremists—whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or others—have set the world on a trajectory of bifurcation, conflict, and destruction” (2013, p. 5). Slattery acknowledges that many conflicts have emerged from religious tensions, mis-understandings and mis-representations. He feels, like Huebner (1991) that educators have a unique opportunity to diffuse religious bifurcation and move toward “healing, re-integration, re-membering, and re-collection” (p.1).
Beyond physical wars, Slattery also argues that perhaps the most damaging influence of religion and spirituality can come in the socio-cultural realm. These forces can create social division, oppression, and imbalances of power. As such, religion is a potentially damaging component of the “hidden curriculum” (Apple, 2004), in which values or ideologies of a dominating community are imposed, normalized, expected, and rewarded.

Slattery (2013) acknowledges that religion and spirituality are delicate, polarizing, and potentially volatile topics. He identifies the affordances and limitations of religion, and concludes that, regardless of where we stand, it is important to study these phenomena thoroughly:

The rituals and dogmas of religion inspire faith and morality for many people. Mosques, synagogues, sweat lodges, churches, temples, sacred mountains, ashrams, and cathedrals have been uplifting places of spiritual reflection, personal renewal, and prayerful worship for individuals and communities throughout human history. However, many people have also been repulsed by the financial excesses, brutal inquisitions, hate rhetoric, sex abuse, blatant hypocrisy, terrorist bombings, and violent crusades carried out in the name of religion by religious leaders, prophets and followers. Religion can alienate or inspire. In either case, it is a powerful cultural phenomenon that must be examined carefully. (p. 75)

As educators, this means our work is to move out of our comfort zones—and help others do it too. Slattery argues that we need to move out of our comfortable psychological spaces, and perhaps physically out of our insular communities, to engage people with differing belief systems, cultures, and perspectives. We need to promote the examined life. The hallmarks of a theological curriculum in a postmodern era are “philosophical investigation, critical evaluation,
spiritual meditation, and historical analysis” (p. 82). As we undertake this process of inquiry and renewal, “[h]ospitality, inclusiveness, and graciousness must be our guiding ethic” (p. 81).

Learning to live with others is the aim of this curricular framework. “The effort to understand curriculum as theological text is not a separate specialized sector of scholarship; it is the call to live with others morally and transcendentally” (Pinar, 1999, p. xxiv).

Postmodern Theology. To better understand Slattery’s (2013) framing of the curriculum as theological text (p. 75-115), it will be helpful to look at the semantics. Theology is a loaded term. The Greek and Latin roots of the word mean “discourse about God” or “an account of the gods” (see Oxford American Dictionary, 2003). The field of theology has deep roots. Every belief system has complex mythologies and rich stories that stretch back generations. While many theologians are focused on ancient etymology, deciphering sacred texts, and ruminating on the names of Deity/Deities, I am endeavoring to understand theology through a postmodern lens.

What does postmodern theology look like? The Mormon theologian and philosophy professor Adam Miller (2012), who teaches at Collin College in McKinney, TX, describes two attributes of a postmodern theologian:

Good theologians need two skills above all others: they must be shameless packrats and they must be imaginative tinkerers. Because they work with found objects, theologians need to be collectors of religious texts, rituals, and objects of every sort. The collector needs to gather a wide variety of objects from a wide field of sources—Eastern, Western, ancient, modern, literary, scientific, etc. Working just with what is at hand, it is best to have a lot on hand. Repurposing these ordinary gestures, altars, and texts—sometimes subtly, sometimes wildly, sometimes both—for theological ends require invention and sensitivity. Tinkering requires patience and care. (p. xiv)
This generous, open-ended model of theology as *bricolage* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) provides insights into how a curriculum could incorporate elements of spirituality. By collecting widely with patience and care, and gathering elements of all faith traditions with invention and sensitivity, meanings can be made. Looking at the practice broadly, perhaps postmodern theology could be framed as careful, ludic play (Rosenstein, 1976; Toloudis, 1989; Buckley, 2006; Mataric, 2005; Barney, 2009, p. 79). These conceptions of play have tremendous affordances in my teaching, and remind me to allow myself room for aimless collecting and imaginative tinkering (Miller, 2012).

Slattery (2013) suggests that postmodern theology is also “an autobiographical process, a cosmological dialogue, and a search for personal and universal harmony” (p. 97). He roots this tradition in Anslem of Canterbury (12th century CE), who declared that theology was *fides quaerens intellectum*, or “faith seeking understanding;” as well as Jürgen Moltmann (20th century CE) who placed the believer between the “already” and the “not yet” (p. 97). This connects to the postmodern paradigm described by Noddings (2005) and Slattery (2013), with the mantras “God is ahead,” or “God-as-yet-unrealized” (Slattery, 2013, p. 105).

The Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh (2007) wrote, “A good theologian is one who says almost nothing about God [...] It is risky to talk about God. The notion of God might be an obstacle for us to touch God as love, wisdom, and mindfulness” (p.150). Perhaps another tenet of postmodern theology is leaving room for the undefined, unknown, and the as-of-yet unrealized.

These framings of theology have implication in my classroom as well. They remind me to keep curricular possibilities open. They remind me to be “eclectic and ecumenical” (Slattery, 2013, p. 75), and to be a shameless packrat and an imaginative tinkerer (Miller, 2012). They
challenge me to be more generous, kind, and patient. Perhaps most importantly, they challenge me to be more attentive to the possibilities I may not have considered beforehand.

Doll’s “Curriculum as (New) Cosmology”

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe”

John Muir (1911, p. 1)

William E. Doll, Jr. (2002) provides a second curricular framework in *Ghosts and the Curriculum*. He outlines a brief history of curriculum theory and then introduces what he calls “the five C’s” (p. 42) of curriculum—currere, complexity, conversation, community, and *cosmology*. Each of these metaphors is worth contemplating, but the notion of curriculum as *cosmology* is especially fitting here.

The Greek roots of cosmology connote “a discourse with the world.” (see Webster’s Dictionary, 1992), or in a broader sense, “the science or theory of the universe an ordered whole” (see The Oxford English Dictionary, 2003).

Alfred North Whitehead is considered one of the early founding fathers of chaos and complexity theory, and a defining figure in process philosophy. Process thinkers, like Whitehead, emphasize becoming over being, arguing that humans can advance beyond the turmoil and dysfunction of the present condition (Slattery, 2013, p. 80). Whitehead was a radical advocate for a new cosmology that sees reality in terms of dynamic movement, rather than static, isolated, unchanging facts (Doll, 2002, p. 47). Whitehead (1967b/1925) wrote:

There persists, however, throughout the whole period [from the sixteenth century on] the fixed scientific cosmology which presupposes the ultimate fact of an irreducible brute matter or material, spread through space… [T]his assumption I call “scientific
Further, this is an assumption I shall challenge as being entirely unsuited for the scientific situation at which we have now arrived. (p.17)

Prior to Whitehead’s work (1978/1929), cosmology was based on the “brute facts” of independent atoms. He shifted the conversation into more fluid territory, where a dynamic flux of entities or occasions became known as process cosmology. This cosmology sought to render the objects and phenomena as being “complex and interdependent” (p. 18). In more poetic terms, the new cosmology stressed that all matter is tangled together in an endless, indescribable way. Or, in the words of poet John Muir (1911), “[w]hen we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe” (p. 1).

In another essay, Whitehead (1967a/1929) insisted that “The essence of education is that it be religious” (p. 14). Doll (2002) preferred the term “spirit-ful” (p. 48). For Whitehead, a ‘spirit-ful’ education meant a sense of responsibility to humankind, since we are all interdependent and interconnected. It meant Whitehead championed “the duty to be involved in human community and global concerns and a profound reverence for the cosmos” (Slattery, 2013, p. 95).

The implications of this in curriculum, for me, include a heightened awareness that everything is connected. My classroom is a vast network, and I am tangled in a fabric with my students. Added to the tangle is the weather, the music we listen to, how many times the lights flicker when I turn them on in the morning, how many emails are in my inbox, what we each ate for breakfast that day, what we each ate for breakfast last week, etc, etc, etc.

Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) was a prolific German performance artist and sculptor who worked extensively with felt. In a book that contemplates and theorizes Beuys’ work, Chris
Thompson (2011) uses felt as a metaphor for this type of tangled, interdependent, new cosmology. Thompson writes:

If we are to think of the interhuman intrigue as a fabric, we are better served by figuring it as a nonwoven and aleatory form rather than a woven and regularized one. The material felt provides a wholly different set of limits and aptitudes for the figure of a fabric that might permit us to model with greater clarity the inescapably intimate cohesion that binds us in the interhuman intrigue. To think in terms of a materiality of the nonwoven as the fabric of intersubjective experience, instead of the stabilizing terms offered by the textual-textilic, permits a subject who is effectively lost in this space where she must continually craft a connection with it. (p. 13)

This reminds me that I am capable of dynamic, complicated connections in my classroom.

Slattery (2013) insists, “In our teaching, curriculum development, and research we must use every opportunity to connect students to the universe, especially the life sustaining dimensions of the global community on our very beautiful yet fragile planet” (p. xxiii).

Doll (2002) concludes: “To bring curriculum to life—to recapture the creative energy of all life, the aesthetic-ness that exists in being—we might well consider a curriculum which combines the rigorousness of science, with the imagination of story, with the vitality and creativity of spirit” (p. 48).

**Huebner’s “Curriculum as Spiritual Journey”**

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, [...] Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything.”

Rainer Maria Rilke (1903, p. 11)
Dwayne Huebner devoted much of his professional life to exploring the potential role of spirituality within secular education. He was part of the curriculum reconceptualization movement in the 1970’s and has taught at Teachers College and the Yale Divinity School.

Huebner (1998) gave a lecture at the University of Victoria, Canada in the summer of 1998. The title of the lecture was “Education: a Spiritual Journey,” and he outlined five human attributes that shape our individual educational/spiritual journeys. 1) Our capability for consciousness, 2) Our capability for imagination, 3) Our capability of will, 4) Our capability for power, 5) Our capability for love. We commence our journey of becoming, he said, by nourishing consciousness, imagination, will, power, and love.

Many educational models have no room for these attributes. Instead they focus merely on learning, which Huebner criticized:

“Learning” is a trivial way of speaking of the journey of the self… We do not need “learning theory” or “developmental theory” to explain human change. We need them to explain our fixations and neuroses, our limits, whether imposed by self or others. The question that educators need to ask is not how people learn and develop, but what gets in the way of the great journey—the journey of the self or soul. Education is a way of attending to and caring for that journey. (1999 p. 405)

Instead of emphasizing ‘learning,’ Huebner reminds me to focus on a process of unfolding—or more broadly, on being.

Epistemology (see Oxford American Dictionary, 2003) is a branch of philosophy concerned with ways of knowing. “It is concerned with finding the truth or the meaning of the idea of truth” (Slattery, 2013, p. 299). Emphasizing learning theory and developmental theory is an epistemological approach. Huebner’s (1999) criticism of educators who focus solely on
learning is not a criticism of learning itself, but of stopping there. He believed educators should move beyond learning into the realm of inquiry, exploration, and self-discovery. This approach, considered an Ontological approach (see Oxford American Dictionary, 2003), is more focused on ways of being. To Huebner, education fell short if it did not allow room for an exploration of being and becoming.

Richard Long (1945-) is a British Land Artist that provides a physical application of Huebner’s (1999) injunction to ‘attend to and care for our journey.’ Long has made a prolific career of walking as an experimental art form (Tufnell 2007, p. 39). His work also involves performance, photography, painting, sculpture, collecting, and rearranging found elements (including mud, stone, ice, etc). Walking, however, has been a key component of his work for the past five decades. Rudi Fuchs (2015), an art historian and critic, paraphrased a statement from Long; “Walking, [...] with its hardships and pleasures, the surprise of discovery and growing experience, relaxation and concentration; walking is a good way to think” (p. 26). Fuchs later expands, “[i]t is impossible to ascertain when and where a walk, moving lightly ahead, pauses for a while, curls up into a sculpture like a cat, and goes on its way again. In the end there is one giant work stretched across the world, crossing and overlapping, an epic work of art” (p. 26).

The work of Richard Long reminds me, like Huebner, that my educational life can be a journey, crossing and overlapping toward a sense of becoming. Long and Huebner, paired together, remind me that my classroom can be a place of caring for life.

Huebner echoes the earlier statement from Marina Abramovic (1992a) that education should focus on our “non-rational capabilities” (p. 235). He says, “[e]ducation is the lure of the transcendent—that which we seem is not what we are for we could always be other. Education is
the openness to a future that is beyond all futures. Education is the protest against present forms that they may be reformed and transformed” (1999, p. 405).

Like Slattery and Doll, Huebner argues for the value of acknowledging spirituality in the curriculum. “The need is not to see moral and spiritual values as something outside the normal curriculum and school activity, but to probe deeper into the educational landscape to reveal how the spiritual and moral is being denied in everything” (Huebner, 1999, p. 414). Slattery (2013) likewise asserts that spirituality is connected to every human endeavor, and our understandings in any field can be enhanced when paired with a careful study of spirituality:

I argue that, in order to fully appreciate and understand art, music, literature, history, science, and social studies, the school curriculum must find a way for students to legally and appropriately study religious imagery, mythology, allusions, metaphors from sacred texts, philosophies of science, church patronage for the arts, political theocracies, ethical debates, historical empires, and a host of other related topics. (p. 84).

In other words, perhaps spirituality is part of the “always-already present” (Derrida, 1967).

**There are many ways to define spirituality.** I have found it generative to ruminate on the varied renderings of spirituality. The etymology of “spirit” leads to the Latin word, spīritus, for breath and breathing (see Oxford American Dictionary, 2003). Thus, “spirit refers to that which gives vitality” (Huebner, 1999, p. 343). “Talk of the ‘spirit’ and the ‘spiritual’ in education, need not, then, be God talk… Rather, the talk is about lived reality, about experience and the possibility of experiencing.” (Huebner, 1999, p. 348)

I will provide a few renderings of spirituality to build a broad, overlapping definition, and we will consult an array of thinkers from different backgrounds and communities. Due to the subjective nature of this topic, there are experts everywhere, and I will be deliberately gathering
thoughts within and without academia to form a chaotic bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) of definitions that will collide and coincide. The following is an extremely incomplete survey of a few entry points into a theological discussion of spirituality.

My endeavor is not to reduce the terms to their essential meaning. My aim is to tangle and problematize these notions through Derridean deconstruction, thus tangling, complicating, and inhabiting structures in order to turn them inside out or upside down (Derrida, 1976, p. 24; Kamuf, 2011, p. 36). In the end, after stirring and troubling, “we must respond, and so be responsive and responsible. Endlessly” (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 23). Through this process of provocation, new meanings and understandings may arise, and new paths of action and understanding may become available. The term spirituality has some incredibly broad implications, and could easily incorporate notions of energy, cosmology, contemplative practice, transcendence, soulfulness, and sublimity. Here are a few renderings:

*Spirituality as “moreness.”* In Huebner’s (1985) work, *The Lure of the Transcendent*, he writes that, “an awareness that what we are and what we know can never completely contain what we might be or what we might know” (p. 345). He later continued his line of thought, and said, “[t]here is more than we know, can know, will ever know. It is a *moreness* that takes over in our weakness, our ignorance, at our limits or end” (Huebner, 1993, p. 403). This *moreness* that lies somewhere beyond our ability to comprehend could be a helpful framing of spirituality. Kovel (1991) says that spirituality is “what happens to us as the boundaries of the self give way” (p. 1) and echoes a relation between the person and the universe.

*Spirituality is accepting things as they are.* Scholar Philip Shaw (2007) summarizes a theory of the controversial French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan by observing, “Lacan’s therapeutic practice is centered on getting the individual to come to terms with his or her
alienated identity, the fact that his or her desire for wholeness or completion is an illusion” (p. 133). In other words, Lacan believed that our conceptions of an ideal self or an ideal world were distractions from our real self and the real world. For him, challenging the very notion of an ideal self provided a therapeutic, transcendental release.

*Spirituality is being alive in the present moment.* The Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (2009) has written extensively about practicing presentness. He reminds us, “As you breathe in, you practice arriving. You have arrived. Your destination is here and now” (p.35).

The poet Mary Oliver (1992) writes:

[...] I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention,

how to fall down into the grass,

how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed,

how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

(excerpt from *The Summer Day*, p.3)

*Spirituality is generating your own energy.* Hanh (2009) says, “Often, the body and mind go in different directions, and so we are not fully here. [To be fully here] means to generate your
own presence, your real presence” (p.32). Contemplating what it means to generate my own presence, with body and mind unified in a state of cosmic tension, gives me pause.

Spirituality is an internal sanctuary. The Irish poet John O’Donohue, who worked as a clergyman for years and then decided to become a poet, was recently interviewed for a podcast called On Being (2017). “There is a place in you where you have never been wounded, where there’s still a sureness in you, where there’s a seamlessness in you, and where there is a confidence and tranquility in you. And I think the intention of prayer and spirituality and love is now and again to visit that inner kind of sanctuary” (On Being).

Spirituality is embracing the irrational. Professor Mark Taylor wrote an essay on Jacques Derrida following his death. Taylor (2004) writes that “Derrida taught us that the alternative to blind belief is not simply unbelief but a different kind of belief—one that embraces uncertainty and enables us to respect others whom we do not understand” (p. A-28).

This particular facet of spirituality, its indescribability or unrepresentability, coincides with a discussion of the sublime (see Oxford American Dictionary, 2003), which could be interpreted as meaning ‘up to the threshold,’ or “what takes hold of us when reason falters and certainties crumble” (Morley 2010, p. 14). Thomas Weiskel (1976) writes, “The essential claim of the sublime is that man can, in feeling and speech, transcend the human. What, if anything, lies beyond the human—God or the gods, the daemon or nature—is matter for great disagreement” (p. 3).

Religion and spirituality are not mutually exclusive, but they are also not synonymous. Religion carries connotations of faith communities, piety, creeds, sects, organizations, denominations, and corporations. Spirituality is more elusive, more subjective, more intrinsic and more expansive. For the purposes of this research, both spirituality and
religion are observed, addressed, and critiqued. Occasionally the terms are used side-by-side to address the broad meanings and implications of each word.

This research includes references to elements of religious iconography, which are the visual, auditory, and kinetic representations of spiritual ideas within a faith community. When discussing these elements, it is important to note that it will not be possible to unpack all the layers of religious history and cultural significance within each practice. Instead, we will approach these elements from a perspective of artistic appreciation and spiritual inquiry. The primary focus of this research, however, is spirituality and its applications, implications, affordances, and limitations within the field of contemporary art education.

**Premodernism, Modernism, and Postmodernism in the Arts**

Just as Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern paradigms have implications for teaching and curriculum theory, they also manifest themselves in tangible ways through the arts. These paradigms have spilled into nearly every field, but the arts in particular provide a visceral look into the motivations and aspirations of each ideology. It is not necessary to provide a full representation of these art periods/paradigms here, but a simple rendering will be helpful to align my teaching philosophies with my emphasis on Postmodern/contemporary art.

Premodernism in the arts is marked by mysticism, magic, and dogmatism. As Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2008) pointed out earlier, many Premodern ideologies viewed mankind as fallen, disgraced, imbalanced, and prone to evil (p. 163). It became the work of artisans to create objects that could aid the viewer in (re)aligning themselves with the heavens, becoming balanced, attaining good fortune, and/or gaining merit. Primitive cave-paintings, pyramids, henges, totem poles, carved masks, shamanistic icons, prayer wheels, mala beads, and voodoo dolls, for example, are all manifestations of the Premodern paradigm in the arts.
Modernism in the arts is marked by a search for objectivity. In this paradigm, artists sought answers to fundamental questions about the nature of art and human experience (Little, 2004). Modernists sought grand truths about the underlying structures of humanity. Their work pushed toward answers in a rational and empirical way, and they believed a work of art should be read and interpreted to find concrete, unshifting, universal meaning (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008). Works of art spanning from Michelangelo and Da Vinci, to Monet and Van Gough could be placed within this paradigm.

Postmodernism is a direct reaction to Premodern and Modern paradigms. As defined by Davis, Samara, and Luce-Kapler (2008), Postmodernism admits that “[we live in a world] of partial knowledge, local narratives, situated truths, shifting selves” (p. 167). An art historian (Little, 2004) adds, “The ethical touchstone of Post-Modernism is relativism — the belief that no society or culture is more important than any other” (p. 131). Postmodern artists often use their art to undermine the way society constructs and imposes a traditional hierarchy of cultural values and meanings (Little, 2004, p. 131).

I am drawn to the Postmodern paradigm described by Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2008), that identifies improvising (Martin, Towers, & Pirie, 2006), occasioning (Davis, Sumara, & Kieren, 1996), conversing (Ashton-Warner, 1963), and caring (Noddings, 1984) as guiding motivations. This framework encourages emergence, flexibility, contingency, and expansive possibility (Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 171), and many contemporary artists are working, in their own ways, to explore these notions of improvising, occasioning, conversing, and caring.
**Contemporary Art as an Educational Tool**

Lydia Ross (2018), an art educator from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), was recently interviewed by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In the interview, she was asked why she believed contemporary art should be utilized in education. She responded:

> Contemporary artists are impactful on three different levels. [First], they ask provocative questions and compel their audience to look at issues in new ways. Second, they propose alternative strategies to systemic problems. Finally, they imagine radical possibilities for change, which encourages students to dream instead of feeling like they have to operate within an existing system. (Ross, 2018)

As my students and I discussed the problems and potentialities of spirituality in our classroom, contemporary art encouraged us to look at the issues in new ways, it enabled us to address systemic problems in standardized education, and it emboldened us to look for ways that we could radically change ourselves and our communities to become more thoughtful, kind, considerate (Noddings, 1984), and mindful (Hanh, 1995) of the otherness of the Other (Bernstein, 1992).

Most fittingly, I believe contemporary art is especially helpful in pursuing a postmodern theology (Slattery, 2013), a new cosmology (Doll, 2002), and a spiritual journey (Huebner, 1998). Again, Marina Abramovic (1992b) has a helpful perspective. She says, “Artists today? They are couriers, they accompany people on the true adventure, a journey into the inner self” (p. 237).
Seeking Strangeness

The arts can be a (re)sensitization tool, making us more aware of “the otherness of the Other” (Bernstein, 1991, p. 66). Seeking the “Other” is a key component of art practice. It opens up new ways of understanding those around us, and new ways of sitting with strangeness. Art educator James H. Rolling (2011) wrote that [the arts] are:

much more than just a generator of activist manifestos, or a universal language of self-expression or a means of crafting meaningful objects with technical precision... [They are] a self-determinative means through which to aggregate, accommodate, and assimilate ways of thinking not our own and likewise disseminate our own meanings and resources to others. (p. xx)

Thus the arts, according to Rolling, are a means of sharing—an overlapping of strangeness. In a diverse classroom, filled with differing ideologies and experiences, art can fill in the gaps between us. It can help develop a greater sense of appreciation for ideas and people that may have once been strange.

Noticing a stranger can be frightening, especially when we are comfortable. The stranger may threaten our sense of self, and “to invite the stranger into our horizon is to risk questioning our own views and ways of being” (Wang, 2002, p. 294). In Huebner’s (1998) words, the precarious act of embracing the stranger could result in “turning inside out” and “turning outside in.” Embracing the stranger could force a series of radical shifts in our worldviews. Parker J. Palmer (1993) suggests that the stranger can serve as a spiritual guide that can shatter assumptions and challenge our conventional, taken-for-granted notions of truth. Our truths, especially when they are partial—meaning biased and incomplete—are especially in need of
unsettling (Kumashiro, 2004; Barney, 2009, p. 90). The process of becoming acquainted with strangeness can be extremely uncomfortable.

This discomfort is important. Social justice scholar Megan Boler was the first to articulate the term “Pedagogy of Discomfort.” In her 1999 book *Feeling Power*, she writes that “[a] pedagogy of discomfort begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others” (p.177). As an educator, I am seeking this type of critical unsettling collaboratively with my students.

Strangers are also present within (Aoki, 2005). We are hard to get to know, even to ourselves (de Botton & Armstrong, 2016). But the process of continually becoming (re)aquainted with our ever-shifting, multi-faceted selves is an opportunity for growth, introspection, and deep-looking (Hanh, 1995). Barney (2009) observes, “Tolerating strangers within provokes me to revisit my own identities as artist, researcher, and teacher, to view them as strange” (p. 43). Barney (2009) also points toward the definition of strange in the Oxford American Dictionary (2003). The term strange is a shortening of Old French *estrange*, from the Latin *extraneus*, meaning “external,” or “strange.” Strange, however, also means (1) unusual or surprising in a way that is unsettling or hard to understand, and (2) not previously visited, seen, or encountered; unfamiliar or alien.

In my teaching, I want to reach out for the unfamiliar and the strange. I want to embrace difference (both without and within) with enthusiasm, and I want to respond to the call of the other with care. Curriculum scholar Hongyu Wang (2002) wrote:

Education is about change, emergence, and transformation, which makes it a spiritual journey, a journey of nurturing consciousness, imagination, will, power, and love to reach
out for the constant rebirth of the self inward and the world outward. Such a spiritual vision of education is infused with the transcendent dimension of human life, the creative energy of the cosmos, and a sense of responsibility for answering the call from the other—the stranger. (p. 293-294)

Huebner (1985c) describes this quest as a search for moreness and newness in the self, in others, and in the world. His vision of the curriculum as a spiritual journey could perhaps be summarized as a process of unfolding toward strangeness, both without and within. He writes:

Education is a call from the other that we may reach out beyond ourselves and enter into life with life around us….The otherness that informs and accompanies education is the absolute Otherness, the transcendent Other, however we name that which goes beyond all appearances and all conditions. Education is the lure of the transcendent—that which we seem is not what we are for we could always be other. Education is the openness to a future that is beyond all futures. Education is the protest against present forms that they may be reformed and transformed….Education is indeed a leading out….it is a leading out by the Otherness that is the source of transcendence. (p. 360-361)

In my personal pedagogy, I want to be aware of the other in every sense of the term—and I want to view otherness as an opportunity for growth, and perhaps even transcendence, like Huebner (1998) suggests. I want to seek strangeness in myself, in others, and in my community. I want to be awake to the precariousness of the other (Levinas, 1961). Framed in this way, seeking moreness, otherness, and strangeness is the ultimate aim of this research.
A/r/tographic Praxis

A/r/tography is a relatively new, but globally active, practice-based methodology that emphasizes the practices of artists (A), researchers (r), and teachers (t) (Irwin et al., 2006). A/r/tography is a qualitative methodology that enables artists, researchers, and teachers to investigate their overlapping identities and question their personal practices, while simultaneously collecting and generating data (Bickel, 2008; de Cosson et al., 2005; Gouzouasis, 2006; Irwin et al., 2006; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Sinner et al., 2006; Springgay, 2008; Springgay & Irwin, 2008; Springgay et al., 2005; Springgay et al., 2008; Springgay et al., 2007).
The methodology is largely autobiographical in its approach and draws from phenomenology (see van Manen, 1990; Narayan, 2011), which is an empirical and descriptive form of analysis. Qualitative research data is usually rich with descriptions of particular situations that allow for subjective interpretations, and A/r/tography emphasizes the interpretive and the phenomenological. A/r/tography is a relational form of inquiry that pursues meaning making, understanding, and the creation of knowledge that is embodied and situational (Irwin, 2013). Again, the goal of this research is not to produce objective, generalizable truths, but rather to enlarge my personal understandings about a phenomenon, and in turn, enlarge interpretive frames of my identities as artist, researcher, and teacher (Irwin, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

Arts based research includes the idea that artistic artifacts can be utilized as data and the artistic inquiry process itself as being a form of both data and data analysis.

A/r/tography is nestled under the larger umbrella of Arts-based educational research (ABER), which Barone and Eisner (2006) describe as “inquiry that enhances our understanding of human activities through artistic means” (p. 95). Whereas quantitative (traditional, empirical) research endeavors to uncover knowledge that is fixed, certain, reliable, and generalizable within particular settings or situations, arts-based research, being a qualitative and non-traditional form, seeks transferability—to underscore findings that may be adaptable and applicable in an array of different settings and situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

This type of research does not search for absolutes, but rather for the “enhancement of perspectives” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 96), and for the enlarging of one’s understanding (Irwin, 2013, p. 104). In this way, engaging in A/r/tography is a deeply personal pursuit, producing findings that are introspective, transferable, relatable, and adaptable.
A wealth of research exists investigating the various applications of this research method, and there exist many possible variants and descriptions of this particular type of research. Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, and Gouzouasis (2007) offer this succinct definition:

As an arts-related methodology, a/r/tography interfaces the arts and scholarly writing through living inquiry. In a/r/tographic practices, the identities, roles, and understandings of artist/researcher/teacher are intertwined in an approach to social science research that is dedicated to perceiving the world artistically and educationally. It is an inquiry process that lingers in the liminal spaces inside and outside—and between—of a(artist) and r(researcher) and t(teacher). (p. 84)

A/r/tography embraces and employs three distinct (and perhaps seemingly disparate) roles filled by an art teacher, even as they overlay, overlap, and intersect with one another.

A/r/tography is a product of poststructural thought, embracing and seeking flux, change, multiplicity, and variability. Thus, the many iterations of this method are in a constant “state of becoming” (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, Gouzouasis, 2008), and the initial questions that sparked the research are allowed (and anticipated) to shift and change throughout time. Irwin (2013) affirms that a/r/tographers “pay attention to the evolution of inquiry-led questions. It is here that the a/r/tographic project often becomes a transformative act of inquiry” (p. 104). Just as the locus of the research is lived experience, the method itself takes on a life of its own throughout the process, adapting and responding to its environment in an endless variety of ways.

A/r/tographers borrow directly from a variety of disciplines, especially the social sciences, in terms of data collection. For example, they conduct surveys and interviews, keep records and field notes, and collect artifacts such as documents, photographs, mementos, and other items of significance. In addition, they contribute their own artifacts to the pool of data
through individual art-making practices, which serve as generative forms of preliminary, formative, and (or) summative reflexive inquiry. As is the nature of all qualitative methods, enormous amounts of data can be collected through a/r/tography.

This method requires that the researcher approach their research from a variety of angles, perspectives, and literacies. As an artist, they seek literacy in contemporary art practices, art history, techniques, media, and technology. As a researcher, they are engaged in dialogic exchanges, thirsty for new ideas and concepts, willing to question and problematize their own understandings. As an educator, they have their fingers on the pulse of their students, seeking new strategies for engagement and collaboration, working to open their classroom site by transforming it into a space of emergent possibility.

Scholar Rita Irwin (2013) acknowledges the complex, multifaceted demands of this research method, and suggests that the work of an a/r/tographer is “reflective, recursive, reflexive, and responsive.” Irwin elaborates:

Reflective, as they rethink and review that which has gone before, and what may happen; recursive, as they allow their practices to spiral through an evolution of ideas; reflexive, as they interrogate their own biases, assumptions, and beliefs; and responsive, as they take responsibility for acting ethically with their participants and colleagues. (p. 105)

The reflexive component of this research deserves further untangling. As mentioned previously, this method could be described as living inquiry, meaning that research is not piled on top of what one does, but, through the lens of this method, what one does becomes the research—so that “who one is becomes completely caught up in what one knows and does” (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. 104).
A/r/tography and Phenomenology

This notion of putting lived experiences under the microscope of our attention and critique relies heavily on the field of phenomenology (van Manen, 1990)—the research of lived experience, or phenomena. Phenomenological researchers strive to attune themselves toward seeing pre-reflective, taken-for-granted, and essential understandings through the lens of their always-already pre-understandings and prejudices (van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology is a way of researching the essence or essential meanings of phenomena (Narayan, 2011, p. 189). Simply, phenomenology is “the study of essences” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii), or perhaps the study of lived experiences. The term essence refers to the essential meanings of a phenomenon; that which makes a thing what it is (van Manen, 1990).

There is an immediacy and an intimacy within phenomenological research. van Manen (1990) suggests that the challenge of phenomenology is to describe what is given to us in immediate experience without being “obstructed by pre-conceptions and theoretical notions” (p. 184). This immediacy and intimacy can be frightening, but Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire (1998) reminds that the purpose of all research is to uncover—it is to realize relationality to other objects. This implies a requirement for risk taking and venturing on the part of the researcher (p. 21). This also implies a willingness to change, to adapt, and be transformed by our successes and failures in, and out of, the classroom. And as our plans, assumptions, and research goals inevitably fall short, “we have opportunities for autobiographic and curricular reinvention” (Kalin & Barney, 2014, p. 28). This is the type of process that A/r/tographic research affords.

To elucidate A/r/tography further, it will be helpful to see an example of the research method at work. A/r/tographer Rita Irwin and a team of her colleagues (Irwin, 2013; Irwin,
Bickel, Triggs, Springgay, Beer, Grauer, Xiong, & Sameshina, 2009; Sameshina et al. 2009; Triggs & Irwin, 2008) undertook a research project working with immigrant groups in their community. Their preliminary research question asked, What artistic products might be created as we examine the immigrant experience in a specific city? They worked on the project for over four years and collaborated with eight different multigenerational immigrant families. Over those years they conducted interviews, collected artifacts, kept detailed field notes, and even attended and photographed family events and gatherings. Each year they held an exhibition highlighting the art they had made with/from the immigrant families.

Over the years their original research question adapted, shifted, expanded, and bifurcated based on their experiences. They became fascinated with the theme of gates, which evoked notions of thresholds, border epistemologies, arrivals, departures, beginnings and endings; and the theme of gateways began to permeate their artwork, which opened up new, fertile soil for discussion and exploration. Here is the story of an Estonian immigrant woman who participated in the research, as told by Rita Irwin (2013):

Gabriele was born in Poland after her family was driven from Estonia. At 9 days of age, Gabriele was carried by her grandparents as they escaped with very few belongings into Germany where transitional settlements existed. They soon moved to Canada to settle in Northern Alberta where they homesteaded land. Her mother died shortly thereafter and the ensuing years were difficult. Despite their challenges, the family learned a new language and adjusted to the new culture. Later, Gabriele became an art educator and soon met her husband, an airline pilot […] Gabriele recounts her history through a visual narrative in Gabriele’s gate. It illustrates the few belongings her family brought from Estonia, the letters family members sent over the years, and the tracing of journeys,
homes, and family members. The “gate” structure further illustrates the threshold of change, the monumental effects of change, [and] the power of the family unit.

(p. 106)

This is a beautiful story, made more beautiful and more accessible through the practice of A/r/tography. During the exhibition, viewers were given opportunity to pass through a series of constructed sculptural gates, which became visual narratives for stories like Gabriele’s, incorporating photographs, letters, and artifacts. This exhibition allowed for unique, novel visualizations of personal histories, which, as people passed through these thresholds, opened spaces for conversation within the community.

Opening dialogic spaces is one of the ultimate goals of A/r/tography. Irwin (2013) concludes that A/r/tography plays a vital role in helping us consider “the relationship between and alongside identities, art and graph, theory and practice. Openings reside in these in-between spaces and suggest there may be cracks, ruptures, tears, or cuts in what we perceive” (p. 107). These liminal spaces, where A/r/tographers strive to linger (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2007, p. 84), have infinite potential. As suggested by the poet and musician Leonard Cohen (1992), “Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack / A crack in everything / That’s how the light gets in” (from Anthem).

Unlike the project described by Irwin, my research site was a high school classroom in American Fork, Utah, where my students and I became co-researchers as we investigated and un/did our own spirituality—critically looking at the affordances and limitations of our own spiritual practices.

Like the project described by Irwin, we began with a few preliminary research questions, and then we “[paid] attention to the evolution of inquiry-led questions,” because, like Irwin
(2013) states, “[i]t is here that the A/r/tographic project often becomes a transformative act of inquiry” (p. 104). And this transformation of ideas and identities is precisely what we hoped to explore.

By allowing and encouraging our preliminary research questions to mutate and bifurcate, we embraced the complex, irreducible, and incompressible potential of the classroom (Slattery, 2013, p. 296; Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 76-89). We worked within a curricular framework that resisted prescription, and worked toward being responsive, adaptive, and expansive. With these goals in mind, prompts for class assignments were informed by Davis and Sumara’s (2006) notion of “constraints that enable,” which they define as:

structural conditions that help to determine the balance between sources of coherence that allow a collective to maintain focus of purpose/identity and sources of disruption and randomness that compel the collective to constantly adjust and adapt. (p. 147)

Our preliminary research questions included, How might you define spirituality? How might spirituality be enhanced through art-making? How might spirituality be hindered through art-making? Chapter four describes this in more detail. See Appendix X for the questionnaires we used in class.

In tandem with exploring these questions, students were introduced to new media and processes through classroom workshops that added depth and variety to their artistic vocabulary. I also introduced them to the work of artists who explore themes of sublimity, spirituality, and soulfulness through a variety of social, cultural, ethnographic, and geographic lenses.

**Limitations of A/r/tography**

It ought to be mentioned that art-based qualitative research paradigms which focus on “relationality and living inquiry” (Prendergast, Lymburner, Grauer, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis,
2008, p. 59) are still viewed with some skepticism within school systems highly motivated by empirical, quantitative data.

Beyond the expected suspicions from STEM-focused educators and researchers, scholars within the field of art education have identified some important criticisms that both “sing and sting” (Leggo, 2014) for the field of arts-based research, and A/r/tography in particular. Scholars Jan Jagodzinski and Jason Wallin (2013) published a book called *Arts-Based Research: A Critique and a Proposal*, that offers some valuable betrayals of the field. Essentially, they argue that as radical and progressive as the field of arts-based research is, it is not radical enough (Garoian, 2013). They propose that arts-based research endeavors to normalize the art-making process through pre-existing research methods and ontologies, and typically end with epistemological representations (Garoian, 2013). They (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013) propose a new, more radical, rhizomatic, and post-human form of lived inquiry that advocates “the centrality of becoming in pedagogical relations” (Atkinson, 2013) and “enables seeing and thinking in irreducible ways” (Garoian, 2013, p.vii). Also, scholar David Pariser (2008) argued that arts-based research produces neither research nor art. Chapter five provides an expanded discussion of the affordances and limitations of A/r/tography.

**What is Data?**

This research took place in my art classroom at American Fork High School in American Fork, Utah. The data collection included normal educational practices such as essays, class presentations, questionnaires, discussions, and art projects. My research was incorporated into the curriculum as prompts, class discussions, essays, student questionnaires and assignments. For students who did not wish to participate in the research, I did not include their writings,
responses, or artwork in my data. Two students chose not to participate in our class discussions, writings, and art-making. Instead, they worked collaboratively on their own projects.

My personal teaching practice in the classroom is a key part of my research. My own journals and writings are part of the data. I also include photos of student work, and some excerpts of student writing. Audio recordings were used during class discussions to chart the course of our conversations and document what students say. The student responses were not anonymous when I collected them, since all research activities were part of a normal school curriculum. However, student responses will remain anonymous in this document.

I collected my data from a purposeful sample of high school students who chose to participate in the research and were permitted by their parent or legal guardian (see the Institutional Review Board documents in the Appendices). My research explores my own teaching practices and the influence of curriculum and teaching in a secondary education site. I am particularly interested in rich, qualitative descriptions of student learning experiences, and consequently, I needed to limit the number of participants in the study to a manageable size.

This project took the form of a curricular unit in my classroom research site. I introduced the new unit as I would any other unit. The difference, however, was an invitation for my students to share their personal work with me as a form of data. For students who were interested, I sent them home with paperwork explaining the project, a consent form, and a photo/video release form.

Data is often understood to be verifiable, organized, and/or symbolic information. A/r/tographers also think about the practices of artists and educators as occasions for creating knowledge as a type of new understanding or possibility space, where being part of a community is a way to reframe artist, researcher, and teacher roles as a lived inquiry, or a form of research
that includes life beyond a typical closed research site. Educators working within such a model engage in educational inquiry that helps to explore issues, themes and ideas that inspire learning that extend outside of classrooms and foster lifelong learning and that encourage the building of a social community. These processes form the basis for a living inquiry. Living inquiry is about being attentive to life in and through time, relating what may not appear to be related, knowing that there are always connections to be explored (Prendergast, Lymburner, Grauer, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008, p. 59).

I collected student writings, student essays, classroom observations, personal journal entries, artistic artifacts, photos and videos, and I analyzed the data by searching for prominent themes. Through an a/r/tographic lens, the very experience of making art is framed as form of inquiry surrounding preliminary research questions, and thus becomes a form of data. The artifacts that remain in the wake—such as paintings, drawings, sculptures, photos, computer programs, video games, clothing, documentation of performances, etc.—are gathered as data as well. Further, as student and teacher researchers process what has happened through reflective journaling and conversations, the writings, recordings, and field notes also become aggregated into the data pool. This form of ‘lived inquiry’ (Prendergast, Lymburner, Grauer, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008, p. 59) has potential to generate massive amounts of qualitative data.

Curricular Sinning

In many religious traditions there is a deeply ingrained sense of right and wrong-doing. In Eastern belief systems (such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Taoism, etc.), good works help the practitioner to accrue merit and/or dispel bad karma. In the Abrahamic traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, a common metaphor for spiritual progression is a pathway that leads to God. For example, the Qur’an (1990) offers this plea:
In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of
the worlds… Thee do we serve, and thee do we beseech for help. Keep us on the right
path. The path of those upon whom thou hast bestowed favors. Not the path of those upon
thy wrath is brought down, nor of those who go astray. (p.1)

In these faith systems, the path to heaven, good fortune, and/or good favor is paved with good
works, rites, oblations, covenants, and ceremonies. Whenever a practitioner stumbles off the
path, gets lost, or goes astray, this is known as a transgression or sin. The term sin carries heavy
weight in these traditions, and can connote a falling away from God (see Oxford American

The *path*, through an educational lens, could be the rational-empiricist, or Modernist,
conception of teaching and learning that is “linear, incremental, carefully sequenced, and
punctuated by frequent testing to ensure individuals are keeping pace and drawing appropriate
conclusions” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 165).

By leaving the standardized educational path, or *sinning*, and seeking tangents and
detours, it opens opportunities for more Postmodern conceptions of teaching (Davis, Sumara,
and Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 171) that include collaboration, conversation (Ashton-Warner, 1963),
improvisation (Martin, Towers, & Pirie, 2006), occasioning (Davis, Sumara, & Kieren, 1996),
and caring (Noddings, 1984). Further, a deliberate turning away from oppressive, convergent
curricular systems opens spaces for emergence, flexibility, contingency, and expansive
possibility (Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 171). I am seeking this type of
decentralization in my classroom, where students and I encourage each other to *transgress* the
taken-for-granted assumptions about what school should be—to get lost in the tangents and
detours, marking our paths with landmarks of our own choosing.
CHAPTER 4: Data + Analysis

Figure 11. Prayer Flags above Namche Bazar.

An Introduction to the Data

This chapter engages with that data collected and created at the research site, and processes it through the methodological lens of A/r/tography. It includes various forms of qualitative data, including stories, conversations, field notes, class discussions, questionnaires, and various samples of art-making. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the purpose of the data is not to produce generalizable truths, but to present transferrable potentialities in curriculum theory and art education. As the data is explored, I will weave in an analysis, which includes potential implications and understandings.

The Site

American Fork High School was founded in 1902, and the structure has shifted and changed throughout the years. My classroom used to be the school library. I have tall ceilings
and large windows, with bookshelves lining three of my walls, filled with books, art, and odd collections. Another art teacher described my classroom as a cabinet of curiosities, and I am thrilled with that description. Tibetan prayer flags, Christmas lights, elk antlers, a dragon-shaped kite, mannequins, sewing machines, globes, Coca Cola bottles, stretched canvases, overhead projectors, art books, old cameras, chalkboards, knitted blankets, typewriters, skulls, and an old wooden vinyl stereo all compete for attention in my classroom.

This research took place over three weeks with my Advanced Placement (A.P.) Studio Art students. The A.P. art class is a year-long high school course aimed at helping each student develop a portfolio of their own work. Each portfolio showcases how students explore a range of disciplines, mediums, and processes within visual art. The portfolios allow students to choose a guiding theme or question and investigate it through a series of art works. When their portfolios are completed, near the end of the school year, they are shipped to a national review board where professional artists and art educators score each portfolio. It should be mentioned that the Advanced Placement program is a business, and by participating in this program students are supporting the A.P. business model. However, despite the business agenda, we are using the program as a rigorous educational opportunity, and it provides some parameters that challenge students in productive ways.

I waited until their portfolios had been completed to begin this research project, and utilized the last three weeks of the school year to focus on certain aspects of this study. I wanted to have the pressure of their portfolios alleviated, and I wanted students to feel free to try things that they might consider outlandish, strange, uncomfortable, or unfitting for their required A.P. portfolios. Finally, I also wanted to have more time for critical conversations and creation.
Even though the research project only spanned three weeks at the end of the school year, I had known these students for the entire year, and many students had taken my classes in previous years. This familiarity is certainly a factor that contributed to the openness and trust in our communications.

**An Outside Observer**

A/r/tography is a community of practice for *critical friends* (LeBlanc, Davidson, Ryu, & Irwin, 2015; Irwin, Pardiñas, Barney, Chen, Dias, Golparian, & MacDonald, 2017), who simultaneously support, encourage, and unsettle. I have been fortunate to have a few *critical friends* nearby throughout the unfolding of this thesis.

I wanted to include an outside perspective from a critical friend on the milieu of my classroom, the culture of the space, and my approach to teaching. Dr. Mark Graham from Brigham Young University helped me to generate some of the formative questions for this thesis while walking in the jagged mountains of Nepal. He also helped me to develop some of my early conceptions of teaching, and continues to help me question what it means to be a teacher.

Further, he has been spending time in my classroom over the past four years, since I was a student teacher. His observations touch on nuances of my classroom that I had not noticed, and he underscores a few of my previous curricular experiments to form a rendering of my teaching practice. The following section comes directly from Dr. Mark Graham (2018):

One of the characteristics of Clark’s methodology as a teacher is to take the mundane ordinary assignments that are associated with high school art classes and give them a new spin, which often involves connecting digital approaches to analog approaches. Clark also orchestrates the class so that, at some point, the artmaking leads to a culminating event that allows everyone to step back and appreciate what is being
learned. [...] In general, Clark’s approach is to share something he is really excited about, but doesn’t always know why. In the exploration of spirituality, he had questions, but he was not sure if he had answers. They were questions he was still asking. This creates an openness toward inquiry that lets student ideas become valued—and he communicates the fact that he is truly interested in his students and what they have to say.

On my first visit to Clark’s class, when he was a student teacher, the sound of tapping pencils was everywhere. Students seemed bored, with their heads down as they mechanically raised and lowered their pencils to the paper. In the beginning, Clark’s mentoring teacher only allowed him to work with the foundations class, which was for students who had never taken an art class before.

In a reflection of my student teaching experience, I wrote: For the first 3 weeks she wanted me to teach her assignments. One of the most painful was to teach stippling from a worksheet. She taught it first and then wanted me to teach it the same way. It was an exercise where students made small dots close together to create a value scale. After the first day, I asked her, ‘How long will this worksheet take?’ She answered, ‘Oh about 2 weeks.’ I was worried and upset. The kids were falling asleep on the first day while they stippled. She would make them do it again if they had any mistakes. It was rough. What could I do as a teacher? I could walk around, but I felt so useless. There were no concepts or ideas involved, it was just technique. And such a mindless [approach to] technique at that. Dr. Mark Graham continues:

For the capstone project for this class [while Clark was a student teacher], the mentoring teacher wanted the students to do a project that she said the students loved: enlarging and coloring photocopies of coloring books, including dinosaurs, cars, and Disney comic book characters. She said; “I have so many copies because I want them to
be unhindered in their creativity, they can pick any drawing they want then they enlarge it and color it.” But, Clark had another idea. He approached this assignment in an innovative way while keeping the curricular emphasis on observational drawing intact. He placed a skull in the center of a circle of students. Each student did their own drawing from their own unique angle. Later, Clark merged these drawings in a .GIF animation. The final art piece was an animated view of the skull that combined the work of each student as the skull rotated.

He took this process a step further by introducing the students to Eadweard Muybridge’s photographs. Forty students in his beginning drawing class worked together to create a collaborative homage to Muybridge. Each student picked and studied a frame from Muybridge's movement studies, imagining the skeletal and muscular structure of the horses. Students were still doing what the mentor teacher had asked, re-rendering a found image. Clark scanned the drawings and made them into an animated .GIF, but something magical was about to happen, something that Clark says he would never do again.

In another written reflection of my student teaching experience, I wrote: I asked for four student volunteers, and I called their parents to get permission to do an extension of the project. I picked up each student from their home, after meeting with the parents personally to give them details about the project and my contact information. One student sat in the passenger seat with an LED projector, one sat in the back with my camera, and one sat in the middle holding my laptop, connected to the projector. I had a cigarette-lighter adapter that plugged into the projector that I thought would give them adequate power. We got everything situated, then we turned on the projector and it overloaded the system. Everything went black. It didn’t work.
I had to drop all the students off and we were all discouraged. But they were so persistent about the need to get more adapters. So we did it all again a couple days later, with four new adapters, which we tried in turn. But each time the equipment overloaded the adapters, and it still didn’t work.

I was ready to give up. But one of the students said that her dad had a gas-powered generator. It was rusty and hadn’t been used in years, but we hoisted the rickety gas generator into the back of the car and it started up with a plume of smoke. We rolled down all of our windows and I had one of the students look up symptoms of carbon-monoxide poisoning on his iPhone, just in case.

We drove slowly, looking for storefronts that were flat enough on which to project the .GIF animation of our horse drawings. It was such a dumb idea. The generator would die then I would have to pull over and restart it. In short bursts, the students projected the images and captured the results on video. Eventually we got enough footage to make a short video of the ghostly horse drawings galloping across downtown.

It was a crazy idea, but in spite of my misgivings, we gathered some usable footage. On the last day of class, I turned off the lights and showed the finished movie. Students asked to re-watch it four times, and enjoyed trying to find their drawings in the footage. I didn’t want to subvert my mentor teacher’s class and it became an awkward place to be in, because students were so excited about the video.

One of the reasons it was so strange and awkward was because I had been in those same rooms as a high school student. The rooms had once seemed so colorful, full of vibrant conversations and art-making, but with a new teacher and art department, they seemed so bland. A few of the projects I did were open ended, which made my mentor teacher uncomfortable. I
can see now that some of those projects were very loose and how complete freedom can be paralyzing. My mentoring teacher said students love structure and need structure, which she interpreted as copying coloring book pages.

There wasn’t an art club in place, so I started a bookbinding club during lunch each day. I advertised it on the intercom and with posters. I went through 3 or 4 different tutorials, how to cut and fold, and how to stitch. At first there were 12 students, some not even from art class, and then those 12 began teaching others, so the numbers grew and grew. As students taught each other, they developed new variations of the Ethiopian Coptic stitch we had begun with. Altogether we made about 60 books.

I remember my mentoring teacher pulled me aside, and said, in effect, ‘In time you will realize your lunch is pretty special, and you shouldn’t sacrifice your lunches to be with students.’ But I thought, ‘Isn’t this what it is all about, being with students?’ I thought this was so curious, but I understand it better, now that I have a classroom of my own. She said to play less music because music is distracting. She said I needed to distance myself from students more. I thought this was curious as well because all I wanted was to get to know the students more and allow them to know me. At the time that advice was unsettling, but I can see where she is coming from now. While I still aspire to be available for students, I am realizing now the importance of establishing boundaries and personal space. Dr. Mark Graham continues:

Clark’s projects departed from what was customarily done in the classes he was teaching. He was fortunate because his mentoring teacher, in spite of her misgivings, gave him enough space to try out his approach to the foundations drawing curriculum. The result of his imaginative approach and openness to student ideas was a significant increase in enthusiasm and energy in the class. This case demonstrates how an
enterprising student teacher can invigorate a foundation curriculum, energize a classroom, and create a productive relationship with students. It also suggests that attempting to alter an existing curriculum and culture can disrupt the school and classroom culture in ways that are not always appreciated by mentoring teachers. As Clark observed, “As a student teacher that balance of power is so difficult. You want to jump in and teach but the mentor doesn’t want you to derail the class, especially when you have differing philosophies. I wish it could be more of a collaboration.”

Now that Clark has a full-time teaching position, his classroom is filled with interesting objects, books, etc. All of which create an inviting atmosphere that suggests interesting things are about to happen. They also reflect the fact that he is interested… Interested in design, interested in art, interested in artists, interested in fashion, interested different approaches to art making, interested in photography, interested in printmaking. The room is welcoming. It is welcoming to the student, even the strange student. Students feel like they can wander in whenever they want and just be there.
Some of the projects he highlights, and the ways he recounts me describing them, are a little embarrassing. Looking back at his memories of me as a student teacher makes me realize I was probably a difficult student teacher for my mentor to work with, and I may have erred on the side of arrogance, insensitivity, and over-eagerness. I would approach these situations much differently now, and some of these projects I would never do again. But they provide a helpful glimpse of what being in my classroom might be like, for better or for worse.

In our personal conversations, Dr. Graham has also observed that moving beyond institutional borders seems to be motivating factor in my teaching practice. For the record, though, I would never have students in my car again for another Muybridge project. That was dangerous and scary, even after meeting parents and getting permission in person.

But now I organize a yearly *Art Tour* field trip, where we pack onto a charter bus and visit art museums around the country, with plenty of chaperones. So far, we have visited Los Angeles and San Diego, CA, and we are planning another trip to New York this school year. I have continued the bookbinding club, and now we also have a vinyl record club that meets in my room each Friday during lunch. For the vinyl club, a student brings in an obscure record each week, teaches us something about the album, and then we listen to a full track in complete silence on the large wooden stereo in my classroom. We also do a variety of art exhibitions and fundraisers throughout the school year. These events create opportunities for personal, conversational relationships with my students outside of the normal scope and institutional borders of the classroom, and that enables meaningful connections and friendships. All of this helps me to turn my classroom into a way out—an escape from the expected routine and the social norms of a typical public high school classroom.
Hegemonic Forces / Demographic Data

American Fork, Utah, where I teach high school, provides a curious site for the study of spiritual hegemony (refer to Chapter 2 for more information about Antonio Gramsci and the implications of this term). The small, rural, middle-class community has about 28,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), and the city is an especially religiously homogenized community, even in an already homogenized region and state. Some demographic data (2018) suggest that 95.73% of residents in American Fork identify as being religious. 93.35% of the total population identify as Mormon (members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or LDS); 1.38% are Catholic; 0.15% are another Christian faith; 0.34% are an Eastern faith; 0.00% are Jewish; 0.00% affiliates with Islam (bestplaces.com). Another source (2017) reports that the surrounding county, Utah county, is 84.7% Mormon, and the State of Utah as a whole is 62.8% Mormon (Salt Lake Tribune). However, an independent Mormon demographer named Matt Martinich (2017) noted that there is a big difference between being on the rolls of the Mormon church and being in the pews. He estimates that only 40% of Mormons nationwide are active and participating members of their local congregations (Salt Lake Tribune). Regardless, these
numbers provide a rough rendering of the community, even though this data is not conclusive, and is suspect for a variety of reasons—including unclear and/or inconsistent data collection methods.

In any case, the large, seemingly homogenous religious majority in the community where I teach creates a unique set of challenges. The spiritual and religious minority, including Mormons who are at odds with common practices and policies of their religious institution, are often the victims of what could be termed a religious hegemony where mainstream—traditionally conservative, right wing—Mormon ideologies and cultural traditions are imposed upon the entire community, and considered the norm. It is vital to identify and critique all elements of social, religious, or spiritual hegemony because, “[p]ersons from majority religions are often ignorant about the ways that religion can coerce, marginalize, and intimidate minorities” (Slattery, 2013, p. 85).

A Note About Mitigating Risks to the Research Subjects

Before beginning the research, as part of my Institutional Review Board (IRB) application, I was asked to clarify the potential risks that students could encounter if they chose to participate in the project. After some thought, I outlined a few precarious possibilities associated with this type of project. I wrote that the act of creation, in general, can be disorienting and dizzying. The process of producing art objects can open opportunities for deep introspection—giving voice to hidden questions that can be persistent, abiding, and troubling. Further, we would be exploring sensitive terrain surrounding spirituality, plus the affordances and limitations of religious experience. Because I taught at a high school in an seemingly homogenized community, and although I anticipated having discussions about openness, sensitivity, and the differences between religious and spiritual experience, I knew there would be
a chance that students could feel ostracized if their belief systems or spiritual positionings did not align with their classmates. While I knew I would work to create a classroom climate that is open and receptive to all voices and perspectives, I recognized that whenever this type of territory is entered, there is always the risk of students feeling alone or ostracized.

After extensive paperwork and a thorough application process, I received approval to conduct my research from the Institutional Review Board at Brigham Young University, as well as my principal at American Fork High and the Superintendent of the Alpine School district.

**Basic Curricular Scope and Sequence**

After introducing the unit, we started class each day with a discussion. Our conversations typically began with an open-ended question—something that I was wondering myself, or a question brought up by a student. Our discussions related to spirituality, religion, rituals, religious hegemony, contemporary art, and complex questions regarding spirituality in secular education.

In my classes I occasionally ask students to write responses to discussion questions prior to our class conversation in order to gather their thoughts, and also the notes provide a partial record of our conversations. These short written responses along with questionnaires (see Appendix p.xx), my own field notes, audio recordings, and artistic artifacts have provided massive amounts of qualitative data.

Our discussions were typically followed by a short workshop, where I quickly demonstrated various artistic mediums and processes that students could adopt and apply to their art-making, or not. The rest of our class time each day was treated as an open studio, where students could work on various art projects.
Over the course of the three week unit, we had class conversations each day, multiple work days, one day of student presentations, and another day of critiques regarding our final projects. I will be very selective about what I present in these pages, because the sheer quantity of writings, discussions, audio recordings, and artworks would be difficult to wade through. I will include data that feels most productive and generative.

Stepping Into The Research

I began with an invitation. I told my students stories about Nepal, and how it continued to stir my thinking and art-making. I showed them a few of the things I had been making, including photos from a large art exhibition I had recently completed. I told my students that I continued to be interested in the collision of spirituality and art-making, and that I wanted to make art with them that explored our individual notions of spirituality, cosmology, theology, etc. I sent them home with a permission slip and a photo/video release waiver (see “Invitation to be a research participant,” Appendix p.xx), and I made it clear that I would not use photos or videos of the students (or their art) if they chose not to be a part of the project. I informed the class that as we took spirituality into consideration in our discussions, I anticipated creating a safe space together where all perspectives would be valuable. If students chose not to participate in class discussions, I assured them it was completely fine, and they would be allowed to have free work days and could listen to music on their headphones as they produced their own projects. Twenty-four of my students returned with their waivers signed, and two chose not to be part of the research (instead, they worked collaboratively on an anime-fashion magazine).

My Art Practice

Being in the jagged mountains of Nepal, feeling so displaced, and meeting such beautiful people stirred me in a way I couldn’t put into words. Making art was a ruminative process that
helped me to continue considering the questions that emerged while on the trek. As mentioned earlier, my research methodology views art-making as a form of data—an occasion for further inquiry and meaning-making.

These artistic projects became intertwined with my research process. Art-making became a pivotal component of my data. The process of creation opened new questions and formed new connections that I hadn’t considered before. Later, the artifacts I had produced became entry points for my students and I to begin talking about spirituality and making artifacts together.

My art exhibition, on the main floor of the Harris Fine Arts Center on Brigham Young University campus, included photos, videos, sculptures, audio components, and a large installation. It created an odd arc between Tibetan Buddhism and a Demolition Derby in Idaho. More importantly, it explored the connections of disparate communities, and reminded me that spirituality can take surprising forms.

Figure 14. Demolition exhibition, mandala installation.
Demolition

I told my students a story about my art exhibition: A few weeks after returning home from Nepal, I was eating corn dogs at the Eastern Idaho State Fair. My mom had grown up in the small town of Blackfoot, where the fair is held, and I had been to the fair almost every year of my life. Even though I was so familiar with that place, it seemed especially foreign that year.

In addition to eating corn dogs, counting cut-off t-shirts, and trying not to throw up on the Gravitron, I was there to photograph the Demolition Derby. I was a teenager when I saw the derby for the first time. I was expecting a few old cars to putt around in the dirt and tap into each other. But what I saw, instead, were shiny muscle cars with reinforced welded bumpers, roll cages, large tires, with deafening engines raised out of the hoods, spitting flames. The sound of the engines made my heart pound, and when the cars crashed together I was sprayed with dirt clods. I sat in a stupor when the derby ended, picking specs of dirt out of my teeth and hair.

This year I had a pit pass, and began photographing the drivers as they tinkered with their engines and zipped up their jumpsuits. As I talked with them, something curious happened. They began saying things that reminded me of Buddhist monks in Nepal.

I remembered the Tibetan Buddhist practice of creating and then ceremoniously destroying sand mandalas. These monks spend hours, often days, making elaborate patterns of colorful sand, which each grain delicately placed in a precise design. And when the design is finished, they simply sweep it up, place the sand in a bowl, and dump it into a body of water.
For Buddhist monks, this is a meditation on *Impermanence*—the notion that everything is always in flux. The world as we see it and our lives as we know them will never be quite this way again. Everything is in a state of decay or transition, including our emotions, our bodies, the state of our clothing, our houses, our cities, our governments, etc, etc, etc. In effect, everything that we see around us in the material world, and even the things we don’t see, are always moving. Our entire existence, says the Eastern philosopher Alan Watts (2018), is a “weaving of smoke” (p. 108).

I thought of the Buddhist monks, who spend so much time and energy making something that they just destroy. And then I thought of the demolition derby drivers, who also spend so much time and energy making something that they just destroy. It opened a strange dialogue in my mind between two very different communities. I imagined a monk in a saffron robe, standing...
with the drivers in the dirt, watching them frantically weld and hammer before the derby began, in clouds of cigarette smoke. I imagined a derby driver, covered in grease, standing in a monastery watching monks carefully place each colorful grain of sand in a mandala, surrounded by a haze of incense. I imagined them each smiling when the destruction began. I imagined that they would intuitively understand something about what was going on. Maybe not.
I brought a white sheet to the derby and stretched it over a wooden fence as a backdrop for portraits. I did this for two reasons. One, I wanted to isolate the drivers from the background in an editorial style. Vogue photographer Richard Avedon (1923-2004) released a portfolio of work called *In The American West* in 1985, where he used a similar approach to create portraits of strangers he met while traveling in the West. And two, I wanted an excuse to spend a little more time with each driver. Whereas a photojournalistic approach would have been quick and unstaged, an editorial approach required me to slow down and have a brief moment with each driver.

In my conversations, I began asking the drivers what motivated them to spend so much time and money fixing up a car that would only be driven for a few minutes. There was a small cash prize for the winner of the competition—certainly not enough to pay for the cost of the car or the modifications—but surprisingly, none of the drivers mentioned the cash prize. Instead, their responses were more philosophical. A father said that time was passing too fast with his boys, and he wanted an excuse to spend more time with them. With a cigarette dangling from his lips, another driver told me that it didn’t matter if he won or lost, he just loved the community of the derby. He had competed each year for 21 years. While wiping black oil onto his jeans and duct-taping a rolled up towel around his neck for a brace, another driver told me he just loved the rush of adrenaline. He didn’t care if he won or lost either. He just wanted to be in the ring for a few minutes. Their responses focused on being present and being more fully alive—concepts that dovetailed in a very strange way with the tenets of Impermanence in Tibetan Buddhism.

I was stirred by their responses and I wanted to explore these connections through an art exhibition. When I returned home, I produced an art exhibition including two videos, audio field recordings, some sculptures—a large prayer wheel made from two welded tire rims, and a 108-
bead mala necklace, made entirely from lug nuts and car wires—and a large installation in the form of a 15’ diameter sand mandala, littered with car parts. There were also carnival lights above the mandala that echoed the elemental color sequence of Tibetan prayer flags. The exhibition was up for almost two weeks on the main floor gallery of the Harris Fine Arts Center at Brigham Young University.

Figure 17. Demolition exhibition, mandala installation.
Entering Uncomfortable Discussions

On our second day, we began class with a discussion. I told students that I wanted to preface this unit with a discussion about openness and appreciation. I posed the questions, “How can we talk about spirituality and keep everyone safe, valued, and appreciated?” “How can we validate and appreciate perspectives that differ from our own?” “How can we differentiate between religion and spirituality?” I told them that we would establish some definitions and parameters as a class, and I would frequently receive anonymous feedback from class members to ensure we were maintaining a safe space for earnest inquiry and discussion.

I should note here that this particular class of students was an extremely cohesive group. We had been together nearly an entire school year, and we had spent significant amounts of time in each other’s company. Many of these students had also joined me on Art Tour, where we took a charter bus to Los Angeles, CA, and spent time in museums and created work of our own. The six-day trip helped us to become even more acquainted. I had also held many after school “studio
hours” where A.P. students could stay late to spend time together and make work. All that said, I was not particularly concerned about these students clashing or being insensitive to each other, although I knew they held a wide variety of beliefs and perspectives.

The students and I began setting some ground rules for the unit. “How can we talk about religion and spirituality and keep this a safe place?” I asked. A few students raised their hands, and a girl named Sam responded, “Just don’t be a dick.” The class laughed and the other hands went down. That summed it up pretty well. I wrote her suggestion on the board, and the class laughed again.

I asked again for any other ideas, and wrote a few more responses on the board: “Be kind” “Listen” “Don’t be afraid of someone who believes different than you” “See what you can learn from other people” “Don’t try to be a missionary.”

I thanked them for their feedback and then passed out a questionnaire (See “Questionnaire #1” in the Appendix). I told the students it was just an opportunity to articulate some of their thoughts, and it wouldn’t be graded. They could also keep their responses anonymous if they chose. The purpose was to help them mull over the questions for a few moments before jumping into a discussion.

The survey asked, “How might you define spirituality?” “What is the difference between spirituality and religion?” “How can spirituality be expressed in an artwork?” “Why do people put spiritual themes in artwork?” “Why should people not put spiritual themes in artwork?” (A student raised her hand and asked, “Shouldn’t this question say, ‘What wouldn’t people want to put spiritual themes in their artwork?’” I said yes absolutely, and that her wording was much more clear. I thanked her for the correction) and “What makes talking about spirituality in a public school challenging?”
I gave the students a few minutes to fill out the survey, and then we had a discussion. I told students they could keep the questionnaires at their desks to add thoughts as we went through our discussion, and I would collect them at the end.

**Deconstructing Parameters + Re/Defining Spirituality**

Our very first step was to create a broad definition of spirituality as a class. Students had beautiful and surprising responses to the question, “How do you define spirituality?” I used an audio recorder to document our conversation, and the following compilation of thoughts incorporates both the verbal and written responses of students. I have changed the names of students to preserve their anonymity, and I have omitted responses from students who chose not to be part of this research.

To begin, I deliberately avoided bringing in any outside sources. I told my students I wasn’t interested in what a dictionary, a theologian or philosopher says about spirituality. I was interested in them—and I wanted to build a broad, collective classroom definition. Hands began darting up, and they said that spirituality is:

- Something that makes you wonder. (Ashlynn)
- [It’s a] feeling of tranquility… Everyone has those moments throughout the day when they take a breath and they realize they’re taking a breath, and they’re [present], and they acknowledge everything around them. That is a spiritual moment to me… [Spirituality] is something that makes you whole. (Corrine)
- As someone who’s not like super religious, I kind of have a hard [time] with the idea of spirituality being something bigger than myself. And so for me, my personal spirituality is a meditation to try and understand life around me. (Hallie)
- A yearning or struggle for something that is bigger than yourself. (Walker)
• Spirituality is a struggle to better yourself and your community. (Sam)

• Anything that gives you comfort. (Jeff)

• That feeling that everything is gonna be okay. (Morgan)

• For me spirituality is a recognition of purpose—whether that’s my purpose in the moment right now, or the purpose of something else that I’m seeing in the world. (Cole)

• A surrealness that can’t be put into words. It’s when you feel so alive that it’s almost not real. A sacred surrealness. (Lexi)

• Spirituality is where there is no division. (Brooklynn)

• Being alive in the here and now. (Taevyn)

• What science can’t define. (Jane)

• The absence of fear. (Kayla)

• I think spirituality drives human connection... It’s something that pulls us all together. (Dayna)

I thanked them for their thoughts, and to their definitions I also added one by the scholar Patrick Slattery (2013), who suggests that spirituality could be an embracing of the irrational or intuitive (p. 6)—a counterbalance to our rational world. I shared a thought by Jacques Derrida that the great spiritual traditions of the world teach us to call certainty and secularity into question (Taylor, 2004, p. A-28). Our discussions revealed anew that spirituality embraces a multitude of meanings. Together, we expanded and reconfigured our previous notions of spirituality.

The second question on their survey was, “What is the difference between religion and spirituality?” Together we discussed the critical differences between the two terms. Students had
some keen observations. They said, “Too often we mistake spirituality as religion, but in reality, religion is just a mode for spirituality, a way to become more spiritual.” “Spirituality is a lot more abstract and it’s not limited with guidelines.” “Religion is a belief where you worship someone else, while spirituality is where you work on yourself.”

After we formed a generous definition of spirituality and made important separations between religion and spirituality, we began discussing spirituality in secular education. On the questionnaires students were asked to write about what makes talking about spirituality in a public school potentially challenging and hazardous. They observed, “Not everyone was raised/taught the same things. You can’t act like one way is the right way.” “People may be afraid of ways of thinking that are foreign,” and “It’s difficult because you don’t know if people are judging you for your views.”

I added to their observations by identifying periods in our educational history where curriculum has been used as a spiritual, religious, and “cultural bomb” (Slattery 2013, p.77) to regulate and assimilate minority and immigrant communities, effectively eradicating and destroying their culture. I also introduced them to the concept of cultural hegemony (Gramsci 1965), and we discussed ways in which a culturally, and/or religiously dominant majority could be dangerous for minority groups (and for themselves). A student chimed into the conversation at this point and said, “When teachers talk about religion it makes me uncomfortable because I don’t have a religion and I know that most people in this area are Mormon. I’m fine with objectively talking about religion [...] but usually when a teacher talks about religion, they’re talking about theirs.” This poignant comment stirred our conversation further, and we began critiquing authority figures and power structures inherent in our school community. For many students (who would self-identify as being part of the culturally and spiritually dominant
Mormon majority), this became a turning point for them to realize how their actions and assumptions could be potentially exclusive and problematic.

We discussed Thich Nhat Hanh’s (2007) notions of deep listening and generating true dialogue. He writes, “Learning to touch deeply the jewels of our own tradition will allow us to understand and appreciate the values of other traditions, and this will benefit everyone” (p.90).

Students also had thoughtful ideas in regards to building a classroom culture that was open, generous, and accommodating to a variety of belief systems and perspectives—and one that challenged and endeavored to dismantle imbalanced power structures whenever they became apparent. Student responses to the questionnaires provided valuable guidelines for our classroom. They essentially all said the same thing, and affirmed the need to be kind, to be respectful, and to be open-minded.

A few of the responses, however, cut deeper. One student wrote, “Don’t talk about what religion you think is true, don’t be judgmental of other religions or people who don’t share your beliefs. Don’t talk about doing something so your soul can be ‘pure’ so you’ll go to heaven.” This was an extremely important concept to address. I hadn’t foreseen this conversation and felt unprepared to navigate the terrain. We talked about how notions of purity can be adopted and propagated by faith communities—and how they can be divisive, damaging and filled with hate rhetoric. Another student brought up “slut-shaming” and how it can occur when the hegemonic religious majority imposes their values on the entire community—or when individuals impose their system of standards on someone else.

Another student spoke up and said he didn’t feel safe in his local Mormon parish (or ward) because some members of the community refused to accept him as bi-sexual. They continually made him feel inadequate, unworthy, and unloved, he said, and he had already been
battling depression and anxiety. His own mother had even threatened to throw him out of the house for texting another bi-sexual boy. He said she was weaponizing guilt and shame in the name of religion, and imposing her standards on him.

Some background may be helpful here. The Mormon church and the Queer community have a strained relationship, at best. Many members of the Queer community feel ostracized by current church policies that prohibit them from full activity in the Mormon community (Knoll, 2017). Social researchers point to a connection between Mormon youth suicide rates and LGBT identity struggles (Knoll, 2016). The evidence is primarily indirect and anecdotal, but it cannot be ignored. Youth suicides in Utah have nearly tripled since 2007 (Price, 2016), and Queer suicides in Utah are more than double the national rate and climbing (Knoll, 2017).

This particular student had come out in my classroom a few months before, during an art critique. I had not anticipated having that conversation during a critique, and felt unprepared (again) to navigate the terrain. I responded with care and concern and the class members, even the practicing Mormons, were extremely supportive and kind. I was touched to see many students stand up and hug him to affirm their friendship and love. Through tears, this student later told me that he had been contemplating self-harm the day he came out in my class. The kind, warm response he received made him feel happy and hopeful about his future.

As he told us about the guilt and shame he had been receiving from his mother and his faith community, students and I made it clear, again, that we supported and cared for him. I was happy to see students react in such careful and kind ways.

I could not have anticipated these tangents and detours. No script or lesson plan could have provoked these conversations. By posing open-ended questions (real questions that I cared about as well), students and I built a framework of caring (Noddings, 2005), and opened a space
for healing and re-integration (Huebner, 1991, p.1). These discussions invited us to think more critically about our community and our place in it.

In their own small ways, these conversations began the work of dismantling hegemonic systems of power and opening spaces for deep listening (Hanh, 2007, p. 90). These conversations also opened up new possibilities for research and art-making in our classroom.

**Building Arcs**

At the beginning of our third class, I told the students a few stories about Nepal. I showed photos from our trek, and then began sharing some of the parallels I had noticed between this community of Tibetan Buddhists and the field of contemporary art. I drew connections between Marina Abramovic (2010) and meditation; John Baldesarri (1970) and Tibetan sand mandalas; Richard Long (1967) & Hamish Fulton (1972) to walking meditation; Mark Dion (2002, 2007, 2012) & Fred Wilson (2008, 2011) to collections of odd, holy objects; Rirkrit Tiravanija (1990) & Alison Knowles (1962) to the kindness of monks sharing their hot milk tea; William Lamson (2014) to circumambulation; and Janine Antoni (2002) to practicing prayers and mantras.

This was an interpretive act that intentionally didn’t appeal to artist statements in any way (Barthes, 1967). As mentioned earlier, I recognize that this could be mutually destructive—disrespectful to both the spiritual community and the artists. However, I also felt that this exercise could be mutually beneficial—opening new spaces of critical dialogue by tinkering with these communities of practice.

I asked students if they could think of any parallels between spiritual practices and contemporary art. A few hands raised, and students made curious connections that I hadn’t thought of. For example, one student brought up Arno Minikinen, a Finnish landscape photographer who typically hides an abstract human body (often his own) into his images.
Minkkinen was a favorite of this student, because she also enjoyed figure studies and landscape photography. Perhaps his images, she said, could be a spiritual effort to connect with the earth. Perhaps the hidden human forms could represent an effort to become the landscape. Another student had recently taken up Japanese embroidery and said that, for her, doing small repetitive motions over and over again had become a meditative practice.

I asked students if they wanted to continue exploring arcs between contemporary art and spirituality. They did, and I invited students to build their own arcs, and we used the remainder of class time doing research. I gave students some resources for finding contemporary artists (Art21 was a helpful starting point). I invited them to find a work of contemporary art and connect it to some sort of spiritual and/or religious practice. This was an ungraded activity, but I told students I would love to have their thoughts written down somehow, so I could read them later.

On the next day of class, students presented their arcs to each other and turned in short essays that further explained their thinking. Their presentations were simple, and each only lasted between 1-4 minutes. Each student stood and shared an arc they had found. A few students even made short slideshows. Some students thought of a spiritual practice first, and then worked to find artwork that could connect with it. Other students worked the opposite direction, starting with a work of contemporary art, and finding notes of the spirit-ful in it (Doll, 2002).

Students surprised me with the connections and meanings they made. One student cited the *Seascapes* of Hiroshi Sugimoto (2015). The photos are a typology of ocean water. Each photo is black and white, horizontal, with the horizon line perfectly centered. The only two elements in each photo are the sky and the ocean. The student wrote [sic]:

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*Seascapes* of Hiroshi Sugimoto (2015). The photos are a typology of ocean water. Each photo is black and white, horizontal, with the horizon line perfectly centered. The only two elements in each photo are the sky and the ocean. The student wrote [sic]:

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For me Spirituality has always been an unsurity. My whole life I have associated spirituality with religion and never allowed myself to venture out and explore other forms of peace. I have struggled to find a connection with god and myself. With religion there has always been a barrier that I climb and repeatedly fall down. However I have always felt connected to something bigger. That I think right now is the universe and my place within it. I have come to feel a connection with the grass below my feet and the sky above my head, yet I continue to fight a battle with god. I am learning that what is important is finding my place and my peace with the world around me and space above me. I believe that is my spirituality. [...] Hiroshi Sugimoto is an incredible conceptual artist whose work focuses around the idea of the transience of life, and the conflict of life and death. “Seascapes” is a series of photos he took of different oceans around the world. With every photo he spends a few weeks studying the area in front of him. He states, “I feel like I am a part of this nature and landscape. I start feeling this is a creation of the universe and I am witnessing it.” [citation unknown] I find this absolutely beautiful and deeply relate it to my spirituality.

Another student found a painter named Ashley Collins, who uses horses as a primary theme in her paintings. Throughout the school year, this student had created an entire A.P. portfolio that revolved around Western landscape motifs. The student wrote:

Ashley Collins is an American artist who uses incomplete horse figures or horse heads painted over historical documents to address psychological and sociological issues of power, love, strength, and endurance. The horses are symbols of a soul that changed her life or someone who helped her along her path or shined a light on the path.
The student paused in her presentation, and then said that she had been hurt in so many ways by humans throughout her life, but horses had always felt safe. For her, horses represented everything that was good in the world. They were her spiritual protectors, she said.

Another student named Zoe created a connection between the light & space artist James Turrell, and the ancient Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain system of mystical focal points called Chakras. According to some traditions, she said, colors play a pivotal role in activating and aligning the Chakras—although, she admitted, she was just beginning to study the various chakra systems, and was still unsure about the specific details and histories. She shared a personal experience about being sick with an autoimmune disorder, and finding solace, healing, and energy in color. James Turrell, she assumed, probably felt the same way, even if he used different words.

Each presentation created unexpected arcs between two very disparate fields. I was excited by the meanings they had made, and students responded well to each presentation—but I could tell that the class was getting eager to plunge back into art-making after three days of discussions, research, and presentations.
The Final Project Prompt

I invited each student to inhabit the arcs they had created by making a work of art that could be contextualized as both a spiritual practice and a contemporary art practice. This would be the final component of the unit on spirituality. Since their portfolios were submitted and this was one of the last projects of the school year, I encouraged students to try something they had never done before. Throughout the year, students had been exposed to many new and non-traditional genres of work including installation, video, performance, etc, etc, etc. I hoped that students would do something outlandish, and enter unexplored terrain.
The next few class periods started with a short discussion, and then they had the rest of the time to work on their final projects. I wandered around the classroom and had discussions with students as they worked. I produced artwork alongside them.

**Santa Fe, TX**

After a few work days, we saw the news of another school shooting. This one had taken place in the rural town of Santa Fe, TX—and the shooting started in an art room. It hit home for me in a strange way. I began reading every article I could find, and stumbled onto one from NPR (National Public Radio) that raised some questions only peripherally related to the actual shooting.

Many school shootings are marked by heated debates about gun control in America, but this article pulled out a curious thread in the aftermath of this attack. Many members of this small town believed that school violence would stop if we re-instated religion in the curriculum. “We need God back in our schools,” said a grandmother of one of the students who survived.
The article notes that, “[a]lmost two decades ago, the U.S. Supreme Court told the Santa Fe Independent School District that it had to stop allowing student-led prayers at school events. It's a case that still reverberates in the community today” (NPR citation). That ruling was the 1999 Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe US Supreme Court case mentioned in Chapter 2.

This was a strange claim by members of the conservative community, that violence occurred in schools because student-led prayers had been outlawed. I wondered how students would react to this claim. I felt it would be remiss to avoid this difficult conversation, so I brought the article to my classroom and read a portion of it with my students. I asked students what they thought, and I turned on my audio recorder. While I had assumed we would talk for 3-4 minutes and then spend the rest of our day working on art projects, I could never have expected the complex conversation that emerged. We talked for the entire class period, and when the closing bell rang students remained in their seats and chose to continue talking. Nearly every student contributed to the discussion, and it was fascinating to watch the way concepts and camps emerged throughout the conversation. I had begun writing my literature review (Chapter 2) during this time, and many of the arguments from my students echoed educational scholars and historians. My classroom became a microcosm of the larger debates and questions regarding spirituality in American education (view the entire transcript of our conversation in Appendix xx).

I read a portion of the article and asked my class, “What are your gut reactions to that? When people say we need to put prayer back in school, or begin reading from the Bible, what are your thoughts?” Hands began darting up. The following are a few direct statements from my students, transcribed from my recording [sic]. “There are so many religions and everyone has their unique set of beliefs, and I feel like you can’t tackle all of that,” one student said. “If you
have Bible study, you are probably leaning more towards the Christian faith, but there’s Muslims, and Jews and a million other religions, and so if you do that, regardless of how hard you try, you’re going to be leaving out people. And I just don’t think that’s cool,” another student said. “I think it’s awesome if that’s how you want to deal with your grief. If turning to religion is how you deal with it then [...] that’s a great way for you to cope; but for people who don’t believe in God, for that way of grieving to be forced upon them [...] isn’t healthy.”

I commented that when I go to educational conferences I always see “Best Practice Lectures,” where presenters take the stage and offer their “guaranteed and viable” lesson plans. They promise that by adopting these strategies all students will pass the A.P. test, or stay engaged in class, etc. I told my students that I always walk away from those lectures thinking, I’m fairly certain that actually wouldn’t work for my entire class. What’s best for some people is never best for all people. Or, in the words of scholar Daniel T. Barney (2009), “Best practices are illusions, simply because they are only ‘best’ for the largest percentage of generalized populations. Working within this frame is linear and might do one thing well, albeit, at the expense of diversity, flexibility, and adaptation” (p. 249). Thus, anytime we’re making broad generalizations and assuming what is best for everyone—imagine, for example, trying to decide which holy texts to read in school—that is hazardous and harmful for everyone.

A student raised their hand and was sympathetic to the claim in the article, with a few provisions. He said, “I feel like what these people are trying to say, is to bring back God into our schools is to focus more on God in others instead of a self-centered culture [...] I think when they say to bring God back into schools [...] it’s more of an outward way of looking at your community and treating others.” Another student quickly responded. She said, essentially, that any time religious elements are introduced to a curriculum, it becomes oppressive and
exclusionary. “I think [talking about God in an authoritative way] can ostracize those who don’t believe, and then they can get bullied more, and it’s not a good situation. For instance... never mind, I don’t want to bring that up.” She hesitated to continue her thought, and I encouraged her. “In our community,” she said, “the majority is Mormon, and people like me get ostracized for not being Mormon. It would be like that, but in schools, and you can’t get away from it [...] They should teach things like how to treat others, and self love [without talking about God].”

Another student responded to the idea of talking about God in school. “I feel like the idea of God is so abstract that it would be hard to break it down enough to shove it into curriculum. Our curriculum is very this-and-this-and-this-and-this,” she said, “and I don’t think God in any way is that. I don’t think you can break it down to the bare bones of what God is.” A student said, “I really like the idea of not exactly putting a specific religion in schools, but connecting to something that’s bigger than yourself and learning to control emotions.” Another student, who hadn’t contributed to the discussion yet, provided an articulate comment:

I think that the implications of religion in schools is very frightening to me; because over the course of history, religion has abused power, and I think that people start to use God as a means to an end rather than for true belief. They all say, well God hates the gays, in order to prevent gay marriage. There have been many examples of that over the course of time [...] If you were to say, “let’s put the Christian God back into our schools in America” I think that polarizes people to into us and them, which breeds spite and hate for each other [...] I think that it’s interesting that people view God as such a loving being, and yet, when you’re talking about God, so much hate has come from religion and trying to put religion in things. I think that religion is important, but I think that difference is also important [...] I think that when we are able to talk about that and be
like, “oh well I’m not Mormon” and “I am Mormon,” we can have a discussion about
that; about why we believe the way we believe [...] When everyone is thinking the same,
I think that’s... scary. [sic]

I agreed, and remembered Slattery’s (2013) injunction to let go of certainty and the desire for
uniformity (p.106). A few more comments underscored the value of religious and cultural
diversity, and the ways it enriches our education.

As students responded and debated, I remembered Thich Nhat Hanh and Patrick Slattery,
Huebner and Doll, Noddings and Pinar. So many of the things my students were saying
resonated with the literature I was reviewing—albeit in very different terms, with more usages of
descriptive words like “weird” and “cool” and “interesting.” It was also fascinating to mentally
categorize my students’ comments into the Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern paradigms. As
the discussion came to a close, a few minutes after the final school bell rang, students and I
settled on a few things. 1) Evangelizing in a public school is destructive, 2) If religion and
spirituality are discussed in school, it must be in an open, generous way, and 3) Diversity of
thought and practice in spirituality, or any other realm, is something to be cultivated, not resisted.
Again, I remembered Slattery’s (2013) proposal about postmodern theological discourse, that
“diversity, eclecticism, and ecumenism bring us closer to wisdom and justice. One must give
everything away to become rich, let go in order to live, experience suffering in order to
understand joy” (p. 107).

This conversation lingered in our classroom, and it spilled into art-making for a few of
the students. One student began navigating the gun control debate through his own creative
process. Inspired by the contemporary Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang, this student used gun
powder to create a series of drawings of guns that had been used in acts of violence across the United States (see Figure 20).

**Un/Doing Spirituality / Artistic Case Studies**

This section explores some of the artworks that were produced by my students. Photographs and short renderings give a glimpse into the thoughts of each student as they explore notions of spirituality. I have selected a small sample of work that best represents the diverse thoughts and conversations shared on our final critique day. Student names have been changed.

**Colby, Truth**

Early in the project, Colby and I had a conversation about the subjective nature of spiritual truth. The student was intrigued by the idea that everyone experienced spirituality in a different way, and something that was special or sacred or rang deeply true to one person could be utter nonsense to someone else. I encouraged him to play with perceptions in his artmaking, and to see if there was a way to make something that would appear differently in different contexts or from different perspectives.

This student stumbled onto the typographic experiments of Austrian graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister, and became fascinated by his work. For Colby’s project, he created an installation in the woods using strips of white fabric and a staple gun. The fabric was stretched between and around trees to spell the word “Truth” when viewed from one precise angle. As the viewer moved from the designated angle, the words became increasingly illegible, eventually becoming entirely scrambled and unintelligible.

The student documented his installation with a handful of photos and a video made while rolling past on a skateboard. He presented his work to the class on a digital projector, and led a
short discussion about spiritual subjectivity. He said his aim was to create a physical representation of the ways we can all view the exact same experience or phenomena, and interpret it in an endless variety of ways.

Colby also said, “My spirituality is based on searching for truth, in whatever methods necessary, and there’s not one set way to do it. I’ve only found truth by changing my perspective.” I asked him what those ‘changes in perspective’ looked like, and if he’d be willing to share an example. He mentioned a recent political conversation with a friend regarding the recent re-designation of Bears Ears National Park and Capitol Reef National Park in Utah (President Trump shrunk Bears Ears by 1.1 million acres and Capitol Reef by 800,000 acres). Originally, he had only heard the conservative argument that it would save the country money, stimulate the local economy, and that the locals themselves were petitioning for the change. What he hadn’t seen, however, was that the ‘locals’ petitioning for the change were primarily white, and the actual ‘locals’ were the Native Americans—who had petitioned to preserve their sacred lands through a National Park designation. Without the National protection, the lands fell into State hands, and are now susceptible to privatization, including drilling and mining. This move to shrink a National Park was unprecedented, and posed many troubling questions. Colby said his friend helped him to see another side of the issue, and that shifted his thinking about the argument. He said his parents were still in favor of Trump’s move, and he was struggling to understand how they could be supportive of the decision.

I acknowledged that grappling with spiritual/political differences can be extremely challenging. Finding your own truths is challenging enough, and grappling with competing motivations and ideologies internally can be painful. But dealing with others, who often (always) have very different paradigms, can require a great deal of patience and practice.
He went on to say that he recognized each person had their own truth, and that he always wanted to be supportive of the truths valued by others—even when it was hard. I agreed with him.

Later that day, however, I continued thinking about our discussion, and I began to have some reservations. Was tolerance of competing ideologies a passive acceptance of injustice? If the purpose of a postmodern (theological) curriculum is to “ameliorate tensions and advance justice” (Slattery, 2013, p. 75), perhaps in the case of Bears Ears and Capitol Reef, the correct response is to act out instead of sit down and nod at a differing ideology. I recognized that I was in a position of power and privilege, because I was not directly affected by the downsizing, and I could afford to sit down in passivity.

It made me think more deeply about tolerance of differing spiritual or religious (or even political) ideals. At what points, I wondered, would tolerance of another ideal become socially irresponsible? Obviously religiously-motivated physical violence is irrefutably abhorrent, but what about social violence? Or, in the case of Bears Ears, what about geo-political violence? Thinking about these questions gives me pause.
Figure 21. Colby’s project, *Truth*.
Starla, *Ritual*

In thinking about spirituality, Starla was drawn to various rituals that involve repetition. We talked about religious oblations like the Muslim call to prayer, or Tibetan prayer wheels, and she was intrigued by the cyclic nature of these practices. She wanted to do something performative for her art project, but she wasn’t sure quite what it would be.

I showed Starla the artist Heather Hansen, who creates large drawings through the dynamic movements of her body. Hansen uses her training as a dancer to move around the substrate and create marks as she goes. She blends her identities as dancer and artist to create large scale performative drawings, and there was an element of repetition and ritual in her work.

The student found something spiritual in the way Hansen approaches her work, and decided to explore the process herself. She created a performative drawing on cement with chalk, and documented her work with a video that she presented in class. Throughout the school year Starla had been drawn to painting (primarily acrylic on masonite), and had never explored the medium of performance. The class was excited to see her try something new, and she said the experience was liberating and exciting, even though her family couldn’t quite process what she was doing.

Starla contextualized her piece as a visualization of spiritual ritual, and connected her process to Hansen. She wrote, “In spirituality, repetition is a common theme. Repetition of prayer, repetition of breathing, repetition of practice. Heather Hansen uses repetition to turn vague shapes and movement into something defined and beautiful, and that is what inspired me to do a movement piece of my own.”
Elenor, Self Portrait #2

During Art Tour in Los Angeles, Elenor had seen an unsettling installation by Thomas Hirschhorn (2005) called Chromatic Fire at the MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art). I had warned students about the exhibition, but I didn’t realize how graphic the content would be. The installation was a chaotic bricolage of mannequins, cardboard, paint, wood, tape, chains, carpet, cloth, screws, nails, wood figurines, electrical wire, television monitors, and fluorescent light fixtures—but the most prominent elements were poster-sized news headlines and photos of dead bodies from war zones and crime scenes. Hirschhorn also included large prints of drawings created by the Swiss artist and self-proclaimed healer Emma Kunz. Kunz came from a family of weavers, and her background in fiber arts manifests through the intricate patterns and line work which define her drawings. She believed her art had magical healing properties, and that a variety of ailments could be alleviated by spending time in front of her work. Hirschhorn's
juxtaposition of her work with images of graphic violence created a tension that was impossible to ignore. Art critic Jerry Saltz (2006) wrote:

Thomas Hirschhorn's latest exhibition is a walk-in manifesto, a book of the dead about the psychic place where mysticism, modernism, mayhem and terror collapse into one another. Many will find this show revolting. Not because it's bad or resembles a parade float from perdition, or weakens on repeated visits, but because of Hirschhorn's use of violent imagery and his supposed estheticizing of it. (p. 1)

I felt worried that the installation would cause them to feel unsettled or queasy, so I stood at the entrance of the room to warn students of the content inside. Many students felt they couldn’t handle the graphic imagery, so they continued exploring other parts of the gallery. Elenor was one of the few students that entered in the room and lingered. She was captivated by the piece, and was able to sit with the chaos.

Hirschhorn (2013) is famous for his mantra “Energy, Yes! Quality, No!” And his work reflects that philosophy. The entire gallery was littered with non-traditional fine art materials like cardboard, duct tape, and printer paper, reflecting his disinterest in expensive materials or conventional notions of craftsmanship. However, a different type of craftsmanship was certainly present. His focus on energy was manifest by the sheer, overwhelming quantity of material in the installation. It was disorienting to enter that space. Hirschhorn’s work focuses on creating installations, ‘monuments’ and obscure collections as a form of artistic inquiry.

Elenor had been wanting to make something along those lines, perhaps on a smaller scale, but didn’t know how that could be connected to a spiritual process. I asked her how she might define spirituality, and she wasn’t quite sure how to put her thoughts into words. Eventually she said that she was still trying to figure it out. I told her that was great, and that her
art-making should reflect that. I asked her to think about how she could ask questions about her own spirituality through her art-making. Although I didn’t use the term A/r/tography in our conversation, I was reminded of the many ways that art-making can aid in the process of research and meaning-making (Irwin et al, 2004).

While she brainstormed, she asked to borrow a book from my shelf called “Art as Therapy” co-authored by Alain de Botton and John Armstrong (2016). At the end of class she was still reading and asked if she could take it home. The next day she showed me a few portions of the book that resonated with her:

> We are hard to get to know. We are mysterious to ourselves and therefore no good at explaining who we are to others […] Art can help us identify what is central to ourselves, but hard to put into words. Much that is human is not readily available in language […] It is a strange thought, that personal identity and qualities of mind and character can be discovered not only in people, but also objects, jars or boxes […] We can hold up art objects and say, confusedly but importantly, ‘This is me.’ (p. 65)

She decided that she wanted to assemble a collection of objects to create a spiritual self-portrait. She also wanted to incorporate two old TV’s that she had recently found in a junkyard. Her father was a handyman and was helping her to make them operational again. The project sounded ambitious and I was a little leery that she wouldn’t complete the work, but I was excited to see what she could do.

On the day of our critique, she didn’t come to class with anything and I was a little disappointed. But then she showed me a video on her phone of the installation set up in her garage. She had built a large multi-tiered shelf, and filled it with jars and glass cases and painted mannequin parts. The two TV’s were also on the shelves, and were fully functioning. Each TV
was playing a video that she had created using Adobe Flash (she learned how use Flash by watching YouTube tutorials, and had been dabbling in the program for a few weeks). The videos included actual ultrasound footage of her as a baby, kinetic typography, graphic patterns, and a series of existential statements and questions, such as “This is me as a baby. This proves I’m a real person. I think I’m a real person.” “How do I know I am real?” “Was it my fault?” “Why do we exist?” “Why do people have to die?” The videos were timed perfectly to interact with each other as a form of call and response.

Later, Elenor wrote about her experience making the project. “I see people being drawn to religion and spirituality in hopes of finding answers and explanations to their questions — but for me, I often find that the further I walk down a spiritual path, the more questions arise. This piece is not only a collection of objects, but a collection of questions — a search for answers I’m hoping to find.”
This is me as a baby.
This proves I’m a real person.
I think I am a real person.

HOW DO I KNOW THAT
I AM REAL?

WAS IT MY FAULT?

WHY DO WE EXIST?

WHY DO PEOPLE HAVE TO DIE?

I DON’T KNOW

I DON’T KNOW

I DON’T KNOW

I DON’T KNOW

Figure 23. Elenor’s project, stills from Self Portrait #2.
Hannah, Sacred Space #1

In our conversations, Hannah told me that she was interested in notions of a sacred place. She said that, in her mind, space and spirituality go hand in hand. I thought that was an interesting concept and asked her what makes a space spiritual. She responded that it’s probably different for everyone, but for her a spiritual place is one where she can feel centered or balanced. I mentioned that her definition of a spiritual place sounded more like a psychological place, and I wondered what it would look like to try and make her psychological space an actual physical space.

She found the contemporary photographer Daniel Gordon while searching on Art21. Gordon blends the boundaries between photography, collage, and sculpture to create busy, colorful, and playful still life images. Hannah found something in his work that spoke to her, and said that she wanted to try creating a still life of her own that represented a sacred space within her mind.

For our class critique, she brought in a photo of a still life she had created at home using plants, cups, patterned fabric, and colorful paper. “Spaces are created to allow you to feel things you wouldn't normally feel in mundane places,” she said. Later she wrote, “Daniel Gordon creates beautiful spaces of fake objects and manipulates them in photoshop. Sometimes spirituality can be manipulated to make you think it’s something it’s not.” That last sentence raised all kinds of questions for me. What was spiritual manipulation? Whatever spiritual manipulation was, was I doing it?
Figure 24. Hannah’s project, Sacred Space #1.
Carmen, *Balm*

At first, Carmen was doing a small, repetitive embroidery project and was thinking about ritual and repetition. After talking with her, I could tell that she wasn’t fully invested in the project and wanted to explore another theme. I asked her if she had any hunches, and she wasn’t quite sure. I asked her to think of a question or a paradox that she would like to explore with her art. The next day, she decided to explore the dual nature of religious practice, and the ways it can both harm and heal. I thought that was an intriguing idea.

She brought in series of photo illustrations for the final critique. Each image depicted something broken, or someone in pain. Despite the heavy concept, the photos were bright, colorful, and whimsical. In three of the photos, showing a skinned knee, blood is represented with red sequins.

The title of her series, *Balm*, refers to the phrase *Balm of Gilead*, found in the Bible (Jeremiah 8:22, KJV). Balm is a fragrant ointment that soothes and heals the skin, and balm from Gilead was especially rare and valuable. She plays with the term in a paradoxical way by substituting balm for lemon juice in two of her photos.

Her work stirred discussions in our class about what a wound is, in a spiritual context. I asked students how they might define a spiritual wound. From one perspective, a student said, a wound could be a mistake. In Judeo-Christian terms, it could be an offense or a sin. From another perspective, a wound could be a limitation or a barrier. Perhaps another definition is anything that makes you feel inadequate or lonely. In all of these cases, we concluded, religion and spirituality promise healing. However, what soothes and heals for one, may cause pain for another.
Figure 25. Carmen’s project, *Balm.*
Figure 26. Carmen’s project, *Balm*. 
Santiago, Typology

Santiago was interested in the theme of impermanence. Since I had recently been exploring the same theme through art-making, I had plenty of thoughts. I shared a list of artists and projects that also explore materiality and impermanence.

The list included, 1) Swiss artist Jean Tinguely’s “Homage to New York,” (1960) where (with the help of other artists and engineers like Billy Klüver and Robert Rauschenberg) he created a 27-foot-high, self-destructing machine. When it was turned on, the machine lit itself on fire and started sawing and hammering itself apart. It ran for about an hour and a half before completely collapsing. 2) Janine Antoni’s “Lick and Lather” (1993), where the artist made several busts of herself out of soap and chocolate. She licked the sweet sculpture to re-mold her image and took the soap bust to the bathtub with her until the water erased its features. She said, “I think it’s a funny thing when you think about the creative process and what we go through when we’re making a work. A lot of times, there’s this element of destruction, that we have to kind of unmake in order to make, and that interests me very much” (Antoni, 1993). 3) “The Cremation Project” by John Baldessari (1970), as mentioned earlier in this paper. And lastly, 4) Michael Landy’s “Breakdown” (2001), where he catalogued and then destroyed all 7,227 of his possessions.

I may have been over eager in offering all of these suggestions to Santiago, and he seemed a bit lost after I told him about all these projects. He did his own research, and discovered Mary Mattingly on Art21. Mattingly is an artist and an environmental activist, and Santiago was especially intrigued by her “House and Universe” (2013) series. In that body of work Mattingly creates large bundles of her possessions wrapped in twine, which she calls “boulders,” and then does performances hauling them around her city.
Santiago wanted to take a similar inventory of the objects he owned. He created a typology of objects by photographing his possessions in front of a red backdrop, and then he compiled the photos in a digital grid with Adobe InDesign and made a large photographic print. Santiago wrote:

Mary Mattingly has a process of recording every object she owns and traces the history of each of her belongings. She notes how it came into her life, its distribution from global supply chains, as well as where the raw materials were from. After seeing her work, reading her thoughts, and hearing why she is doing this, I thought [...], Why do we have all these mass produced things? Do we really need all this stuff? In my life as well as others I have seen objects take place of more important things and driving spirituality out. I came to the realization that nothing is permanent and to really have spirituality you need to not be caught up in “stuff” [...] Spirituality is the way you live, what you do, and what you get out of it all. It is the feeling you get from those things, and from how you live [...] Spirituality is the self realization and the inwardness you gain from your actions.
impermanence (im-pur-man-əns), n. [Fr. impermanence — Sp. impersan, impermanencia, in mdp's permanent.]"}

Not permanent; not enduring.


impermanence (im-pur-ma-nəns), n.

[Sk., mâyâ, Pali, māyā: This term refers to the Buddhist notion that all things of sensation are impermanent. Once created, they decay and pass away. Although this notion is particularly true for human illness and death, the idea refers to the nature of all things. It is one of the reasons for suffering and is considered one of the three marks of existence.

*Figure 27. Santiago’s project, Typology.*
Phillip, I’m Sorry

For Phillip, spirituality meant a sense of social responsibility. He and I talked about spirituality as a form of penance—or making things right. Phillip was burdened with the weight of having unintentionally hurt some of his friends, and he wanted his artwork to be a performance and a public apology. Earlier in the year, I had shown my class a performance called “Family Tree” (2000) by Chinese artist Zhang Huan. In the performance, Huan’s face is progressively covered by calligraphers writing the names of his ancestors, ultimately culminating in his face being entirely covered in black ink. Phillip was intrigued by Huan’s work, and wanted to make a variation of his own. For Phillip’s piece, he wrote a series of apologies on his own chest with sharpie markers and documented his performance with video. After presenting his work, he wrote:

During the past year [...] I had many experiences in which I didn’t make my apologies known, whether it was a lack of apologizing at all, or not apologizing in a way that was clear, it caused many of my relationships to be strained and even end. Through these experiences I came to realize and believe in the importance of apologizing — even when it’s difficult or uncomfortable. A large part of my spirituality is connected with and contingent upon apologizing, or repenting, to my god. The process of apologizing can be painful, awkward, embarrassing, and even difficult, but is vitally important for all relationships to continue and grow. My relationships [began to] heal once I had apologized, and my relationship with god was strengthened as well. The “apologies” performance piece was a meditation of the process of apologizing. [I attempted] to write specific apologies on myself in a way that the audience could read but I could not [...] By marking my skin with these apologies that weren’t for myself but those who needed to
hear them, I was able to make them known — but more importantly understood. Genuine apologies can be felt, and I most certainly felt mine.

Figure 28. Phillip’s project, still from *I’m Sorry.*
CHAPTER 5: Limitations + Affordances

Figure 29. Ancient Mani Stones, broken and stacked beside the trail in the Khumbu.

Criticisms

The format of this conclusion does not follow a typical format. This chapter addresses two major components of my research that deserve critique and further discussion, and then outlines seven potentialities, understandings, and implications that emerged in this research. Following the criticisms and the implications, I will close with some final thoughts.

First, I will address the limitations of A/r/tography, and second, I will address the overarching theme of this research, which could be contextualized within “the holistic-spiritualistic movement in art and its education” (Jagodzinski, 2013). There are important
problems, limitations, and contradictions within any move toward the holistic or spiritual within the field of education, and I need to outline a few of them here, with my responses.

A/r/tography, Limits and Affordances

Scholars Jan Jagodzinski and Jason Wallin offer some important criticisms, or what they term *betrayals* (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; Jagodzinski, 2017), of A/r/tography, the research methodology used in this study, and arts-based research as a whole. Jagodzinski & Wallin (2013) published a book called *Arts-Based Research: A Critique and a Proposal* where they essentially argue that, as radical as arts-based research is, it is not radical enough, as a research methodology, and shares too many similarities with existing, established research methods. Scholar Charles Garoian (2013) endorsed and summarized the argument by writing that arts-based research could/should be viewed as:

*the event of ontological immanence*, an incipient, machinic process of *becoming-research* through arts practice that enables seeing and thinking in irreducible ways while resisting normalization and subsumption under existing modes of address. As such, arts practice, as *research-in-the making*, constitutes a *betrayal* of prevailing cultural assumptions, according to the authors, an interminable renouncement of normalized research representations in favor of the contingent problematic that emerges during arts practice.

(p. vii)

In other words, their (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013) argument is that the process of art-making is even more complex than arts-based researchers endeavor to make it seem, and should not, or cannot, be tethered, controlled, corralled, reduced, or compartmentalized by traditional research methodologies. They propose that arts-based research endeavors to normalize the art-making process through pre-existing research methods and ontologies, and typically end with
epistemological representations (Garoian, 2013). They (jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013) propose a new, more radical, rhizomatic, and post-human form of lived inquiry that advocates “the centrality of becoming in pedagogical relations” (Atkinson, 2013) and “enables seeing and thinking in irreducible ways” (Garoian, 2013, p.vii).

After jagodzinski & Wallin (2013) offered a betrayal and “a critique of the fundamental tenants” (p. 1) of arts-based research, a handful of scholars (Irwin, 2013; Leggo, 2014; Boulton-Funke, 2014; Holbroock & Pourchier, 2014) responded. The Poet/Scholar Carl Leggo (2014) published an article called Riffing while riffling: 25 poetic ruminations that offered a series of responses to jagodzinski & Wallin’s (2013) criticisms. The entire exchange is worth studying, including jagodzinski’s (2017) later response directed specifically toward Leggo (2014) and Boulton-Funke (2014). One of the primary limitations of jagodzinski & Wallin’s (2013) criticisms, Leggo (2014) points out, is the very endeavor to draw parameters around, and place limitations upon, an ever-expanding body of praxis and methodology. Leggo (2014) also plays with language forms and toys with jagodzinski & Wallin’s (2013) possible misusage of the word tenant, when tenet was probably intended. Leggo (2014) welcomes the provocations and critiques as opportunities for growth and refinement within the fields of arts-based research, but also offers this poignant rebuttal:

In general, the biggest problem with spelling out the tenants and tenets of arts-based research is simply that the tent that holds those tenants and tenets is expansive and always expanding. Any effort to pin down the walls of the tent will lead to exclusion, and calls of a mighty but with enough conjunctional umbrage to court an injunction to desist. (p. 94)

responded by pointing out that Pariser’s (2008) argument assumes we can all agree on definitions of the terms art and research. Barney (2009) continues:

The questions, is it art? and is it research? are questions that I do not find very helpful in contemporary discourse […] Postmodern discourses voice multiple art worlds (Chalmers, 2001; McFee, 1991) that serve a plurality of tastes, institutions, powers, agendas, and beliefs. A person who discounts all qualitative research, for example, even though that research may have proven useful to many, will undoubtedly not find value in arts-based research methodologies informed by phenomenology, hermeneutics, narrative inquiry, and artistic practice, like a/r/tography. (p. 253)

James Heywood Rolling Jr. (2010) offers a similar thought, and reminds us that, “there is no one set of criteria for judging the artistic quality of a work of arts-based research just as there is no one paradigm for the beauty of a work of art” (p. 104). These scholars (Barney, 2009; Rolling, 2010; Irwin, 2013; Leggo, 2014; Boulton-Funke, 2014; Holbroock & Pourchier, 2014) affirm that the deltas of arts-based research are continually expanding, and there is plenty of room for continued investigation, inquiry, and praxis.

The Holistic-Spiritualistic Movement, Limits and Affordances

jagodzinski (2013) also offers a series of valuable, incising critiques of what he terms “the holistic-spiritualistic movement in art and its education” (jagodzinski, 2013). In an article called “Concerning the Spiritual in Art and Its Education: Postmodern-Romanticism and its Discontents” (2013), he outlines three doubts that he has about the underlying assumptions and motivations of the Spiritual-Holistic movement.

First, he notes that the gap between spirituality and religion is not as wide as we might like to make it seem. Even though many within the field of art education, including the Caucus
on the Spiritual in Art Education (CSAE), are quick to distance and differentiate spirituality from religion, the two terms are unavoidably intertwined. Further, jagodzinski (2013) cites the research of sociologists (Caplow, 1983; Dobbelaere, 2003; Luckmann, 1967), who show that secularization, defined as “the shrinking influence and relevance of over-arching religious systems” (jagodzinski, 2013, p. 278), has ironically turned spirituality into a new religious form. jagodzinski (2013) writes,

A multiplicity of spiritualisms are now available, a bricolage of selected values culled from various traditional religions. Sociologists have called it “individual religion,” “bricolage religion,” “private religion,” “invisible religion,” and “diffuse religion.” The very separation of church from state has ironically not led to secularization but, on the contrary, to the ‘sacralization’ of life in American society. (p. 278)

In other words, spiritualism, in its resistance to religion, has become a new pseudo-religion in and of itself.

This important critique of the spiritual-holistic movement reminds art educators that their attempted separation of spirituality and religion does not preclude the possibility of inadvertently teaching a new invisible religion. In my conversations and art-making with students, I endeavored to explore spirituality in an open-ended, emergent (Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2008), non-determinative, and non-oppressive way. Our attempt was to look critically at religious systems and social fabrics (Huebner, 1993, 1999), and our intention was to simultaneously do and undo spirituality. Framed as such, I believe our critical inquiry avoided instating or enforcing any oppressive, invisible ideologies.

jagodzinski’s (2013) second doubt regards the inclusiveness that spiritual-holistic praxis claims to work toward. The appeal of moving toward the Other (Palmer, 1993; Huebner, 1998;
Wang, 2002) is problematic to jagodzinski (2013), because no matter how close we get to the Other, he claims, irreconcilable differences will always exist. jagodzinski (2013) writes:

The concept of “inclusiveness” and a “strong spiritual core” is especially apt in its democratic appeal toward the Other […] Self-reflection between the self and Other is crucial to its operation so as to maintain a certain distance. The Other's perspective can be appreciated, admired, studied, empathized, and observed… to the point where a “Real” difference emerges, when the imaginary is threatened and a distance has to be reinstated. (p. 278-279)

jagodzinski (2013) argues that in order to maintain spiritual harmony and dialogue, a permanent distance between self and Other has to be created, instated, and/or accepted.

While I agree that any Other will always contain knowledge that I cannot know (jagodzinski, 2013), I do not believe that our permanent state of mutual incomprehension creates an invariable hedge between us. We are not working toward sameness, which jagodzinski (2013) seems to pair with the notion of inclusiveness. Noticing and appreciating difference is the goal, and noticing difference can certainly be frightening, unsettling, and disturbing—especially when we want our personal worlds to be settled and predictable. The stranger may threaten our sense of self, because, after all, “to invite the stranger into our horizon is to risk questioning our own views and ways of being” (Wang, 2002, p. 294). But this threatening is mutually beneficial, and Parker J. Palmer (1993) argues that the stranger can serve as a guide to shatter assumptions and challenge our conventional, taken-for-granted notions of truth. Our truths, especially when they are partial—meaning biased and incomplete—are especially in need of unsettling (Kumashiro, 2004; Barney, 2009, p. 90). By seeking the Other (Palmer, 1993), heeding the call of the strange(r) (Huebner, 1998; Wang, 2002), and working toward inclusiveness, we learn to sit with

jagodzinski’s (2013) third doubt claims that “[t]he impulse of spiritualism and holism is Romanticism now in its postmodern forms” (p. 279). Romanticism arose largely in response to the industrial revolution, and sought to mend a perceived broken relationship between humans and Nature. The fundamental assumption of Romanticism was that humankind had distanced themselves too far from Nature, and the artist’s duty was to re-connect the two entities. In jagodzinski’s (2013) parallel, Nature could also represent conceptions of spirit, moreness, or “the open space of radical Otherness and alterity, [which] is always subject to ideological investment” (p. 279). Thus, according to jagodzinski, spiritualism and holism strive to reconnect humans with their transcendent conceptions of Nature, and return to “an Eden-ic time when body and mind were in harmony together in|with Nature” (p. 278). jagodzinski’s (2013) critical reminder is that Nature, or the “open space of radical Otherness and alterity” (p. 279) is not something for us to control or predict. He reminds us that Nature can be horrifying, and entirely ambivalent to humankind. The beauty and horror of Nature are intertwined and interdependent. Perhaps we have never been in harmony with Nature, and our hunger for harmony is a fantastical delusion. jagodzinski (2013) writes, “[t]he enchantment of Nature is both magical and uncanny; it is the magical side of the reenchantment that the art education literature continues to forward, repressing its monstrosity—its uncanniness” (p. 279). Thus, while we may strive to use the arts
as a vehicle to (re)turn to Nature, Nature, with its chaos, complexity, ambivalence, violence, and absolute unpredictability, will not (re)turn to us. It will continue to work and enjoy itself “in its own meaningless way” (p. 279).

This is an important reminder, that no matter how hard we try, we will never be able to control or predict Nature, or the absolute Other (Huebner, 1985c), whatever that may be. Any educator seeking to use the arts as a vehicle to (re)turn to Nature may be sorely disappointed when Nature does not turn back.

jagodzinski (2013) concludes his article with an important charge. He writes that our symbolic and superficial turns toward Nature are perhaps manifestations of our “fetishistic disavowal” (p. 279) of an ecological crisis that is already here. “We need an ecology without Nature,” jagodzinski (2013) writes. This critique challenges any practitioners of the spiritual-holistic educational movement to look again at their praxis and identify and dispose of any gestures that are merely symbolic and superficial. Thich Nhat Hanh (2007, 2009) calls this engaged Buddhism.

The Problem with Rube Goldberg Machines

In my introduction, I drew a parallel between this research and a Rube Goldberg machine—an unnecessarily complicated contraption that is built to perform a simple task. In this case, I stated, the simple purpose of the machine was to explore spirituality in a high school art classroom. I wrote that if this research enabled me to enter spaces of critical dialogue and create artwork in an open, inquisitive, inclusive classroom climate—the machine worked. This conclusion could be framed, then, as a simple question: Did the machine work?

However, I’m wondering now if perhaps that is the wrong question. Perhaps that approach is too linear and too determinative, assuming I knew what would happen before I even
began. Perhaps better questions are: What did the machine do? What didn’t the machine do? What components fell off in the process? What components were added? What were the surprises? What else could this machine do? And, what could be done with all of the pieces left over?

In keeping with the narrative, non-linear, and introspective possibilities of A/r/tography (Irwin et al, 2004), I am endeavoring to let my questions shift and change, folding outward and into themselves.

Affordances

What did this do? Is a difficult question to answer. It is easy to address what we did and what happened in my classroom. On the surface level, we made art that explored spirituality, and we talked about complicated issues surrounding religion, spirituality, art, and education. We read articles, and students rattled off their thoughts while I quickly scribbled on the chalkboard, in a plume of white dust. Students and I made art. We made messes in my classroom.

On a deeper level, I believe that by attempting to build a bridge between contemporary art and spirituality, we opened up spaces for generative conversation and critical dialog. I believe that our work pushed us in new directions and invited us to reframe our conceptions of spirituality. Perhaps even deeper, I believe that we moved toward “healing, re-integration, re-membering, and re-collection” (Huebner, 1991, p.1) in small ways in the classroom.

However, that can only be measured with anecdotal evidence, and it wasn’t necessarily my aim. My intentions going in to this project were simply to strive for new understandings and make new meanings as an artist, researcher, and teacher.
Implications

I have been stained by this research. Despite the dangers, precarities, and discomforts, this project has been extremely generative in my personal teaching praxis. I will carry the following observations, potentialities, and lingering questions with me long after I close this book. I hope these implications will be transferrable in some way to the readers of this work. All of these implications are interrelated, but I will try to separate them into a few categories.

Implication 1: *Calling Forth Our Non-Rational Capacities*

This research pushed me out of safety, beyond the limits of my knowing. I have learned that a study of spirituality, in any form, necessitates an open, whole-hearted, generous, and playful state of not-knowing. Even more broadly, I am learning that perhaps the field of education as a whole could benefit from embracing this mentality—accommodating the irrational and/or intuitive components of teaching and learning. Unfortunately, these non-rational capacities, or spiritual dimensions, of pedagogy are often considered suspect within the framework of current K-12 education.

With Abramovic (1992a), I observe that our modernist, rational education system over-emphasizes proof, evidence, and quantitative patterns, and treats our perceptive abilities and non-rational capacities with suspicion. I repeat the words of Abramovic (1992a), who elaborates:

"Bit by bit we are pushed into a rational pattern, losing our non-rational abilities and instincts. Our society is constructed entirely upon rational patterns. Everything which is not rational is treated with a certain secrecy [...] Our rational way of thinking demands proof, evidence, but this is only one element in our perceptive capabilities [...] Art is a
field in which the non-rational may sometimes be tolerated, where it is creatively employed. I want to introduce the non-rational into our society. (p. 235)

Classrooms seldom emphasize or explore the non-rational aspects of our experience in this world. Teachers, and especially art teachers, have a unique opportunity to subvert the modernist model and embrace a more postmodern conception of teaching, learning, and being. With Abramovic, I believe that the arts can be a vehicle for critiquing educational systems, subverting our emphasis on rational patterns, and returning to a childish sense of non-rationality. By admitting our inability to understand, empirically, much of anything, and “[calling our] certainties into question” (Slattery, 2013, p.6), our not-knowing doesn’t have to be frightening. Rather, our not-knowing can become a celebration that “[t]here is more than we know, can know, will ever know” (Huebner, 1993, p. 403).

What does calling forth non-rational capacities and embracing not-knowing look like, for a teacher? It means welcoming decentralized power structures (Davis & Sumara, 2006) where complex learning happens in a network (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008; Freire, 2006). It means viewing ourselves as fellow pedagogues with our students, and learning collaboratively alongside them, rather than assuming to be the ultimate authority in our subject. It means not taking ourselves too seriously, and reframing our teaching practice as ludic play (Rosenstein, 1976; Toloudis, 1989; Buckley, 2006; Mataric, 2005; Barney, 2009, p. 79). It means being “eclectic and ecumenical” (Slattery, 2013, p. 75) in our pedagogy. It means “[letting] go of the need for certainty [and] uniformity” (Slattery, 2013, p. 106). It means trusting the irrational and intuitive, and seeking it out through the process of learning. This type of teacher “allows things to be unsaid, for ambiguities to exist, for things not to be concluded” (Graham, 2015, p. 66).
Implication 2: *Heeding the Call of the Strange(r)*

With scholar Hongyu Wang (2002), I view education as an invitation into strangeness—an opportunity to get away from the known, expected, familiar, formulaic, and predictable. I view education as an opportunity to seek, accommodate, and embrace difference, in whatever form it may come. Wang (2002) elaborates:

> [E]ducation, by its essence, is a spiritual quest, a quest for transcending and transforming current forms of life, a quest for imagined possibility, a quest for dynamic connections with something larger than the self, others, and the world through a journey of opening to the strangeness both inside and outside the self. (p. 287)

Seeking strangeness, both externally and internally (Aoki, 2005), is a task I pursued in this research, and will continue to pursue in my teaching career. As a teacher, I want to inhabit spaces of risk and difference (Derrida, 1976). I want to be uncomfortable, and I want to sit with strangeness at the fringes of my understanding.

This research project, *un/doing spirituality*, invited my students and I to be stirred and unsettled by re-imagining and re-considering our ways of thinking, practicing, and being. Further, by seeking strangeness and unsettling, we re-wrote and re-evaluated our assumptions about others and ourselves (Rolling, 2011). At the end of our project, one of my students wrote:

> I think by not talking about [spirituality] in classrooms, we accidentally perpetuate misconceptions people have about others beliefs. Rather than not talk about our beliefs, I think educators need to strive to create tolerance between their students and unfamiliar (and sometimes scary) ideas. By doing this, students would not only become more educated and humane citizens, but also learn how different people use spirituality to become better people.
If this curricular unit created a little tolerance, or helped students become a little less afraid of unfamiliar (and sometime scary) ideas, it would certainly have been worth the work.

I found that students were extremely capable in navigating delicate, and sometimes contested, terrain. They were graceful and gracious with potentially volatile topics. They responded to difference, and heeded the call of the strange(r) with care, concern, and kindness.

What does *heeding the call of the strange(r)* look like, for a teacher? It means cultivating a classroom climate “where every stranger and every strange utterance is met with welcome” (Palmer, 1993, p. 74). It means sitting with difference (Hanh, 2007), and it means deep listening to the thoughts, opinions, and beliefs of all people, regardless of their status, origin, or orientation. It means caring (Noddings, 2005) for the *Other* (Palmer, 1993; Levinas, 1961; Aoki, 2005). It also implies an introspective process of accounting for multiple selves (Barney, 2009), and giving each of our multiple selves permission to co-exist—because, after all, “each one of us is *both* self and other; each subject is inhabited by *both* self and other. In each one of us there is always a part that is a stranger to the self—other than self” (Aoki, 2005, p. 288).

**Implication 3: An Opening Toward Moreness**

I believe conversations about spirituality do not have to be taboo in a K-12 classroom, but they must be approached in an open, critical, and generous way. As a teacher, these conversations about the spirit-ful (Doll, 2012) can take many forms. A definition of spirit by Huebner (1985) is especially generative for thinking about these types of conversations. He writes that, “an awareness that what we are and what we know can never completely contain what we might be or what we might know” (p. 345). He later continued his line of thought, and said, “It is a *moreness* that takes over in our weakness, our ignorance, at our limits or end”
This moreness that lies somewhere beyond our ability to comprehend is a helpful framing of spirituality for my purposes as an educator. However, plunging into the realm of the speculative can also create new problems. Weiskel (1976) reminds us that, “The essential claim of the sublime is that man can, in feeling and speech, transcend the human. [But what], if anything, lies beyond the human—God or the gods, the daemon or nature—is matter for great disagreement” (p. 3).

A classroom, especially an art classroom, can allow fascinating collisions and mergers of differing perspectives and experiences. By opening space in a classroom for discussions of spirituality, “the boundaries of the self give way” (Kovel, 1991, p. 1), and new understandings about the self, the other, and the universe can emerge. Inevitably, our understandings will always be contested, but grappling with those differences can be a generative, albeit delicate, exercise.

With Slattery (2013), I believe teaching can be a “cosmological enterprise directed at understanding the universe” (p. xx). Of course, understanding the universe is an impossible task. However, I believe our non-traditional “perceptive capabilities” (Abramovic, 1992a, p. 232) may be able to help us discover something about the universe and/or our place in it. Scholar Mark Graham (2015) affirms the value of moreness within a rigid educational system. He writes:

Modern civilization […] views mythology or religious symbolism as superstitious fables that reflect outmoded forms of thinking. Nonetheless, properly framed, the sacred dimensions of existence can have a meaningful place in scientific, technological societies, and even in our factory-like schools. (p. 67)

The sacred dimensions of teaching and learning can offer new possibilities for rendering our worlds, and I am excited to explore these types of moreness with my students.
What does *opening toward moreness* look like, for a teacher? It means seeking the transcendent, in whatever form it may come (Huebner, 1991, p.1). It means viewing teaching and learning as “an autobiographical process, a cosmological dialogue, and a search for personal and universal harmony” (Slattery, 2013, p. 97). It means bringing the curriculum to life by combining the “rigorousness of *science*, with the imagination of *story*, with the vitality and creativity of *spirit*” (Doll, 2002, p. 48).

**Implication 4: Trespassing as Pedagogical Strategy**

As I compiled my review of the literature, and read more and more about religion being used to corral and coerce minority groups, I became increasingly uncomfortable with the direction of my research. I worried that there was no safe way to enter these conversations without a whole demographic of students being ostracized or oppressed, becoming a victim of hegemonic forces in the community, or being inadvertently wounded by my own biases and blind spots. On our first day, when I began to introduce the research project, I felt like I was trespassing into dangerous, restricted terrain.

As students began creating a broad classroom definition of spirituality, however, I was surprised at the tone in the room. I was happy at the warmth and enthusiasm with which students encountered difference. Students navigated sometimes strange and contested terrain with awareness, sensitivity, and insight. I was encouraged to see students practice deep listening and thoughtful responsiveness. I believe that our discussions about deep listening and true dialogue (Hanh, 2012) had a positive impact on the tone of the classroom, but I also acknowledge that no formula could ever guarantee these types of openness, sensitivity, and generosity.
Even though our conversations were positive and productive, they were not easy or comforting. My students and I dove headlong into our discomfort—and that discomfort, some scholars argue (Boler & Zembylas, 2003), can be a catalyst for growth. By trespassing into unknown, discomforting scenarios, we were able to look more critically at the systems we are a part of (Freire, 1968).

In particular, this research helped my students and I to look more critically at the strange social fabric that is formed by religious and spiritual systems (Huebner, 1993, 1999). These are the systems that we attempted to address and critique, since, “[m]any global conflagrations are rooted in religious conflict and theological misunderstandings, and this must be examined by scholars and teachers who desire to ameliorate tensions and advance justice” (Slattery, 2013, p. 75). By addressing and critiquing this social fabric, we disturbed and collapsed old structures, allowing new structures to emerge (Derrida, 1976). I view this type of trespassing and unsettling as a form of civic engagement (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008).

What does trespassing as a pedagogical strategy look like, for a teacher? It means venturing into uncomfortable, but valuable, conversations. It means not shying away from complex, delicate, and emotionally-charged topics. It means approaching danger, but in safe ways. It means embracing discomfort as a catalyst for growth (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2008). It means critically inhabiting old structures, assumptions, and/or beliefs in order to turn them inside out or upside down (Derrida, 1976, p. 24; Kamuf, 2011, p. 36). It means welcoming the “the duty to be involved in human community and global concerns [with] a profound reverence for the cosmos” (Slattery, 2013, p. 95).
Implication 5: *Curricular Sinning and Transgressing*

I am learning to resist the rational-empiricist, or Modernist, conception of teaching and learning that is “linear, incremental, carefully sequenced, and punctuated by frequent testing to ensure individuals are keeping pace and drawing appropriate conclusions” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 165). As addressed previously in this work, many faith systems have similar, sequential structures. In these faith systems, the *path* to heaven, good fortune, and/or good favor is paved with good works, rites, oblations, covenants, and ceremonies. Whenever a practitioner stumbles off the path, gets lost, or goes astray, this is known as a transgression or sin. The term sin carries heavy weight in these traditions, and can connote a falling away from God (see Oxford American Dictionary, 2003).

As an educator and researcher, I am realizing that the *path* of current K-12 public education discourse is fairly boring. It is too formulaic, too pre-determined, and too rigid— unbending to the individual needs, abilities, and interests of students. I am realizing that falling off the path into a pattern of curricular sinning may be a much more dynamic route.

In some traditions, sinning also carries connotations of causing harm to self or others. Every analogy breaks down at some point, and I certainly am not trying to advocate any sort of harm to my students. However, it may be generative to think about curricular sinning in terms of causing harm to a potentially oppressive educational system.

What does *curricular sin and transgression* look like, for a teacher? It means letting go of pre-scripted lesson plans. Perhaps it could mean asking questions that produce an array of answers, instead of shallow questions with a single pre-determined answer. It means being responsive and responsible, endlessly (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 23). By leaving the path of pre-determined learning outcomes and objectives, educators are enabled to seek tangents and
detours, and it opens opportunities for more Postmodern conceptions of teaching (Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 171) that include collaboration, conversation (Ashton-Warner, 1963), improvisation (Martin, Towers, & Pirie, 2006), occasioning (Davis, Sumara, & Kieren, 1996), and caring (Noddings, 1984). Further, a deliberate turning away from oppressive, convergent curricular systems opens spaces for “emergence, flexibility, contingency, and expansive possibility” (Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 171). I am seeking this type of decentralization in my classroom, where students and I encourage each other to transgress the taken-for-granted assumptions about what school should be—to get lost in the tangents and detours, marking our paths with landmarks of our own choosing.

Implication 6: *Arc-Building as Generative Praxis*

With Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2008), I believe that “knowing has a networked structure” (p. 17), and knowledge occurs by generating arcs between nodes of information and experience (Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler, 2008). As an artist, I have found this incredibly liberating. My job, through this lens, is simply to make connections—bizarre connections between disparate bodies and disciplines, because “[e]very new idea is just a mashup or a remix of one or more previous ideas” (Kleon, 2012).

My students and I created arcs between the fields of spirituality and contemporary art. These arcs provoked new understandings and motivated our studio practices. I am realizing that generating arcs between obscure nodes of information, observation, and experience can open new possibilities, insights, and opportunities for creativity.

What does arc-building look like, as an artist? It means paying attention (Oliver, 2005), and being continuously open to new experiences with/in the world. It means looking for
connections everywhere, between everything, and looking for the ways that each node is “hitched to everything else in the universe” (Muir, 1911). It means making meaning and making special (Rolling, 2011), and translating those meanings into studio practice.

Implication 7: An Understanding of Research as a Non-Determinative Rube Goldberg Machine

When writing the introduction to this work, I found joy in comparing this process to a Rube Goldberg machine—comically involved, unnecessarily complicated, and laboriously contrived to perform a simple task. As the research went on, however, I noticed the machine moving in unexpected, complex ways. I became less concerned with whether or not the simple task would be accomplished, and more interested in how the machine itself began to surprise me. The machinery took on a purpose of it’s own, and the movements of the machine became more important than the simple task that it was designed to accomplish. In keeping with my A/r/tographic methodology, my questions shifted, and my research became a “transformative act of inquiry” (Irwin, 2013, p. 104).

What does this mean for me, as a qualitative researcher? It means I am going to approach my next research project as an open-ended question, with a hunch (Graham, 2015) rather than a hypotheses. It means I am not going to try to control or predict the results of my research. Rather, I will seek a strange phenomena or a curious precarity, and jump inside. I will endeavor to view my research as a form of lived inquiry (Prendergast, Lymburner, Grauer, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008, p. 59; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2007, p. 84), and strive to inhabit spaces of risk and difference (Derrida, 1976).
Conclusion

I urge readers to consider the affordances and limitations of this research, and the spiritual-holistic education movement as a whole. Educators need to be cautious that their brand of spirituality or holism is not merely invisible religion—or “a bricolage of selected values culled from various traditional religions” (Jangodzinski, 2013, p. 278)—and that their teaching practice does not ostracize or oppress, condone hegemonic forces (Gramsci, 1965), or inadvertently wound by biases, prejudices, or silences.

When approached in an open, generous, delicate, kind, and critical way, I propose that a careful un/doing of spirituality can help art educators create safe spaces where “every stranger and every strange utterance is met with welcome” (Palmer, 1993, p. 74). I believe that this type of praxis and discourse can help educators and students to heed the call of the strange(r) (Huebner, 1998; Wang, 2002), sit with difference (Hanh, 2007, 2009; Derrida, 1976), and become a little more available for each Other (Palmer, 1993; Aoki, 2005; Barney, 2009).
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Application for the Use of Human Subjects,

Part A: Application Information

1. Title of Study

   Title:  Contemporary Art and Holistic Education

2. Principal Investigator

   Name:  Clark Goldsberry
   Phone:  (801) 472-6433
   Address:  330 E. 200 S. Provo, UT 84606

   Title:  Masters Student
   Email:  egoldsberry@alpinedistrict.org

3. Research Personnel

   NOTE: Please include Principal Investigator in this section

   Name   Department   Role   Study Responsibilities   CTTI Login Name
      Clark Goldsberry   Art Education   Principal Investigator   Gather and analyze data, share findings in my MA thesis   clark112
      Mark Graham   Art Education   Research Consultant   Provide consultation and critique of my research questions and methodologies
      Dan Barney   Art Education   Research Consultant   Provide consultation and critique of my research questions and methodologies

The principal investigator and all personnel must have completed CTTI training within the last 5 years prior to submission.

4. Qualifications of Research Personnel

   Please provide a description of the training and experiences of the principal investigator and each of the Research personnel as it relates to the proposed research on the Personnel Biosketch forms.
   i. The Personnel Biosketch Forms should be attached as part G
   ii. Biosketches should be no longer than 2 pages
   iii. Note that curriculum vitae will not be accepted
DO NOT STAPLE

5. Funding Source

(Note: If this research is associated with an active or pending research grant, attach a copy of the methodology section of the grant with this application.)

a. How will this research be funded? Internal Funds

If other, please explain:

If the research is funded by an external sponsor, please complete the following information:

b. Name of Funding Source:

c. Status:  
- Funded
- Pending

d. If funded, grant ID#:

e. Grant/Contract Title:

f. Principal Investigator listed on Grant/Contract:

6. Research Duration (Please note that the start date cannot occur before IRB approval)

Estimated start date (choose a date): April, 2018

Estimated completion date (choose a date): June, 2018

Part B: Research Overview

7. Brief Research Summary (please limit to one page)

Please provide a brief (no more than one page) summary for a general lay audience that includes background, rationale, and hypothesis for the proposed research.

While conducting field research in India and Nepal through the BYU Art Education department, I investigated the interweaving of Buddhist and Hindu artistic iconography. My research explores the relationship between spirituality and art-making, and further, the spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning (also called holistic pedagogy). As a graduate student and a high school art teacher, I am using my classroom as a research site to consider the question, “How might the spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning be incorporated into my curriculum?” Spirituality in secular education can be a polarizing topic, but many contemporary scholars are suggesting that religion and spirituality are complex cultural phenomena that ought to be studied with openness, generosity, and sensitivity. My research explores art-making and spirituality as two symbiotic communities of practice, and attempts to open new spaces for dialogue through art history, art criticism, and art-making.

The following questions provide the impetus for my research: Some scholars (Slattery, O’Malley, Shapiro, Kesson, Zinn, Noddings) suggest there may be room in the postmodern curriculum for a discussion of theological texts. How can I employ such texts, and what will happen? How does an art curriculum that focused on the spiritual or holistic dimensions of human experience influence student discourse and artmaking? What affordances and limitations will arise during discussions, student reflections, and student artmaking while

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engaged in learning about notions of spirit, the sublime, and the irrational in secular education? How might spiritual and religious iconography provide an entry point into the world of contemporary art for my high school students?

8. Research Categorization

a. Will the proposed research be conducted in a typical educational setting, involving normal educational practices, such as:
   - research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or
   - research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods
   - Yes  ☐ No

   If yes, please list the activities below
   Student essays, including reflective essays, class presentations, student questionnaires, discussions, student art projects (drawing, painting, sculpture, etc).

b. Are there activities (questionnaires, procedures, etc.) that subjects will perform regardless of their enrollment as a subject in the proposed research?
   - Yes  ☐ No

   If yes, please list the activities below
   My research is incorporated into the curriculum as prompts, class discussions, essays, student questionnaires and assignments. For students who do not wish to participate in the research, I will not include their writings, responses, or artwork in my data.

c. Will the proposed research gather data using educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior in such a way that investigators will be able to identify subjects? (Either directly or indirectly)
   - Yes  ☐ No

   If yes, please list the activities below
   My personal teaching practice in the classroom is a key part of my research. I will analyze my own journals and writings as part of the data (refer to questions 18 and 19 for more information on my research methodology). The other part of my research includes student responses, as described in 8a. I will also include photos of student work, and some anonymous excerpts of student writing. Student responses will not be anonymous, since all research activities are part of a normal school curriculum. However, when reporting data, student responses will be anonymous.

d. Are the subjects elected or candidates for public office?
   - Yes  ☐ No

   If yes, please explain
e. Will the research involve the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens that are publicly available or where the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified by the investigators?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

If yes, please explain

9. Location of Research

Please indicate all locations where the proposed research will be conducted (i.e., room numbers, local address, institution, city, state, country, etc.)

American Fork High School, Classroom #5, 510 Caveman Blvd, American Fork, UT 84003

10. Research Subject Information

a. Number of Subjects 25 students

b. Gender of Subjects F,M,+

c. Ages of Subjects 14-18

d. Identify any of the following vulnerable populations that will be included in the proposed research.

☐ Children  ☐ Institutionalized

☐ Pregnant Women  ☑ Students Enrolled in Your Class(es)

☐ Prisoners  ☐ Mentally Disabled Persons*

☐ Economically Disadvantaged Persons  ☐ Educationally Disadvantaged Persons

* An individual who is unable to provide informed consent for themselves

e. If the proposed research will include a vulnerable population, as identified above, please provide justification for their inclusion.

My research examines the curriculum and teaching within a specific secondary public school, and draws on theory and research relating to secondary curriculum and teaching.

f. Please provide a description of the subject population. Specifically explain the criteria that will be used to include or exclude potential subjects from participating in the proposed research.

A purposeful sample of high school students who choose to participate in the research (and are permitted by their parent or legal guardian) will be included.

g. Please provide an explanation and justification for the number of subjects (Part B, 10a) to be enrolled in the proposed research (e.g., power/sample size analysis, citation of comparable studies from the literature).
My research explores my own teaching practices and the influence of curriculum and teaching in a secondary education site. I am particularly interested in rich, qualitative descriptions of student learning experiences, consequently, I need to limit the number of participants in the study to a manageable size.

11. Non-English Speaking Subjects

In accordance with federal regulations, subjects cannot be excluded from research on the basis of race, sex, age, language, or disability status.

a. Will the proposed research likely recruit and/or involve subjects or parents/guardians of subjects who are not fluent in English?

- Yes  - No

If yes, please indicate the languages:

| Spanish |

If yes, please submit an English version of the consent form AND a version of the consent form translated into the appropriate language(s) as attached documents in part E.

b. If you believe the proposed research requires the exclusion of a particular non-English speaking subject population please provide a justification and explanation below. (Note: investigator inconvenience and/or additional effort associated with producing bilingual documents will not be considered as an appropriate justification)

|  |

12. Subject Compensation

a. Will subjects be compensated for participation?

- Yes  - No

If yes, please describe the form of compensation (i.e., cash, check, gift certificate, voucher, 1099, etc.).

|  |

b. If compensation is monetary please provide the amount of compensation.

|  |

c. Please provide a brief justification for the form and amount of compensation provided to subjects.

|  |

d. Please describe when and how compensation will be provided to subjects.

|  |
Part C: Research Proposal

13. Research Question

What do you intend to measure, observe, describe, demonstrate, confirm, etc. from the proposed research?

The overarching questions for my research include: How might the spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning (sometimes called holistic pedagogy) be incorporated into my curriculum? (Refer to questions 18 and 19 for more information about this qualitative research methodology) How does an art curriculum that focuses on the spiritual or holistic dimensions of human experience influence student discourse and artmaking? What affordances and limitations will arise during discussions, student reflections, and student artmaking while engaged in learning about notions of spirit, the sublime, and the irrational in secular education? How might spiritual and religious iconography provide an entry point into the world of contemporary art for my high school students?

14. Hypothesis

If applicable, state your hypothesis for each of the research questions listed in Part C, 13

This research is emergent, and will adapt as the project unfolds. I am not looking at generalizable truth, but rather transferable ideas and principles. I am investigating my own personal teaching practice as a form of lived, reflexive inquiry—hoping to improve, adapt, and adjust my own positionings as an artist, educator, and researcher (again, refer to questions 18 and 19 for more information regarding my methodology). While I can generate many speculations about where this research could lead, I am deliberately choosing to suspend my suppositions in order to follow the paths that the research provides. A traditional hypothesis is not applicable here.

15. Background and Significance (please limit to 2 pages)

This section should provide clear, logical and sufficient support from the scientific literature that provides a rationale for the proposed aims and hypotheses stated above.
The following questions are currently being explored in the work of contemporary educational researchers: What are the holistic dimensions of art education, and how could they be framed through the diverse lenses of spiritual traditions and cultures (O'Malley, Shapiro, Kesson, Zinn, Noddings)? What role has religion played in education (how has it oppressed, indoctrinated, silenced, and assimilated communities? How has it nourished, healed, helped)? What role has religion played in art education (Graham, Slattery)? How have artists approached sublimity through premodern, modern, and postmodern paradigms? If, as some scholars suggest, there may be room in the postmodern curriculum for a discussion of theological texts, how can I employ such texts, and what will happen?

“Religion can alienate or inspire. In either case, it is a powerful cultural phenomenon that must be examined carefully. In fact, many global conflagrations are rooted in religious conflict and theological misunderstandings, and this must be examined by scholars and teachers who desire to ameliorate tensions and advance justice (Slattery, 2013, Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era, p. 75).”

“There are people who believe that prayer and other observances should be allowed in our public schools, others who believe that school is not the place for any discussion of religion, and still others who believe that a sensitive examination of religion is essential to any genuine form of education. I locate myself in the latter group [...] More than 2000 years ago, Socrates argued that one’s life should be examined if it is to be worth living. This examination—a continuous round of reflection, analysis, and discussion—should certainly include religious, existential, and moral questions. As we know, some Athenians found Socrates dangerous, and he was condemned for impiety and corrupting Athenian youth. Today, more than 2000 years later, we still have not found a way to include intelligent discussion of religious matters in our public schools. Young people who are fortunate enough to attend the finest liberal arts colleges benefit from such discussion, but almost all others never have that experience, despite evidence that they long for it and seek answers to religious and spiritual questions (Noddings, 2005, Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy, p. 15).”

“Religion is a significant factor and often the hidden script behind many school curriculum controversies—from assimilation in the common schools, to evangelization through prayer and Bible readings in the public schools before 1962, to censored literary books on sex education or gay and lesbian issues since 1990, to intelligent design proposals for the science curriculum in 2005. We ignore religion and theology in our curriculum conversations at great peril (Slattery, 2013, Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era, p. 79).”

“I argue that, in order to fully appreciate and understand art, music, literature, history, science, and social studies, the school curriculum must find a way for students to legally and appropriately study religious imagery, mythology, allusions, metaphors from sacred texts, philosophies of science, church patronage for the arts, political theocracies, ethical debates, historical empires, and a host of other related topics... (Slattery, 2013, Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era, p. 84).”

“In our ‘civilized’ world the non-rational capacities which we still possess as children are completely destroyed within a rational education system. Bit by bit we are pushed into a rational pattern, losing our non-rational abilities and instincts. Our society is constructed entirely upon rational patterns. Everything which is not rational is treated with a certain secrecy [...] Our rational way of thinking demands proof, evidence, but this is only one element in our perceptive capabilities [...] Art is a field in which the non-rational may sometimes be tolerated, where it is creatively employed. I want to introduce the non-rational into our society (Abramovic, Statements, 1992).”

“Democracy and theocracy are incompatible. Rigid ideological denominational proselytizing in anathema to my thinking [...] attempting to ignore or suppress the religious, spiritual, and theological dimensions of cultures
and individuals is equally dangerous and destructive. I am on a search for a way to balance these aspirations—
separating religion and government while at the same time embracing the spiritual and the theological [...] So
how do we appropriately include theology and cultural diversity in the curriculum without establishing religion in
the public sphere? Many contend that it is very difficult to embrace religious diversity while still keeping church
and state separate—an impossible quest, according to some—so it is best to leave all discussion of religion and
spirituality to religious communities and families. I agree that prayer and worship are very personal matters and
that proselytizing in the public sphere is destructive. However, we must find an appropriate way to teach
theology, textual hermeneutics, cultural diversity, and critical analysis without crossing the line of separation
between religion and government (Slattery, 2013, Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era, p. 76-81).”

16. Subject Recruitment and Informed Consent

a. Which of the following tools will be used to recruit subjects? (Check all that apply)

- [ ] Posted/Distributed Flyer
- [x] Classroom Announcement
- [ ] Email to Subjects
- [ ] Third Party / Non-study Personnel / Professional recruiters
- [x] Website / SONA / Social Media / Online
- [ ] Other: [ ]

b. Please describe the initial contact with potential subjects and the process to obtain their consent.

This project will take the form of a curricular unit in my classroom/research site. I will introduce the new unit
as I would any other unit. The difference, however, will be an invitation for my students to share their
personal work with me as a form of data. For students who are interested, I will send them home with
paperwork explaining the project, a consent form, a photo/video release form, etc.

c. Are you requesting a Waiver or Alteration of Informed Consent?

- [ ] Yes   [ ] No

If yes, the Request for Waiver/Modification of Consent form (see ORCA website) must be completed and
submitted in Part E with this application.

d. Have you attached the necessary consent forms in Part E of the application?

- [ ] Yes   [ ] No

e. Have you attached a copy of all recruitment materials (i.e., scripts, flyers, screen shots of online material, etc.)
in Part H of the application?

- [ ] Yes   [ ] No

17. Research Methods

a. Write a complete description of all procedures involving human subjects in the proposed research. This
description should encompass the experimental course of a subject from their entry into the study to their
completion of the study.

This research will take place over 5 weeks. Before beginning of the unit I will explain to students the nature
of the research and solicit their participation as described above. At the beginning of the unit, I will give each
student a questionnaire that will explore their knowledge of the terms we will be discussion and the themes of
the course. Each day, we will have a discussion topic relating to spiritual iconography, contemporary art, aesthetics, art history, and their own experiences. In my classes I often ask students to write responses to discussion questions prior to our class discussion. I will follow this practice here. These short written responses along with my own research notes will provide the data from these class sessions. Our discussion will be followed by a workshop, where I will demonstrate various artistic mediums and processes relating to our assignments. Then each student will receive an assignment, prompt, or guiding question to respond to via writing and/or art-making. These written or artistic responses will take place during class and in some cases be part of the students’ homework. They are a key part of the data.

Data analysis will include careful reading of student written work and careful interpretation of their artistic work within the context of their own commentary about their work in process and in completion. Once artistic assignments are finished, we will have a class critique where students will have an opportunity to comment on their own artistic process and the meaning of their work, as well as an opportunity to comment on the work of their peers. The finished work will be accompanied by individual artist statements, which will also provide insights as I analyze their learning experiences and interpret their work. I will document these discussions in my own field notes. At the end of the unit, I will give students another questionnaire that will explore their culminating responses to the important questions of the project.

b. Many studies use multiple instruments/questionnaires/surveys as part of the research methodology. If applicable to the proposed research, list each instrument/questionnaire/survey that will be administered to subjects and provide a rationale for the inclusion of each one.

My research methods will be qualitative. An important focus of the research is my personal teaching practice, a key instrument will be my own journals and notes from our classroom discussions and projects. To gather data on the influence of my own curriculum and teaching, I will gather data from student responses as described in 17a. These include two questionnaires, one at the beginning and one at the end of the unit.

c. Please indicate how many times human subjects will perform research activities.

We will be doing three major projects over the course of six weeks, with eight lecture/discussions, and four in-class workshops and demonstrations. There will be some work done outside of class by students.

d. How much time will each visit take?

Our class time is 1 hr 15 mins, 2-3 times a week.

e. What is the total time required for a subject to complete the proposed research?

Total time will be 18 - 20 hours.

f. Will the research include the use of existing data, research records, patient records, and/or human biological specimens?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please provide a description of the data and the source of the data. (If applicable, attach the data transfer agreement in part II)
If the data has identifiable subject information associated with it, please describe how the data will be de-identified.

If the research involves deception or less than full disclosure?

- Yes  
- No

If yes, please justify the need for deception in the proposed research.

Will the research require accessing student educational records?

- Yes  
- No

If yes, please describe the procedures you will employ to access the information. Specify the information you will request.

Does the research involve audio/video recording or photography?

- Yes  
- No

If yes, please describe how and in what situations the recordings/images will be used. If applicable, attach the video/photographic release form in Part H.

With permission from students and their parents or legal guardians, I will be documenting the artwork of my students via photography and video. I will be presenting their projects (through video and photo) at state and national conferences, and submitting articles (with photos) to educational journals. I may also include an appendix with photos in my final thesis documents.

Will subjects be followed after completion of the proposed research?

- Yes  
- No

If yes, please explain.

Have you included a copy of all instruments, questionnaires, surveys, and/or interview questions to be used for this research in Part F of the application?

- Yes  
- No
18. Data Analysis

Whether quantitative or qualitative, please provide a detailed description of the research design/statistical design and data analysis plan for the proposed research.

I will employ a qualitative research methodology known as A/r/tography, which is a relatively new, but globally active, practice-based methodology that emphasizes the practices of artists, researchers, and teachers. The methodology is largely autobiographical in its approach and draws from phenomenology, which is an empirical and descriptive form of analysis. Qualitative research data is usually rich descriptions of particular situations that allow for subjective interpretations, and a/r/tography emphasizes the interpretive and the phenomenological. A/r/tography is a relational form of inquiry that pursues meaning making, understanding, and the creation of knowledge that is embodied and situational. Again, the goal of this research is not to produce objective, generalizable truths, but rather to enlarge my personal understandings about a phenomenon, and in turn, enlarge interpretive frames of my artist, researcher, and teacher identities. Arts based research includes the idea that artistic artifacts can be utilized as data and the artistic inquiry process itself as being a form of both data and data analysis.

Data is often understood to be verifiable, organized, and/or symbolic information. A/r/tographers also think about the practices of artists and educators as occasions for creating knowledge as a type of new understanding or possibility space, where being part of a community is a way to reframe artist, researcher, and teacher roles as a lived inquiry, or a form of research that includes life beyond a typical closed research site. Educators working within such a model engage in educational inquiry that helps to explore issues, themes and ideas that inspire learning that extend outside of classrooms and foster lifelong learning and that encourage the building of a social community. These processes form the basis for a living inquiry. Living inquiry is about being attentive to life in and through time, relating what may not appear to be related, knowing that there are always connections to be explored. I will collect richly descriptive qualitative data in the forms of student writings, student essays, classroom observations, personal journal entries, artistic artifacts, photos and videos, and then I will analyze the data by searching for prominent themes, and considering the affordances and limitations of my curricular experiments as I engage in my artistic and regular teaching practices.

19. References

Please provide pertinent references from the literature that support the rationale and hypothesis for the proposed research. (Limit to one page.)

"Simply stated, a/r/tographers' work is reflective, recursive, reflexive, and responsive. Reflective, as they rethink and review that which has gone before and what may happen; recursive, as they allow their practices to spiral through an evolution of ideas; reflexive, as they interrogate their own biases, assumptions, and beliefs; and responsive, as they take responsibility for acting ethically with their participants and colleagues. With these notions in mind they engage in their own form of artistic and educational activities as a way of collecting information, analyzing ideas and creating new forms of knowledge (Irwin, 2004, Practice Theory: Seeing the Power of Art Teacher Researchers, p.105)."

"[A]rts based educational research (ABER) [and A/r/tography] is inquiry that enhances our understanding of human activities through artistic means (Barone & Eisner, 2006, Handbook of Complementary Methods in Educational Research, p.96)."

"Traditional forms of research search for knowledge that is certain, valid, and reliable with the findings being used to explain and predict outcomes. [A/r/tography], on the other hand, is not about certainty but rather the
"A/r/tographers are constantly engaged with ideas, data, and artistic processes as ways to create new understandings through knowledge creation. Moreover, a/r/tography resists being stabilized by particular forms of data collection and analysis, or artistic processes and products, in favor of being responsive to contemporary practices. It is essential for a/r/tographers to be familiar with work of contemporary artists and educators, and consider how those practices might influence their perceptions, their ways of pursuing inquiry, and their ways of creating knowledge (Irwin, 2004, Practice Theory: Seeing the Power of Art Teacher Researchers, p.105)."

"A/r/tography is living inquiry, an embodied encounter constituted through artistic and textual understandings and experiences as well as artistic and textual representations. In this sense the subject and the form of the research are in a constant state of becoming (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008, Being with A/r/tography).

"Educators engage in educational inquiry that helps them explore issues, themes, and ideas that inspire their learning, and learning to learn [...] A/r/tographers may use social science-based qualitative forms of data collection (surveys, document collection, interviews, participant-observation, etc), and are often interested in personal stories, mementos, and photographs. As with any form of qualitative research there is the possibility of collecting a tremendous amount of data [...] Searching for prominent themes across the data is important. However, a/r/tography also recognizes that perceptions should be explored (Irwin, 2004, Practice Theory: Seeing the Power of Art Teacher Researchers, p.105)."

[For a/r/tographers], inquiry-laden practices are not merely added to one's life but are one's life so that 'who one is becomes completely caught up in what one knows and does (Sumara & Carson, 1997, Action Research as Living Practice, p. xvii)."

"[W]hile a/r/tographic projects may begin with one or more research questions, the act of living inquiry assumes these questions will evolve during the project. A/r/tographers are able to create artifacts and written texts that portray the understandings gained from their original questions; however, they also pay attention to the evolution of inquiry-led questions. It is here that the a/r/tographic project often becomes a transformative act of inquiry. Research questions are steeped in the practices of artists, educators or artist-educators and therefore have the potential to influence that practice in and through time [...] [A/r/tography often has an interventionist nature that aims to benefit the lives of the participants. A/r/tographers focus their efforts on the improvement of practice, understanding practice from a different perspective, and/or the use of their practice to influence the experience of others (Irwin, 2004, Practice Theory: Seeing the Power of Art Teacher Researchers, p.105)."

20. Benefit to Subjects and Society

a. Please describe any benefits that research subjects will receive as a direct result of their participation in the proposed research. (Note: compensation is not considered a benefit)

There are no direct benefits.

b. Please describe how this research may provide benefit to scientific knowledge, a specific discipline, and/or society in general.

A growing community of contemporary educational scholars are examining their classrooms as research sites for considering the spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning. My research contributes to the literature surrounding holistic pedagogy by approaching the conversation from a unique angle. As a secondary educator
in the arts and humanities, my approach to the topic will weave visual culture, art history, contemporary art, and aesthetics into the conversation. Further, I view a sensitive exploration of delicate topics (such as spirituality, religious iconography, etc.) as a form of civic engagement—and this research will enable me to open spaces of critical dialogue with my students.

21. Risks

Generally, risk assessment in research considers the harm, trauma, discomfort, stress, or any other undesirable or untoward consequence of being a research subject whether anticipated or unexpected. Risk may take the following forms: physical, psychological, emotional, financial, and/or social. This list is representative but not comprehensive.

Please consider the following questions based on the experiences that subjects might encounter through participation in the proposed research.

a. Whether great or small, please describe the potential risks to subjects that participate in the proposed research.

Creation can be disorienting and dizzying. The process of producing art objects can open opportunities for deep introspection—giving voice to hidden questions that can be persistent, abiding, and troubling. Further, we will be exploring sensitive terrain surrounding the topics of spirituality, the sublime, and the affordances and limitations of religious experience. Also, because I teach at a high school in Utah Valley, the student population is very homogenized (about 83% LDS according to the LDS Seminary rolls). Although we will have discussions about the differences between religious and spiritual experience, there is a chance that non-LDS students may feel ostracized if their belief systems or spiritual positionings do not align with their classmates. I will work to ensure that students feel safe with their beliefs in my classroom, and I will work to create a classroom climate that is open and receptive to all voices and perspectives, but I recognize that whenever we enter this type of territory, there is always a risk of a student feeling alone or ostracized.

b. What steps will be taken by investigators to reduce the aforementioned risks?

We will preface this unit with a discussion about openness and appreciation—posing the questions, "How can we enter this territory and create a safe space together?" "How can we validate and appreciate perspectives that differ from our own?" "How can we differentiate between religion and spirituality?" We will establish some definitions and ground rules as a class, and I will frequently receive anonymous feedback from class members to ensure we are maintaining a safe space for earnest inquiry and discussion.

22. Confidentiality

The following questions address your efforts to maintain subject confidentiality in the proposed research. Protecting hard copy data may involve de-identification of data and secured storage locations and conditions. Protecting electronic data may involve a secure network, password access, and data de-identification/encryption.

a. Describe what type of hard copy data will be generated by the proposed research (i.e., notes, audio/video tapes, questionnaires, etc.).

Student essays, artwork, photo and video.

i. Where will this hard copy data be stored and how will it be protected?
Student essays and artwork will be placed in a locked storage room behind my office. Photo and video will be stored and protected on an external hard drive at my home.

b. Describe what type of electronic data will be generated by the proposed research (i.e., computer files/spreadsheets, questionnaires, images, video, audio/mp3 files, etc.).

Images, Video, Audio.

i. Where will this electronic data be stored and how will it be protected?

An external hard drive at my home.

c. How long will data from this study be maintained by the principal investigator?

1 year for my research project, and for 3 subsequent years in case questions about data arise.

d. Will raw data be made available to anyone other than the principal investigator and the immediate study personnel?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

If yes, describe the rationale and procedure for sharing study data. Include a description of what will be shared and with whom. Specify the protections in place to transfer the data.
Part D: Researcher Agreement

The research study involves the use of human subjects. I understand the university's policy concerning research involving human subjects and by submitting this application I agree to:

- Obtain voluntary and informed consent of subjects who are to participate in this project.
- Report to the IRB any unanticipated effects on subjects which become apparent during the course of, or as result of, the experimentation and the actions taken.
- Cooperate with members of the committee charged with continuing review of this project.
- Obtain prior approval from the committee before amending or altering the scope of the project or implementing changes in the approved consent document.
- Maintain the documentation of consent forms and progress reports as required by institutional policy for three years.
- Safeguard the confidentiality of research subjects and the data collected when the approved level of research requires it.

Signature of the Principal Investigator ___________________________ Date 2/17/2018

Note: Submissions from student principal investigators require the signature of their faculty sponsor (see below).

I have read and reviewed this proposal and certify that it is ready for review by the IRB. I have worked with the student to prepare this research protocol. I agree to mentor the student during the research project.

Printed Name of Faculty Sponsor ___________________________

Signature of Faculty Sponsor ___________________________ Date ___________________________

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**IRB Forms Submission Instructions:**

1. Check this form for **completeness**, detail, and accuracy.
2. Save this form for your records.
3. Applications received **on or before the 20th** of each month will be reviewed by the committee on the first Thursday of the following month.
4. Upon receipt of your proposal by the IRB office, you will be assigned a proposal ID number that should be used in all future correspondence concerning your proposal.
Additional Parts
Please attach the appropriate Parts as described below.

Applications that do not contain all of Parts A-D and all necessary Additional Parts will be returned to the applicant without a review.

Forms are available at http://www.orca.byu.edu/irb/BeginApplication.php.

Part E
- Consent documents
- Assent documents
- Parental permission documents
- Request for Waiver or Modification of Consent form

Part F
- All questionnaires, surveys, interview questions, discussion questions

Part G
- Biosketches of all Research Personnel (each Biosketch should be no longer than 2 pages)

Part H
- Letters of support from sponsoring institutions/organizations, if applicable
- Photographic Release
- Video Release
- Recruiting Materials (including scripts, flyers/posters, letters, screen shots of online recruiting materials, etc.)
- A copy of research grant methodology section, if applicable
APPENDIX 2

Application for the Use of Human Subjects, Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects (IRB). Parts E, F, H. Consent Form + Photo / Video Release. This was provided in both English and Spanish for students and their parents/guardians.

RESEARCH PROJECT

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT + PHOTO / VIDEO RELEASE

Introduction

I (Clark Goldsberry) am conducting research for my Master’s thesis in Art Education at Brigham Young University, and I would love your help. The research will be woven into the curriculum in each of my classes, and the artwork that students create will be the “data” for this project, but I can only include the data in my research if I have permission from each student and their parent/guardian.

Background + Procedures

As an artist, researcher, and teacher, I am interested in the spiritual dimensions of teaching, learning, and art-making (also called holistic pedagogy). In each of my classes we will be studying artists and designers who explore spirituality in their work, from variety of perspectives and backgrounds, and we will be creating our own artwork in response. It should be mentioned here that there is a difference between religion and spirituality, and we will be focussing on spirituality, using a definition that is broad and inclusive. I am a firm believer in the separation of church and state – prayer and worship are very personal matters and religious proselytizing in the public sphere is destructive. Yet, I believe the spiritual dimensions of teaching, learning, and art-making are phenomenons that deserve attention, and are worth exploring in the right ways. Many scholars in curriculum theory are beginning to explore holistic pedagogy, and I hope to contribute to the conversation through this research.

Each of my art classes will be exploring the spiritual dimensions of our lives through writing and art-making, and each student will respond to the prompts and assignments in their own unique way. What students share with others in the class will always be their choice.

If a student agrees to participate in this study, the following will occur:

- I may include anonymous excerpts of their writing in my thesis research.
- I may include photos or videos of their artwork in my thesis research.
- I may include photos or videos of the student, with their permission.
- All student names will remain confidential.
- I may include my personal notes relating to my conversations with the student during class workshops and/or discussions.
- I may contact the student and parent/guardian via email to clarify their writings or ask for additional information about their art-making.
- There will be no grade incentives or penalties related to the research.
Risks + Discomforts

By participating in the research, there is no added risk of physical discomfort, pain, emotional discomfort or embarrassment. Students can be as vulnerable as they choose in their writings and art-making, and they can choose what they share, if anything, with their classmates.

Benefits

There is no direct, quantifiable benefit for participating in the research. It is hoped, however, that through participation each student's artwork will be seen by larger audiences, and can contribute to conversations with curriculum researchers on a national platform. Further, participation may encourage the student to create introspective artwork and writing, which is always has intrinsic value.

Confidentiality

The primary research data (photos and videos of student work, and student essays and writing prompts) will be kept on a password protected computer at the researchers home. At the conclusion of the curriculum unit, all identifying information will be removed and the data will be kept in the researcher's password protected external hard drive for one year, before being cleared.

Compensation

50 extra credit points will be given as compensation for participation in the research. For those who do not wish to participate in the research, 50 extra credit points can be earned by reading an article and writing a 2-page paper in response to the article. These are extra credit points, and can only help a students grade. Again, there are no penalties for not participating.

Participation

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your class status, grade, or standing with the high school.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Clark Goldsberry at cgoldsberry@alpinedistrict.org for further information. You are also welcome to contact my graduate studies advisor, Dr. Daniel Barney at danielbarney@gmail.com or Dr. Mark Graham at mark_graham@byu.edu.

Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu.

**Statement of Consent**

By signing below you are indicating that you have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of your own free will to participate in this study — or that you approve of your student participating in this study.

**Photo + Video Release**

As part of this project, I will be gathering photos and video footage of you (or your child) during participation in the research. Please indicate what uses of these photographs you are willing to permit, by initialing next to the uses you agree to and signing at the end. This choice is completely up to you. I will only use the photos/videos in the ways that you agree to. In any use of the photographs, you (or your child) will not be identified by name.

___ Photographs can be used for classroom presentations.
___ Photographs can be used for academic conference presentations.
___ Photographs can be used for fundraising presentations/proposals.
___ Photographs can be used for newspaper or magazine publication.
___ Photographs can be posted to a website (clarkgoldberry.com)

I have read the above descriptions and give my express written consent for the use of the photographs and videos as indicated by my initials above.

**Signatures**

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Date
APPENDIX 3

Application for the Use of Human Subjects,

Part G:
Biographical Sketch

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects

Provide the following information for the Primary Investigator/Research Personnel and other
significant contributors in the order listed on the IRB Application, page 1.
Follow this format for each person. **DO NOT EXCEED TWO PAGES PER PERSON.**

Part A: Basic Information

1. Name [Clark Adam Goldsberry]
2. CITI Username [clark112]
3. Position Title (PI, co-PI, Research Personnel) [PI]

Part B: Education/Training

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<th>Degree (If applicable)</th>
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<th>Field of Study</th>
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<td>Brigham Young University</td>
<td>MA Art Education</td>
<td>02/18</td>
<td>Art Education</td>
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Part C: Research Qualification Statement

I am conducting research for my MA thesis at Brigham Young University. I am a public educator, and have worked at American Fork High School in the Alpine School District for the past four years. I teach Advanced Placement (A.P.) Art, Photography, Graphic Design, and Drawing classes. I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with an emphasis in photography, graphic design, and studio art. I am a member of the National Art Education Association, and I have presented my research in New York (2017), Chicago (2016), and New Orleans (2015) at the annual National Art Education Association conferences. I am a recipient of the BYU ORCA (Office of Research & Creative Activities) grant, the BYU MEG (Mentoring Environment Grants) grant for graduate mentoring of undergraduate students, and the BYU REVERB grant—which helped me conduct field research in Nepal (2016) and India (2015). I have submitted a presentation proposal and been accepted to present my current research in Seattle at the upcoming National Art Education Association conference (2018).

*(Please provide a brief explanation of your training and research experience that qualifies you to conduct the proposed research.)*

Part D: Relevant Publications

- National Art Education Association conference, Seattle (March 2018). Presentation "Bridging Contemporary Art and the Sublime"
Part A: Basic Information

1. Name  
   Daniel T. Barney

2. CITI Username  
   dbarney

3. Position Title (PI, co-PI, Research Personnel)  
   Research Personnel

Part B: Education/Training

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<tr>
<td>University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada</td>
<td>Ph.D</td>
<td>04/09</td>
<td>Curriculum Studies: Art Education</td>
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Part C: Research Qualification Statement

1. Doctoral research involved a semester-long study in the Vancouver School Board (Canada) looking at the affordances and limitations of an emergent curriculum and developing the methodology A/r/tography as a pedagogical strategy.
2. I have received a Laycock Creative Grant where I collaborated with and mentored a BYU graduate student and other students in a large-scale community project. The results have been presented in three scholarly journals and have been presented at two international conferences.
3. I am currently conducting a Mentoring Research Grant with undergraduate students. We have presented our initial findings at one international conference and 1 major national conference.
4. The publications listed below are all peer reviewed and focus on pedagogical issues using new and emerging research methodologies and approaches. Please also note the editorial qualifications and contributions to the field.

(Please provide a brief explanation of your training and research experience that qualifies you to conduct the proposed research.)

Part D: Relevant Publications


Part G:
Biographical Sketch

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects

Provide the following information for the Primary Investigator/Research Personnel and other significant contributors in the order listed on the IRB Application, page 1. Follow this format for each person. **DO NOT EXCEED TWO PAGES PER PERSON.**

Part A: Basic Information

1. Name  
   Mark Graham

2. CITI Username  
   grahmark

3. Position Title (PI, co-PI, Research Personnel)  
   Research Personnel

Part B: Education/Training

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<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>04/02</td>
<td>Department of Curriculum and Teaching</td>
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Part C: Research Qualification Statement

1. Doctoral Research involved a 6 month study of adolescent artistry that was later peer reviewed and published as A Case Study of Adolescent Development in a Disciplined Based Art Education Classroom in Studies in Art Education 44(2), 2003.
2. I have conducted two National Art Education Foundation funded projects, both of which were peer-reviewed by the National Art Education Association.
3. I have conducted 2 Mentoring Research Grants, part of which were published in Visual Art Research 40(1), and The Heart of Art Education (2015), as cited below.
4. Most of the publications listed below are peer-reviewed reports on research projects, notably those listed in Studies in Art Education, which is the research journal for the National Art Education Association and the most rigorous journal in the field.

*(Please provide a brief explanation of your training and research experience that qualifies you to conduct the proposed research.)*

Part D: Relevant Publications


Graham, M. A. (2017). The Confluence of Art, Design, and Media Arts in Art Education. This is a web
publication featured by National Art Education Foundation of the National Art Education Association.


Graham, M. A. (2012). Teaching Conversations, Contemporary Art, and Figure Drawing. Art Education.

APPENDIX 4

Student Questionnaires, ungraded, used to gather responses and track conversations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) How might you define spirituality?</td>
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<td>2) What is the difference between spirituality and religion?</td>
<td>2) What is the difference between spirituality and religion?</td>
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<td>3) How can spirituality be expressed in artwork?</td>
<td>3) How can spirituality be expressed in artwork?</td>
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<td>5) Why should people not put spiritual themes or imagery in artwork?</td>
<td>5) Why should people not put spiritual themes or imagery in artwork?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6) What makes talking about spirituality/religion in public school challenging?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7) What rules should we have in our classroom as we discuss spirituality and religion?</td>
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Go to Art21.org find an artist that you think is curious, strange, fascinating, or intriguing.
1) What is their name?

2) Describe the visual characteristics of their work (What does it look like? What is it made of?).

4) What does the artist say about their work? Why are they making it?

5) What makes their work interesting? Why does it speak to you?

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1) Contextualize your work as a spiritual object or practice. What spiritual practice(s) are you responding to?

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2) Contextualize your work within the field of contemporary art. What artist (or artists) are you channeling? How did you find the artist(s)?

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Transcript of a recorded Class discussion.

The following transcription of a recording in my classroom provides insights into the complexity of our conversations. This happened during one of our work days on the final project. It is presented here in full, without any commentary, although a few sections are highlighted. I assigned numbers to participants in the transcript, based on the order in which they stepped into the conversation. I initiated the conversation, so number 1 represents myself, and numbers 2-14 represent students.

1- I’m going to read part of a news article, and I’d love to toss around some ideas with you. This might connect to some things we’re thinking about, it might not. I don’t want this to be too heavy, but we’re going to a heavy place. Did you guys hear about Santa Fe, where ten people died in a school shooting a few days ago?

[class responded with nods and a few comments]

1- After Parkland, in Florida, just a few weeks before, a lot of the reaction from the students turned immediately to gun control, as you know. There were marches and rallies, but after this shooting in Santa Fe, the reaction has seemed a little different. I found an article on NPR that poses some interesting questions that have been mulling around in my brain, and I want to hear your responses to it.
The article is called *Santa Fe Church Community Reflects on Texas Shooting*, and I’ll read some of it to you:

“Rocked by Friday’s shooting at Santa Fe High School, the religious community is looking for answers. Some faith leaders and church goers say prayer needs to return to school.

“Sunday morning, people in Santa Fe, Texas, flocked to local churches, seeking comfort after this week’s high school shooting that killed 10 people and injured 13 others.

“The residents of this deeply-religious community are just starting to process their emotions, as they also look for answers as to how such a thing could happen.

"'Lord I need you, oh I need you,' sang the choir at Arcadia First Baptist Church. It was the refrain of many who are turning to faith to deal with the grim reality that this familiar, and tragic, American routine has now come to their town.

“Pamela Pannell's grandson would have been in the art class where witnesses said the shooting started, but he was in another room that day for Advanced Placement testing.

"That's the hard part," she said. "To come that close to losing him."

“Pannell held back tears, saying her heart goes out to the people who have lost a loved one in the shooting.
“Texas Gov. Greg Abbott attended the Sunday service. Later, he talked about what he called ‘obvious’ ideas to prevent future shootings, including tightening school security and keeping a closer watch on who leaves and enters school grounds. Abbott has also pointed to a mental health program that intervenes when kids show warning signs that they might become violent.

“For Pannell and other churchgoers here, the answer is simpler.

‘We need God back in our schools,’ she said.

“Almost two decades ago, the U.S. Supreme Court told the Santa Fe Independent School District that it had to stop allowing student-led prayers at school events. It's a case that still reverberates in the community today.

“Just down the road from Pannell's church, at Calvary Crossroad Church, Pastor Del Toler told his congregation to think about that court case the next time they get a chance to vote. He said there might be a number of ways to prevent a shooting, but religion should be at the center.

‘I think the church is a focal point,’ he said, ‘and I think we've gotten the cart before the horse, and we want the other things, but we don't want God.’”

So basically, these people are suggesting that we need to reinstate prayer and religion back in schools? I want to toss that out to you, and see and feel what you guys are thinking about this.
What are your gut reactions to that? When people say we need to put prayer in schools, or have Bible readings in schools, what are your reactions to that?

3- When was the last time they had that in public schools?

1- It actually wasn’t that long ago, 50’s and 60’s.

4- Aren’t there private schools that still do that?

1- Yeah, there are private schools in Utah that read from the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

4- They call each other brother and sister, and have a scripture of the day, and they say a prayer to open and close every class.

1- Yeah, the conversation of private and public school is an interesting one, but maybe we can try to focus on public school, since that’s where we are.

5- I don’t really like that idea, mostly just because there are so many religions and everyone has their unique set of beliefs, and I feel like you can’t tackle all of that. If you have Bible study, you are probably leaning more towards the Christian faith, but there are Muslims and Jews and a million other religions, and so if you do that, regardless of how hard you try, you’re going to be leaving out people and I just don’t think that’s cool.

1- That can be exclusive to people who aren’t Christian, yeah, 2.
2- I mean, I think that that’s awesome if that’s how you want to deal with your grief. If turning to religion is how you deal with it then cool, that’s a great way for you to cope; but for people who don’t believe in God, for that way of grieving to be forced upon them I feel like isn’t healthy. I feel like we need to focus on actual legislation and doing something instead of having faith you know? Because that’s kind of what religion is, and again, I think religion is awesome. Good for you if that’s what works for you then awesome. Do it. But that’s not good for everyone.

1- In education we talk a lot about Best Practices. I go education conferences where I listen to Best Practice Lectures, and teachers say, “This is a proven, guaranteed and viable solution in your classroom to make sure your students pass the AP test, or to ensure your students are engaged in classroom discussions, etc.” and every time that I go to these Best Practice Lectures, I walk away thinking, you are missing a whole demographic of students, who this would not be the best for. What’s best for one person is never the best for everyone. So thanks for bringing that up.

6- I think that my question that I would pose to them being as I am a religious person too though I think this is not the way it should be handled. My question is... are they expecting praying to God as a “please don’t let things happen, stop this?” Or is it for protection? What are they trying to get at by reading their scriptures? Why can’t individualized prayer - maybe they can even look at their community and the people around them and the religious people that are in their
church and say, “why don’t you go out and pray more?” But what is the
effect of having a big group? Isn’t God supposed to listen to
everybody? So why will he only pay attention if a big group of people
pray?

1- Interesting, yeah great question.

3- So I’ve seen this on Facebook and follow both very Liberal people
and Conservative people, and a lot of the Conservative people I follow
will be like, “bring back God into school.” My first reaction to it
was like; I don’t think that’s going to work. One, because I don’t
think we could actually do that because all of the people that say
that that’s not the way to go, and especially in the world, and the
way that it is now with you can’t assume certain things about people,
you can’t exclude certain types of people for the most bizarre things,
right? Or not the most bizarre things; so I don’t think that would
work, but I do like what they are getting at. Like 2 was saying, about
it being and after thing, to help what happened after - I feel like
what these people are trying to say, which is the part that I agree
with, is to bring back God into our schools is to focus more on God in
others instead of a self centered culture which is what I think is
what America, and the world is turning in to. I think when they say to
bring God back into schools, its more to focus on- if you look at the
teachings of God in most any Christian belief, it’s more of an outward
way of looking at your community and treating others, and a lot of
what the “Right” is saying is how kids are mentally disturbed, and the
are getting bullied and all of that stuff so if you were to bring God
back into schools, it would be more of a nicer place to be, so that would fix a lot of that stuff. Which I agree with the theory behind that, but in practice, sadly I don’t think simply bringing God back into schools would work. I do think that being nicer and more outgoing and Christlike as a community would definitely.

7- I think no.

1- Haha, no to what?

7- They shouldn’t do that, because like 5 was saying, not everyone’s the same religion. I think it can ostracize who don’t, and then they can get bullied more, and it’s not a good situation. For instance... never mind, I don’t want to bring that up.

1- No, you can bring anything up!

7- Well, I don’t know. Just kind of like in our community, the majority is Mormon, people get ostracized for not being Mormon, in some cases. It would be like that, but in schools, and you can’t get away from it. I do agree with 3, they should not teach religion in schools, because that’s weird. They should teach things like how to treat others, and self love.

1- You know that’s a pretty radical proposal, right? When I go to these school board meetings, a lot of them are focused on what they call STEM; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, making students ready for the business world, ready for a career. I feel like teaching
about being open-minded or being kind is something that is not even on the radar of some of the STEM people.

7- That’s so weird, like why not? That helps people throughout their whole lives. If you can learn how to communicate with other people in a good way and be able to work with all types of people, that will help you so much in life. Who cares about science if you’re not even going to go into science. If you learn how to work with people, that will help you so much more than passing an AP test.

1- Right. Who cares about cellular mitosis if you don’t know how to be kind?

2- Okay, I have a few things. I think...well, as someone who doesn’t associate with anything religion, I don’t have a definite idea of what God is, or what religion is. Just because it’s not something that’s in my life. Hearing that we are bringing God back, is just this abstract concept to me. What does that even mean, you know? Other than preaching the Bible. I guess in a way God can be self love, and treating others how you want to be treated. So I can understand how the ideas that are taught in religion can correlate well with real life situations, but I feel like the idea of God is so abstract that it would be hard to break it down enough to shove it into curriculum. Our curriculum is very this-and-this-and-this-and-this, it’s chapter by chapter; and I don’t think God in any way is that. I don’t think you can break it down to the bare bones of what God is, and what that even means to be Christ-like. I think if we are going to be focused on
anything, we should be focused on the issues that need to be resolved. This guy, he literally went and shot up the school because this girl rejected him. Did you know that?

1- That was in Santa Fe?

2- Yeah! He was having romantic feelings for her for four months, and she kept rejecting him so he brought a revolver into the school and shot her. In her class. Then shot a bunch of other kids. So it’s like, why are we even talking about bringing God into school, when we could be talking about how this guy - there is just so much other content that people are missing and I feel like it’s stuff that no one is addressing. I’m not even talking about, “take away everyone’s guns!” That’s not realistic you know? Teach people to be kind, teach people to handle rejection, you know? I feel like there are so many situations in our world where a girl rejects a guy, and she ends up dead in a ditch. I feel like we should be focusing on that, you know? I feel like if boys AND girls were taught how to deal with rejection, and how to deal with all of this stuff - because nowadays, people are getting participation awards for everything. People don’t know how to be rejected. I feel like if you were teaching people how to handle emotions, and handle feelings instead of chapter-by-chapter curriculum, I feel like our world would just be better.

1- So what you’re suggesting is a more direct approach to the problem, because these people say, “lets focus on self-love, or religion” or whatever, but that might be a more indirect route.
2- Yeah, I feel like you need a long term and a short term solution, because long term it’s not going to effect what’s happening now, but short term is not going to effect what’s happening later. So I feel like if you approach teaching people emotions, and how to love themselves and others, and how to treat people with kindness and then you also address all these issues of rejection and sexism and physiological and mental problems, then our world would be better, and we wouldn’t have all of this stuff.

1- I like that. Okay, I want to make sure we get time to hear from everybody who raised their hand. 8, you’re next.

8- For me, I know myself as a pretty religious person, that’s just how I am; and in Jr. High, I had these after-school private art classes, and the teacher would start and end every lesson with a prayer, and I was SO uncomfortable with that.

1- WOAH, and held at school?

8- No, it was private, but there were a couple of other kids. And even though I’m really religious, it still made me so uncomfortable. That was just kind of weird to me.

1- That’s totally valid, that’s a great point. Okay, 9.

9- I don’t think that they should necessarily - like when they say that they want to introduce God back into school, I don’t think it should be introducing Mormonism or Catholicism, etc, or something like that, I don’t think that a certain religion should come into school. I
think the idea of how it is now, like do not talk about religion at all, should probably change. I mean, everybody is going to be different, but you never know if it is that one person that is really disturbed or something. If one thing hits home for them – because I feel like religion a lot of the time, no matter what religion it is, usually religions do teach kindness or understanding, or being open minded. Even though I’m Mormon, in this class when we talk about Buddhism or different things like that, I can take away from things that aren’t still what I believe in. It’s interesting, just introducing something that is a bigger topic that can apply, but not a direct principal, like the Mormon church says this or the Pope said this or whatever. Just the idea of help, but not forcing the class to pray together, but just the idea of being more opened as a whole about religions.

1- We should also mention that praying in church in a very specific and denominational way is illegal. That would be considered proselytizing, or ministering. If you’re pushing denominational thinking on anybody, even if it’s just broad; like saying “here is a Christian belief that you guys should adhere to.” Even that, is not constitutional. Teachers are in positions of power, and if they enforce a religious ideology in any way, that can be oppressive. I think praying could fit in that, if it was a specific type of Christian prayer.

9- Yeah, I don’t think they should push it and force anything, I think they should just not ban – if there is one kid in the class that feels
comfortable, and they want to do something that’s more religious, I don’t think that teachers should have to shut it down or anything like that because they aren’t allowed to “discuss” religion.

1- Interesting. Yeah, fascinating.

10- I think that the implications of religion in schools is very frightening to me; because over the course of history, religion has abused power, and I think that people start to use God as a means to an end rather than for true belief. They all say, well God hates the gays, in order to prevent gay marriage. There have been many examples of that over the course of time. I think that if you had - and this is just talking about like if you were to say, “let’s put the Christian God back into our schools in America” I think that polarizes people to: I do believe this, or I don’t believe this; and then it becomes us and them, which breeds spite and hate for each other. I think that it’s interesting that people view God is such a loving being, and yet, when you’re talking about God, so much hate and awful things have come from religion and trying to put religion in things. I think that religion is important, but I think that difference is also important. I think that when we are able to talk about that and be like, “oh well I am not Mormon” and “I am Mormon,” we can have a discussion about that; about why we believe the way we believe. When everyone is thinking the same, I think that’s... scary.

1- Right, I agree, I totally agree. Mahatma Gandhi was asked once if he had ever read the Bible, or if he’d read the teachings of Jesus, or
if he liked Christians; and he said something like, “No, I love your Jesus, it’s your Christians that seem so unlike Jesus to me.” And he was under British rule, British was a colonizing power that was essentially using white nationalism to stampede across India.

11- I think the idea of teaching religion in teaching, I don’t think would be their goal. I think their goal would be more to teach about a God. Because all Gods have been a figure in all of the religions, and they all have similar aspects. They all serve others and are exceptional beings. So I think when you are religious, you are accountable to that person. I think teaching accountability through religion... I don’t know.

1- And you see some benefit to that.

11- Yeah, and not like even straight through religion, but just teaching people to be accountable of their actions.

6- I think - well first off, I didn’t grow up here. I grew up in Florida; and there’s really no way to explain to people how different it is living outside of Utah county. It is a complete different world. I think that people who live in these type of small, conservative communities get these ideas and ideologies that we are supposed to live by. They are coming up with these ideas of why don’t we just put God back into a curriculum? I can for certain say that I know people, and leaders here, and even parents and kids that would agree with that; but I think when you step outside, and you grow up somewhere different, or you experience the world somewhere you understand how
bizzare of a concept that is to everybody else. Or we can sit and talk about it, and analyse the pros and cons, but most people would say “you’re crazy.” I think another question that I would ask to the people who want to put God and prayer back into schools, I want to ask: Once you put prayer and God back into the curriculum, what are you doing from there? Are you expecting God to work his magic, that is believed that he has, and then just call it good? Because it’s not just going to entirely stop everything. So then I would ask, Where do you go after you put God into the curriculum?

1- Compelling question, that’s great.

5- I just think everyone is talking about the pros and cons and I think that putting religion into school is kind of forcing this one culture, this one type of community on everyone. I think the beauty of our community and our culture is that it’s made by all of these different groups of people. All of their different ideas, Liberals and Conservatives, and it’s like the reason our community is so amazing and the reason it flourishes so well is because it has all of these influences from things that shouldn’t be together, but they are. I think that’s part of the reason that school is such a beneficial place to be, because I’m here and I’m not very religious, but [11] is, and we share ideas and we talk about ideas and we all come from different backgrounds, and we share and it helps us to learn and grow. But if you’re saying you go to school and you learn about this one type of religion you’re kind of pushing down all of those other ideas that are helping us grow and develop into human beings.
4- I think that the biggest thing to look at is that we don’t exactly need religion, but I feel like we need some sort of spirituality. My grandma grew up in a household where each of her six siblings were different, one’s Mormon, one’s Protestant, one’s Baptist, one’s Catholic, one’s Presbyterian and one’s an Atheist. So she’s grown up with this different respect for all of these different religions, because that’s all her family, she loves them. Not even her parents were the same religion growing up. They’ve had this connection of - just this spirituality, which could be felt for different people. I believe that spirituality and religion should be part of your life, and it’s part of life; just make it okay for you, as long as you’re not encroaching upon another’s rights. I believe that you should live your standards and live the way your religion says you could/should/will, and if you don’t believe in that, live any way you believe in living.

12- I really like the idea of not exactly putting a specific religion in schools, but connecting to something that’s bigger than yourself and learning to control emotions. There’s a school in Europe who instead of doing detention, they are doing meditation, so they can reflect on their decisions. I think that would be a better solution, not just like totally taking out spirituality, but not enforcing it.

1- Yeah. I like that approach a lot.

13- I was thinking, what is it that makes people mentally ill in the first place? Is it that there’s no God that they believe in? I don’t
believe in that. I think there is a perfect amount of people that aren’t religious that are completely fine, and normal. So I wonder what makes people that way. Because I know there’s a lot of classes, even at our school, like world religions, leadership principles that have helped me be more “stable”, and teach me good lessons. I wonder if we bring in religion, will make it feel more like we are starting a conformity; like we all have to have this one cure to your mental illness. I don’t think that’s what it is. I think even in this culture in Utah, like with seminary - I think plenty of people go to seminary and don’t get any help from it. I think it comes down to your personal choice, and you have to learn how to make that choice for yourself.

2- I just don’t know; because I don’t understand why you can’t teach the concepts of morals and of caring and whatever, without teaching God. I don’t see how those two have to coincide. I get how they can, and I get how they can fit together, but I don’t think you have to teach God to be able to teach love, kindness, hope, and prosperity. I think all of these things, you can still talk about; you just don’t have to talk about God. I don’t think that that’s a must. You know? I think that in certain situations, let’s not teach god, but let’s teach morals. They are different, I think that if you teach kids, this is what it means to be moral, and this is what it means to love others, and treat people with kindness and respect. I think if you teach kids to have pride and dignity, I think that will go a long way. I don’t think we have to talk about should we introduce religion, or God or whatever back in, it should we teach our kids to be decent human
beings. I think a lot of the time, people just assume that people that don’t believe in God just don’t have any morals. No, they do! Morals are a man-taught thing. I think that focusing on whether or not God should be allowed, is focusing on the wrong thing.

13- What do you do if you don’t have parents capable of teaching you that?

1- If you don’t have parents that teach you morals?

13- Yeah, like how do you teach a kid that, without the regular family base? I feel like a lot of mental illness stems from family. I believe it comes from something. I’ve watched Criminal Minds, and some people think they’re just crazy, they’re born that way, but I honestly think that it stems from something that happened in their life.

1- There are a lot of crazy religious people out there, aren’t there?

2- Okay, so I do think that mental illness does stem from something, but I come from the most broken of broken homes. I’m pretty fine I think, and even if you learn morals from your family, by implementing that in school, kids are going to have more of an opportunity of ways they can succeed in life if you talk about it in class. It can’t just be up to our families to teach us these things; because yeah, like 13 was saying, some kids have totally messed up families. You have to learn somehow, and I think that just kind of furthers my point in teaching it in school.

1- Yeah, I like that a lot.
14- I just think there are a lot of issues with that proposal. Like one, 6 already touched on that, but it’s really vague, what does bringing God back into our schools even look like? And I really liked the point that 2 had, that you don’t have to teach morals because they are inseparably connected with the idea of God. For me personally, it is inseparably connected with God; but I can also separate the two and recognize the two entities for themselves. I think that because of what 10 touched on, and the polarizing it can create... it wouldn’t be effective for every single student. And like 1 was touching on, with the “fix all” idea that we have in our education system, there isn’t just one remedy that’s going to solve it. It’s a complicated issue, and it requires a complicated solution. It’s not going to be as simple as we need to pray more in out classes, or we need to read more Bible verses. It’s like, no, it’s different for each student and each situation. I think it’s almost naive to say that introducing God into a system is going to fix everything. Even as a religious person who lives in a religious - we live in an education system that’s saturated with religion - I don’t know, we are very affected by it, and we are able to recognize that it’s not going to be as effective.

1- There’s a scholar named Patrick Slattery who talks about the “Hidden Curriculum.” For example, the way science teachers can teach evolution, or the way that biology teachers can teach sex education, is limited by school councils which is informed by the cultural and religious climate of the community. So there is a hidden curriculum here that I think is important to address and critique.
I believe that we shouldn’t be putting this on a school system, school systems have all complained about and talked about how it’s already broken. It’s already hard to get legislation and to put in place in the first place, so why are we going to try to put something into an already broken, needs-work system. I do believe it all starts with the family, there are exceptions to everything, but what’s the point of family? Family is supposed to have kids and they are supposed to teach those kids the basic morals and how to live as a decent person. It’s been shown that a lot of families that are single-parent families--and it’s risen in both white and black communities a crazy percentage and has resulted in a lot more violence and a lot more indecent individuals, I feel--which is not always the case but I feel like definitely having not only a two-parent home, but just a home where you can go home and have it be a safe place. That should be everyone’s safe place, is their home, and their family. I feel like that’s the place where you are born and grow up as a child, and when you are a child you are the most influenced then. I feel like that’s where you pick up most of your values and morals and dealings with other people, is looking up to the people that you should--and not in all cases--respect the most, just because they’re your parents, they’re the people who brought you into this world for the most part. It should be their job to be putting decent people out into the communities; which might need to start with school, you start with school puts decent people out there to get married and go from there. I mean we’ve had our community – America’s been around – all of the guns have been in America for how long? Only in recent years have we
seen all of these school shootings in such tight - I don’t know what to call it - events?

1- Yeah, I agree with a lot of your points. We should wrap up, I just want to close with a couple thoughts. So in education, and in our educational system, so much emphasis is placed on becoming a “cog” in this societal machine, becoming efficient, learning science, technology, engineering, math. So much of your education has been consumed with bubble sheets, and filling in the blanks, and so little of our contemporary educational landscape is occupied by discussion of heart, or morals, or interbeing, or self-love, or spirit. For me, as an individual, that’s one of the reasons that I feel really intrigued and compelled to jump into this world of art in a public school. I feel like this is a way that we can subvert the system and inject these types of discussions, where we can talk about caring, and we can talk about kindness, and we can talk about listening, and communication, and sitting together with our differences. Especially sitting with opinions and perspectives that might be drastically different from our own. I think that is very vital, and I think that is what art can do. I think it opens us up to other people’s experiences in this world. I know that that might be a really grand, or a really big statement but I honestly do believe that by making things and by sensitizing ourselves to other people; that can change things. Even in small or subtle ways. That can change our experience in this world, that can change the way we appreciate other people’s experiences in this world too. Anyways, these are things that I’m
thinking about a lot. Thanks for all of your thoughts today guys, I really, really appreciate that.

[the bell rang and school was over, but a large group of students stayed to continue the discussion]

5- There was this interview with one of the students from the school, and someone asked if they were surprised and they said, “It been happening to all the other schools, it was just a matter of time before it happened here.” I just feel like if that’s the conclusion people are coming to, how is praying going to fix it, because people are already praying. Ten kids get killed in a school and people pray about it, but nothing is happening. So why are we putting God in schools if it’s already not doing anything?

1- There was a march for our lives in Seattle, which was one of the biggest marches across the country, and I was there (for the NAEA 2018 Seattle conference) in the middle of this march. One of the signs that I saw repeated over and over again was, “we don’t want any more thoughts and prayers, we want laws and legislation.” We want action, we want something that can change this. I think that’s very important, but there’s also a part of me that says, why not both? Why not thoughts and prayers to console and perhaps to soothe, but let’s also take legislative action.

5- Yeah, it just doesn’t fix everything, so yeah keep praying, but take action as well.
1- Yes. Absolutely. That’s what we could call a holistic approach, where you’re approaching it from all different angles at the same time. You’re saying, okay, if thoughts and prayers work for you, do that. Over here we are going to work on legislation. And over here we’re going to march.

2- I think that’s where I’m at, because I’m not saying, “Don’t pray about it,” and I feel like there definitely are some who are like, “why are we praying about this? Do something.” When really, if praying about it is how you’re going to grieve, awesome. Grieve in the way that is best for you. I believe in grieving, and I believe in grieving in your own way. And I think that a lot of people really do that by thoughts and prayers. Some people are just taking action on it, and again, I think you have a short term solution; which is like prayers and marching even. I think these are both short term things that brings a bunch of attention but in reality aren’t doing a lot. I think that there are a lot of things, like 1 was saying: implementing caring, and love, all of this stuff into our schools which I think would change a lot. A lot of these kids that resort to violence, I feel like in a lot of scenarios, haven’t felt love. I think that if you implement – and I don’t mean a romantic love – I just mean love as in a joining of people, and knowing people are there for you.

6- A joining of differences, I think.

2- Yeah, like knowing that love is a real thing, for you, by implementing this environment where people feel cared for, and they
feel like they can talk about things. Because if you’re in a situation where you feel like you can’t talk about your feelings, people often resort to violence. I feel like in a lot of situations, masculinity is also kind of a thing sometimes. I think men are so pushed, like men don’t cry, men don’t talk about their feelings, men don’t get sad you know? I feel like by forcing this idea of masculinity onto people, it’s like making them hard-hearted, and making them think there isn’t a sense of caring for them. I think that if we just implement an all-around environment of acceptance, where people feel loved and cared for, and feel like they can talk about morals, and feel like they can respect one another, then you’re going to have a better environment. Nothing can go wrong from telling each other you love them.

13- What 2 said just sparked a memory of what I learned last year in a health class with a student teacher actually. She told me - it really surprised me what she said - she said that addiction and impulses come from a lack of connection with people. I’ve never thought about it that way, and I still don’t really understand that, but I thought that was a super interesting thought. I think like what 2 was saying, you need to feel loved. You need people. People need people. I fully believe that. I don’t know you you could implement that into school, or make people have friends. I just thought what she said was cool.

2- I think that it kind of all starts with good teachers too. I feel like I have had a lot of teachers that hate their jobs, that hate children, you know? I feel like in the beginning, they are super pumped about teaching, they loved kids - otherwise they wouldn’t have
started doing it, but I feel like this environment of our whole academic program just kind of is sanding at teachers until they are just nothing. They are so done with Sage testing and snotty kids, and having to watch what they say every day or they’re going to get fired for talking about morals, you know? I feel like if we implement this, it’s not only going to benefit the students, it’s going to benefit the teachers. If you have teachers that continue loving their work, and love their environment they’re in, and they love their students, then everyone is going to succeed in life.