

IT IS YOU THAT I SEE IN ME: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF  
THE ARTIST TEACHER IDENTITY

BY

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THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Early in my life after graduating with a degree in the fine arts, I felt that I had a firm grasp of my identity as an artist. However, due to muscular dystrophy and the need to acquire health insurance and a stable source of income to address it, I soon found myself in the teaching profession. Because I had chosen to pursue teaching out of necessity rather than by choice I would soon find myself in a position where I became unsure of my identity as an artist. Overwhelmed with the responsibilities of becoming a teacher, I devoted more time towards developing my identity as a teacher rather than as an artist. As the fissure between my artist and teacher identity widen with each passing school year, I began to wonder whether I could ever reconcile my artist and teacher identities.

This thesis seeks to better understand and reconcile my dual identity as an artist and teacher. Through using autoethnography I explore how my identity has evolved over time and how it is intertwined with the lives of artists and educators who have taught and influenced me. Furthermore, my thesis explores the usefulness of self-study in art education and how autoethnography allowed me to see identity as less of title one earns and more like something that emerges from within through thoughtful action, critical reflection, and sustained attunement.

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## PROLOGUE:

"My aim is to put down on paper what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way."—Ernest Hemingway

Prior to introducing the project, I want to describe why I am making a commitment to being clear and direct with my reader. Despite having this sentiment prior to arriving at a large Midwestern university, I was afraid to sound simple and unsophisticated amongst my colleagues. In this new environment, far from the people and place I called home, I wanted to be a part of something, to be well-liked and respected. I quickly became swept up in the politics and performance of being a graduate student.

Due to my insecurities, I compensated by writing in dense prose. I thought that by writing in dense prose I was somehow being intellectual. It turned out to be quite the opposite. Wrestling with the anxieties and frustrations resulting from my writing style, I wondered whether it was worth the time to write and express my thoughts and ideas through writing. Art making, an activity I did prior to graduate school, seemed more natural while writing felt laborious and unnatural. I questioned whether the path of a writing intensive graduate program was worth the work. I wished for a way out because the stress of doing something unfamiliar was something I wanted to avoid all together. However, with time, I realized writing felt unnatural because it was something I did not do with regularity prior to graduate school. Yet, much like art making, the more I wrote and failed at it, the more comfortable I became with writing.

Despite years of formal public schooling, writing was something I was not comfortable with. For example, nouns, adverbs, and adjectives were terms that I knew

but had little understanding of. In other words, I knew about the parts of a sentence, I just did not understand what they were. If I were to be honest with the reader and myself, I would still have a difficult time pointing out the specific parts of a sentence. Would this make me illiterate? Maybe. But, here I am writing.

Be that as it may, how did I learn how to write despite not having a deep understanding of sentence structure? I learned how to write at a young age by being around the English language, whether it was in public school, in literature, and in television programming. I learned how a sentence should sound like by being hearing English being spoken in school and on television. I learned what a sentence should look like through reading. Thus, the literature I enjoyed reading and the conversations I found myself in shaped my writing style. Being a reader of satire (e.g. Jonathan Swift, Douglas Adams) and someone who loves talking, my writing style became a fusion of these activities. My writing style, despite its wordiness, its conversational quality, and its use of figurative language did not seem to raise the suspicions of my former educators prior to graduate school. I suspect at the time, as a young high school student, my writing style was intelligible enough to give me a passing grade.

However, the disadvantages of writing dense prose would make itself clear in graduate school. Even though, Pennbaker (1997) and Rubin (2013) wrote about the expressive, meditative, and therapeutic benefits of writing in dense prose, I had to remind myself that writing this thesis is also about adding to a conversation. Thus, I should not be writing this project solely for my own enjoyment and therapy. Even though personal experience may have served as the project's impetus, I made a commitment to

adding to a pool of knowledge by revealing, pointing, and describing a potential way of understanding and working through my artist teacher identity.

Acknowledging that my style of writing needed to adapt to a different audience, purpose, and context, I began searching for an author who evoked the earnestness, directness, and clarity I sought. I would find it in educational philosopher, Samuel Rocha. Written in a clear, descriptive, and direct manner, Rocha's book, *A Primer for Philosophy and Education* (2013), modeled the qualities that I wanted in my own writing.

However, simply reading and modeling my writing style after Rocha was not enough. I also needed to outline a guiding principle for this project. In this instance, I find the adage "form ever follow function" as a useful guiding principle. Coined by American architect Louis Henry Sullivan (1896), "form ever follows function" was used by Sullivan to describe a principle of architectural design that sees the purpose of what is being made functioning as the starting point for its design. Despite its reference to architecture, Sullivan's adage can be applied to other disciplines. For instance, I am writing a thesis, a proposition corroborated through research and lived experience. Seeing this thesis like a blueprint, there is an implied responsibility to communicate to the reader how I arrived at a conclusion while providing them with the opportunity to apply and adapt what has been discovered in my thesis to their own lived experience. Much like a blueprint, I list the materials I have compiled (literature review), explain why these materials were chosen (methodology), and illustrate how these materials were prepared, assembled, and tested (method). Continuing with the metaphor of the blueprint, the reader can choose to follow it exactly and/or make modifications to the blueprint (project) and adapt it to the context of their lives, situations, and environments. Using

Sullivan's adage, more as a guiding principle than a dictate, I found it useful in helping me layout the structure and intent of this thesis.

As I continue reflect, theorize, and write about my practice as an artist, researcher and teacher, I have been asked who my intended audience should be. I have struggled with this question. First, I see this project as an offering, one that my partner, my parents, and non-academic friends can understand and use for themselves. If my project is successful in helping them, that is more than enough of a reward. Second, to future art educators who ask themselves, "who am I, an artist, a teacher, or both?", I offer a story of self-discovery. A story that points to the usefulness of autoethnography and how it helped me navigate my identity as an artist and teacher. Prior to this project's conclusion, I saw my identity as an artist and teacher as conflicting with one another. At the time, my identity as artist, seen as someone who is engaged in making art, felt incompatible and in conflict with my identity as a teacher, acknowledged in this project as a person who educates students. Through autoethnography I discovered a tool that helped me see and thereby develop an understanding of the artist teacher identity that is complex, layered, evolving, and shaped by the people around me. Through this thesis, I point to autoethnography as a method that allowed me to work through my own identity while illustrating to the reader how they could use autoethnography for their own projects of self-discovery. Lastly, beyond those I have listed, I do not know who else has the potential to be my audience. Therefore, with the intention of giving my thesis to have the greatest amount of accessibility, I will write it in a simple, descriptive, and straightforward manner.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“All human plans [are] subject to ruthless revision by Nature, or Fate, or whatever one preferred to call the powers behind the Universe.”

— Arthur C. Clarke, 2010: *Odyssey Two*

### **Things do not always go as planned.**

When I was an undergraduate student majoring in fine arts, I considered myself a painter. Acrylic was my medium and wood panels were my painting supports. I loved staying after hours in my studio even if I was not painting. There was something about being in my studio amongst other like-minded students that felt safe, generative, and fruitful. My studio was a place of growth and reflection. It was unlike any other educational experience I had before. Life seemed to make sense and this thing called art felt like my calling. I worked hard to make a living at it. I worked in a studio to hone my craft and conversed with peers to define and refine my concepts. I worked alongside exhibiting artist as an art preparator. I interned at art galleries and curated exhibitions at artists-run spaces around Houston. I had lived the life of an artist, or rather, what I had conceived as the life of an artist. However, life and circumstance would take me down a different path.

In 2003, I was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy, a progressive musculoskeletal weakness. Despite the intention of becoming an artist, my disease became an ailment that I needed to address. Unfortunately, at the time as a young person working several part-time jobs, I did not qualify for health insurance from any of my various employers. Being past the age of 21, I could no longer be covered under my

parent's health insurance at the time. This made for a grim situation. Grappling with the abrupt reality of my situation, I felt the need to set a new course for myself.

I was unsure of what other job I could do other than an art-related one. There were careers other than teaching that I had considered. For instance, I wanted to be full-time art preparator. However, my ailing body and an inability to lift more than 50+ pounds repeatedly made this profession an unlikely choice. I wanted to be a museum registrar, but a lack of experience and education made it difficult to be considered for this profession as well. I could have pursued a career in the computer sciences, but it was not a passion of mine. I simply did not love computers, the way I loved art.

For months, I applied to various art-related jobs hoping that someone would eventually take a chance on me. As the months came and went I grew frustrated as my luck seemed to run dry. But then several friends, who were also public school teachers, suggested that I consider a career in teaching. I was hesitant at first but it would not take much convincing. "Mike, you could work from 8 to 3, Monday through Friday, and make art and/or travel during the summer break", my friends would say. At the time and out of desperation, I made the decision to pursue teaching despite my lack of classroom teaching experience. Teaching and public education was willing to give me a chance, a stable source of income, health insurance, and time to make my art. It could not be that tough, right?

I mulled over their suggestion and began convincing myself that teaching was something that I could do despite my lack of experience. I knew that it might be hard from my own experience as a former high school student, however, I remained optimistic. Through the encouragement of family and friends, I made the decision to

become a certified art teacher. In spring of 2005, I applied and enrolled in an alternative certification program to acquire my teaching certificate. Following six months of teacher preparation, two week of teacher observation, and a tempestuous first year of teaching I would become a fully certified art educator in 2006. Following my first year of teaching, I had overcome the anxieties of teaching and the stress of managing a safe classroom. The income and insurance I was receiving from my job as an educator was more than enough compensation. It allowed me to pay for my car, my student loans, and my own place. However, it seemed like it was at a price. For the first four years of teaching, I was so involved in becoming a better educator that my practice as an artist was reduced to doodling in the margin of handouts I would receive during teacher professional development.

By 2010 after paying some significant debts, moving into a new classroom, and working for a new school district, I decided to reignite my practice as an artist by leasing a studio space with two other artists who also happened to be teachers themselves. By now, the “promise” of having time to work on my art after school and during the summer did not pan out the way that I thought. Instead, my time after school, were spent grading, lesson planning, organizing an art club, and researching better classroom management techniques While my summer, was spent recuperating and acquiring professional development credits to keep my teacher certification valid. The dream of having a job that would also allow me to make my art, while giving me enough income to live comfortably did not seem to work out. I wanted to make art for myself and for a future career as an artist, however, my responsibilities as a teacher in a public school made it difficult. During the next nine years, I spent teaching in public education, I questioned

whether teaching was truly my calling. Sure, I enjoyed teaching and my education community had affirmed that teaching was something I had a knack for, yet despite my peers' affirmations and belief in me as an educator my desire to be an artist lingered like a ghost in the background. I still wanted to be seen as an artist first and a teacher second, and the promise of having time to work on my art during the summers and after work never panned out as neatly as I would have liked.

### **Getting here.**

In retrospect, the insecurities I had about my own artist teacher identity are not something unique to my situation. As art education scholars, such as Zwirn (2002; 2005), Horwat (2015), Daichendt (2011; 2010; 2009), Ball (1990), and Byrd (1964) have pointed to this conflict of identity as common struggle for individuals who see themselves as both an artist and teacher. The tension is tangible and as Zwirn (2002) points to in her dissertation, without initial artistic commitment and the support of family and friends, artist teachers give up on art making altogether because of the difficulty of “organiz[ing] their school lives so that they don’t overtake their artistic lives (p.214). Fortunately, at the beginning of my teaching career, my school life did not fully consume my artistic life because of the praise my artwork had received and from the support of my friends and family. Yet, the longer I was in the classroom the less likely it seemed that I would ever fulfill my goal of being an artist.

When I started on this journey of being an artist teacher, my initial goal was to search for meaning in my identity as an artist and teacher and to understand why I became a teacher and why my identity as an artist was still so important to me. I wondered whether I had stopped long enough to define who I was an artist and teacher.

In retrospect, I realize that my time in a six-month alternative certification program simply did not provide me with time, the tools, the resources, or the space to investigate my emerging and evolving identity as an artist teacher. Furthermore, as a teacher, I spent a considerable amount of time researching how to improve my practice as an educator, rather than using research to help me define and understand who I was as an artist and teacher. In pursuing graduate school, I wanted to resolve what felt like unfinished business and to reconcile my identity as an artist and teacher.

As I conducted research, reviewed the literature, and recollected my memories of becoming an artist teacher, I began wondering how and to what degree the research and literature was relevant and reflective of my experience, my research, and what I was writing about it. Was I merely using the research that I had discovered and relying on what was previously written to describe what I was experiencing. Or, could I use my research to develop the vocabulary and craft an instrument that would allow me to conduct my own personal inquiry into artist teacher identity and describe to an audience a unique insight that I might have discovered in this process of self-study.

Despite the nine years I spent teaching and making art, I found it difficult to describe and define my identity as an artist teacher. At first, I questioned whether the difficulty stemmed from a lack of resources or institutional constraints. However, I felt that I was simply shifting the blame off myself by approaching the issue from this angle. Without anyone to blame, but myself, I began to feel lost. I was far from home, away from my loved ones, amongst new people, in a city unfamiliar to me, lost in the literature, and at a loss for words. I felt considerable isolation. I did not like feeling alone. It felt miserable. I wanted to hang out and be among living, breathing, and conversing people.

This seemed like a more attractive proposal than attending to my studies in my studio apartment.

It was during this period, that I began to ponder the importance of self-reflection. I noticed that in this new environment, far from what was familiar, I was constructing a new identity for myself, for better or for worse. When I began recognizing identity as a process, and as the result of action, rather than as a fixed entity, I became more aware of who I was hanging out with and understanding why I enjoyed their company. I began to have a personal and deeper understanding of the type of learning and living proposed in *Be Near to Me: An Articulation of a Nearness Pedagogy*, a thesis by Jorge Lucero (2008)

In his thesis, Lucero (2008) proposes that we can learn by “being near one who does it the way one would like to do it” (pg. 3), and articulates his proposal through four essays that are to be performed in addition to being read. As Lucero writes, “these performative and philosophical “pauses” also seek to incarnate the spirit of the *pedagogy of nearness* by playing with the formal workings of the “traditional” thesis project to stay conscious of the reader and how they perform in conjunction with any text to create a “pedagogy.” This collaborative making of a “text” is also key to the pedagogy of nearness” (p. V, 2008).

As someone who is defining and describing their practice as an artist and teacher, I found Lucero’s (2008; 2011) endeavors to blur the boundary between art and teaching through his awareness of content and form inspirational. Furthermore, through the work of art and education scholars, such as, James Haywood Rolling (2004), Pauline Sameshima (2006; 2009;2013) and Nick Sousanis (2015), I can also glimpse at the

possibility of a thesis that is more than a report of my finding but an artwork in and of itself.

I want to do more than tell my reader about the artist teacher identity. I want to find and model a strategy that a reader could use to conduct their own inquiries into their identities as artist teachers. As Unrath and Franco (2013) write, “clearly, each of us travels a unique path to becoming a teacher with distinct pre-dispositions, prescribed pathways, and roads less traveled that somehow bring us to a common place” (p.82). Yet, how does an individual develop and construct their identity as an artist teacher and how useful is it to reflect on our own experiences with art and education within this process of becoming? Furthermore, are preservice and experienced art educators given opportunities to reflect upon and work through their emerging and evolving identities as artist teachers, or is it something that is simply looked over?

In reviewing the literature of the artist teacher identity development, very few articles within the context of art education appear to forefront identity development as process of self-reflection, meditation, and action. Even fewer article seem to model a strategy or instrument that an individual could use to explore, construct, and understand their emerging and evolving identities as artist teacher. It would appear that identity development is an under researched and under explored field within the context of art education. However, research by art scholars such as Jorge Lucero (2008, 2011), James Haywood Rolling (111), Sharif Bey (2014), Kathleen Unrath (2009a; 2009b; 2013), Berwanger (2013), and a/r/tographers such as Stephanie Springgay are good resources to engage with this particular conversation.

My identity as an artist and teacher is always in the process of becoming. This self-study looks to investigate how my identity as an artist and teacher was constructed and (re)negotiated through my past and present experiences with art and education. Why was it so important to me to express my identity as artist? Did my identity as a teacher not seem as important? Why did I feel compelled to see the artist and teacher as two different and distinct identities? Was that division a necessity? Lastly, does it really matter what I label myself or was it more important to put thoughts into action, as my partner Sonia, has often reminded me.

**My hesitation or the difficulty of transforming ideas into words.**

This thesis has taken much longer to put into words than I had expected. Despite having no specific structural guidelines for what constitutes a Master's thesis (e.g. literature review), what I saw from reading the articles, theses, dissertations, and books for this thesis is the formalized structure that many of these projects use. Typically consisting of an introduction, a statement of the problem, literature review, method/methodology, analysis, conclusion/implications, these parts of academic writing gave me a particular structure upon which I could base my own thesis. Yet, in writing my thesis, the structure of academic writing felt insincere and unfamiliar to the way I processed and understood the world. Writing my thesis using this particular structure did not feel right. It was stifling. Simply put, it was not me. This hesitancy with using a traditional thesis structure grew out of the fear that my thesis would end up tracing the artist teacher identity rather than mapping it.

It is important to clarify what I mean by tracing and mapping. According to Martin and Kamberlis (2013), research projects that trace, “copy and operate according to

“genetic” principles of reproduction based on an a priori deep structure and a faith in the discovery and representation of that structure” (p. 670). While projects that map, chart “open systems that are contingent, unpredictable, and productive” (p. 670). Written differently, projects that trace tend to be formulaic because they work according to a certain design, while projects that map are generative because they reveal “potential organizations of reality rather than reproducing some prior organization of it” (p. 671).

In writing this thesis, I wanted to create something that was candid to my way of being and integral to my practice as an artist and teacher. As I mentioned in the prologue, I learned by doing, by making a mess of things and reassembling the parts until it begins coalesce into something that is reflective of the world as I understood it. Upon, being asked to propose a thesis, my anxieties got the best of me. As a Vietnamese American growing up, I was always anxious about fitting in and making myself feel like I belong. Growing up, I never quite felt that I was neither Vietnamese nor American. The anxiety of not quite fitting-in is a palpable fear, and makes me weary. Akin to my own experience growing up, am I being un-academic, if I do not write or do things a certain way? According to Don Trent Jacobs, also known as Four Arrows, the answer is no. In his book, *the Authentic Dissertation*, Four Arrows (2008), writes that “the goal...is not to replace the historical values of academic research in the Western tradition, but only to challenge some of these values and offer alternative ideas that stem from different, sometimes opposing values” (p. 2). Four Arrows defines the authentic dissertation as a “spiritual undertakings and reflections that honor the centrality of the researcher’s voice, experience, creativity, and authority.” Therefore, an authentic dissertation for Four Arrows,

focus[es] more on important questions than on research methodologies per se...[it] move[s] away from an over-emphasis on academic writing if it tends to stifle creativity or one's true voice...do[es] not fall for the "myth of objectivity"... remember[s] that art, music, and story-telling are living information systems...."(p. 1-2)

What Four Arrow's hints to, despite his use of the word authentic to describe it, is the importance of creating a project that is honest and candid with your way of being in the world. One that "recognize[s] the value of diversity...remember[s] the importance of one's sense of place and self-determination...[and] see[s] art as a living process for communicating and understanding" (p.6).

Throughout the process of researching, collecting, reading, and organizing the articles, books, theses, and dissertations for my thesis, I have begun to map out the theories and ideas which support, shape and challenge my understanding and experience of becoming an artist teacher. In writing this thesis, I ask myself, will I take a path that has already been treaded and use a method that has been accepted, or will I chose a form that honors my way of being and my voice?

I find through the work of scholars such as Martin & Kamberlis (2013), Four Arrows (2008), Lucero (2008; 2011), Sameshima (2006) and Au (2014) the permission to write a thesis that attends to my way of being. Despite the difficulties that may arise from merging the scholar-self with the artist-self (Leavy, 2009), I find encouragement to pursue a less traditional thesis from dissertations such as Christopher Kuan Hung Au's (2014) *We Don't Line Up For Recess: The Autoethnography Of A First Grade Teacher*. By using autoethnography rather than traditional qualitative research methods such as

case studies Au made his research more engaging to read. As the reader, we are invited to glimpse into life as a teacher as he navigates his past experiences with the Hawaiian education system and unpacking how these experiences have and continue to shape and restrict his ability to imagine new forms of teaching. In the end, Au's dissertation not only gives his reader a unique and captivating way to engage with his research, he also provokes his reader to question, reevaluate, and reconsider what knowledge and research *means* and *is* to them through his use of autoethnography.

### **Arrangement of the thesis.**

Acknowledging that writing a thesis can be an act that is both artistic and political; I want to adopt a form, which hints to the development of identity as a process, one that is co-constructed historically and culturally. In compiling and researching the material for this thesis, I became troubled by the treatment of the artist teacher identity as an either-or proposition (Day, 1986) and that the identity of the artist and teacher are always in tension. I do not believe that is always the case. As I have experienced, the tension I felt was of my own doing. Through self-reflection, I began to acknowledge that I was creating the constructs that made becoming an artist teacher difficult. Furthermore, I also began to recognize and understand how societal and institutional forces shaped my artist teacher identity. As I acquired more knowledge, perspectives, and experiences, my understanding and construction of the artist teacher identity, by consequence, evolved. This thesis therefore is an autoethnographic study of my becoming an artist teacher.

As my experience with muscular dystrophy has taught me, life despite all our plans and safeguards can take us on an unexpected journey. As Steinbeck writes in *Travels with Charley* (1962), "we do not take a trip; a trip takes us" (p. 3). Seeing things

as such, what I am offering is not a solution that fully resolves or reconciles the artist teacher identity. Because to suggest that such a solution exist implies that, I am ignoring the complexity of what it means to be an artist teacher. Instead, motivated by my desire to help others who also find themselves grappling with their identities as artist teachers, I offer a story of becoming an artist teacher that points to the importance of self-reflection in identity development within the context of art education. In other words, I offer a story that shapes our views, thoughts, and understanding of the artist teacher identity when it is told and retold (Rolling, 2010).

In chapter two, I will set the stage by describing what autoethnography is. Chapter three, will articulate through several autoethnographic narratives how I developed and constructed my artist and teacher identity. These chapters will also seek to question the problematic nature of artist teacher identity and to imagine the artist teacher not as label or a singular entity, but as a philosophy and an action. Chapter four, will summarize the themes, findings, and issues that emerge from my autoethnographic narrative. While chapter five, will point to some recommendations for art education. Playing with traditional thesis form, the review of the literature and discussions are woven around the narratives that I present and “are bound to the particular time in which they were encountered” (Au, p.2, 2014). Lastly, I will draw out through my autoethnographic narratives the usefulness of self-reflection and the importance of actions over words.

Throughout my thesis, I will continue to point to the artist teacher as an identity that is not predetermined, but rather, multifaceted, and reflective of one’s experiences with art and education. An identity, to use Watson (2008) words, that is “stronger, more

beautiful, and more productive...than a planar [conception of] self” (p. 140) because it is formed through crystallization rather than triangulation.

Through this thesis, I invite the reader to perform their own self-reflections and to glimpse at the artist teachers that await or already exist but are hidden or forgotten. My autoethnographic project is further guided by the following questions:

- 1.) How does one know and reveal their emerging identities as artist teacher?
- 2.) How have I experienced key points in my journey of becoming an artist teacher?
- 3.) What are some of the forces that have shaped how I experience my identity as an artist teacher?
- 4.) How have I used autoethnography in (re)constructing my identity?

### **Why research identity development of the artist teacher?**

I am not the first individual to see the importance of identity development in art education. For instance, research by art education scholars Dennis Atkinson (2002) and Laura Hetrick (2010), point to the importance of understanding how students and teachers develop and acquire their identities. For Atkinson, his investigation of identity development was sparked, in part, by his desire to see an art and teaching practice that encouraged a “more sensitive understanding and appreciation of difference” (p.196). While for Hetrick, her investigations into identity development, through a Lacanian lens, is fed by her desire to aid preservice art teachers. As Hetrick (2010) suggests, we can help preservice art teachers work through the anxieties of teaching art and their identity as art teachers by giving them the opportunity to understand and discuss their own fantasies and desires of teaching art and becoming an art teacher.

For my self-study, I am focusing on how I developed and (re)negotiated my identity as an artist teacher. My decision to use an autoethnography comes from a desire to not only investigate, reflect, and discuss the artist teacher identity, but to shape the form of my project to evoke the self-reflective process that I am writing about and to share this strategy with readers who may experience the tension of the artist teacher identity. In the spirit of Four Arrows (2008), I believe in the importance of forwarding these stories and employing methods and forms of knowing and writing that honors my voice, experience, creativity, and authority as a researcher. I should also be mindful that these forms of knowing and doing will challenge the traditional thesis structure and normative ideas of research. In other words, I will need courage and determination as I seek to convince others to see the value of my endeavors.

My interest in the identity development arises out of my own experience as an individual who had one aspiration, becoming an artist, but changed course and became a teacher due to circumstances of life. In this new situation, I strived to be a successful teacher. At the time, out of fear, desperation, and a lack of training and experience, I felt that I had to abandon my artistic practice. For a period of four years, I neglected my artistic practice to focus on my professional responsibilities as a teacher. In doing so, I abandoned and nearly lost an integral part of myself. I did not want to live this way, making one choice or the other, so that I can merely survive.

As Hetrick (2010) and Horwat (2015) point to, when a breakage occurs between the fantasy and reality of the artist teacher, it becomes easy to feel hopeless and isolated. It was in such a place, where I found it easy to forget why I loved making art or whether I could love teaching. When I became more concerned with the artist teacher as a

prescriptive title, entity, rather than as action, I found it to be unsustainable. I offer this thesis as a way of pointing to a method of self-study that the readers could use to investigate and construct their artist teacher identity. Furthermore, I want point to the importance of using continual and critical self-study and self-reflection to describe, map, and reveal how our emerging artist teacher identities are constructed and reshaped by our past and present experiences with art and education. I believe that identity, despite its usefulness in situating and supporting how we see ourselves in relation to others, can become harmful, if we do not question them.

My thesis will point to the artist teacher identity is not an entity to be attained, but something that emerges from within, through thoughtful action, critical reflection, and sustained attunement. However, before moving on to the limitations of this study, I will conclude on a light-hearted note.

I find that the simple everyday activities such as watching a movie shapes my philosophy. I often discover bits of wisdom from the most unexpected place, in this case, it is from the movie Kung-Fu Panda. In a scene of the movie, Po's kung-fu master, Shifu, tells Po and the others to evacuate the valley after an encounter with the movie's antagonist Tai-Lung. During the evacuation, Ping, Po's adoptive duck father, sees Po feeling defeated and powerless. In his effort to comfort his son, Ping reveals the secret ingredient of his soup to Po:

Mr. Ping: The secret ingredient is... nothing!

Po: Huh?

Mr. Ping: You heard me. Nothing! There is no secret ingredient.

Po: Wait, wait... it's just plain old noodle soup? You don't add some kind of special sauce or something?

Mr. Ping: Don't have to. To make something special you just have to believe it's special.

[Po looks at the scroll again, and sees his reflection in it]

Po: There is no secret ingredient...

Perplexed, Po takes out the Dragon Scroll and finds himself looking at his own image in the reflective golden surface of the scroll. Through Mr. Ping's wise words, Po makes the connection and acknowledges that the secret to "limitless power" is not some secret ingredient, but a belief in yourself. Through my own self-study, I will discover that the artist teacher identity is not something to be acquired, but an identity that emerges from within and through action.

### **Limitations, I can only see so far.**

Before moving into chapter two, I will discuss some of the foreseeable limitations of this project. First, taking into consideration this project's use of an autoethnographic method it is important to suggest to my reader, ways with which to engage and evaluate this project. As Sparkes (2002) writes in his chapter in *Ethnographically Speaking*, readers should resist the "temptation to seek universal, foundational criteria" (p. 223) to evaluate an autoethnographic project. Unlike a traditional thesis, a project of an autoethnographic nature engages the reader by a variety of aesthetic, literary and poetic conventions (Jones, S., Adams, T. E., & Ellis, C., 2013) to analyze or comment on social and cultural practices by using the author's lived experience as the site of research. Consequently, each autoethnographic project is distinct and reflective of the author's

subjectivities and their sensitivities to the previously mentioned conventions. This makes the implementation of a universal criterion for judgment difficult, akin to how one defines what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ art. Furthermore, as Roth (2005) reminds us, every reader will also bring to a reading, an interpretation that is informed by their individual experiences, or subjectivities, in the world and that there is no one sense, message or reading. In other words, each reader will arrive at *a* reading rather than arrive at *the* reading.

Illustrating a sensitivity to this issue, Sparkes (2002) proposes through citing Schwandt (1996) that when evaluating an autoethnographic project, the criteria that the reader uses to evaluate the work should be applied contextually. Furthermore, these criteria should be seen as “enabling conditions and guiding ideals” (p. 223), rather than an apparatus that situates and replaces one form of dogma with another. Instead of making judgments of value based on its repeatability, levels of contamination, and so on, a reader should instead develop a criterion that examines how a study embodies qualities of “coherence, expansiveness, interpretive insight, relevance, rhetorical force, beauty and texture of the argument” (p. 223).

In conducting this self-study, I acknowledge that a thesis of this nature, an autoethnography (to be discussed in chapter two), privileges and forefronts the perspective and experiences of the researcher. For example, Sara Delamont (2007; 2009), a strong opponent of autoethnography, has argued autoethnographic studies are self-indulgent, they focus on experiences rather than analysis, and cannot be written ethically. I do not entirely dispute all of Delamont’s critique and in reviewing a few art education autoethnographic studies for this project, I can see where Delamont derives her

discontent. However, I take Delamont's critique not as an attack but as a provocation, one that reminds me to be mindful of the pitfalls of the autoethnographic process.

Furthermore, Delamont's critique also points to our responsibilities as researchers in a formal institution to add onto a pool of knowledge and to pay due diligence to those involved, directly and indirectly, in our research.

Finally, this project is of speculative nature. The primary goal of this self-study was to draw attention to the complexity of the artist teacher identity in an effort to develop a deeper understanding of how I developed and (re)negotiated my identity as an artist teacher. Even though, I intended the form of this project to model a strategy that the reader could employ/deploy in their own autoethnography, I should also acknowledge that it may not be for everyone. Akin to my own experience in the studio and in the classroom, not everyone thinks in the same way. At best, we acknowledge our differences and offer our stories and ideas in the hopes that someone will find some use in it someday. Furthermore, if and when, I seek to revisit this project through a form such as a dissertation, I would like to expand the scope of this project to include the autoethnographic narratives of other individuals who also identify as an artist and teacher to render an evolving portrait of the artist teacher. Now whether future projects will employ an autoethnography is uncertain. However, my interest in alternative forms of knowing, doing, and being has not waned.

## CHAPTER 2: COMING TO AUTOETHNOGRAPY

### **The beginning.**

Autoethnography is an emerging research method, methodology, and form of lived inquiry that uses the experiences of the researcher as a site to develop understanding of social phenomena (Wall, 2006). The earliest use of the term autoethnography can be traced back to anthropologist David Hayano (1979) in his essay *Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects*. In Hayano's essay he proposes that individuals who study people, culture, and societal phenomena, such as anthropologist, to write and do ethnographies of their "own people". In conceptualizing the term, Hayano expresses three reasons why he believes there has been a turn towards autoethnography within schools of anthropology in the United Kingdom and America. First, Hayano (1979) mentions how it has become almost impossible to study "small, isolated tribal groups as if they existed apart from other peoples or world economic and political forces" (p. 99). Second, Hayano saw that a greater number of minority and foreign anthropologist were being trained and that many of them, either by choice or restriction, chose to study their own communities and people. Hayano also notes that since there was a growing popularity for courses which studied ethnicity and minority cultures, the need for minority social scientist to study their "own people" grew. Third, Hayano acknowledges that due to a decrease in funding social science research and an increase in competition for funding that supports research aboard had waned significantly. Consequently, many postgraduate students in the field of the social sciences found themselves doing some of

their “predoctoral fieldwork in their own backyards” (p. 99) and using their “own people” as a subject of research.

Following Hayano’s coining and theorizing of the term in 1979, autoethnography has become a significant yet controversial form of qualitative inquiry (see Delamont 2007; 2009). However, through the continued work of social scientists such as Denzin (2010;2013), Bochner & Ellis (2002) and Sparkes (2002), autoethnography would gain a presence and legitimacy in the world of qualitative research. Furthermore, the use of autoethnography by art and education researchers, such as Rolling (2003), Jewett (2006), Lucero (2011), Zimmerman (2011) and Mutch (2013), would help it become a legitimate form of qualitative inquiry despite once being perceived as a passing fad (Ellis, 2013). In this chapter, I will briefly describe the literature relevant to autoethnography and draw out from the literature the form of autoethnography I intend to use for this project.

### **Setting the framework.**

The formation and purpose of autoethnography as Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013) write are attributed to four interrelated historical trends in social science research:

- 1.) A recognition of the limits of scientific knowledge and growing appreciation for qualitative research
- 2.) A heightened concern about the ethic and politics of research
- 3.) A greater recognition of and appreciation for narrative, the literary and aesthetic, emotions and the body; and
- 4.) the increased importance of social identities and identity politics (Jones, Adams and Ellis, p. 26, 2013)

Qualitative research, as Jones, Adams & Ellis (2013) point to, formed in the response to limits of quantitative methods of research and the growing acceptance that there were other ways knowing. As qualitative research became more accepted, it ruptured and fissured the landscape of social science research (e.g. sociology, anthropology). The resulting gaps offered abundant space and ample opportunities for the social sciences to question, reform, and reconceive the form and goals of its inquires.

Prior to moving forward, I will take a pause and take a brief step back to offer my reader with a brief overview of postmodernism, a philosophical movement that gave qualitative research its footing and autoethnography its presence. I would caution that the following list will grossly simplify the concepts that define postmodernism. But, akin to a list one takes to a grocery store, they are useful in offering a quick overview of what is needed in order to move forward.

Postmodernism, as defined by Lyotard (1984), maintains a disbelief in metanarratives. Written differently, postmodernism is highly skeptical of universal and objective truths. Postmodernism contests the authority of rationalism or the idea that truth can only be derived through empirical methods and intellectual and deductive reasoning. Within the context of postmodernism, the idea of an objective truth was an illusion that was made “real” and hardened through language and text. As Nietzsche (1954) asserted, truth is “a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are” (p. 46-47). For those who can be labeled as postmodernist, such as Nietzsche (1954),

language and text were more than mere forms of communication. Language was also seen as a tool for power and authority. Therefore, language and text could be used to control, oppress, and subjugate when it is unquestioned and unchallenged. Lyotard (1984) later argued that in a postmodern world metanarratives would collapse and spur forth a crisis of representation.

Seeing things as such, “in the wake of war, colonial domination, and the genocide of slavery and the Holocaust, people began to question the ability of enlightenment thinking and objectivist methods” (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, p. 26, 2013) to understand society. Postmodernism emerged in response and as a critique to the themes of rationalism and universal truths, concepts that defined modernist and enlightenment thinking. Questioning the nature of truths, the methods by which these truths were acquired, and seeing the power of language and text, postmodernism works on these concepts:

- (1) an elevation of text and language as the fundamental phenomena of existence
- (2) the application of literary analysis to all phenomena
- (3) a questioning of reality and representation
- (4) a critique of metanarrative
- (5) an argument against method and evaluation
- (6) a focus upon power relations and hegemony
- (7) and a general critique of Western institutions and knowledge (Kuznar, 2008, p.78)

As the social sciences became aware of the limits of scientific knowledge and the importance of human stories, emotions, the human body, social identity, and identity

politics, researchers would begin to embrace qualitative research methods as suitable and legitimate alternative.

Despite qualitative research's growing acceptance within the social sciences, there was growing concern amongst researchers, such as Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008), about whom the research was for and whether the researcher could speak for those who are being studied. As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) have argued:

“qualitative research, in many if not all of its form (observation, participation, interviewing, ethnography), serves as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth. The metaphor works this way. Research, quantitative and qualitative, is scientific. Research provides the foundation for reports about and representation of “*the Other*” (their italics). In the colonial context, research becomes an objective way of representing the dark-skinned Other to the white world” (p. 1).

As Denzin and Lincoln imply, there is a need for qualitative research to question its goals and the methods that researchers use to gather, collect and present information. In other words, Denzin and Lincoln are concerned that qualitative research is another form of colonizing knowledge. Their argument works this way, colonizing nations relied on humanistic disciplines, such as anthropology, to produce knowledge about foreign worlds. The colonizing nation would send an observer to a “foreign setting to study the culture, customs, and habits of another human group” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 2, 2008). As Denzin and Lincoln (2008) points to, these reports were then “incorporated into colonizing strategies, ways of controlling the foreign, deviant, or troublesome Other” (p.2). Left unquestioned and unchallenged, this way of doing things did not change

significantly until the late 1980's (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013).

For Denzin & Lincoln (2008), Jones, Adams & Ellis (2013), the phrase *colonizing power* serves as a metaphor. The metaphor can work in this way. I am an artist teacher. I want to study other artist-teachers. As I conduct my project (an ethnography, case study), my descriptions and understanding of the artist teacher are informed by my education and what I have considered worth knowing, which in turn, is informed by what my society (familial, institutional) has considered worth knowing. Therefore, if I do not question the nature and structure of this knowledge, I may unknowingly restrict my ability to imagine new ways of being an artist teacher.

The idea that qualitative research was colonizing knowledge became a concern for many social scientists. Therefore, social scientists began to develop, theorize, write, and advocate for different ways of knowing, such as autoethnography, to work around and through the problems and pitfalls of qualitative research (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Bochner & Ellis, 2009; Jones, Adams, Ellis, 2013). In the following section, I will briefly discuss autoethnography.

### **Using the self as the site of research. What is autoethnography?**

Autoethnography is defined broadly as a form of qualitative study where the researcher uses their lived experiences as the site of research. Written differently, autoethnography “is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, p.1, 2011). These texts are usually written from a first-person perspective and consists of dialog, emotion, and an attempt by the

author to become self-conscious of how history, social structure, and culture has affected and shaped our understanding (Bochner & Ellis, 2002). By using themselves as the sites of research and writing themselves into the story autoethnographers try to do the following:

- 1.) disrupt the norms of research practice and representation;
- 2.) to work from insider knowledge;
- 3.) to maneuver through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty and making life better
- 4.) break silence and reclaim voice
- 5.) make work accessible (Jones, Adams & Ellis, p. 32, 2013).

While some of the goals of autoethnography are debatable (see Delamont 2007, 2010), what makes the autoethnography a compelling form of qualitative inquiry is the earnestness by which it outlines its goals. Unlike other research method, such as comparative analysis (see Collier & Mahoney, 1996) that accounts for selection bias, autoethnography leaves the bias of the researcher are transparent and more exposed. In other words, autoethnography do not makes claims to objectivity. As Jones, Adams, & Ellis (2013) suggest, it is the assumption of objectivity that is “one of the most problematic notions in traditional social scientific work” (p. 33). Autoethnography does not claim to produce better or more reliable research than other methods. Rather, it is another approach to research that tries to accounts for the personal in an effort to render research as a complex decision-making process that is composed of “intuitive leaps, false starts, mistakes, loose ends, and happy accidents” (Ronai as cited by Jones, Adams, & Ellis, p. 33, 2013).

Whether seen as a method or as “a way of living and of writing life honestly, complexly, and passionately” (Jones, Adams & Ellis, p. 41, 2013), autoethnography has and continues to receive criticism. For researchers who find value in autoethnography, and want to prove the importance of autoethnography to the social science research community, they have responded to the criticisms by attuning autoethnography to address their respective research interests. Thus, this fissured autoethnography into a variety of approaches that puts differing amounts of emphasis on the researcher’s interaction with others, presentation, analysis, and power relationships (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). For instance, for sociologist Norman Denzin, indigenous/native autoethnographies emerged to address, disrupt, and decolonize power in research that is observed as being in service to the colonizer. For Denzin and others who no longer found the subjugation of the other by the colonizer (e.g. White, masculine, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied) inexcusable, they worked to construct their own personal and cultural stories to counteract them. (Denzin 2006; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008) While for others, such as sociologist Carolyn Ellis, reflexive autoethnographies emerged from her interest in understanding how deeply our lives are intertwined with the lives of others.

**Evocative or analytical: do I have to choose; can’t it be both?**

As autoethnography fissured, evolved, and became reflective of the researcher’s goals and interests, the resulting boundaries of what forms an autoethnography expanded. The likelihood that one clear and precise definition of autoethnography became less likely. Yet, autoethnographers such as Anderson (2006), have begun to make a distinction between two forms of autoethnography; evocative and analytical. Even though this divide is a human construct, it will give some sense of definitional clarity. In the

following section, I will briefly touch on what is meant by evocative and analytical autoethnography. I caution my reader with seeing what is to follow as a checklist. In the process of defining and describing the distinctions between an evocative and analytical autoethnography, the listing of certain attributes may function to provide the reader with a sense of what each form of autoethnography should be, in other words, a set of governing rules. Seen as rules, these descriptions can be constrictive and narrow our vision of what an autoethnography could be. On the other hand, if these descriptions are seen as guiding principles, these descriptions can be more constructive. Think of it this way. If I were to tell you what a “rule” of painting\* is, such as, it is the application of paint onto surface, if left unquestioned, the resulting vision of what can be a painting is governed and filtered through this rule. Therefore, a painting can only be a painting when it is paint applied to a flat surface. However, if painting is seen as a guiding principle, painting can become an amenable concept that is more susceptible to play and reinterpretation. The work of Katharina Grosse (fig. 1) characterizes this notion of painting as a guiding principle rather than as a rule. As Ebony writes (2011), Grosse “commingles the diverse tactics of artists such as Robert Smithson (in his earthworks) and Jules Olitski (in his misty Color Field canvases) to create something startlingly new”. Treating painting as a guiding principle, Grosse creates work that works within the parameters of a painting without being limited by the rule that a painting is only when paint is applied to a flat surface. With this in mind, the following descriptions of evocative and analytical autoethnography should be seen as principles rather than rules. Furthermore, as Denzin (2006) points to in his essay *Analytic Autoethnography, or Déjà Vu All Over Again*, it is important to also be aware and critical of the traditions that have

informed our attitudes and proposals, and to ask ourselves whether they (our attitudes, education, and tools) will allow us to do the work we want to do. If it does not, we should move on.

As Anderson (2006) proposes, an analytical autoethnography is a form of autoethnography that follows a more traditional structure of qualitative inquiry in contrast to evocative autoethnography which values the integrity of the authors voice and blurs the boundary between literature and science, and uses “compelling description of subjective emotional experiences [to]create an emotional resonance with the reader” (p. 377). In Anderson’s proposal (2006), he situates five key features that characterizes an analytical autoethnography: 1.) The researcher is a complete member in the research setting; 2.) The researcher tries to be reflexive through analysis; 3.) makes the researcher’s narrative visible 4.) dialogues with others beyond the self; and 5.) is committed to theoretical analysis.

In characterizing the differences between evocative and analytic autoethnography, I find an analogous concept in painting styles. Autoethnography is a painting composed of many different elements (interpretive practices, methods, theoretical frameworks) that blend, overlap, and form new composites. These elements “seem to shape and define one another, and an emotional, gestalt effect is produced” (Denzin & Lincoln, p.6, 2008). As the artist creates their paintings, certain elements of the painting may become emphasized because they attend to certain interests and proclivities. The elements that are more prominent and are expressed gives the painting a certain character and quality. The character and quality of these paintings can then be identified and grouped into a style,

such as realistic or abstract. Autoethnography, it seems, is undergoing a similar process of being grouped and categorized.

For Leon Anderson (2006), his proposal for analytical autoethnography appears to stem from a desire to shape and advocate for an approach to autoethnography that is consistent with traditional modes of qualitative research. Furthermore, Anderson's proposal for analytical autoethnography comes from a place of concern. As Anderson (2006) points to, his concern is the fear that other forms of autoethnography will be obscured or eclipsed because of evocative autoethnography's impressive rise. Thus, Anderson's proposal can be seen as carving a space for another form of autoethnography. Anderson, by outlining certain characteristics and creating a loose framework, gives presence to analytical autoethnography. Yet, for Norman Denzin (2006), Carolyn Ellis, & Arthur Bochner (2006), they see Anderson's proposal and framework as potentially restrictive, thus limiting or silencing the researcher's self (Pace, 2012). Because, as Pace (2012) points to, when a framework, such as the one proposed by Anderson is treated as a prescriptive set of procedures and rules rather than as flexible strategies, it can unintentionally limit, silence, or restrain the researcher.

For a novice researcher, it can be tempting to rely and adhere to a framework to construct a research project. In addition to writing and researching for a project, a novice researcher is also negotiating their own insecurities, anxieties, and frustrations as they are defining themselves as a researcher. It is within this context, where Denzin, Ellis, and Bochner's argument gains traction. As a novice researcher, I am in the process of doing the work and carving out a space for myself. In coming across a form of qualitative inquiry such as autoethnography, a framework such as the one proposed by Anderson is

useful in helping me start and write my autoethnographic project. However, when certain aspects of my project begin to deviate from the framework, I may become distressed and discouraged. In the process of simply getting the project done, I may limit and silence myself by adhering to an established framework.

There are differences between evocative and analytic autoethnography. These particular forms of autoethnography have their strengths and weakness. For instance, evocative autoethnography, through its use of literary and aesthetic techniques and conventions can readily connect with the reader by making the research come alive through descriptive language (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). Showing, rather than telling, the reader why the stories and research matters. As Ellis and Bochner (2006) have recommended while writing an evocative autoethnography, certain elements of analysis and generalization are suspended to avoid losing “the very qualities that make a story a story” (p. 440). Yet, this avoidance of explicit analysis is where evocative autoethnography receives many of criticisms and critiques (see. Sparkes, 2002; Delamont 2007, 2009). On the other hand, analytical autoethnography tries to address this issue by outlining analysis as part of its framework. By making analysis an explicit part of the analytical autoethnography process, researchers can use this framework to remind themselves to move back and forth between the personal and the social and thereby connect personal experience to theoretical perspective. But, as Ellis & Bochner (2002; 2006) and Denzin (2006) have cautioned, a framework however innocuous and well intentioned can become a mandate or rule that restricts the researcher and author from being themselves.

With this in mind, and akin to my practice as an artist, I do not see the elements that characterize and differentiate evocative and analytic autoethnography as rules but as attitudes and tools that will allow me to do the work for this project. For this project, I want to connect with my reader by writing evocatively and with emotion. Yet, through using the analytical autoethnographic framework as proposed by Anderson, I want to work back and forth between the personal and the social. I want to connect my experience with becoming an artist and teacher with the literature I have reviewed and to evoke in my reader a “me, too” moment. I want to show my reader the process of becoming an artist teacher then tell them about it. Finally, I want my project to appear less didactic and something more pedagogical.

**Putting memories into words. Giving it presence.**

Prior to presenting the autoethnographic texts in chapter three, it would be helpful to describe to my reader how these texts were generated. It is important to me and for this project to take these pauses, however brief, to point to and describe the process. As mentioned in the previous section and in the introduction, I want to do more than tell my reader about what I have discovered. I want to describe, point to, and if possible find a strategy that the reader could use for their self-study. Now whether the reader will call what they are doing as an autoethnography is entirely up to reader. What I believe is more important than naming the action, is pointing to the process by which this action takes place. Which for this project is self-reflection and understanding “how autoethnography can be used to move and change selves, communities, and worlds” (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, p. 40, 2013)

In chapter three, the autoethnographic texts I have chosen to write are centered around particular moments and events in my life where elements of my artist teacher identity were shaped, contested, and renegotiated. By focusing in on certain events and memories, such as my identity as an artist and teacher, I gave myself something to search for and examine. Akin to an archeological excavation, this purposeful sectioning of my memory made my project more manageable and gave me a starting point for mapping my artist teacher identity. But where do I start? A good starting point, was to ask myself a question such as *what societal, institutional, relational, and corporeal forces have shaped how I experience my identity as an artist-teacher?* Using this question as a starting point, I keep in mind that the resulting narratives may not answer the question in the most straightforward manner. In revisiting these memories and transcribing them, autoethnography gives me the permission to make my text raw and full of emotion. At this stage of writing my autoethnography, just doing the work and putting my thoughts into writing took precedence over readability and conciseness. As Ellis and Bochner (2006) cautioned, the process of writing an autoethnography can be inhibited if analysis is stressed to early on. Keeping this in mind, Ellis and Bochner's words gave me the permission to make my initial narratives messy. Thus, I made a mess things and let it be. Afterwards, I began the process of sifting through the mess of lived experience and making sense of things. I began by rereading my narratives and analyzing which ones were relevant to my project. This was followed with a healthy amount of revisions and connecting the personal to the social.

As I began the search for meaning, I admit that there was some hesitation. I was new to research and autoethnography. However, autoethnography gave me the

permission to use my live experienced as the site of research and allowed me to make a mess of things. As I began the process of reflecting, making meaning, and connecting the personal with the social, I too, was researching, changing, and evolving. In short, autoethnography's pliability allowed me to do the work for this project and overcome the anxieties that I had with traditional research methods.

In chapter three the following narratives explore through writing how I constructed my artist teacher identity. I will analyze these events to uncover, discover, and acknowledge the bias and subjectivities that formed my idea of the artist teacher identity. In revealing these bias and subjectivities to myself, I hope to unsettle my view of the artist teacher as a title to be acquired and to imagine the artist teacher identity as an action to be carried out. In preparing and presenting these autoethnographic texts, I acknowledge that I am not the only individual who has experienced the tensions of negotiating and reconciling multiple identities, however, in sharing my stories I want to offer different a perspective and approach to understanding the artist teacher identity.

### CHAPTER 3: THESE ARE THE STORIES I CHOOSE TO TELL

“Once a journey is designed, equipped, and put in process; a new factor enters and takes over. A trip, a safari, an exploration, is an entity, different from all other journeys. It has personality, temperament, individuality, uniqueness. A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike. And all plans, safeguards, policing, and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us” (John Steinbeck, 1962. p. 3)

I came into graduate school with a set plan. It was to graduate with a Masters, so that I could move on to pursue doctoral work. However, when I arrived at the university and began to do the work, I began to feel out of place. I do not know what it was or why graduate school had become so difficult, but it was starting to burden my being. I enjoyed learning and writing prior to graduate work but I felt unsettled now, why? To be honest, I felt many things. I felt unwanted. I felt like I had made a mistake. I felt like I had taken the wrong path. I wanted to be me, yet being me, seemed difficult. It was not the fault of my adviser, the faculty, or even my peers. They were all amiable and supportive of my being, I just felt very insecure about who I was now, within the context of academia. I felt alone. I had an identity before I got here, but I was starting to question it now. How does one define themselves? How does one find their way? I loved art and education, but in this new place, I was starting to become disenchanted. I wanted to make artwork, yet, most of my time was spent reading and writing. Was this what art education was about? What happen to the art in art education? I felt like I was I I was afraid of

becoming disenchanted with the program, and consequently, art and education. I needed to give myself some distance. I did not want art and education to become something I dreaded talking or thinking about, like a scornful ex-lover. I began to look for love and affection in other places. I began hanging out with the Masters of Fine Arts students, because I still wanted to be seen as an artist. My identity as a teacher, although important, was not as important as my identity as an artist. What was it about being an artist that made it so enchanting? Why did my identity as an artist still have a hold on me despite devoting nine years to public school art education?

This question would linger for some time. It was always in the back of my mind. A personal quest that I thought I would fulfill after I had finished my Masters degree. Yet, as I continued my work in graduate school, by the second semester of coursework, I had lost my sense of purpose. Why was I here? Was it really for my students or for me? I felt like I was just going through the ebb and flow of school at this point. In, out, done, repeat. In, out, done, repeat. I did the coursework and wrote the essays that were needed. But, that gave me no personal fulfillment. This felt demoralizing. I just wanted to go home. I just wanted to throw in towel and quit. Yet, I stayed. I stayed because of the people, because the conversations I had in and out of class were fruitful and generative. As summer and fall rolled around, I still had a difficult time coming up with a research topic despite the topic of identity being in the back of my mind. Maybe the idea of identity seemed overdone, maybe it felt too simple, whatever the reason, the topic of identity would not become the focus of this project until much later. By fall of 2015, I had thrown out thesis idea after thesis idea, but I was afraid of committing to just one idea and following through. Maybe it was out of the fear of

making it perfect or maybe it was the pressure of having to make a substantial contribution to knowledge. Either way, I had trouble committing. I made the promise of finishing my thesis in the fall, but I fell through on my commitment. By this time, my insecurities were getting the best of me. I wanted to get my thesis done, but I had so much difficulty getting it started. Once again, it felt like I needed to take a break and recollect myself. I needed to take care of my relationship and myself, I needed to sew myself back together before I totally unraveled at the ends.

After winter break came and went, and I had time to reflect. I doubled down on my efforts to complete my thesis. After taking a class with Norman Denzin in the fall, I felt reassured, through exploring the concept of identity in his seminar class, that a project exploring the artist teacher identity was worth doing. Why it took two years to realize that, I do not know. But, in writing this project, I feel that my issues with identity and negotiating what it means to be an artist, teacher and researcher had something to do with it. After winter break, I told myself, after reading article after article about the artist teacher identity, that the artist teacher was more about action and less about what the term denotes. For example, after reading, Michael Day's Artist-Teacher: A Problematic Model for Art Education (1986), I was troubled by the notion that the artist as an individual who places a high premium on individualism. With the advent of social practice art, which encourages social engagement and collaboration, Day's description of an artist becomes dated. Yet, it had me thinking. Who is this artist teacher that I speak of, and who is this artist teacher to me?

### **Becoming the teacher and artist.**

Around the first week of March 2005, I had started the process of becoming a certified teacher. During the first three months, I went through pre-service training. As the name might imply, I was training, rather than learning, to be a teacher in the classroom. As I recall, the alternative educator certification program in the interest of training teacher as quickly as possible, paid no specific attention to a specific field of study unless you were teaching English language arts, mathematics, or science. Consequently, the coursework for art teacher preparation was generalized. What the program trained us to do was how to create a lesson plan and keep control of the classroom. Otherwise, other aspects of art teacher education (that I would experience later in graduate school), such as writing a teaching philosophy and discussing art education literature were not covered. Taking into consideration the program's brief three-month duration and the lack of art educators facilitating the learning experience, this undertaking would have been difficult to do. By consequence, I did not have the mentors, resources, space nor time to analyze and theorize my practice as an artist or teacher.

As the three-month teacher training ended and the required certification and content exams were completed, I was given the choice to either complete my teacher certification through unpaid clinical teaching under an experienced art teacher or teach in a classroom under a probationary license. Out of my own eagerness to work and to receive a stable income, I opted for the latter. Supplied with three months of training and about a month of experience teaching at a community art center, I would get the

opportunity to teach art at a school of 800+ students in a school located in a northwest suburb of Houston in fall of 2005.

Charting a new course in life as an artist teacher, I was optimistic and ready to start despite my lack of experience. I dove into teaching headfirst and by the third week, quickly and secretly wanted a way out. Despite, the training and preparation I received, nothing, it seemed, could prepare me fully for the complexities of the classroom.

Due to difficulties, such as managing student behavior and an apathetic mentor, my first year of public school teaching was difficult, lonely, and miserable. If it were not for the continual encouragement and support of my principal, the music teacher, family, and friends, I would have most likely quit. Through their words, I found the energy and determination to continue teaching. I also began acknowledging during this time, that if I wanted to become a better art teacher, I needed to devote a large part of my time and energy to doing just that the following year.

As my first year of teaching came and went, I spent the second year reorganizing my life and priorities around my career as a teacher. Out of my anxieties of being an effective teacher and the fear of losing my job, I, with Sonia's help, began creating a schedule to budget our time. As Sonia and I allotted time for activities such as cooking, exercising, cleaning sleeping, grading, lesson planning, and teaching, we realized that art making would have to happen on the weekends, after school right before we went to bed, which was around 11 P.M. and during our summers off.

We reluctantly accepted the idea that we could not devote as much time to our artistic practice. However, we wanted to be good teachers. Therefore, it seemed like a necessary sacrifice at that time. As we, devoted more and more time to improving our

respective teaching practice, we began to see the benefits of doing so in our classrooms. My students began to respect me more and were more willing to accept the advice and guidance I offered. While my lesson plans, which were simple and clumsy at the beginning of my teaching career, became increasingly refined, creative, and challenging. More importantly, through these positive teacher growth experiences, I no longer lamented the decision to pursue a career in teaching.

By my second year in the classroom, teaching had become enjoyable and fruitful, but at what cost? Even though, I no longer regretted the choice to become an art teacher, but my identity as an artist became increasingly unclear. As I relegated my artistic practice to weeknights and weekends, I felt like I had lost the dedication and discipline I felt was necessary to be an artist. As I devoted more time to improving my practice as a teacher, I felt that I was spending less time making, exhibiting, and curating art. Consequently, I no longer contributed to the Houston's art community in the same capacity I had as an undergraduate. I felt like I failed as an artist, because I was no longer an active and productive member of my artistic community. This made the adage, "those who can, do; does who can't, teach" (penned by George Benard Shaw 1903 in "Maxims for Revolutionist" in *Man and Superman*) scathing and all too real.

Experiencing growing frustration, I feared that if I continued to teach I would eventually lose my artist identity and an essential part of how I identified in the world. I contemplated quitting and desired a different career, other than teaching, a career that would not take time away from my artistic practice. However, the fear of no longer having insurance to attend to my illness and a steady income made quitting an unviable choice. Even then, I constantly flirted with the thought of quitting. Could I teach but still

make art, or was there a different way. By the third year of teaching I would start flirting with different ways of expressing my artist identity in the classroom to remedy my sense of loss.

### **Becoming the artist and teacher.**

Wrestling with my identity as an artist and teacher, I began easing the frustration and doubt by expressing my identity as an artist in the classroom. During my third year of teaching, I began interweaving my teaching and artist identities. Growing exhausted of an apathetic mentor and a lack of accessible art education resources, my early efforts to interweave my teaching and artist identities was borne out of necessity. I remember vividly the event that had lead up to this moment. It was sometime near the end of my second year of teaching. Throughout my pre-service teacher training, I was taught that I needed to keep discipline in the classroom, otherwise chaos and disrespect would be inevitable. Now, when I was told that I needed to be consistent, I took it to mean with everything, procedures, rules, consequences, and even the orientation of a student's paper. The event that would cause me to revisit my own experience as a student unfolded like such. I had just finished showing to a fourth-grade class how to draw a fish for a project where they were creating an underwater environment. As I began picking students to help me hand out the materials to the class, a student raised their hand to ask me a question. They asked me, "Mr. H, can I draw on the paper this way?" I looked down at their paper and noticed it had been turned vertically. I looked at the student and told them no. The student gave me a look, one of disgust. I tried to rationalize my actions with the student and with myself. I told myself, that is was for the better. That it was about having consistency in my classroom. That it was necessary for my students to follow my

procedures accurately. I told the student, “sorry, but you need to follow my instructions”. Luckily, for me the student did what he was told. However, I felt horrible. I tried to see myself in the student’s shoes. Would I have wanted my teacher to tell me something similar, no! I would have never survived my undergraduate coursework, if my professors said that I needed to paint as a painting major. I begin to notice that what I had been trained to do, such as maintaining classroom discipline, conflicted with what I wanted to do as a teacher. I began reflecting on my time as a student, specifically from high school through undergraduate work, to find the teachers that were the most influential in shaping my identity as an artist. I thought about moments where they had said or done something that left an indelible mark on my being. If I saw them as good teachers as a student, they must have been doing something right. In wanting to reshape my identity as a teacher, I looked towards those that have helped shaped me into who I am know and who I want to be.

### **Looking back, to look forward.**

So, I first began thinking about Mrs. S, my high school art teacher. She was a tough, yet loving teacher. She would always push her students to produce the best work that they could, and she would tell us if it was “shit”. Even though she refrained from using such language during school hours, when a bunch of us would stay after school to work, “proper” language would take a back seat on occasion. I remember feeling proud of being in Mrs. S’s class. To be in Mrs. S’s class, was to be on the winning team. I remember going to various art competitions around the Houston area, where Mrs. S and her high school students would rack up rewards after rewards. I mean the rewards were great and all, but that was not what made Mrs. S great. When I think about what made

Mrs. S great, it was her trust and sincerity. Being in Mrs. S' class, I remember drawing and painting a lot from life. Mrs. S loved drawing from life. She would frown if we were using photos as a reference for a self-portrait. Yet, despite Mrs. S' penchant and insistence on drawing and painting from life, she trusted that each of us, her students, would do our best work. She never stood over our shoulders to make sure we were on task, she just trusted that it would get done. I remember sometimes when we, the students, got bored or became frustrated with our work we would play a game of chess or futz around on the computer. I do not remember her ever scolding us for being off task. Though on occasion she would remind us of our project's deadline, as a way of simply saying, you need to get this done. That trust she had in us, was something I wanted to carry over into my own practice. However, that was not the only thing I wanted to carry over from Mrs. S. I also wanted to carry over her honesty. Mrs. S had a way of telling us what we needed to hear. Sometimes what she had to say was the painful truth, other times, it her voicing her concern in such a way that it lashed you like a loving mother's scorn. How many times do you get to hear a teacher say in an after-school work session that a color your friend choose to use in his painting looks like baby shit brown. It seems strange now, even to me, that a teacher would or could say such a thing. However, as a student from a low-income family, I appreciated that she was being "real", being herself, rather than trying to save us from ourselves.

Mrs. S' trust and honesty were some of the qualities that I wanted to include in my teacher toolbox, but what about my artist toolbox? Who or what would fill that toolbox? For me, Professor H, was the epitome of both who I wanted to be as an artist but

also as a teacher. Professor H, reminded me a lot of Mrs. S, except she was a few inches shorter and had short black hair.

I did not get to have Professor H until my junior and senior year of college. I remember my first encounter with Professor H. It unfolded like this. I had just signed up for a course titled advanced drawing. I remember signing up for the course because it had the word advance in it. I felt that if I wanted to get better at drawing, I should take a course labeled advance drawing, it seemed simple and straightforward. Yet, I was perplexed by the class's "selective" enrollment. What did that mean? Did that mean I had to provide a portfolio of work to be accepted into the class? Either way, the course description told anyone who was interested in this class to come the first day. Thursday, 5:00 p.m. rolled around. It was time for Professor H's course. I remember arriving to her course and quickly taking a mental inventory of who was in her class. In a way, I was sizing up the competition. However, doing so would make me feel insecure very quickly. I was the only junior student who had enrolled for the class. I thought to myself, shit, there was no way I was going to get in, especially, if I was competing against graduate and senior students for the coveted fifteen spots. Yet, I stuck around and heard what she had to say about the course. She did not say much except for, fill out this statement of intent and turn it into me before Wednesday of next week. For those of you that are selected, please check the door to this classroom on Wednesday. I took the form and filled it out at home.

First name: Michael

Last name: Ho

Level: Junior

What is your interest in enrolling in advanced drawing and how do you think it will benefit you: I want to take advanced drawing because...

I finished filling out the form over the weekend and turned it in on Tuesday when I got back onto campus. As Wednesday rolled around, I remember waiting anxiously for the list to see if I was accepted. I was okay with not getting in. I had already talked myself through it. When 5:00 p.m. rolled by, the list was there on the door. I walked from my junior block studio down the hall and toward the classroom door. As I scanned the list, I noticed it was arranged alphabetically by last name. A...B...C...D...E...F...G...Ho. What?! Did I read that right? I got in. That Thursday, those who were selected went to her class and received a syllabus for her course. The first assignment for Professor H's course was to make something ephemeral from something non-ephemeral, or to make something non-ephemeral from something ephemeral. I was taken aback. I thought this was a drawing class, where was the drawing. I remember a student on the first day, asking the same question. To which her response, was you can draw if you like, however, we are also treating the word drawing as a concept. We did not do much that first day except discuss our ideas. Afterwards, Professor H told us the structure of the class.

It looked something like this:

First week on Thursday: project introduction

Second week on Thursday: work session outside of class

Third week on Thursday: progress critique, bring works in progress\

Fourth week on Thursday: completed project critique

Each project took a month to complete; consequently, we only had the opportunity to work on four projects in each semester.

When time came for our first projects to be installed for critique, I remember shoddily hanging the oversize raindrops I had made from polyester resin from the ceiling using tape. There it was my project for all to see. I was happy with my piece, but also critical of how it turned out. When it came time for my critiques, I was started off being highly critical of myself, I mentioned how disappointed I was, that certain elements such as the raindrop turned out. Professor H, seemed impressed with my level of modesty, and had remarked “self-effacing and self-redeeming all in one, I like that.” Perplexed by her vocabulary, I nodded and took it as a compliment. Throughout our time together, Professor H would teach me how see things as concepts, to push the boundaries of what could be, and to not be limited by my medium, and letting my ideas shape the form and delivery. What Professor H taught me to do, was to look at the possibilities of thing, the what if. However, this was not the only gift that Professor H gave me, she also taught me what it meant to be truly forgiving and understanding.

The events that led up to Professor H’s moment of genuine forgiveness and understanding unfolded as such. It was 11 a.m. on a Tuesday. A group of us thought it would be fun to go drinking on campus. We hopped into the elevator, went down to the first floor, and walked to a satellite cafeteria on campus. We went down stairs and decided that a barbeque restaurant would be where we would get our pitchers of beer. 1...2...3...4...5...6, we had begun to lose count of how many pitchers of beer the six of us had consume. We were all extremely inebriated by 2:00 p.m., in the afternoon. I remember that the six of us stumbled back to the art building in a drunken stupor. It was embarrassing to be so intoxicated by 2:00 p.m., however, I think all of us, were too drunk to I even care. I remember getting in to the elevator and getting out on the fourth floor,

we were drunken mess. As we stumbled back into our studios, I remembered seeing Professor H outside having a smoke. She gave us all a look of concern. She did not address the situation at the moment. However, once some of us had slept off our drunkenness, I remember seeing Professor H going around and having a personal conversation with each one of us. I had stepped outside to have a cigarette break Professor H joined me. As we both had our cigarettes, she told me how disappointed she was in me, but that she also understood what would drive us to do something so impulsive. She empathized with me by recalling her own story of being a restless child who rode her bike on a highway and her drug use in the late 1980's and early 1990's. I was surprised by her honesty. Once again, much like Mrs. S., she was not trying to save me from myself. She just said that she understood. She was not trying to be a teacher, an individual who was trying to educate me; rather, at this moment she was being a human showing her own flaws. After about half an hour, she closed with, do not waste this opportunity, you have a purpose if you are here in this program. Throughout, the rest of my time at the University of Houston, I would spend quite a bit of time talking with Professor H. when I had the chance. We would talk about anything that came to mind. Sometimes, it would be about my muscular dystrophy, other times it was about my brother, and other times it was about art. In the end, when I left the University of Houston, Professor H had imparted on me her qualities of forgiveness and understanding, and the penchant for seeing most things in terms of what if.

### **Using my toolbox, reconstructing the artist teacher.**

Sparked by own mistakes as a teacher, I made the decision to reshape my artist teacher identity so that I could better attend to my students. Consisting mostly of self-

reflection, my early attempts to braid these two identities, resulted in a teaching practice that was heavily-informed by my education in the fine art, my past experience with Mrs., S and Professor H, and my practice as an artist. When I began to incorporate elements of trust, honesty, forgiveness that I had learned through my own education into my teaching practice, the more enjoyable teaching became for me. I was no longer resorting to the teacher training I had received, which I felt had given me the sense that teaching consisted of varying parts of classroom management, assessment, and imparting my knowledge onto students, my time with Professor H, taught me to see the “what if”. By the third year of teaching, I felt encouraged by my time with Professor H, to create plans that evoked a sense of mystery and/or element of chance. I am ashamed to say this, but when I first started teaching, I used many cookie cutter plans. It was not because I could not come up with my own plans. Rather, it was a tactic, to divert my time and energy towards getting a hang of classroom management. To make do with what I had, to get by, to fake it, until you make it. Teaching, or at least getting better at it takes time. I can say that by my third year in the classroom, I felt like I was doing more than simply showing my students how to use a brush, I was also beginning to show them that art, thanks to Professor H, was also a way of thinking. This felt like a healthy and happy middle ground. Sure, I still wanted more time to make my own work. However, by incorporating some of my artistic training and practice into my teaching, I made teaching a bit more palatable; a bit more bearable. I was really starting to enjoy this thing called teaching.

### **Becoming the artist and teacher x 2.**

By the fourth year of teaching, I had begun working at a different school and Sonia, my partner, became certified to teach art in Texas. Now that both of us were

teaching art, we could negotiate our artist teacher identities together. Even though, I had already begun interweaving my artist and teacher identities by my third year of teaching, a part of me still desired to express my identity as an artist. However, it would be more than just my desire, it would be our, Sonia and my, desire. By now, Sonia and I have been in a steady relationship for four years. As a trained artist, herself, we both shared a mutual dream of being able to sustain ourselves from our art. Much like journey, Sonia also started teaching as well. Unlike me though, Sonia desire to be an artist was significantly stronger than my own. In many ways, Sonia's desire to be an artist sustained my own dreams of being an artist. While her continual encouragement allowed me to find the energy and time to apply to opportunities to nurture my identity as an artist. Thus, I began this chapter of my life by applying to an artist residency at a local art center in Houston. The application did not make it to the final round, and I did not get the residency. However, now that some of our student loans had been paid off, we thought it would be an opportune time to get a studio.

Therefore, in 2010, Sonia and I would lease our first studio from a friend who had begun renovating a downtown Houston warehouse into artist studio spaces. We were fortunate that he had a space we could lease. I also think he appreciated that it was friends, rather than a stranger, that were renting from him. We provided him with a source of income, and in return, he provided us with a space to make and exhibit art work.

In this space, separate from our home and work, Sonia and I felt like we were artist again, albeit on the occasional weeknights and weekends. At first, the forty-five-minute drive did not seem so bad. Sonia and I had scheduled Fridays and Saturdays as

our studio day. Therefore, on the weekends, we would drive down to our studios to make our art, and if we needed to, we would grade or mat or student's artwork. However, that happened very infrequently. Throughout our two years at that space, we made a small body of work and exhibited art in some local shows, however, driving forty-five minutes to and forty-five minutes from our studio was becoming a significant time commitment. In 2012, after some debating and searching, we moved from our studio of two years to a new space ten minutes away from our home. By shortening the commute to our studio to ten minutes, we gave ourselves more incentive to make art after we were done teaching. It worked well for the both of us. Our teaching practice also seemed to benefit from it as well. Besides being a space where we could make art, our studio gave us a place to grade student assignments, devise and experiment with new lesson plans and materials, and develop multiple curricular units. Our studio was more than our personal playground it also became a test bed for our classroom.

### **A beginning starts with an end.**

Yet, despite balancing what seems like a healthy studio practice with our teaching practice, I was not entirely content with my profession as a teacher. A part of me stayed restless and unsure whether teaching, at least in public schools, would be my lifelong profession. I had other ambitions and I was unsure whether teaching would allow me to pursue my desire to be a working artist as well. In 2014, after teaching for nine years, I made the decision to pursue graduate school hoping that I would discover a different way of balancing my love for art and education. I thought that graduate school would give me the time to figure this out. Given access, albeit brief, to extensive resources and materials and most importantly time, I could expand my research tool set and pursue this project of

understanding my artist teacher identity. Something that was difficult to do while ii was teaching. As I have learned through writing my autoethnographic thesis, my artist teacher identity continues to be shape and formed my past and present experiences with art and education. In other words, my identity as an artist teacher is always evolving and in a constant state of change. The stories I selected for this thesis are just a few that have helped me better understand how current societal and institutional forces have influenced my artist teacher identity.

As an individual who is constantly negotiating my artist teacher identity, this process of reflecting upon and transcribing my experiences to better understand my identity will be a common and welcome occurrence. As I have learned, reflecting upon one's life with a serious eye should not be a burden or busy work done to acquire an education or a degree. I believe that those who become involved with art and education, such as art teachers or teaching artist, should reflect on their experiences with it since inquiry, learning, teaching, and art making are all continual processes. As my project illustrated, my artist teacher identity is reflective of how I interpreted, internalized, and expressed my experiences with art and education. By revisiting and reexamining my past and present experiences with art and education through autoethnography I uncovered a few of the forces that have shaped my identity as an artist teacher. Furthermore, by using autoethnography, I could construct a richer more inclusive idea of the artist teacher.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### **Findings.**

In this section I will draw out findings from my autoethnography to point towards theories that helped me understand and articulate what I experienced. In writing an autoethnography, I explored an aspect of myself through writing (Richardson, 2000). However, through careful curation the reader only sees stories that are closely connected to the goals of this project. For example, there were several pages of reflective writing about my identity as a Vietnamese American. However, I felt that this information even though it was important for my own journey, was more information than I felt necessary to answer the question of *how does autoethnography allow me to see identity as something that emerges from within through thoughtful action, critical reflection, and sustained attunement?*

In writing out these histories, I started to explore what Denzin (2013) refers to as the “sting of memory” (p.126), a moment of an epiphany. Autoethnography is a form of inquiry that allows individuals, such as the artist teacher, to look deeply at themselves (Pente, 2004). Through revisiting the past, I renegotiate within the present a path forward that attempts to address some of the misgivings and missteps of the past. Furthermore, autoethnography gave me an opportunity to inquire whether certain practices were desirable and productive for my identity as an artist teacher.

As these stories were put into words and text onto screen, it allowed me to recognize and map certain patterns and proclivities that allowed me to create a list of recurring key words. These words, when put into something such as a search engine or library catalog,

helped me discover relevant literature that may help in theorizing what was taking place. These words made the immaterial material by giving a name to an event and/or experience.

For instance, in writing my stories about how Mrs. S helped shaped my artist and later my teacher identity, I forwarded the notion that to be in Mrs. S' class, meant you were on the winning team, that by being alongside Mrs. S you would be rewarded for your efforts. Furthermore, in earlier reflections which I did not include in this project, the term acceptance and recognition with respect to identity came up often. Wanting to acquire a deeper understanding of identity, I searched for literature about identity work. This led me to theories of identity work by Erikson and Marcia. Their theories helped me develop an understanding of identity and identification and allowed me to form some tentative conclusions about identity.

### **Identity as a process, or how does one know and reveal their emerging identities as artist teacher?**

Reexamining my memories through writing, I might have experienced what Erik Erikson (1968) conceptualizes in his theory of identity development as the stage of identity vs. role confusion. For Erikson's, identity vs. role confusion, is marked by a period where one has a strong desire to re-examine their identity to figure out who they are and how they fit into society. As they explore various possibilities, they begin to shape their identity based on the outcomes of their explorations. However, when an individual is unsuccessful in establishing some sense of identity, this leads to an identity crisis. In Erikson's (1968) *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, his stages of personality development proved useful in helping me understand some of the challenges I had with my identity.

Despite the usefulness of Erikson's theories, his theories also implied that identity, at some point in our adult lives will be resolved and that there will be some sort of closure. As my stories illustrate, identity does not always form neatly, if ever. Therefore, if identity work were continuous, influenced, and co-constructed by those around me, this would mean that as my relationship to them changes, so does a part of me.

Struggling with making Erikson's theories work for me, I found that the theories of James. E Marcia (1993), which built on top of Erikson's theories, useful in explaining identity work as a process. Marcia's work, which built on top of Erikson's contribution to our understanding of identity development, introduced four levels of identity status. These levels, foreclosure, identity diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement, are used to signify how identity is either conferred or constructed. In foreclosure, identity is conferred, thus the individual commits to an identity without exploration. A brief example of this would be when someone calls me an artist. If I do not explore what it means to be an artist or teacher, I have already foreclosed on my identity.

With the stage of identity diffusion, Marcia defines this stage as an individual's unwillingness to either explore or make commitments to an identity. An individual, being in this state of indecision does not experience much anxiety since they have not put much investment into an identity. An example of this would be my experiences early on with teaching. As I went into teaching, I kept changing myself, adapting, and performing my teacher identity out of survival and my identity as an artist took a backseat because I did not feel at the time that it was necessary for my growth as an educator. Eventually, my identity as artist reemerged and became something I began to care deeply about once more. When I began to care about my identity as an artist, I began to invest into it, to explore

what being an artist meant to me. In doing so, I shifted into what Marcia coins as identity moratorium and identity achievement. During identity moratorium, an individual still has not made any firm commitments to their identity but are actively exploring the possibilities. Those in moratorium are “like trapeze performers, holding on to the bar of the past while swinging toward that of the future, often with much of the vacillation, fear, intensity, and excitement” (Marcia. 1993, p. 9). When an individual has experienced identity crisis, undergone identity exploration, and have made commitments to an identity, they arrive at a stage that Marcia coins as identity achievement. However, what was worth noting was Marcia’s acknowledgment that identity continually shifts and develops into adult life. As we shift from an identity that is conferred, as with foreclosure, to one that is constructed we experience what Marcia conceptualizes as the moratorium and achievement (MAMA) cycle. In this cycle, individuals experience an event that causes uncertainty in their identity. When these events occur, an individual undergoes a process of re-constructing their identity. During this process of identity reconstruction an individual will still find some continuity with an earlier identity, however, their newly constructed identity has broadened to include a wider range of lived experiences and commitments (Marcia, 2003).

As my stories, illustrate I underwent this cycle of moratorium and achievement throughout the course of my life. As time passed, the periods between these MAMA cycles have increased and I have become more comfortable with who I am as individual, with my identity, and how I choose to identify. I believe that my interest in the artist teacher identity stems partially from being unable to resolve my own identity and partially from experiencing an event, such as graduate school that has caused me to experience a state of identity disequilibrium. As Marcia (2003) has theorized, it is from this uneasiness that I

find and create an opportunity for myself to revisit past identities and to re-examine how I have constructed my identity, as I did through my autoethnography. It is during this process of identity re-construction, to understand how I am, who I am, that I begin to broaden how I define myself in order to accommodate new experiences and commitments.

**Revisiting the past, or how have I experienced key points in my journey of becoming an artist teacher?**

Through using a form of inquiry such as autoethnography, I could relive, albeit through memory, past experiences that were important in shaping my understanding of what it means to be an artist teacher. Through this written this thesis, I looked and relooked at these experiences to see, feel, and understand their impact on my being. What is difficult to illustrate to my reader, is the continual process of writing and rewriting these experiences. Much like rubbing a piece of fabric against a rough surface and causing the threads to fray, each time I revisited these memories and put them into words, certain threads begin to emerge. Through playing with the parts of my memory that I have frayed from the fabric of my life, I began to see how others' lives were woven into my own. Autoethnography served as one form of inquiry that I use to experience key points in my journey of becoming an artist teacher. Part of the difficulty in deploying autoethnography was keeping a delicate dance between the reader and the author, the past and the present, thinking and action. As an author of an autoethnography, there is a desire to offer the steps that I felt are necessary for moving forward, however, sometimes I may offer too many steps and this may cause the reader or the author to stumble. However, in writing an autoethnography what I have been encouraged to do is to revisit and rewrite these memories as a way of practicing the steps to this delicate dance and to see if any of these

steps need revision. Much like dancing, I can only get better at doing something such as reflection and research, by doing it.

**Interwoven or what societal, institutional, and corporeal forces have shaped how I experience my identity as an artist teacher?**

I am acknowledging and seeing how my identity is interwoven with the societies, institutions, and individuals around me. As I wrote, revisited personal memories, and began reviewing the literature, I began to see how much of my own issues with the artist teacher identity stemmed from unresolved questions and unchallenged assumptions I had of each identity. Through writing, I began to uncover and reveal to myself how I constructed a particular idea of the artist and teacher. In offering these stories to my reader, I focused my attention on my experiences with two teachers and how they shaped aspects of my artist teacher identity. However, what I did not explore in depth were the assumptions about the artist and teacher I had during that time. For instance, as a youth in high school practicing art, Mrs. S did not question the individualistic nature of my artistic practice. In that regards, if I continued to see my practice as an artist as solely an individualistic pursuit, I might have acknowledged in part, some of Michael Day's (1986) concern that an artist is a "individualist nonconformist [who] is not compatible with the performance of many teaching responsibilities that require placing the welfare of students first" (p. 40). Yet, in writing my autoethnography, I became aware that Day's notion of the artist teacher was eventually revised and overwritten by my experience with Professor H. Who despite her identity and career as a professional artist, which Day sees as conflicting with the responsibilities of teaching, showed qualities of forgiveness and openness that influenced my practice and my identity as a teacher. Through this process of writing which

autoethnography afforded me, I can see how societal, institutional, and corporeal forces in the past have shaped who I am now. Writing prolifically through an autoethnographic form helped me sketch out and map out particular events and people in my life that helped me shaped my conception of the artist teacher and to challenge those that may cause me difficulty.

### **Palimpsest or how have I used autoethnography in (re)constructing my identity?**

As Jones, Adams & Ellis (2013) write, autoethnography can be a method “for figuring out life and writing through difficult experience” (p.35). When I began this thesis, I wanted to figure out why I still had issues with seeing myself as an artist teacher. This was a considerable source of stress for me, since as my stories situates, my identity as an artist formed prior to my identity as a teacher. The quickness with which I was thrown into the profession of teaching made it difficult to resolve and reconcile my dual identities. Written differently, I found myself becoming a teacher through circumstance. In this moment of being thrown off balance and acknowledging the responsibilities of a new profession I found myself in, my identity as an artist seemed like an unnecessary burden, because I feared that my training as an artist would interfere with keeping proper classroom management and expectations. Yet, my direct experiences with art and being amongst individuals, who may have had the label artist, art professors, and artist teacher, would fundamentally shape my identity and philosophy as an artist teacher and helped me with my teaching. Finally, what autoethnography helped me realize as well is that change takes time. Autoethnography as a process is akin to sanding layer of paint off a wood table to expose the grains that hold the table together. This process of reflecting, of moving between past and present, like the sanding, takes effort, time, and openness. As

the “grains” of experiences are exposed, some of them help me to do the work I want to do while others can become counter-productive. So, in the spirit of Denzin (2006), when I find that a momentary conception of the artist teacher identity no longer helps me to do the work I want to do, I need to move on. I need to overwrite it and rewrite a new path forward. More importantly, this movement forward is achieved through work and not whether I call myself an artist teacher, artist-teacher, artist, and teacher. Even though, identity is important in situating ourselves in relation to our social group when terms like artist and teacher are deployed uncritically, meaning without asking ourselves what these terms mean, it can be addictive and destructive (Kilburn, 1996). An identity such as the artist, when essentialized, can function like a walled garden that one creates to confirm a particular form of existence in contrast and separate from the individuals, societies, and institutions that surround it. This is a precarious existence. In this situation, the cross-pollination for example with the teacher identity is feared because it might contaminate a particular ideal of what it means to be an artist or teacher, however, if identity is used carefully and strategically, “it can be effective in dismantling unwanted structures or alleviating suffering” (Kilburn, 1996). As clear in the work of Zwirn, Daichendt, and Horwat, the artist teacher becomes a hybrid identity used to question and dismantle the structures that make having to forefront the artist identity a necessary task to confirm a way of being that is made out to be counterproductive to the responsibilities and goals of teacher. As their work illustrated, that is not the case. More importantly, through reading the narratives of participants in both Zwirn’s and Horwat’s studies, I see the importance of continuing to do the work we want to do. If I want to be seen as an artist and teacher, I begin by sowing the seeds by enacting these identities through doing. Afterwards, I

sustain my identity as an artist teacher by being close to others who enact these identities the way I want to. This act of being close to others who enact the kind of artist teacher I want to be nourishes my ambitions and provides me with an opportunity and a path to fulfill my goals. As I have realized through reflecting on my journey to becoming an artist teacher, discomfort will be an emotion I will experience time and again as I am exposed to different ways of becoming an artist teacher. What I have discovered through writing this autoethnography is that my feelings of discomfort stem from being exposed to various ways of being an artist teacher that challenge my ideas and preconceptions of the artist teacher identity that were informed by my past experiences. However, when I allowed my preconceptions of the artist teacher to be challenged and remained open and susceptible to change, I created the conditions that would allow me to develop a hybrid identity that allowed me sustain my desire to become an artist and teacher. Lastly, through writing this autoethnography, I acknowledge that patience and selflessness is also key. As I continue to do the work I want to do and be the artist teacher I want to be, I have begun to acknowledge that what I sow may not bear the fruits of my labor as quickly as I would like or that I will have the opportunity to enjoy these fruits. However, despite my inability to see or even reap the fruits of my labor, I continue to do the work I want to do with the lingering hope that my labor and fruit will help others to sustain and achieve their own goals of being an artist teacher.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

### **Conclusions.**

My story, is also the “story of the people who inhabit my life world, it is a story of us” (Poulos, p. 476, 2013). I started this thesis with the goal of understanding who I was as an artist teacher. I also wanted to understand why I had trouble reconciling my identity as an artist and teacher. Throughout the course of this thesis, before and during its writing, I arrived at a conclusion that the biggest obstacle to seeing myself as an artist teacher is myself. Furthermore, I became aware that my identity is interwoven with the lives of those who have and will influence me. In reading articles, relevant to the artist teacher identity, such as Day (1986), I saw how particular notions of the artist teacher identity are momentary and can become dated. When identities such as the artist and teacher are seen as rigid concepts it becomes easy to forget how these identities are shaped by and through our experiences with individuals and institutions. I speculate that by envisioning the artist teacher as an action we can begin to have a more productive conversation about whether our actions sustain the work we want to do rather than whether we are being an artist or teacher. In completing this thesis, I ask myself, am I simply defined by just two identities, that of the artist and the teacher? I believe that my identity is more layered and complex than that. I believe Rolling (2004) said it best, “As I write about my body, it feels strong and uncertain. It is a child again. I can kick my legs out. I can move my body wherever I choose. I can tell about its strength. I can paint it. I can sing it. I can stomp it. I can reconstruct the fragments of my broken body. I can move it near to other bodies, blend my body with other selves. Past selves. No body will be

discarded. I can be beautiful. I can (re)imagine. I can say my new and changing names” (Rolling, p. 57, 2004). In other words, what Rolling points to is the idea that identity is always in a continual process of being constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. It is tempting, as Rolling implies, to discard parts of my identity when it appears to not allow me to do the work I want to do. However, as I have discovered through writing this autoethnography, through writing about my body, my identity as an artist and teacher will always be in a state of change. As I come across others who enact the way I want to live and do the work I want to do, I allow their presence to influence my identity and their differences to challenge my preconceptions. Through this process of being influenced and challenged, I take the experiences that are worthwhile, or that will allow me to sustain the work I want to do, and blend it into my hybrid identity.

I started this thesis because I was curious about my identity as an artist teacher. I felt that I did not have an opportunity to deeply investigate my identity and work as an artist teacher despite being an artist and teacher of nine years. Stemming from unresolved frustration, I searched for a method that would allow me to relive and explore my identity as an artist teacher. I did not want to situate the artist teacher as terms in opposition, but terms that signified a type of work I wanted to do. By repositioning them as actions, making and teaching, am I making something that is also teaching? In writing the recommendation section of this project, I see them as offering approaches that may be useful for my reader to consider.

Self-reflection and self-study is useful and transformative because it fosters self-awareness and self-discovery (Custer, 2014). As Pente (2004) has points to, “many teachers study other teachers or students but rarely look deeply at themselves” (p. 93).

Therefore, within an institution that prepares art teachers, are their explicit opportunities to experience through writing how their identity as an artist and teacher have been informed and shaped by their past and present experiences with art and education? How could writing as a form of inquiry help future arts educators with negotiating and creating identities that are more inclusive and welcoming of hybridization?

Whether I teach, make art, do both, or see it as one and the same thing, it seems important to find ways to do the work and to theorize what I do, even if I am unsure of its value at the moment it is being done. Through writing my autoethnography, I have realized the importance and value of simply being prolific. Despite the hardships, I may experience along the way, I will continue doing the work I want to do, reflecting upon my actions, and adjusting my future course if I find myself drifting too far from my goals and ambitions. Being prolific has helped me move beyond the question of whether or not I am an artist or teacher. Instead, I have begun asking myself what work do I want to do? and am I finding the opportunities to do so? Finally, to nourish my ambitions and to find the strength to continue, I have also discovered the importance of finding the communities and mentors that will support my endeavors, because it is all of you that I see in me.

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