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Title: A Philosophy of Art Education: Practicing Taoism as a Way to Teach Creativity and Response to Art

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Abstract

This thesis concerns practicing Taoism as a way to teach creativity and response to art. The Tao is the ground of being, the root from which the 10,000 things arise and are active. To be wise with the Tao is to intuit this truth, which can only be sensed and not seen with vision that sorts things according to appearances. It is through this insight that we are able to teach creativity as we are connected to the greater intelligence that holds all life within itself without prejudice. This is simply to be open-minded.

This thesis, 'Practicing Taoism As a Way to Teach Creativity and Response to Art', is in three parts. In Part One I give the reader necessary background information about the historical origins of Taoism and discuss how its classical philosophical text, the *Tao Te Ching*, is still relevant today as a needed alternative to educational instrumentalism. I go on to explore emptiness teaching in Part Two of this thesis, providing a detailed example of how Taoism can be a form of pedagogy as well as a way to teach response to art. In chapter five, 'Celebrating the Life of the Artist', I also provide examples of student artwork resulting from a non-judgmental facilitation style. Finally, in Part Three of this thesis I explore both self-acceptance and Zen as a means by which we might cultivate in ourselves the truth of Taoism: receptivity to the fact of the natural world and an awareness around one's own perceptions of that world. Throughout this thesis I also include much artwork. I do this to show how Taoism - a visceral connection to life that is genuine - is essentially human creativity when applied not as artifice but as conduit.
Dedication

For my teacher, Stuart Richmond.
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As a prelude to this thesis I would like to take the opportunity to share a bit about myself with you, my reader. Specifically, I would briefly like to provide an overview of what I am going to be talking about and how this perspective on a Taoist philosophy of art education has personally come to be such an important part of my life. But first, let me sincerely thank you for considering these words.

I am proposing in this work that art education is mainly facilitated by the teacher's own capacity to listen, that is, to really hear and resonate emotionally with the voice of another person. This special sort of listening requires emptiness - the ability to be attentive in a way that is open rather than self-acquiring. This means that we are not looking at the art of our students to find and encourage what pleases us. On the contrary, we are teaching creativity through our willingness simply to receive the ineffable story of an individual's life experience as it may come into a form that is right - reflective of itself when simply invited to be on its own terms.

This is Okakura's democratization of art - the recognition that it is the basic right of all people to express artistically what is seen and lived. This is just to be accepted for who one authentically is - the reality of one's own life. This acceptance sustains us within a sense of purposeful relationships: to live for the sake of the value of life itself. Democratization, or acceptance, is the spirit of Taoism: through the revelation of diverse
forms of life we sense our commonality, the ground of being that we share and that holds all intelligence within itself.

Teaching myself emptiness and becoming an emptiness teacher has been a journey of particular necessity to my own situation. I was born of a fourteen year-old girl. Her parents were both Polish immigrants who never recovered from their experiences as prisoners in WWII. They had four daughters, including my Mother. The youngest was placed in foster care as my Grandmother was addicted to medications and unable to care for her children. The eldest daughter escaped the sexual abuse of my Grandfather through marriage at age seventeen. After she gave me up for adoption, my Mother started using substances. This was how she began her adult life - decades of alcoholism, homelessness and prostitution.

I found my Mom when I was in my early twenties. When she talks to me about her life I sense that, at critical points, no one was available to really listen to her. She fell through the cracks, as they say. Called a 'Dirty D.P.' (displaced person) she was perhaps ignored or deprived by her teachers. I don't know. But I do wonder if her life might have been different if just one person could have given her some chance to make herself heard, to make visible for herself the anguish she was experiencing as well as the beauty that is always there if we can just remember it. Isn't it true that a single, effective teacher can make this difference to another?
Today my Mother is in recovery. At age fifty, she is studying as an adult high school student, has a job at Shopper's Drugmart and, for the first time, has her own apartment in a 'NOW' building - New Opportunities for Women. Unfortunately, I have realized with great difficulty that, even though my Mother is sober at this point, she may never be well. Of course I deeply hoped that if she were to ever become sober a relationship would be possible. However, she is very hurt and hurts me in return. That seems to be the only way she knows how to relate. I have come to terms with that fact.

For me, this means that lifting myself up in my own life is the only and the best thing I can do for my injured family. This is, in my view, to practice Taoism. Although it is mysterious and unsayable, all forms of life belong to the one. When I help anyone, I help my Mom. When I support a student who feels unsupported, I support myself. When I listen to a person who is ignored and this puts a sparkle in their eye where there was only sadness before, I have loved the whole world. Tragedies can be redeemed in beauty and meaning does grow even out of ashes. This is not a complex matter to achieve. It is done just as we witness one another living our lives. This is the powerful simplicity of practicing Taoism; emptiness stretches beyond what appears to be our individual lives and neither is it tied to time. Somehow, although the horrors of war cannot be rewritten by goodness, they can be transformed by love, anywhere, anytime.

Coming to understand my life and my work in this way is what I have been able to do. It is, from my point of view today, a possible way to sustain oneself in a world of insurmountable, soul-crushing barriers. This thesis is about how people can remain
spiritually alive despite impossible burdens and losses that are unrecoverable. It is about the ways we invite miracles to happen: a green shoot springs from the dust! Through our human creativity we bring our experiences into concrete, sensible and communicable form. Indeed, writing this thesis has been a profound privilege. As it is true for all of us, to be able to bring what was once inchoate into form is a release from suffering that not only liberates the individual who has achieved it but works as a service to sustain the goodness within everything.
Part One - Exploring Taoism

Becoming the Autumn Leaves

Sculpture by Amie Wolf
Chapter One - Taoism and a Philosophy of Art Education

Notes to the reader: All quotations from the *Tao Te Ching* are taken from a translation and commentary written by Michael LaFarge. When referring to the *Tao Te Ching* itself I will cite the page number of this book only. However, when I quote from LaFarge's commentary, I will give his name and the book publication date in addition to the page number. Further, throughout this thesis I refer to 'East' and 'West' as a way of making a useful distinction between two philosophical approaches to understanding. The former concerns the task of developing receptivity to the world and the latter refers to a more forward way of being - the assertion of the self into/upon the world. Making this distinction is not intended to oversimplify Taoism, deny modern realities such as the global influence of westernization and consumerism, or refer to geographical areas as if they could be culturally pure. Rather, naming 'East' and 'West' enables me to discuss exactly the complexities that the Yin/Yang shows: all things contain elements of the other.

Introduction

The *Tao Te Ching*, an ancient Chinese book that is a philosophy of life, provides us with a framework for thinking about education that is important as a counter-balance to the pervasive pedagogical assumption of instrumentalism. Is learning only a series of goals to be systematically set out and assimilated? Yes, there is that knowledge we might attain and then use as a means to deliberately forward ourselves into the world according
to goals we formulate. However, in addition to the masculine principle of animus, which is to impose one's will upon supposedly inanimate matter, there is also the feminine principle of anima, which is to be receptive in the absence of willfulness to the life that is within matter. The latter principle of anima is the foundation of aesthetic education - to soften oneself so as to harmonize with the reality of constant change that is life.

Artists tell of this truth as they live it. The arts therefore challenge how we have defined education as a series of aims to be achieved progressively. A pedagogy founded on the premises of instrumentalism does not completely fit when it comes to teaching the arts as it leaves something vital of the subject on the side. How might we envision an approach to teaching that is suitable to the arts then, a pedagogy that is not only the imparting of knowledge and skills but the transmission of something that is to do with the soul of living experience?

The *Tao Te Ching* reminds us of the paradoxical wisdom of anima: the most powerful force of creative intelligence is engendered through the character of water, which fills whatever spaces that exist as it moves non-choosingly, not hesitating to occupy any place and resisting nothing. In this way, "being weak is Tao practice" (p. 74). We are quick to acknowledge students who are willing to work hard for offered rewards at school, who 'aim high'. However, the Tao teaches that we should not offer rewards but just allow people to be as they are. Like weak water, the Taoist facilitation style is free of the rigid limitations of a goal-oriented, forward pressing ego that goes only to its own aim. When we teach with the Tao, which is not to manipulate, we allow the intelligence of a student
to fully blossom. This is because "the desire to be praiseworthy artificially emphasizes some qualities while repressing others we become ashamed of, resulting in a loss of wholeness and a lessening of true worth" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 37).

This thesis critically explores a philosophy of art education as a matter of embodying this 'weak' water-spirit that is to practice Taoism. I have named this 'emptiness teaching'. The ego is at the helm of full-of-self teaching - the narration of facts to be absorbed by objectified students - whereas hsin, the no-mind of non-doing, is the well of the unknown from which the arts come. Such an open mind does not impose its own way on others, thereby transcending itself as an agent of conditioning to function as a space for the possible to unfold. Trungpa refers to this beginner's mind, which does not think it knows anything already, as a meditative state. He observes, "When we are actually creating a work of art our message is simply one of appreciating the nature of things as they are and expressing it without any struggle of thoughts and fears. We give up aggression, both toward ourselves, that we have to make a special effort to impress people, and toward others, that we can put something over on them" (1996, p. 1-2).

**What is Taoism?**

The Tao is the Ground of Being, the source from which all things come. It is the Mother of Life. However, unlike our biological Mothers, it does not age and die but is timeless. In Chinese philosophy, the Tao is the seed character of these two aspects of the universe - change and changelessness, form and formlessness, matter and spirit. In the words of
Wan Shi, "I and the Ten Thousand Things are of One Root" (Franck, 1993, p. 51).

Acknowledging this truth as we live is considered to be the ultimate affirmation that is Taoism.

In Taoism, the ten thousand things are all the various and different forms that appear distinct but are actually more like fingers on our hand. Yes, all that is in view for us are the fingers that seem to be individual and moving about on their own. Yet below these is the hand by which each digit is attached. Although the Tao defies the logic of what appears to be evident before us - individuals who are discrete - it is not that way. The implication of this is the fact of our inter-connection: what happens to one finger affects the other fingers and there is no simple action of just walking away from the whole entanglement. Thich Nhat Hanh describes this as inter-being in Peace Is Every Step:

"Defiled or immaculate. Dirty or pure. These are concepts we form in our mind. Let us look at wealth and poverty. The affluent society and the deprived society inter-are. The wealth of one society is made of the poverty of another. 'This is like this because that is like that.' Wealth is made of non-wealth elements and poverty is made by non-poverty elements. So we must be careful not to imprison ourselves in concepts. The truth is that everything contains everything else. We cannot just be, we can only inter-be (1992, p. 98). If you are a good organic gardener, looking at a rose you can see the garbage and looking at the garbage you can see a rose. Without a rose we cannot have garbage and without garbage we cannot have a rose. The rose and the garbage are equal. The garbage is just as precious as the rose" (ibid., p. 97).

Thich Nhat Hanh's examples point to something that is really beyond our grasp. Taoism is not something to be attained, nor is it a fixed entity. We can only intuitively embody knowledge of the Tao - the inter-being of life - because the Tao is the life of our intellect.
itself. It cannot be seen in the usual ways that we look but involves a knowing that is non-grasping, or non-knowing. This non-forcing way of being is called wu-wei. Such a receptive eye cuts through convincing and seductive intellectualisms to access the pulse that is our inter-relatedness. This eye that cuts through is incredibly creative because it is free of convention. Beyond the illusions of designation, we recognize that any particular identity of ourselves as this or that is therefore not who we ultimately are and that reality is something other than an idea we can compare to other ideas in our mind.

To be wise with the Tao involves an entirely different way of going about our teaching. Our usual way of regarding the world involves a myriad of distinctions and judgments based along the lines of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Our school system is based in this way of seeing. We construct meanings of success and failure based on achievement scores on standardized tests. An open mind, however, does not mistake these divisions to be an ultimate form of reality. How then is a Taoist teaching style possible in a school system that views education as a goal to be attained and sorts students accordingly? Further, is such a teaching style even important?

To explore this question I now turn to the classical text of Taoism - the Tao Te Ching. This ancient document, mainly written by the scholar Lao-tsu (as far as is known), beautifully elaborates on the philosophy of Taoism in practical terms, serving both as a rationale and a how-to-text. Taoism is to teach as a conduit, bringing out the best qualities in everyone. Willful teaching, on the other hand, misses the goodness that is pre-existing in people because it is busy with manipulation. This makes education a dead
thing as opposed to a lively and exciting adventure. I will discuss further in Chapter Three, *Facilitating Student Artistry through Emptiness Teaching*, what the *Tao Te Ching* means in terms of teaching when it states, "Softness and Weakness accompany life" (p. 160). However, I will first provide some necessary background information regarding the *Tao Te Ching*.

**A Brief History of the *Tao Te Ching***

The *Tao Te Ching*, which means 'Sutra of the Way and the Virtue', is rooted in the preceding shamanism of tribal people who lived along the banks of the Yellow River in China more than 2500 years ago. "These people had not yet developed a national identity nor did they venture far from the banks of the river" (Wong, 1997, p. 11). Living in direct contact with nature, tribal people negotiated with the spiritual personalities of the elements, the plants and animals, as well as other invisible powers in order to make their way in life. This capacity to dialogue with unseen, inner life forces of the world is the basis of Taoism, which advocates living one's life with respect to the sentient existence of other life forms.

Accordingly, the *Tao Te Ching* teaches that good leaders must have a first hand understanding of truth as it can only be revealed through a personal connection with the fact of nature itself. This is to see oneself realistically - a rather insignificant being whose life is very brief and who is going to die. Taoism is to act in harmony with the meaning of that law of life: we are small and mortal. This insight teaches us that it is not
within the reasonable scope of our lifespan to control the lives of others. People who are unusually self-imposing "put themselves out of joint with reality and reality in turn turns against (the) ...excess added above and beyond any solid grounding in reality" (p. 5). However, a leader who is wise with the Tao is deferential, not hungry for power and control over others but kind and compassionate toward people.

The virtue of personal humility is the most significant attribute of practicing Taoism. The consequence is that "such a one doesn't project a 'solid' presence in the world" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 69). Indeed, Taoist practice engenders a felt-quality of softness in a person that appears somehow insufficient precisely because it is not something in and of itself. A Western worldview generally assumes that strength can only be a willful action and that a competent teacher is one who is always doing something. However, a good teacher can also teach by not teaching. The Tao Te Ching offers us a needed alternative, pointing out how the softness of water, which flows without choosing, is far stronger in its character than animus - the self-defeating imposition of the one's will onto others. This ends teaching as a war of wills and yields instead a style of teaching that is humane.

Is the Tao Te Ching Relevant?

The Tao Te Ching is the first known writing about Taoism and is considered a classic text. It was developed by more than one person, among whom Lao-tsu is the most prominently known. He was born into the educated upper class and held a government post, only to depart from this position disillusioned with the abuse of government power...
during what is known today as the Warring States Period (475-221 BC). During this time, ruthless feudal lords used military force to conquer smaller fiefs and establish a peasantry of people who were at their mercy.

Clearly, the *Tao Te Ching* is an ancient cultural document. How might we interpret it then? LaFarge asserts that his aim is to best understand the book in terms of its original meanings. For this, he says, a great deal of background knowledge is necessary. However, as LaFarge points out himself, the original cultural meanings of the great book can never really be known with any certainty because the society in which it was written is no more. As Grayling explains about the thinking of Wittgenstein, "...language is woven into all human activities and behavior... part of the fabric of an inclusive 'form of life'" (1996, p. 79). Therefore, the true meaning of what we say or write cannot be interpreted fully without the living meanings within the words. What hope does this give us when it comes to making sense of ancient texts?

I agree with LaFarge when he writes, "the *Tao Te Ching* is a stimulus for arriving at insights we were on the verge of having" (1992, p. 189). However, further to serving as a stimulus to insights, the text of the *Tao Te Ching* communicates the truth of the Tao - the Ground of Being. Although it was undeniably once part of the fabric of an inclusive form of life 2,500 years ago, the writing succeeds in revealing the elemental: the root from which the ten thousand things come. This root is not a subject of cultural interpretations for it is simply not a subject that might be put up for interpretation at all. The timeless is timeless, the changeless is changeless, and the Mother beyond feature is
the original face without beginning or end. So perhaps it is not that we need to worry about interpreting the *Tao Te Ching* at all. Rather, we might allow it to interpret us to that which is beyond the imaginable and transcendent of the known.

**A Philosophy of Art Education and the Tao Te Ching**

The *Tao Te Ching* was developed in reaction to the unfairness of a brutal government exerting its power over impoverished people. Although the injustice it refers to occurred about 2,500 years ago, this problem among people is not antiquated. On the contrary, the *Tao Te Ching* is useful for us today insofar as it is not unreasonable to suggest that parts of modern classroom life reflect aspects of the ancient system of feudalism in China; the teacher is a sort of lord in a position of power over students, who can be like peasants without land insofar as it is the teacher's legislated right to put them to work as she or he sees fit. The modern teacher can also enact punishments and rewards to manipulate desired activity. Is this not something in kind to the model of inequality through domination the *Tao Te Ching* speaks of an alternative to? I think so.

In this sense, the *Tao Te Ching* offers us a very relevant, contemporary and needed alternative to modern educational philosophy. The document mainly advocates a way of thinking about leadership that involves not this forceful domination but a dynamic receptivity. It explains how the use of any force whatsoever is destructive and instead shows how we might work more effectively through the principles of *wu-wei*, or non-
forcing. The *Tao Te Ching* teaches, "Thirty spokes unite in one hollow hub - in this 'nothing' lies the wheel's usefulness" (p. 32).

Teaching with the wisdom of the Tao is teaching from this state of hollowness, organically unfolding a student's impetus in the absence of external pressure artificial to its terms. It is through this hollowness, or emptiness - embodied by the teacher - that students are best empowered to be individually and authentically creative within vital communities. We might degrade such gentle facilitation as weakness or demote a subject area that is without the hard edges of teacher demand and strict evaluation. However, softness succeeds through humility and gentleness as it causes no harm, no disharmony and no destruction. This brings out the best in everyone. The following parable of the sun and the wind illustrates this way of emptiness teaching.

The wind and the sun decided to compete with one another. Who could best get the person to remove their jacket while walking outside? The wind was the first to try. Wind blew gently at the start and the person zipped up her jacket. So wind blew harder. The person clutched their jacketed closer to their body by wrapping their arms tightly around. This made the wind blow very hard but to no avail as the person only pulled her coat closer to her. Finally, exhausted, the wind gave up.

Then the sun tried. With the warmth of her light she gradually relaxed the person, who dropped their arms beside their body and began to smile. The sun then grew in her warmth and light and the person removed the jacket, pleased to feel the sun on her skin.
There was no struggle and no difficulty. Sun won the competition gloriously. In this fable, the sun is like a teacher who has Tao and the wind is like a goal-oriented teacher who wants some sort of learning to happen for their student. For the former, wonderful discoveries unfold without any aggression. For the latter, the journey is a self-defeating battle that works against itself. This is "the rule for Tao - things as they are" (p. 84).

**Living the Tao, Teaching the Tao - A Portrait of Carl Leggo**

In the essay, *Twenty-six Way of Listening to Light*, Carl Leggo writes about his journey of inquiry into his total life's work of practicing and living the Tao. "I am obsessed with the invisible that cannot be seen," Leggo enthuses (2001, p. 174). "I want research that pokes into the cracks where light can find release" (ibid., p. 183). Interpreting Leggo's essay according to the *Tao Te Ching*, his self-described obsession with the invisible that cannot be seen is a craving for the powerful creativity of a life in harmony with the Tao. In his words, "I want to evoke or conjure a wholeness from the traces" (ibid., p. 181). Leggo's described research into finding cracks where light can find release is his work to align himself with such wisdom - a sense of the connective ground in which all forms of life emerge from and return to. This ground works through us as we work, enabling us to do remarkable things. This is to be a person with Te, an energy "one 'accumulates' internally through self-cultivation and that can be envisioned as a cosmic force" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 247).
How does Leggo do this conjuring of wholeness from the traces and how does he teach people about this "something ineffable that holds the parts together" (ibid., p. 180)? He bravely admits, "I can't even explain my own pedagogy. I still don't know what I do. If I stop and try I grow more confused" (ibid., p. 184). Although this may sound strange, when it comes to being with the Tao, which is exactly that which cannot be grasped, what Leggo is saying makes perfect sense. The Tao is as much our ground of being as it is anything's ground of being. To comprehend it concretely would be like a baby developing in its Mother's womb suddenly emerging on the outside to hold her in its arms. Impossible.

In a similar way, we are enveloped by the Tao and inseparably within it. Just as an embryo cannot grasp its Mother we cannot and will not ever grasp the Tao for it sustains our life. We are irrevocably attached to the inside of it. When Leggo speaks of listening to light in a way that causes him immense confusion he is referring to an awareness of the Tao. This awareness is necessarily insensible to the intellect and experienced through a sensitization of embodiment. "My research is really about opening my ears and eyes and tongue and skin and now and lungs and heart and spirit, to learn to laugh with the ducks," (ibid., p. 178) Leggo aptly describes.

When we are wise with the Tao, we sense the oneness of all things and see a sort of orchestration of comings and goings within life that is very beautiful. I believe such blissful insights might be called Satori. We laugh with the ducks, although this sounds incomprehensible without having experienced it first. However, it begins to make sense
when it happens to us. This is because our understanding of ourselves is no longer small and segregated but vast and living through an embodied reality of inter-connection. True, although we still do not know the Tao because it encompasses us and is greater than our knowing, we have sensed it through our body as it can only be intuited.

The gist of Taoism is not predominantly an intellectual understanding but a consciousness that we embody as an instinct. It takes time and practice to allow an unfolding into this being. Leggo warns that we cannot be so rushed in our scholarly research but that we must take an unhurried approach if we are to have it come upon us. The problem with academia today, he cautions, is that it is done too quickly and with the completion of a goal in mind. We remain closed to so much within ourselves as well as to the secrets within nature because we refuse to allow ourselves to be in the world.

Taoism is too complex for an economical way of thinking. As its emblem the Yin/Yang shows, everything contains a bit of everything else. So knowing the Tao makes it impossible to formulate easy, linear arguments based on ideology separate from the difficulty that is experience. This is what Leggo describes as "a poet's language I am always trying to hear, to learn no light without shadows, no shadows without light" (ibid., 190). It is in the embracing of opposites - "exploding dualism" (Bai, 2003, p. 43) - that a shift in perception occurs, allowing us to suddenly see in a new way the common foundation that connects and animates the rhythmic processes of moving, changing form. From this perception, which is altogether radically different from the modern norms and assumptions of goal-driven instrumentalism that usually define how we teach, we are
profoundly challenged to re-imagine all that we have taken for-granted about the meaning of education.

**Conclusion**

In our work as both teachers and as students the Tao will evade us as long as we cannot give ourselves the opportunity to be aimless. Leisure is the essence of philosophy, Leggo points out. The love of wisdom takes the time of timelessness, which is not only a very long time. It is endless. Like light, we also have infinite ways of listening. Joy as well as difficulty and immense responsibility are integral to the domain of co-creating with life as a way of being. However, this is the necessary work we must do if we are to be empowered as facilitators of creativity for others.

In the following parts of this thesis I look more at the task of cultivating emptiness so as to teach artistry. First, I would like to conclude Part One at this point with 'I Love the Falling', a work of inquiry that is an example of one of the ways I personally practice emptiness - being receptive to a larger sphere of life by taking the time to appreciate the world for its own sake and without a time limit. 'I Love the Falling' is research as an extension of personal creativity so as to viscerally intuit the truth that is the Tao, even as it is hidden within mere traces of what can be seen. "When the eye wakes up to see again, it suddenly stops taking anything for granted. The thing I draw, be it leaf, rosebush, woman, or child, is no longer a thing, no longer my 'object' over and against which I am the supercilious 'subject'. The split is healed" (Frank, 1993, p. 8).
Chapter Two - I Love the Falling
The fall.
The leaves...
The sunshine.
The long...
The trees lose their leaves one at a time...
Leaves fall through me
I am the wind
and the
fire
Leaves shine in the rain.
Clouds chase the stars.
Hold my hand dear
as the summer disappears.
Soon all the leaves will have fallen and gone into the earth.
In the fall the sun hides...

Under the Moon
I have my orange umbrella in the rain.
I remember the colors of the leaves.
Part Two - Teaching and Taoism

Lotus Bloom

Painting by Charlan Chen
Chapter Three - Facilitating Student Artistry

Through Emptiness Teaching

Introduction

"Taoism, like its legitimate successor Zennism" (Okakura, 2001, p. 30), is about just living the reality of our lives. It is a 'disguise-manufacturing-free zone' where our experience of being a person is acknowledged just as it is. We do not busy ourselves dramatically with efforts to get more of something 'positive' and to eliminate or alter what is 'negative'. Rather, Taoism is to let go of choosing in order to just be aware of and go with whatever is true about our condition. This is like living a day properly, in accordance with the sunrise and sunset. We do not try to make day into night or night into day. We live the actuality that is the fact of our life without fighting with this fact.

In this 'nothing space', in which judgments and goals are relaxed, students are invited to be more honest in their self-expression. This is because people can bear the vulnerability of uncertainty - the state of creative engagement - when no externally imposed standard of success is set. As the *Tao Te Ching* teaches, "Being is born of Nothing" (p. 75). In the absence of evaluation we can stop over-thinking things - throwing a wrench in our creativity for trying hard to be successful. Taoism invites us to drop the masks we wear in a competitive society and take up visual art production as a practice of self-acceptance instead. "Art is our own reflection," writes Okakura. "In condemning it we condemn ourselves" (2001, p. 71). So we must stop condemning ourselves. Our art is just here as
we are just here. That's all. To acknowledge our art with this attitude of "Loving-Kindness" (Chodron, 1996) is the humanizing practice of Taoism that enables us to live our lives authentically. In this way, the non-choosing Taoist classroom environment liberates creativity - the active bringing forth from our own lived experience a concrete expression that resonates with the truth of ineffable, personal feeling, imbuing our lives with a deeply satisfying sense of meaning and order.

For teachers, the cultivation of a Taoist facilitation style is to view one's job as just another part of an entire life's work toward this return of original self-acceptance. This is "the rule for Tao: things as they are" (p. 84). What does 'things as they are' look like in the day-to-day of a classroom? The *Tao Te Ching* is a text that provides answers to this question; the poetic writing describes teaching as a discipline of holding oneself back so as to not to impinge upon others. "Yes, says the wise person: I Do Nothing, and the people transform themselves" (p. 168). This is emptiness teaching - we allow our students to be creative as we refrain from manipulating them to suit our idea of what they should be doing.

I begin this Chapter Three, 'Facilitating Student Artistry through Emptiness Teaching', by giving an example of how easy it is to misinterpret emptiness by the framework of a Western consumer mentality. In a materialistic culture it is difficult to comprehend the value of emptiness - a state of being that one cannot own or capitalize upon and that has no opposite state. I then discuss what Gross and Shapiro call "big understanding" (2001, p. 112), elaborating on what emptiness is and how deficiency needs are at the root of
clinging to beliefs out of step with reality. I continue with three cases studies that illuminate how emptiness teaching facilitates creativity. In the first I talk about how Taoist teaching helped an anxious student to develop artistry - visual art production for the sake of "the experiential aspects of creating beautiful pictures as a way to connect more deeply with the world" (Gross and Shapiro, 2001, p. 4). In the second study I examine how emptiness teaching removed obstructions to creativity by addressing a student's false ideas of self. Finally, I describe how an emptiness teacher can celebrate pre-existing artistry as it was already a way of being for a mature student.

I conclude this chapter with a critical and detailed examination of my own way of emptiness teaching. This is both to impart content as well as hold a space for self-directed art production in ways that are consistently responsive. Emptiness is to teach for the sake of the living people who are in the room, not as an authority figure but as one among others who exercises her capacity to learn even when sharing knowledge. The result of emptiness teaching is a vibrant, creative classroom community dynamically facilitated through the skillful integration of mutual respect and personal freedom. Primarily, this is not to objectify people or a curriculum but to "turn students' everyday experience into the very content of learning... (by) deeply listening to one's and each other's 'inner life' as the foundational education practice" (Bai, 2007, p. 2).

The four central aspects of emptiness teaching that I will explore in the final section of this chapter are: 1. Building in-class relationships of trust and respect that are responsive to the authentic thoughts and feelings of individuals; 2. Imparting course content through
DVD's so as to improvise a lively conversation afterward as opposed to imparting a possibly alienating lecture-as-a-monologue; 3. Making studio time a self-directed invitation to experiment freely in an atmosphere that is process-based as opposed to evaluative or product-centered, and; 4. Holding opportunities for meaningful, spontaneous encounter through the facilitation of peer teaching (the mini-lesson).

**Interpreting Emptiness**

"Speaking little is what is natural" (p. 30).

While exercising at the gym in the first week of January, an acquaintance approached me for conversation. "I'm here now, you know," he enthused. "That is my New Year's resolution for 2010. I'm not worried, for example, about how I have to pick up my brother-in-law at the airport later on this afternoon, right? I'm not thinking about the future at all. I'm in the present moment," he beamed. I listened to my friend as he tried to teach me this critical lesson of emptiness. He was so passionate about what he'd read regarding the importance of being in the moment he went on about it to some extent.

Later, at the stretching mat, I reflected upon my sense that this well-intentioned person and I had missed the opportunity to connect. Due to his effort to teach me something, it seemed no genuine exchange had occurred. Instead of receiving the other, his idea of presence became yet another "anxious avaricious tentacle of the self" (Murdoch, 2006, p.
the 'self' that is full of goals and, because it wants to do something so badly, strangles the moment by unfurling the ropes of its willfulness.

It is a common mistake to misinterpret emptiness according to the context of what we might personally have. This mistake is called spiritual materialism. "There are numerous sidetracks which lead to a distorted, ego-centered version of spirituality," explains Trungpa. "We can deceive ourselves into thinking we are developing spirituality when instead we are strengthening our egocentricity through spiritual techniques" (1973, p. back of book). My friend at the gym, to my view at least, made this error. Instead of dissolving his ego in emptiness he strengthened his ego with the notion of imparting the idea of emptiness to others.

In a consumer mindset of relentless acquisition, the ability to practice and perhaps even comprehend emptiness as a way of being has largely been lost. This "Western attitude is unfavorable to the understanding of the East," Okakura points out. "The Christian missionary goes to impart but not to receive" (2001, p. 8). Indeed, the Tao Te Ching does not make sense according to consumer values. "Doing Tao one suffers a loss every day - loses and loses some more and so arrives at not doing anything" (p. 56). This seems ridiculous in a culture that views the worthwhile as the self who lives to actively accrue money and expensive objects.

It is very easy in to mistake that we are in the moment just because we are trying to be. However, emptiness is altogether a different way of experiencing our lives that has
nothing to do with the notions of effort or acquiring. The empty mind isn't trying to be present or trying to stop scheming or eager to talk about emptiness. On the contrary, "those who understand are not talkers" (p. 66). This is because emptiness is really empty - a state of present awareness that does not exist in relation to opposite concepts, such as non-emptiness. In the words of D.T. Suzuki, this "is decidedly not a system founded upon logic and analysis, by which I mean a dualistic mode of thinking" (1969, p. 38). Emptiness requires that we approach our identity differently, to conceive of the self not as a discrete object defined by what it prefers and dislikes, but to "make oneself like a corpse or a piece of wood or a rock" (ibid., p. 197). We can now see how it is impossible to verbally teach or even talk about emptiness for it is ultimately impossible to even understand emptiness. It is simply "not in the realm of names or forms" (ibid., p. 190).

**Big Understanding**

"Turn back to being an Uncarved Block" (p. 36).

Presence is not an intensification of the self so as to get the 'me' more and more here. Emptiness as a quality is the embodiment of alert stillness, a non-grasping awareness that is a lessening of the self - a diminishment of who we think we are, what we want to do, what we believe is right, and so on - that allows the moment to be known to us as it is. If we want to laugh with the ducks as Leggo does, we must be quiet and inexhaustibly patient, expecting nothing but remaining attentive with the attitude that we are happy just to be here. This is to "become the Valley of the World" (p. 36).
The valley of the world is the gap between our initial perception and our projections. We develop this mental spaciousness through a practice of self-awareness. First we notice the ways in which we evaluate, select/reject, form an opinion, and so on, in response to what we see. This noticing then deepens into a 'valley' as we come to understand that these responses are of our own minds and not ultimately the fixed nature of what we perceive. Certainly, these "projections bring about powerful emotional interactions between ourselves and external objects," (2001, p. 32) explains the Dalai Lama. However, "as we contemplate the way we project our judgments we can begin to appreciate that more reasoned emotions and thoughts are more grounded in reality" (ibid, p. 33).

We must train ourselves to see through our projections. The capacity for true perception - to see what is actual rather than automatically and unconsciously reacting to stimulus in habitual ways - is an achievement in emptiness Buddhists call detachment. Contrary to the notion that detachment is to withdraw from becoming involved in the world of things, it is actually to be completely willing to become involved with everything. The self that projects is simply dissolved into emptiness and so no longer resists, allowing us to be more attuned to what is actually happening as we are less distorted by the entrenched patterns of conditioning. Such an open mind is not only the key to creativity but to morality insofar as "ethics start when you don't know what to do, when there is this gap between knowledge and action, and you have to take responsibility for inventing the new rule which doesn't exist" (Derrida, 2003, p. 32).
Staying with initial perception, a receptive state of "freedom from premeditated ideas, openness to seeing the world freshly (and) renouncing expectations" (Gross and Shapiro, 2001, p. 20) is a task that we work at to achieve. "The process of taming the mind is a lengthy one," says the Dalai Lama (2001, p. 50), precisely because we have charged emotional justifications for imposing certain views upon what we see. For example, the way we perceive the world often reflects our need for it to be less threatening, more predictable and familiar, altogether possible for us to take. We may cling to ways of seeing that do not match reality as "an unconscious compensation for the anxieties and uncertainties of daily endeavor" (Cartier-Bresson, 1999, p. 38). Gross and Shapiro, co-authors of *The Tao of Photography*, call this rigid adherence to particular interpretations "barriers to seeing... an inability to fully embrace life" (2001, p. 85).

Creativity opens with our capacity to be receptive, to fully embrace life. Therefore, teaching art primarily concerns liberating people from anxious behaviors that obstruct insight in their "need to control a situation for a sense of safety" (Gross and Shapiro, 2001, p. 83). The Taoist style of emptiness teaching allows people to relax, removing causes for anxiety that are the most significant impediments to artistry. This is because "it dampens the passion, it unties the tangles, it makes the flashing things harmonious, it makes the dust merge together" (p. 69). Indeed, beautifully authentic pieces of visual artwork often begin to evolve in a Taoist atmosphere that soothes rather than riles people up. I would like to now share an example of how such a Taoist approach helped one of my most anxious students open up to enjoy her creativity.
An Anxious Student Develops Artistry

For the first few weeks of the nine week drawing and painting class I teach with the Vancouver School Board, Shirley talked very much. She did not hesitate to tell other students what to paint or how to paint, brought in special painting equipment no one else had and boasted openly about her formal art training. Shirley also confided in me that she was afraid her superior artwork might make other students feel inadequate and further gave me many books to read. One of them was titled, How to Make Red Hot Paintings that Sell.

As the class progressed it became evident that Shirley had difficulty making a painting. Her sketchbook was mainly full of written notes and she experienced little success and much struggle during studio time. However, despite the contradiction between how she presented herself and how she actually was, I warmly accepted all of her instruction and did not interfere with anything she had to teach. If I had engaged in a conflict of wills with Shirley - arguing with all her advice - I would have only entrenched her deficiency needs more deeply. In this way, Shirley's task to break through her barriers to seeing began through my emptiness. "What-has-No-Being enters what-leaves-no-opening" (p. 102).

After the first few weeks of the nine-week course passed, Shirley told me, "I like you Amie. I think you are a nice person." Of course, whether or not I am actually nice is irrelevant. The significance of this comment was that it showed Shirley had achieved
some space between her projections and her initial perceptions. In judging me to be 'nice' she was actually saying that she felt adequate as a participant in my class. Indeed, Shirley had gained enough detachment from her anxiety to move from self-doubt to self-confidence. This growth was facilitated by emptiness teaching - the "job of Not-Doing carries on his teaching done without talking" (p. 92).

As her clinging to ideas of competitive grandeur thus relaxed, Shirley hit a turning point. She left her easel and the Red Hot Paintings that Sell book at home and began to create small pictures of softly coloured flowers using watercolour pencils. During studio time Shirley seemed incredibly relieved to leave the compulsion to assert herself as the most successful painter in the class behind. She softened. One little flower painting at a time, Shirley permitted herself to really appreciate the enjoyable experience of making art as an end in itself. To witness this was very touching.

Shirley continued to study with me for a second semester. Almost six months after her first unconscious break-through of self-confidence, she communicated a personal appreciation for the experience of artistry. On her midterm exam she answered the first question - 'Depict what making art has been like for you in this class' - by drawing an extremely light pencil sketch of tiny flowers at the base of a great tree. I could hardly see it. Indeed, it was very personal. Beside it she wrote, "Tiny snowdrops coming up after a long freeze." As a result of the warmth inherent to a Taoist approach to teaching, Shirley's creativity had thawed. Her insight into art as an innocent experience of self-exploration was a remarkable transition from her initial view of art as a commercial
object. In this way, the Tao is "the treasure of the good, what protects the not good" (p. 104).

As the end of her last semester of study with me drew near, Shirley told me she was going to miss the class terribly. However, when she left on the final day I sensed that there was really no loss incurred for Shirley at the end of the course. She had only gained. This is Taoist teaching - it effectively brings out the authentic personal qualities within others as it does not interfere. A person cannot lose it as there is "no taste to it" (p. 100).

**Diminishing Obstructions to Student Creativity**

David attended my drawing and painting class consistently for the first five weeks of the nine-week term. The 19 year-old had failed every educational program available to him and feared that he was a hopeless case. During the first studio period, he did a beautiful painting of a sunflower sprouting first as a seedling and progressively maturing into a triumphant, golden flower. Next he created a painting of Bart Simpson pissing on a wall. Then there was a pencil sketch of a lion followed by the M&M characters drinking beer. And so on.

To his surprise, each one of David's pieces was displayed in the classroom. Although he was anticipating a lecture on what 'good' subject matter should be, each piece he made was accepted. When students selected what they felt was their best piece for display in
the hallway showcase, David's pick of 'Bart Taking a Piss' was posted without any
derogatory comment. This was the breaking point that undermined David's false ideas of
personal inferiority. His response was to blow-up habits of defended behaviors into an
absolute firestorm.

David's defenses were sharply honed to be very provoking. However, with
administrative and collegial support, I ensured that he did not receive reinforcement for
these obstructions and they diminished as a result. The young man settled down after two
weeks of acting out and passed the course. When David presented his artwork to the
class on the last day of the term, as the students all take turns doing, I sat beside him. I
felt a settled calmness radiating from him as he did this. I believe he was experiencing
his own self-acceptance. By providing no resistance to false ideas of the self they
dwindle, renewing access to creativity. Rumi calls this healing space of receptivity 'a
field':

"Out beyond ideas
of wrong doing and right doing
There is a field
I'll meet you there"  (Lesser, 2004, p. 163).

Art instruction is primarily the matter of addressing false mental ideas students may have
about who they are so as to allow creativity to flow through their intelligence once more.
This is a sort of reconstitution of a person's authentic self that is possible when ideas of
good or bad dissolve in Rumi's 'field'. "There is nothing to attain or realize," writes Pema
Chodron. "Develop a complete acceptance and openness to all situations and emotions
and all people. Experience everything totally without reservations or blockages, so that you never withdraw or centralize into yourself” (1996, p. 162). Shastri illuminates:

"Picture a glacier stretching for miles on the high hills, from which issue thousands of small streams, flowing far and wide. The glacier is the universal mind. There is but one mind and our individual minds are like the streamlets which issue from it. If the flow of pure water is dammed up, the streams become stagnant. It is essential that there should be an unimpeded flow from the divine glacier within us into our consciousness... the individuality in which our mind is imprisoned must be rendered transparent" (1987, p. 26).

**Celebrating Pre-existing Artistry**

Gloria studied painting with me for three semesters. A refugee who had fled to Canada, she was a mature woman who walked with difficulty. Gloria explained to me how she was almost beaten to death by a gang who attacked her in Canada, but that Jesus, her savior, helped her to walk each day. In shoes that were at least one size too large and rescued from the garbage, she would shuffle into class with her grocery bag full of the bottles and cans she collected on her way to school. Some days were very painful for Gloria and she would grimace. Most days, however, she had a special sparkle in her eyes.

One afternoon, during studio time, Gloria painted a fancy piece of footwear. To the astonishment of everyone, it was a stiletto shoe. Gloria proceeded to apply glitter to the high heel of that shoe and added a splashy, colorful background to the picture. She smiled broadly and with satisfaction as the shoe successfully contrasted outrageously
with her usual subject matter - earnest portraits of young monastic women and still life paintings of books, fruits and little birds.

In addition to painting almost every day, Gloria also shared with the class her poetry about the beauty she appreciated in nature, of her gratitude to be alive and her tremendous devotion to Jesus. She showed us her jewelry that she made from sparkling beads as well, stringing together intricately designed necklaces and bracelets by hand. Her collection of beaded Barbie handbags especially impressed me. Although they were only as big as a dime the miniature purses actually opened, revealing a pocket of space big enough to carry something like a sunflower seed.

Despite her fractured spine, cultural displacement and lack of financial resources, Gloria experienced joy and a sense of purpose. All parts of her life, including her visual pieces, gathered into a single work of artistry - an understanding of how a person lives with goodness. Gloria did not strive to be a great artist nor did she require acknowledgment for a reason to make the things she made. Rather, in all that she did, Gloria actively created expressions of appreciation for that which was worthwhile in her life. From a Taoist point of view, her artwork expressed the perception of a true artist - a person who creates for the necessity of appreciating life itself as opposed to creating for the perceived necessities of self. In the words of Rilke from *Letters to a Young Poet:*
"Try to raise up the sunken feelings of this enormous past; your personality will grow stronger, your solitude will expand and become a place where you can live in the twilight, where the noise of other people passes by, far in the distance. And if out of this turning-within, out of this immersion in your own world, poems come, then you will not think of asking anyone whether they are good or not. Nor will you try to interest magazines in these works: for you will see them as your dear natural possession, a piece of your life, a voice from it. A work of art is good if it has arisen out of necessity. That is the only way one can judge it" (1984, p. 8-9).

As a result of her artistry - good art that has arisen out of personal necessity to become a precious voice from one's life - Gloria and I enjoyed a completely unlikely friendship. All that was required of me was that I serve as a witness to the beauty of her gentle life. I would help Gloria collect bottles and cans from the school's recycling containers after class and I provided her with a bag the odd time she didn't have one. I delighted in her clever thrift store finds - the colorful feather in her hat, the bright stripes on her socks and her purple gloves. I was lucky enough to read many of her biographical writings as well and moved to learn about more of her day-to-day activities, such as volunteering at the library and singing in her church choir. This is Taoist facilitation: with unaffected sincerity "it pulls down what is high, it lifts up what is low" (p. 114).

One day Gloria bowed to me. "I love you very much," she smiled. "I love you too," I smiled back, bowing in return. Is the animation of such a respectful relationship not the most important educational goal? For me it is. Emptiness teaching achieves this matter of central significance to human life. Given how important the experience of community is for both students and teachers, perhaps a Taoist approach to teaching creativity is far too rare in our education system.
Imparting Content and Holding Space?

Facilitating student artistry requires emptiness teaching - having no goal so as to embody the necessary space for others "to gain a true understanding of the world and what such an understanding consists in" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 89). We reel our 'self' in so that others may have some room to become. Yet, emptiness teaching does not mean that we cannot also engage with direct teaching - imparting knowledge to students. Lessons on art history and instruction on how to paint are vital components to any art class. Without information about the qualities of different types of paint and painting techniques, as well as artist biographies and compilations of artwork for viewing, students would be limited.

However, the necessity of a curriculum need not undermine the Taoist spirit of emptiness teaching. We can deliver lessons without so much willful self and continue to effectively bring students forward in their subjectivity despite the impersonal goal of a teacher prepared lesson. This is to teach as the sun might shine, not as a cold wind might blow. The former persuades and the latter, for its effort, strengthens the anxieties from which the great impediments to creativity spring - barriers to seeing. Emptiness teaching is to "discount your personal interests, make your desires few" (p. 170) so as to allow people to shine in the beauty of their own unaffected nature.

Although emptiness teaching may seem impossible to do while giving a lesson at the same time, it is not. Content may be unfolded as a dialogue that is consistent with and perhaps just another form of emptiness teaching, which is "that the clever ones do not
presume to set about doing. Do Not Doing and nothing will be left un-governed" (p. 173). The seemingly impossible task of emptiness teaching while simultaneously giving a lesson at the same time - to Do Not Doing - is the core of Taoism: two irreconcilable opposites existing seamlessly within one practical application. This is to live the paradoxical wisdom of the Tao and this is indeed artistry. When our teaching transcends dualism in this way we succeed at going beyond imparting our idea-knowledge to "give (people) something to fasten to" (ibid., p. 171). That concrete something is the raw, Uncarved heart-stuff of living life.

As teachers, we must individually find our own way to be simultaneously both a source of information as well as a non-imposing presence for our students. The artistry of emptiness teaching works through the uniqueness of each individual to become a whole way of being. There is no one, right way to do it. Indeed, Taoist facilitation is a personal achievement that requires flexibility and the capacity to act fluidly, without set rules. As the Tao Te Ching teaches, "Keep your mind free of sharply defined moral standards to impose on people" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 130). However elusive and without rule-bound instruction the way of emptiness teaching is, I believe we can be confident that we have gotten it right if student artistry comes about as a result.

At this point, I would like to discuss my own personal style of emptiness teaching. I am doing this to demonstrate that emptiness teaching really is who you are as a person - no two art teachers do this work in exactly the same way. For the remainder of this chapter, I examine how I apply my background in theater improvisation with my First Nations
cultural traditions in order to form a practice that works for me. I have divided this practice into four key areas for the sake of discussion: cultivating relationships of trust and respect, improvising lectures, holding blocks of self-directed art production and creating opportunities for authentic encounter through peer teaching.

Building Relationships of Trust and Respect

"Teaching the Tao requires teachers love the students... a special style of teaching that matches the character of the Tao being taught" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 60 and p. 99).

Relating to people properly is central to teaching artistry, where we understand art not as if it were an object we can manipulate but as a primary means of sustaining authentic relationships. Just as it is not possible to live with the heart on the outside of one's body, art is like a living organ in its own right. The purpose of art is therefore necessarily situated within the act of living our lives. This is what Rumi meant when he said love and imagination do many things. Like the heart circulates our blood, bringing oxygen to the cells of our body, creative expression circulates our personal sense of well-being and social goodwill, bringing a sense of community to the people of a group.

The metaphor above helps to illuminate why the art teacher's most central role is to find ways to show and communicate love - which is simply to act with respect toward students on a person-to-person basis. Beautiful art inspires friendships and friendships inspire beautiful art. This is a reciprocal, self-sustaining loop. As Stuart Richmond
quotes Plato, "Beauty is the only visible quality that inspires love" (2004, p. 1). Which came first, the chicken or the egg, the love or creative art inspired by beauty? It seems to be impossible to say as one makes the other and the other makes the one. This is the complex, living reality upon which beautiful art is founded: to relate authentically through a healthy imagination as opposed to mistaking Plato's self consoling shadows - the ego's dream life - as a source for artistic inspiration.

Indeed, we cannot make our students make beautiful art. That is their life work. But we can inspire our students to move towards the beautiful. Love is therefore the single, most effective means of nurturing another person's connection to her creativity: the source of artistry. I believe that looking at visual artwork may even be secondary to the primary, elemental significance of warm heartedness. I would like to share, at this point, four simple ways I engender such a climate of trust and respect in the classroom setting: Inclusion, The Present Greeting, Affectionate Thoughts of Oneness and Honoring the Lives of Our Students.

**Inclusion**

First, including all students in every discussion that goes on in the classroom is critical. "Show unwavering goodness to all," the *Tao Te Ching* emphasizes, "like a loving parent" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 130). The Taoist teacher must therefore not have even a subtle attitude that some students in the class have more worthwhile things to say than others.
All students must be welcomed with equal favor expressed by the teacher through an unequivocal interest and enthusiasm.

To achieve this equanimity, I facilitate classroom discussions according to the First Nations model of the talking circle. In a talking circle, each student is attended to empathetically irrespective of what or how much is said. During these times it is important not to interrupt the speaker but to just listen so as to hear one another. The calm and quiet spirit of Taoism is brought about through this justice of equal dialogue. As a result, "that inner something that is the group at its best" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 133) emerges as it is permitted. This requires that we mainly listen as a form of teaching, which is a radical shift from mainly talking. However, the *Tao Te Ching* stresses, "Thinkers are full of themselves and their plans, caring nothing for the Goodness already present" (ibid., p. 175). Thus, if we are to facilitate creativity, a large part of our work is just to pay attention so as to really hear our students as they are speaking.

**The Present Greeting**

Second, it is vital to greet students. This is to speak a person's name out loud and to be present as you do this. When I say good morning to my students at the beginning of the class, I try to do this from emptiness. I take the time to really see the person before me - to notice the look in their eye, how they have styled their hair, how they are standing, what they are wearing and so on. I am not thinking about myself as I do this but acting in a way that requires a relaxed state of mind that is not of my regular self but self-
transcendent. Such a greeting from a teacher who is fully present helps a person feel that they are welcome and fully accepted exactly as they have shown up today. This is the Tao that unifies people. "A comparison: Tao's presence in the world is like the relation of small river valleys to the Yang-tze and the ocean" (p. 136). It is not something that we teach explicitly but more of "a spirit thing, it can't be worked on"(p. 134) and therefore allows you to be as you are.

At the end of every class, I stand by the door and shake each student's hand. Again, I speak their name out loud and make eye contact as I say good-bye. I smile from a feeling of genuine warmth for each person in my heart. It is through this simple and basic gesture - the appropriate handshake - that an encounter between teacher and student as subject-to-subject is engaged. Nothing flamboyant is required for this most significant contact. This is to "do great things focusing on small details. Difficult tasks in the world always begin from what is easy, great tasks in the world always begin from what is small" (p. 154).

By these little gestures students begin to feel that they are part of a community whose wholeness depends on their being. The tiny seeds for magnificent growth are sown very easily. Just as "a tree you can hardly get your arms around grows from a tiny shoot," (p. 156), we can approach any difficulty in this spirit of inviting a person to belong because he or she is unique and necessary to the group. No student should ever be embarrassed, shamed or punished, even if what they are doing is a breach of 'the rules'. The Tao Te Ching describes this as "the Te of not contending" (p. 124), an indirect and non-
confrontational style of acting that is "excellent speaking: no blemish or blame" (p. 106). This is to discern that any policy, if it must be upheld in an accusatory way, is not really a good rule.

**Affectionate Thoughts of Oneness**

Third, it is important to notice and remember with fondness our students as they reveal themselves through class participation. We must think of our students as people who are like us, with whom we have much in common. Taoism is to cultivate this sense of oneness, "a mental quality incapable of being known through mental scrutiny" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 81). Although how we think of our students affectionately cannot be exactly measured in terms of its effect on performance, I believe that students vitally sense what I think about them and that our thoughts have a great impact on the development of creativity. Can we not agree that teachers who make us feel noticed for our worthiness bring out the best in us? Certainly, a teacher's affectionate thoughts of oneness are incredibly significant when it comes to facilitating creativity.

On my way to work in the morning I make a point of thinking about my students - appreciating the people they are and recollecting the artwork they are making in class. I think this stance of appreciation, generated in advance of the day, is the ground for the possible that enables artistry in an institution that is generally so regulatory and impersonal. This is the "special style of teaching that matches the character of the Tao
being taught. It cannot be put into words (because) a good teacher is like the Tao she
teaches... it is the spirit (that) is taught" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 99).

**Honoring the Lives of Our Students**

It is important to introduce a course in drawing and painting with a written outline.
However, it is more important that these stated aims are brought to life and made
experiential on the first day of the course. This is because creativity is something that we
do - it is the active engagement of an individual's imaginative capacities so as to order
and give meaning to lived experience. Animating this on day one is imperative for it sets
the whole thing into motion at the start, which is critical. I start off by inviting all the
new students to draw a picture on the chalkboard showing something that is important to
them in life. Speaking to the meaning of what they have chosen to depict, participants
then introduce themselves to one another. In this way, artwork is put into action as a
unique form of communication that develops - in actuality and not theoretically - a
community of artists as the core curriculum.

When we honor the lives of our students by acknowledging the meaning of their artwork
we must be deferential. Our aim is not to prove we're the funniest, smartest, most
organized educator but to be a rather unremarkable one so as to allow others to shine.
For teachers, this is to accept the risk of appearing as a non-authority, a regular person
going through life without superiority in relation to anyone else. Emptiness teaching
requires that we are able to endure and to trust our nothingness.
When we are strong enough to be generous in our facilitation - to dare appearing weak - we have begun emptiness teaching effectively. However, it is important to note that although we are non-imposing we do not cease to be vigilant. On the contrary, emptiness teachers must remain aware of uncertainty. Despite the fact that it is the practice of receptivity - Yin energy that brings harmony - Taoist facilitation is passivity dynamically interpreted. When the *Tao Te Ching* teaches that "what appears soft, weak and empty... is the foundation, the source of everything important" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 79), it is not saying that Taoists are doormats who accept everything, even the unacceptable. On the contrary, "the idea of Laoist ruling style still aims at enforcing justice" (ibid., p. 127). However, this enforcement is not full of masculine pride but stems from the self-cultivated presence of Yin. Therefore, it is not destructive or full of itself, but right and necessary for the overall health of a whole situation. The *Tao Te Ching* explains, "Intuitions springing from this state of mind are the same as intuition given by the Tao" (ibid., p. 83).

In Part Three of this thesis I go on to detail how Taoists might work to awaken this open awareness within. For now, suffice to say, emptiness teaching does require that you work hard but this effort is so precise that it is not in any way noticeable. Good things seem to happen by themselves. Indeed, the creativity of others is unfolding through your emptiness in a manner that is not perceptible to students. It is as if nothing is happening but you are doing so much. "The thirty spokes unite in one hollow hub. In this 'nothing' lies the wheel's usefulness" (p. 32). Truly, to embody this hollow hub requires tremendous personal energy from the emptiness teacher.
Imparting Content through DVD's

Teaching by DVD's loosens the domain of the teacher as the one expert, which is key as authority is the one great artistry killer. Videos (which I take out from the Vancouver Public Library) free me from the linear role of teacher imparting content, allowing me to be with my students as a person who is exploring and learning from my own point of understanding, a subjective individual too. This is my way of achieving emptiness teaching, leaving "no tracks or traces" (p. 106) despite having a curriculum. The use of videos accessible from the library to all is Taoist facilitation - it is nothing special. Students are quick to respect this approach to imparting content, allowing you to gain voluntary cooperation as you are not imposing your will forcefully on others, causing resentment. "And so the Wise Person: puts himself last, and so finds himself in front" (p. 22).

Art technique DVD's feature many different artists demonstrating the processes involved in their creative work as well as their personal reasons for such choices. Students see that art encapsulates many distinct and varied approaches, each connected to the particular artist's own inner experience of what is sensible and valuable to him or her. This reveals clearly that art is not just an object but each person's own original, innovative way of being creative in life that is inherently valid. If I featured myself as the sole teacher of art, providing all the lessons myself on how to paint, I would not be modeling artistry as it is necessarily diverse and varied, taking infinite forms among people.
Art history videos are also an invaluable resource as they offer vast compilations of visual works. It seems self-evident that simply looking at art is one of the most powerful tools with which to teach art. In addition, effective art history videos also document the lives of artists in a manner that is provocative and emotionally moving. Students discover that the lives of artists are like their own lives. As we look inside the journey of a creative person, revealed is the universal struggle we all endure as people to make sense of our lives and to savor the beauty of our experience despite the bitterness of disappointment, tragedy and war. Artists are not different from us - they are us. Artist biographies show students that art making is for their life as they are living it now. This implicitly gives students permission to express visually what is most important to them as individuals. There is nothing we must fix up, study or improve upon in order to begin. We can start practicing now. "No one commands it, it always just happens naturally" (p. 140).

After a video has played, each person in the class comments one by one on the information. In the role of direct teacher at this time, I have a pointed opportunity to briefly lecture not from any notes per se but as a participant in a conversation students lead from the basis of their current understanding and growing background knowledge. This way, I connect person-to-person and thus hit the mark more often with my teaching. I can have more confidence that the lesson is relevant insofar as my unscripted lecture is sensitive and directly attuned to the interests, insights and questions expressed by individual students. "Great Tao drifts - it can go right or go left" (p. 138). This requires detachment - a willingness to meet students where they are at, wherever that might be.
Unscripted lectures in response to videos is one example of how an educator might deliver content while remaining in emptiness teaching at the same time - doing what we can to accept and meet others from exactly where they are at. Through emptiness we resonate with the actuality of our students' understandings and then, in a flexible way, we spontaneously seize the moment of response without hesitation and a connection is there. There are no problems or complications of misunderstanding and people are not bored but excited. "Allow to be," teaches the *Tao Te Ching*. "The best emerges without the need to resist impositions" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 169). The method of improvised lectures based around student response to videos works easily and directly, bringing about the desired effect - an inspiration to develop artistry for oneself.

**The Improvised Lecture**

A background in theater improvisation is very useful in terms of facilitating emptiness teaching - which is to encounter others. This requires that we are willing to take the risk to be spontaneous, prepared but unprepared, genuinely open to the moment as it unfolds as unrepeatable and original. In 1999, I studied Improvisation for one year at Humber College in Toronto, Ontario. My teacher was Allan Guttman, the musical director for the original cast of SCTV. As Allan's student, I learned that improvisation is not at all about making up a scene on the spot. To think that you, as a lone actor among other actors, are going to willfully impose your idea of what should happen on stage is total death. Out of fear and a lack of skill, I experienced this humiliation many times.
Finally I learned that improvisation is in fact not making up a scene. It is not to make anything happen for "no one in the world can make (the Tao) his subject" (p. 136). Improvisation is actually to listen, to remember, to pay attention and to respond authentically, in character, to what other actors are doing on stage in the present moment, especially if these things seem insignificant. When we allow ourselves to make even a small discovery then something much more powerful than one's own willfulness can unfold. As if by magic, the whole scene goes along wonderfully when we stop trying to make it happen. This is like crossing over into another world. In improvisation, this responsiveness is called 'accepting offers'. As we receive through our emptiness the actual moment - the offer - the scene goes along perfectly on its own. When I experienced this for the first time, I cried out to Allan, "This isn't just impov, it is a religion, except without the religion!" I had discovered spirituality: an embodied sense of connection to a greater ordering force that functions through self-transcendence.

Accepting offers is an entirely different way of making sense of being that changed my life. It empowered me with a learned capacity for presence. This is necessarily experiential in that you must be inside the scene in order to correspond to the actions of others appropriately. The spontaneous lecture involves the same skills that I came to be adept at through my training in improvisation. As the teacher, we are inside this as it happens, not outside as we might will it to happen by our script. This is the essence of *wu-wei* - to be relaxed, flexible and able to go with what is - in order to develop relationships and a sense of community. For an art teacher, this is ideal insofar as a pre-condition to artistry is often affirmative relationship.
This is the entire crux of this thesis - that creativity is not to make something up so much as it is to respond authentically to what is. The former is to live in a self-protective ego-illusion and the latter is to be more than that - it is to have the capacity to meet others on their own terms, not as we need them or want them to be, but as they are. I think this was probably Plato's central concern about the arts being a degenerative form of knowing. However, I believe that in *The Republic* Plato was not condemning artistry, which is to meet reality through our creative means. Rather, he was condemning willful artifice - the ways in which we fool ourselves into trying to make reality up by ourselves. Such fabrications are what Plato likens to shadows cast inside a dark cave by a fire - art that is an illusion from a place of inner fantasy. I agree with Plato about the problems of artifice. I am thus advocating a philosophy of art education premised upon emptiness, which is the courage to leave the cave of illusions for a real encounter. Emptiness teaching demands of us infinite flexibility, which is to proceed with the difficult: art production and art teaching not as the safe, controlled making up of something, but as an unscripted, unknown and intuitive responsiveness to the facts.

**Self-Directed Studio Time**

I dedicate two full classes every week entirely to student art production. For this block, I employ classic emptiness teaching - embodying a quiet, present space in which students might enjoy creating freely, without any impositions. Students are invited to choose any art medium, subject matter or art technique(s) they feel compelled to try. I encourage them to be self-directed and develop their own resourcefulness, to find what feels
important for them. "Everyone encourages skill so people cultivate artificial Goodness. Dropping all these programs is the best thing you can do" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 171). If a student is having difficulty connecting to painting as a meaningful and exciting endeavor, I talk with them about their interests. In a short period of time, all people seem able to enjoy the momentum of artistry as is seems to grow on its own accord.

The overall emphasis of emptiness teaching during studio time is to warmly support each student in finding their own creative action of visual meaning making that is satisfying and sensible for them. A comprehensive, in-class library is of core importance to non-teaching as it allows students to research areas of art production that are of personal interest. Weekend sketchbook assignments are also designed to support students in connecting visually to the heartfelt significance of their own, everyday life experiences as a worthwhile subject of their art. For example, a landscape sketch might be the view from a window in one's own home, or a portrait sketch might be of an important person in the student's life. All student artwork produced during class time should also be exhibited without selection, including pieces in progress, studies and finished works. This shows the ongoing nature that is the evolution of art as process work.

As artistry is not a product but an ongoing expression of experience communicated, all ends-based activities should be removed during studio time so as to be truly self-directed activity. This includes the suspension of all evaluation of visual work by the teacher. Instead, self-evaluation is a powerful way of shifting from self-conscious effort to self-forgetful enjoyment. Even comments on student artwork ought to be avoided by the
teacher as this establishes her as a judge who has some sort of special authority. This causes people to feel inferior which can cause feelings of resentment. Giving students time to show and discuss their artwork with the class is more appropriate. Finally, student artwork generated in class should not be stored in a portfolio. Hiding art away or picking and choosing 'the best ones' to show is not Taoist facilitation. "Ten thousand things arise and are active and he (the Taoist teacher) rejects none of them" (p. 92).

**The Mini-Lesson**

After four weeks, which is the middle of the term, my students are working strongly as independent artists. They show a trust in the freedom I have given them to experiment with new materials in a classroom environment that is process based. Without fear of comparison, recrimination or judgment, they are each well into their own way of creating artwork that is meaningful and important to them personally. Such initiative was lit as we viewed and discussed art videos. The fire of creativity is crackling in people at this point and no more videos are needed. All that is required now is air. This is when I move completely out of the picture in terms of imparting a curriculum. When students are not engaged in self-directed, open studio time, I do this by replacing video-content with content generated by the students. I call this the mini-lesson.

The mini-lesson is a session facilitated individually by students to the entire class, of which I am now a student as well. During this time, students may share discoveries they have made during studio time with their classmates. For example, a student might show
how she created the reflection of the moon on water and invite others to try. However, in keeping with the overall teaching of artistry, the subject of a person's mini-lesson is very open and ultimately welcomes the subject of one's own life in the most total sense - the things that matter to us most.

Artistry is the whole person and all the ways that they live with feeling and appreciation. It is to explore our lives as relationship. Therefore nothing is excluded in the mini-lesson except for the safe choice. The safe choice is a subject that is emotionally remote to the student. The teacher can only determine if a student's mini-lesson proposal is a safe choice through her own sense of who the student is. This requires again our receptivity. We must be attuned in order to discern between imposition and guidance.

An example of an effective mini-lesson would be Mark's tribute to Michael Jackson. When the celebrity died, Mark was devastated. During studio time, he created portraits of the pop star and a memorial poster as well. For his mini-lesson, Mark showed these works and talked of his admiration for Jackson as a human being. He emphasized Jackson's commitment to charitable deeds despite the fact that the singer had been mocked by the media and abused by his Father. The injustice of Jackson's life seemed to resonate with Mark's own life experience. This went much deeper than what could be in view. Mark's mini-lesson left me with the sense that somehow he had shared and received acceptance/witnessing for the burden of a private sadness on that day. The openness of the project allowed him to do this for himself.
Another example of a good mini-lesson that engendered encounter was from William. At the beginning of the class, William asked if he could do his mini-lesson first because he had to leave early to drive his girlfriend to the airport. Somehow it came out that she was waiting in the school parking lot in his car so we invited her inside to participate. William's girlfriend joined us as he proceeded to invite the class to create early Valentine's Day cards (it was January). The next day, William came to class with tears in his eyes. His girlfriend had gone back to Hong Kong. My sense was that through his mini-lesson William had found some sort of closure, a way of saying good-bye to his beloved in the support and comfort of his art classroom community.

Emptiness teaching can do amazing and surprising things for people as it helps to re-orient students to the story that is their own unfolding humanness despite an institutional context that is often impersonal. Beneath the internalized divisiveness of how we organize students in schools by success or failure, there always remains the person who is not reducible but alive and whole to that life of their own. Recovering such an individual to themselves is to allow them to exist in this truth of who they are. Opening up being as a possibility for others in this way is one of the great powers of visual art when it is facilitated through emptiness teaching for it is this simple connection to our own life experience that is the cause of joy. As the *Tao Te Ching* tells us, "If you're looking for real enjoyment of the world, the most important thing is to preserve a healthy state of mind capable of subtle pleasures and a deeply satisfying relationship to things" (LaFarge, 1992, p. 47).
Conclusion

Reaching out in emptiness, I am learning, returns in its own time, in its own way. I feel satisfied as my students come back to visit me, striking out their own hand to embrace mine just as I did so many times at the beginning. The warmth of a radiant smile communicates their happiness to meet me again and to tell me about how they are doing today. The life of emptiness teaching is a rare blessing to live. As we have allowed the best in others to emerge, we receive the grace that is their own goodness of reciprocity. I can only feel honoured to wake up to another day as an art teacher who is in a position, in some small way, to serve others. This seems to make the fact of my personal insignificance more bearable.

I am 37 years old as I write this thesis. Each day I wonder how much time I might have left as the human being who lives and is called, 'Amie Wolf'. This recognition - the fact of mortality - is our most significant friend on the journey toward being less self-centered and is the foundation of emptiness teaching. "We must first recognize that we shall all inevitably die," writes the Dalai Lama, "(because) such thoughts help us diminish our preoccupation with the concerns of our present lives" (2001, p. 39). In the words of Iris Murdoch, "Goodness is connected with the acceptance of real death and real chance and real transience and only against the background of this acceptance, which is psychologically so difficult, can we understand the full extent of what virtue is like. The acceptance of death is an acceptance of our own nothingness which is an automatic spur to our concern with what is not ourselves" (2006, p. 100).
When we contemplate deeply the fact that we are going to die we can more easily let go of any perceived problem with another for the sake of harmony, which is the giving spirit of Taoism. Emptiness, which is the diminishment of the ego, is of course just the affirmative energy of human love from which all good things come, including visual art. Whether we call this love, humility, emptiness or detachment, we are all speaking to the same truth: to learn to attend to another being for their own sake, without thoughts of self-gratification, is to fulfill the purpose of one's own human life.

I will now follow this chapter with a piece of inquiry called, 'Beauty For Feeling Without Words'. This piece uses poetry and image to convey the spirit of emptiness teaching, which is essentially to be aware beyond our usual projections and desires of the self so that we can "just listen to this as the soil receives the seed" (Krishnamurti, 1995, p. Jan. 29). However, before moving on to this inquiry, I would first like to finish this chapter with a verse from the Bible that encapsulates the meaning of emptiness in the language of Christianity. This is important in order to show that Taoism, although it is to do with spirituality, is not a religion in the dogmatic sense but that very seed concerning human virtue that is the central concern of all religions and philosophies.

"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous, love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (New American Standard Bible, 1 Corinthians 13).
Chapter Four

Beauty for Feeling Without Words

A Love Story
"The essential nature of matter lies not in matter but in interconnections. The essence of the core lies in relationship; relationships make matter." -MindWalk, Movie
Tell me a story, friend.

Well,

Once upon the waves

there was a sunset

and dark branches.

So it begins,

"interpreting the echo of God's laughter." -Doll, p. 155
"...create a moment of life itself." -Alvarez, p. 23

One morning in fresh snow

I saw the birds singing in a tree

We were feeling the same these birds and I

overjoyed in a new white world.

"My body is an open circuit that completes itself in others." -Abram, p. 65
Tell me a story so I can know you,

Wings Wide

so that I can hold you in my heart.

my friend

Now that you've arrived
Let us walk by the sea.
Reality is in our own relationships.

I am here with you.

"Placeless events are not possible."
- Abram, p. 161

Remember?

Love doesn't really have any words at all.
This story is an experience of meeting.
Our lives are the story as we breathe.

Like an open pea shell
the story shows
our souls are inside.
"We all have something in common.

At first it seems we are speaking separately

but after a while there is a shift

and the room is talking in the same voice

and this is what it means to be human." - Hari Gopaul

"People are all the same, madam." - Einstein
Just look at the beautiful light

reflecting on the snow.

Let's go outside!

yes!

Love can most powerfully awaken the soul from its slumber in the body world.” -Abram, p. 122
There are no words for it, this forest sea.

I'm coming undone inside.

It's a big problem
to write it down,
this always new world.

It is not possible to step twice into the same river." - Heraclitus
Don’t worry.

“Truth is the pathless land.” - Jiddu Krishnamurti

Where there are no paths

there is music flowing.

How beautiful is this world.

How I truly do love you.
The most I ever learned involved lots of walking

and not a single word.

Listening is a story
Always there is one to be heard

"From our bodies we understand nature." - Henry Moore
As I write hail is telling the language it speaks

Stones of ice tapping on my window

What it says I can't say

Only that I love to hear the sound.

I'm in the world

and it is wonderful

"Magic is a heightened receptivity to the larger,
more than human field." - Abram, p. 9
Our stories found
   we fall into the arms of one another.

A magic is here
because you are here
my love.

"An invisible and continuous life permeates all things." - La Flesche
Welcome

to my star-side home

where I live

upside

down

below low the ground.

(approximately here)

By starlight under the moon

come near to me as the cherry blossoms do

and let our loneliness

be the never ending rains that have finally passed.
This is beyond my imagination.

I have no idea

how this happened.

"These are your friends. This is your community." -Karen Meyer
Listening to the inside of a tree

"I recognize the higher powers of the spirit...

This is the soul imprinted

with all these colours." - Norval Morrisseau

I listen with my hand.
From within and without

We are of these

the inside stillness

and the outside blowing.

"We will use our actual minds

to create our possible worlds." - Doll, 163
"Life feels itself from the inside...

(we are living here)

...what a day!" -MindWalk, Movie.
Please tell me one more story

before I go to sleep.
I'm listening.
Chapter Five - Celebrating the Life of the Artist

In this thesis I have explored teaching art mainly as a matter of reducing student deficiency needs that are barriers to seeing and suggested the establishing of a non-choosing Taoist classroom environment as being most conducive to creativity. I have also looked at how imparting an art curriculum, including instruction on technique and history, can be facilitated in a manner that maintains a spirit of receptivity. This means that students are never objectified as containers for the teacher's knowledge but personally sustained in a dialogue that is relevant and freshly conceived - creativity itself. It seems timely at this point to include a compilation of visual work generated by my students this spring, 2010, as these pieces are the result of emptiness teaching I have spoken so much about.

To enjoy viewing the visual work of my students is a celebration of being alive - that ongoing journey of making sense and giving voice to our human experiences. "We are not passive receivers of the world but are active in shaping, glorifying and consummating it," writes Lyas. "In these moments we arise transfigured from the deadness of our habitual lives in the continual possibility of spiritual renewal" (2000, p. 31). Cartier-Bresson describes the vitality of the renewal that is the result of visual art production when he writes, "...through the act of living, the discovery of oneself is made concurrently with the discovery of the world around us, which can mold us, but which can also be affected by us. A balance must be established between those two worlds - the one inside us and the one outside us. As the result of a constant reciprocal process, both
these worlds come to form a single one. And it is this world that we must communicate" (1999, p. 42). This oneness of inner and outer is artistry - where the true or essential self comes into presence to receive the world that is external to it, creating a vision of what seems most necessary to express.

The point of art is that it gives us this wonderful chance to communicate how we are personally "organizing and expressing our thinking about ourselves and our worlds" (Lyas, 2000, p. 101). This refreshes us and returns us to that which really matters. In the words of Frederick Frank, "The purpose of art is to transmit the preciousness of life... as a way of bringing people together... It is to be human against all odds" (Squires, 1992, Video). In the space emptiness teaching permits for this "curriculum of life" (Bai, 2007, p. 2), students are empowered to imaginatively weave the threads of personal emotion in relation to life-things so as to invent an original form expressive of their individuality. This is exactly to do with the concrete, particular material of one's own life and explains "the necessity of seeing the world from the point of view of the work" (Lyas, 2000, p. 71).

For example, the portraits of children and the picture of the airplane rendered by my student Vanessa Tam are very moving but only to a person who might be so lucky as to know this young woman. Separated from her baby brothers by her Mother, 17 year-old Vanessa lives with her Aunt in Vancouver. She spent her studio time carefully rendering images of her two younger siblings. The pen and ink drawing of an airplane was
developed the week before spring break, when she would fly back to Alberta to visit the infants with whom she felt a Motherly bond.

Given this biographical information, what seemed to be rather unremarkable art now has significant meaning: creating the pieces helped Vanessa preserve a heart-connection with her family despite separation. As this theme of enduring a disconnection from loved ones is perennial to the human condition, Vanessa's humble artwork successfully communicates ubiquitous emotion. As Lyas writes in *Aesthetics*, "The highest artistic expressions are rooted in the same soil as the humblest" (2000, p. 101). Further to revealing an experience that is universal to everyone - the disintegration of a family due to circumstances beyond one's control - Vanessa's artwork allowed me insight into her situation, enabling a relationship to develop as a result. "Art is a matter of people coming to share feelings, emotions and attitudes... By art we communicate with one another in life" (ibid., p. 61).

To share in the emotions contained within Vanessa's art might not be possible to do by looking at the visual pieces alone. Her art is a celebration of life because it is expressive of the way she has given shape to the sense of her own living experience and allowed herself to be known as a result. The visual work of my students points to this reality of the life of the artist - art is our life as our life is our art. Therefore, it is not possible to come to a full appreciation of visual work without really knowing the artist herself as a person. However, in the feeling of colour, image and techniques selected by the creator, we ascertain a quality of mind that is living there - the artist who is a unique and
irreplaceable human being. Although you - the reader - do not have so many biographical details as I do by which to apprehend the meaning of the student art that follows, and although it is not within the scope of this thesis to enable you to develop a relationship with the artist or enjoy the community of artists in this class, I hope that the self-actualization and friendships generated by emptiness teaching will still be vitally apparent for you as a result of simply viewing the work.

To conclude, a brief note about my drawing and painting students. The adults featured in this section are all completing High School graduation programs with the Vancouver School Board, Adult and Continuing Education, and all the artwork shown here was created this spring, 2010. Adults enroll in Continuing Education for a variety of reasons. Some are immigrating to Canada and seeking to translate their professions here. Often, mature students who are landed immigrants have been successful engineers, architects, medical doctors, teachers, accountants and business people in their homeland for decades. As they start a Western life, they endure culture shock, low level work and are frequently separated from their families. However, many late teen, twenty-something students attending South Hill do not have professional qualifications yet. This group is called foreign students - youth who are living alone or with Canadian families as they study abroad. Finally, many Canada-born students of diverse cultural ancestries return to complete their high school credentials after having quit as minors. Their reasons for dropping out are complex and unique to each person, but often include family difficulties, abuse, addictions, poverty and learning disabilities.
In summary, my students are hardly confident learners. They are each, in their own way, dealing with daunting challenges of cultural marginalization. Many of them lack a sense that they will be successful while in the classroom. Also, it is not uncommon that students were given training in the visual arts at an elementary school level only and often fear that they simply have no talent. This population is further challenged by the fact that they are incredibly diverse. My classes are a complete global potpourri of people. Currently my youngest pupil is 17 and my eldest 69 years old! Needless to say, a strong sense of togetherness - classroom kinship - does not come about instantly.

Knowing this background information is all the more reason to celebrate the ways we come to befriend one another through the visual arts. There have been many times that I have felt grateful for being able to teach my students art as it is such a wonderful means of reaching out to everyone, exactly as they are, and unifying people from that point - the fact of oneself. Indeed, the making of original artwork is a bridge among us that forms communities of understanding that are hard to imagine coming about in the absence of individual creative expression. Considering the diverse population of my Continuing Education art class in Vancouver, that this spirit of classroom kinship can and does emerge seems to be nothing short of a little miracle.
Artist: Andy Yu - I studied art in my High School before. However, most of my art techniques and skills are learned from Amie's class. All of my artistic ideas are from our small library in the classroom which contains a lot of artistic books. My favourite art medium is watercolour because watercolour is a wonderful art medium that makes your painting colourful and vitality! I have artistic strength from deep down of my heart to create such an awesome picture. My art works contain a lot of my deep inside feeling which could express my personal feeling to you! I look forward to continue to create more artwork in the future.

P.S. I don't like to smile but I could express my emotions from my artworks! Like this...
Artist: Pierce Chen - Art for me has been an amazing journey. It was difficult at first, but after a while I enjoyed it. In this term, I have tried using watercolour, pencil crayon and oil pastel, but out of all of it, I like oil pastel more. It is because I like the feeling it came out to be, and also for me it is easier to use than other art mediums. In the future, I will try to develop more artworks by using oil pastel and hope everyone will enjoy looking at my artworks.
Artist: Diana Zhao - I have always known/been told that I am good with hand, but I never knew that I can paint. I am really excited to discover that I can paint something that I am happy with. It makes me really proud. It brought me a joy. I'm not sure about my future aspirations regarding my art, but I am sure I will keep doing it. It is never too much for the beautiful thing! I enjoy art very much. Thank-you for your support Amie. I couldn't have done it without you.
Artist: Tony Fang - I don't have any art background. I get ideas from a photograph or another artist's painting. I love to use watercolour but I'm willing to try other resources as well. My artistic strength would be always learn new techniques while painting and do the best I can. My theme of painting would be freedom - the freedom to create and a message to appreciate landscape. I enjoy the time here to explore, learn and create art pieces. My future aspiration would be to enjoy to create art. If I were an art teacher I would teach watercolour painting is about colours and the freedom to create your own work.
Artist: Rudolf Bugaci - I have not done art since I was in Junior High School. I usually get my artistic ideas from books, pictures on the internet, and views of real landscape or still life. I have tried most art mediums but prefer acrylic paint because it gives me 9 lives like a cat. It gives me room for mistakes so it allows me to play with it a little. My artistic strength would be expressing my own style while also developing an image that reflects on myself. My work always will send out a message of relaxation, joy and even sometimes loneliness. What I have enjoyed most about Art in South Hill would be having the chance to observe other painters creating their own creation while learning new things and applying them to my own work. If I were an art teacher I would teach how to enjoy painting and never judge or dislike your painting. Every painting comes from different styles so sure they will all be different, but different with a unique view and feeling. So be loose, never worry and just enjoy painting.
Artist: LiHong Qiang (Cindy) - I like Amie's Studio Arts courses. That is an excellent experience in my life. I learned Chinese painting when I was a teenager, but I haven't painted for a long, long time. So, it is a new beginning for me. I admire these artists who can do such great paintings. What I like to see is: everyone is an artist. If I were an art teacher, I would teach that an art teacher is to be a guide of the art of life.
Artist: Denis Mashkovsky - I haven't painted since elementary and I really enjoyed it now. My favourite was painting with watercolours and learning new techniques. If I were an art teacher I would teach students to paint with their hearts and that all their work is beautiful and unique.
Artist: Jacy Jiang - I come from China. I like traveling and taking photograph and want to catch every beautiful things around me. Likewise, I very enjoy that art class, because it is an amazing experience to create the beautiful things I think. If I were an art teacher I would be sure to teach the students to experience the beautiful thing and express their own feeling through the creation.
Artist: Yuhau Ding (Daniel) - I'm 69 year-old, but I'm not too old to paint. I think painting is one important part of my life. It looks like humour. I've been studying English Foundations since last year. I also think learning is very enjoyable. The key thing is how to learn something well. I don't think I have painted something well, but I know I still have lots of things to learn. Thanks God! I have very happier life! If I were an art teacher I should tell my students that the arts are not only arts itself. Arts have their own life, includes their own soul and special power... all of these are very helpful to your work and life.
My name is Vanessa Tam. I get my ideas from a photo or my imagination. I prefer using watercolour pencil crayons, because they work like watercolour paint except it isn't as messy. The theme consistently expressed is that I draw what/who I enjoy. I enjoyed thinking about what to draw most while doing art at South Hill. The most important mini-lesson for me was Ben's paper airplanes. We all made one for ourselves and coloured it. After that we went outside and flew them. It was fun! In terms of art, my future aspiration would be to continue drawing as a hobby.
Artist: Palwinder Sangha - I haven't done painting from a long time but it was fun doing drawing and painting. I really like it. In the class I always used books from the library to make my artwork interesting. I like to use Acrylic paint most in the class and most of my paintings were done by acrylic paint. I really liked my class and of course my lovely teacher Amie. She is kind to everyone. As an art teacher Amie did a great job in teaching. I would do the same thing and teach about Emily Carr. I would show the class how Carr struggled and became a real artist.
Artist: Tony Yee. My ideas come from books and magazines. Watercolour is my favourite. I have a previous history in pencil crayon. The time spent at South Hill Art 12 Drawing and Painting has been very memorable. If I were an art teacher I would be sure to teach that art is art. There is nothing good or bad. Even if the creator thinks it's bad, someone may think it is beautiful art.
Artist: Gloria Lau - I haven't drawn for a long, long time. In this class, we can try anything we like. It was fun. You can also see the classmates painting. They are so wonderful. It makes me feel that I have to keep on drawing and I really enjoy it.
Artist: Ben Prasad - Before this class I never knew how to draw or paint at all. In this class I learned a lot about art and my fellow artists. This was a very fun and enjoyable class. Amie, our teacher, made it a free and open class - your art is whatever you want to do and is never judged. If I had another choice to take an elective again I would choose this class again. If I were an art teacher I would be sure to be as cool as a teacher as Amie.
Artist: Vicky Jian - I used to be an architect. I am good at watercolour and pen ink. To show the natural beauty with my painting is my dream. I appreciate South Hill to give us this wonderful time for creating beauty. What a beautiful world outside!
Artist: Shirley Bear - I have been interested in art since I was a very young girl. I have attended artist workshops over the last ten years, but am mostly self-taught. I have really enjoyed being able to experiment with different ideas and media that I haven't tried before at South Hill. I liked doing my mini-lesson and sharing ideas and listening to other people's mini-lessons. I have learned a lot from them. If I were an art teacher I would encourage people to try - to have fun - that everyone's expression and how they see art is different and that difference is to be celebrated. And to give them confidence in themselves in their art.
Artist: Charlan Chen - I am a novice in this Studio Art class, but I love and enjoy being a student to explore my 'talent' in art here. Amie encourages me all the times. She makes me feel that I am an unpolished jewel and has a lot of potentiality in creating painting. During this course, the most happiest thing to me is that I realize art is life and life is art; they are the one and couldn't be separated from each other. I appreciate and realize the meaning of art in my life. For me, it is important that I could draw some beautiful pictures or paintings. If I were an art teacher I would encourage students to anchor on their own certain art level and explore their own world of art. I would remind my students that they are really art teachers of themselves; we need to use our hearts to observe the natural and keep learning from nature.
Artist: Alejandra Sanchez - I haven't painted or taken an art class before. Since taking this class I started to appreciate beauty around me. I enjoy more the colours of the sunset, sky, trees, flowers, etc. and how everything is perfectly match. I like to draw flowers from different books and put them together in one sketch.
Artist: Michael Chen - Biography unavailable
Artist: Lina Liu - During the time I'm taking Studio Arts 11 and 12, I found this the most unique experience I have ever had in my life. At first I couldn't draw a picture at all. However, now I can use my picture to express my feeling of love and beauty. I will be devoted to arts in the rest of my life. I hope in the future I can use my creativity to draw the most touching moment. If I were an art teacher I would first be sure to teach students to look for the beauty of nature, people and society, and then to encourage them to paint them. Then, I will teach them to think about the deep meanings behind different arts and to create some arts which are useful and helpful for people's life.
Chapter Six - Teaching Emptiness As a Way to Respond to Art

Emptiness teaching facilitates student creativity by inviting people to produce visual works of art in an atmosphere free of external, teacher-made impositions. This freedom, supported by instructional days featuring information on art technique and art history, allows individuals the room to be authentic in their self-expression, to produce pieces that are true to their lived experience. An emptiness teacher's willingness to attend to visual work on its own terms, from the perspective of the artist who made it, holds this space open for people. Creating art for the sake of satisfying a curriculum goal or pleasing the teacher pales in significance when compared to the work of fulfilling our human need to personally make sense of and communicate to others the ineffable fact of our own lived experience.

However, in addition to giving students the chance to speak authentically to the truth of their lives through visual work created during self-directed studio time, a complete philosophy of art education must also include teaching students to reciprocate this emptiness in return; to practice responding to the visual from the point of view of the work and not only from the point of view of the self. This is not our meaning that we project onto a work of art for psychological convenience. Rather, this is to resonate with the actual meaning of the work itself through a willingness to detach from our usual ways of seeing, to "surrender ourselves to its authority with a love which is unpossessive and unselfish" (Murdoch, 2001, p. 86). In this sense, art is not an object for decoration, reflecting the taste and personality of the one who procures it, but a living spirit in its
own right, inseparable from the consciousness of its creator. To respond to art only on
the basis of one's own, selective preferences is far too narrow and superficial, yielding
only a shadow of the meaning that more objective aesthetic appreciation affords an
educated viewer. In order to appreciate beauty deeply, which is, to a degree, selflessly,
students must try to consider a work on its own terms, from a place of emptiness. This
requires practicing self-transcendence - the foundation for aesthetic experience.

In this chapter, 'Teaching Emptiness As a Way of Responding to Art', I will examine
three ways teachers might support students to receive the authentic, human meaning that
is communicated in works of art by artists. Specifically, I will discuss the following in
relationship to cultivating emptiness for response to art: 1. the role of art history videos
that stimulate feelings of empathy for the artist in the viewer; 2. student discussion about
the personal meaning of artwork generated in class; and finally, 3. the importance of
exams that stimulate dialogue as opposed to closed definition or 'right answer' exams.
However, before I explore these areas of teaching emptiness so as to support students in
learning to respond through a level of self-transcendence to art, I would like to first
briefly explore the significance of the idea that works of art do have meanings beyond the
free-interpretation of the viewer.

A Return to Meaning - Post Postmodernism and Taoism

In the 20th Century, cultural borders have dissolved in the plurality immigration and
global communications have generated. As a response to this incredible diversity, we
have become aware of the fact that our perception is comprised of something called a 'worldview' - a way of seeing that is not universal but relative. In particular, what was once perhaps taken for granted as a truth about reality is now regarded as up for interpretation. Generally, it is largely accepted that there is no one, right way of viewing something and that a variety of perspectives - none of which can be thought of as more correct than the other as they must all be equally valid - are inevitable. According to postmodernism, there is just no such thing as a reality that might be objectively perceived. In other words, the notion of subjective relativity has trumped the actual.

As a philosophy that states there is not a 'real world' out there that might be apprehended objectively, postmodernism helped us to cope as our territories of worldview shifted in a sea of diversity. However, in its absolute relativism, postmodernism has thrown the baby out with the bathwater, deconstructing even the most vital, core notion that there is a way we ought to live in relation to the fact of nature and other living things. In a world that is now very small, where the industrial activities of one country affect the water, air and soil of the entire planet, and where we are inter-connected through digital communications and a global economy, we are struggling to re-align ourselves with our shared responsibilities. Although each one of us is different, members of a family have in common a commitment that is greater than the individual. For today's modern global family, the natural world that we share is at stake.

When left entirely up to subjective interpretation, right action is often defined from a point of self-centered isolation that generates many problems, such as greed, injustice and
environmental destruction. The troubles of our world suggest that we do not need more of the postmodern philosophy and its view that there is nothing real outside of self-interest and personal opinion. Rather, we need a way to reconnect with our responsibilities: to remember the fact that we are accountable to nature, that nature does exist and that we must act to preserve the interests of others as we make choices about how we ought to live. It is no small thing then to teach that art does have an important, central and intended meaning for the viewer that is autonomous. This is part of the shift from postmodernism to a "post postmodern view of art education" (Richmond, 2009a, p. 523) - a shift from the reign of the individual's freedom to define what is seen to an emphasis on the individual's sense of responsibility to perceive what is actually there.

This post postmodern perspective on teaching response to art through emptiness is distinctly characteristic of Taoism. According to the traditional Eastern worldview, the notion of one's individuality and the value of asserting personal distinctiveness through difference is not a cherished idea. Rather, the non-competitive, unifying spirit of Taoism is reflected in the classical Eastern artist's approach to creativity, including "ideals of aesthetic tranquility and submission to the ways of the past (that) find no parallel in the major cultural motifs of the West" (Okakura, 1964, back of book). A Taoist perspective on art making presumes all that could be created has been created already. Therefore, there is nothing new to create and no such thing as the notion of the Western individualist. In the classical East, an artist is regarded as a small scope of intelligence exploring this vast and factual terrain of the unfathomable given - the natural world that gives life and upon which all life depends. Taoist artists are not inclined to sign their
artwork for this reason - they do not see themselves as having invented the work or having forged an independent identity by creating it. There is simply not that striving to assert oneself as a voice above the others in the traditional Eastern worldview. Rather, there is an under-stated desire to be with the actual that is more vast than shifting selves or ego-oriented behaviors.

The dominant Western worldview, however, tends to believe that people might be totally innovative and that it is good to strive to create something completely new so as to gain distinction. This idea of the creative individual is valued - the person who successfully claims in an aggressive way, "I am me because I am different, separate, from everyone else." The American abstract expressionist artist Jackson Pollock epitomizes this romanticized, inflated view of the rugged, fly-in-your-face rebel of society who breaks the rules to disturb the tranquility and order around him. Far from being considered a triumph, Pollock's expressionism is viewed in the classical Eastern perspective as vulgar and of little value. The goodness of the determined, lonely individual disharmonizing with society is not a Taoist virtue. Rather, post postmodernism is the cultural worldview of the East - to live quietly and humbly, in harmony with the greater laws of the existent natural world and accordance with shared "commitments, beliefs, values, consensus and shared responsibilities" (Richmond, 2009a, p. 524). In the words of my Chinese student, Cathy Zhao, "Art is not about creativity or self-expression. It is about doing the work of communicating what is true about life in a way that can be understood by the viewer."
Art History

If art is about communicating something that is true to life, then aesthetics, in no small way, is the task of imagining sympathetically the life of the artist. Part of the beauty of a work of art is that it is the work of a life - the mind of a particular artist seeking to express their sense of experience. This fact - that all art is expressive of the artist - reaches profoundly to the core of what we are as human beings: we are spiritually alive, compelled to find a form that communicates our feeling. This is our common ground - although our art is different, just as we are different, it is the same in that it is a form of human life.

The capacity to sense how a work of art uniquely achieves this unfolding of an artist as a person in a holistic sense is an achievement of empathetic sensitivity necessary for responding to art fully. This challenges us to really see, which is to feel accurately the human content communicated within a visual piece. For students to apprehend this - to take in the scope of what art offers us - the teacher must present the life of the artist in the most heartfelt way possible as a vital component of understanding their artworks. In particular, a sympathetic portrayal of who the artist is or was as a human being - her personal struggles, hopes, disappointments and joys, as well as the historical and social context of her lifetime - is essential for students to study.

Good art history videos achieve this sympathetic portrayal of artists very well. (I find that the *Kultur* series available at the Vancouver Public Library never lets me down.)
students empathize with the artist as a person through these excellent, provocative videos, that particular artist's visual work begins to appear meaningful in a personal and heart-felt way. Where students may have seen nothing valuable before, there is suddenly a feeling for the beauty of the art through an understanding of its place in the artist's very human life. Art history cultivates this important awareness - to be alive to art as it is not a dead thing for us to project our narrow, self-interested opinions upon but something autonomous and of its own. In this way, empathy opens us to the artist's work like a flower opens in the sun. I would like to expand on this point now by providing a biographical sketch of Emily Carr.

**Emily Carr**

Emily Carr was born in Victoria, British Columbia, in 1871, the youngest of four older sisters and one brother. Her nickname at home was 'Small' and her love for creating visual art disparaged by her family. When young Emily's Mother died, she and her Father had a terrible falling out during a conversation about sexuality Carr refers to as 'the brutal telling'. A feminist well before feminism, Emily Carr then struck out on her own to develop her love for drawing and painting at the age of eighteen. She studied art in San Francisco and in Paris. Carr also traveled to remote Kwakiutl villages in British Columbia, where she felt at home. Her indigenous friends affectionately named her 'Klee Wyck', or 'Laughing One'. Carr wrote extensively about the unfairness of Residential Schools and spent years of her life painting images of Totem Poles and images of Kwakiutl culture as these were in the process of being decimated by the racist policies of
the Indian Act. She felt a deep love for Native people and was devastated when her paintings, honoring the beauty of Indigenous culture and art, were flatly rejected by the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1913.

This rejection of her work caused Emily Carr to have a sort of nervous break down. She rested in hospital for months and, when she finally left the sanatorium, she painted very little. Carr felt like an outcast. In her words, "Life is like a game of musical chairs - when the music stops I never have a seat." During this time she managed a residence called, 'The House of All Sorts', a rooming house in Victoria. When Carr finally did paint again in 1920, her subject matter was no longer First Nations people and totem poles but the Canadian landscape. Carr was inspired by the paintings by Lawren Harris, a member of the Group of Seven. She wrote that his landscapes spoke to her soul "in their language of silent and awe filled spaces." Retreating into nature so as to commit herself to landscape painting in the most complete way, Carr lived by herself in a caravan in the forest with a host of animal friends, including a pet monkey. She was looked down upon by society for doing so because, at the time, a proper woman had to be married, a Mother and a homemaker.

Carr refused society's definition of a proper woman and never married. The loneliness she experienced was intense and difficult for her to bear, and her artwork was scarcely noted. She gained some recognition, however, when parts of her book, Klee Wyck, were read aloud on the CBC. However, her unfashionable views of the injustice inflicted upon First Nations people by Residential Schools were edited from the text. On March 2nd,
1945, Emily Carr died, an unrecognized artist. Only fifty people attended her funeral. Today, however, she is remembered as a visionary, a rebellious genius that had both the intelligence to see and the courage to express the truth of the times even as people rejected this truth. Carr did not turn away from the difficulty of this. Rather, she bravely spoke to the reality of it. For this she paid a great price while at the same time living with the satisfaction of knowing she was an authentic human being. In her words, she was happiest feeling this way: "One hundred per cent pure me."

Knowing about Carr's life and being as reflected in her art allows us to deeply appreciate the profound significance and beauty of her work. How could we be so moved while looking at her paintings without this knowledge? The importance of Carr's drawings and paintings is directly centered in the importance of her human life and all the virtues that she embodied: courage, authenticity, ethical insight, tenacity and, of course, tremendous humanity in the feelings of loneliness, rejection and anger she suffered in response to societal conditions of the period - the norms and prejudices among which she was forced to live out her life.

Carr reveals to us a brilliant human soul, one that would not be quashed by the suffocating societal expectations of her time, a soul that would not be silent in the face of righteous racist laws and policies. Her artwork touches our hearts as we feel into these qualities - the character of Carr's heart and mind: who she was as a person. Yes, Carr's artwork is important insofar as it was an early wake-up call, an effort to bring our attention to the environmental devastation caused by clear cutting. Her work is also a
valuable historical record, featuring depictions that reveal the humanity of First Nations people even as they were said to be savages kin to wild animals and corralled like cattle onto reservations. But above these contributions, Carr’s paintings enliven us to what it looks like to endure as a person who is spiritually alive despite all odds. Knowing this - feeling this - opens us to the great, enduring and powerful aesthetic beauty of Emily Carr’s exquisite artwork.

There are a variety of videos available at the Vancouver Public Library that combine biographical information, images of works of art and interviews with art historians so as to effectively elicit a sympathetic response from the viewer. As a result of watching these videos, students develop a much deeper appreciation of artwork. This is essentially to practice compassion - to feel for and care about another through what we can see about a person; to recognize how visual art and the life of the artist is, in some mystical or even spiritual way, one in the same. This mystery does not apply to famous artists only but includes everyday artists as well. Therefore, discussing the meaning of student artwork in class is another effective way to teach emptiness as a way of response to art.

**Discussing the Meaning of Student Artwork**

After every studio day, my students and I sit together in a talking circle to explore the process and meaning of artwork they've generated. During this time each person shows what they are working on, discusses the significance of their artwork and, if the piece is complete, puts it up in the room for exhibition. Sometimes this discussion is very
personal and other times it is somewhat technical, focused on problems using paint to evoke a certain mood or atmosphere. When technique is brought up, students support one another and often teach one another how to achieve certain painting effects. I might offer a book from our drawing and painting library as a form of assistance. However, the talking circle is mainly a time for people to open up to one another about what is happening in the context of their own lives at the present moment as their artwork relates to such personal experiences. Art is central to the events of an artist's life and when given the freedom to do so, people situate their creativity as a direct, expressive response to those whom they love, what they care deeply about and how they feel.

For example, my student Sylvia developed many beautiful paintings that reflected her emotions as well as the importance of the relationships in her life. In one such work of art, she featured an image of her Father sitting under a huge tree, a glorious butterfly in the distance. She cried as she shared the meaning of the painting with the class during a talking circle. It was the anniversary of her Father's death. Sylvia also made a magical underwater painting as a gift to a friend she was visiting the following weekend. While speaking to this particular work of art she told us about the importance of this person in her life and the wonderful tradition the two friends treasured of giving handmade gifts to one another over the years. Sylvia also had three young sons. One day she painted a gorgeous gold figure of a pregnant woman. The work was inspired by a wooden sculpture of a pregnant woman that she had received while carrying her first child. And so it went. As Sylvia worked she painted out the story of her life - her joy, her grief and her love for her friends and her family. As a class, when we looked at Sylvia's art we felt
her presence - her emotion. Sylvia's artwork placed her, as artwork places an artist whom we know, dearly in our hearts.

A talking circle is often hard work as it mainly involves the task of listening - attending to the other not for a matter of self-gratification or even for some sort of goal. Rather, during a talking circle we are listening just to receive the other as they actually are. This has nothing to do with self-interest in the shortsighted sense nor is there an instrumental aim to the work. The challenge of responding to art through emptiness is that it is not an escape from the demands of reality but a facing of reality - the fathoming of that which is autonomous and not to do with the self. This challenge is to give another the gift of witnessing; a gift of love and caring that is to nurture another for their own sake.

During a talking circle I observe that students sometimes have difficulty affording one another this attentiveness. They might become visibly impatient, sigh, stare at the floor or fall asleep. However, it is important to continue to give students the opportunity to train within themselves the capacity for alertness that emptiness demands - to remain awake to that which is not to do with self-concern. It is only through the practice of this discipline - to be empty as a shell so as to receive what is present and autonomous - that we might have a fully satisfying aesthetic experience. This satisfaction is the simultaneous appreciation of the visual qualities of a work of art in relation to its heart-felt meaning to the artist. This is entirely the experience of being close to another person; a genuine understanding, supported through the creation and sharing of original visual artwork, that yields the fruit of an authentic friendship: the feeling of closeness. In the
words of Iris Murdoch, "Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality... something my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal" (2001, p. 87).

Although response to artwork is an incredibly complex process of perception, "it is possible for the viewer in practice simultaneously to view a work with some historical knowledge in mind, interpret a visual language, and get a feel for the artwork's aesthetic qualities. This is simply a way of saying that human beings can function holistically" (Richmond, 2010, p. 9).

As emptiness teachers try to teach others emptiness as a way of responding to art, we cannot use force to make students listen to one another. Sensitivity, of course, is the last thing that could be coerced out of a person! I believe that we can only try our best to model this emptiness and to give our students the feeling of being received themselves as a means of internally waking them up to the significance of attending to that which lives beyond the ego. Emptiness is an emotional experience, not a teachable item. To be known it must be given and received; its importance is only what comes out of the doing of it - generating the living sense that "we need not as humans live in isolation but that through art we learn to tread the common ground of humanity together" (ibid., p. 12).

As I practice the work of emptiness during the talking circle I am aware of the energy I am expending. Listening with openness and receptivity is really a task we must be prepared to undertake. Eating, sleeping, exercising and emotionally centering oneself adequately before class are all vital aspects of self-care that make attending to that which is not the self possible. Obviously, if a person is very hungry, tired, angry or lonely,
emptiness is especially difficult to practice. Indeed, most of my students are not up for selflessly attending to one another during every talking circle. Some students are rarely up for it. However, I find that by the end of the term, despite not so infrequent 'zoning out', the knowledge generated in class during talking circles regarding the personal significance of artwork to the artist who made it yields an appreciation for the fact that, in a special, even sacred way, the visual speaks to the inner life and being of the person who made it. But how can we know our students are, in fact, responding to art in this way?

Exams That Stimulate Dialogue

Exams that invite reflection through open-ended questions are a means by which we might assess student response to art. Through exams that are meant to stimulate dialogue - a way to talk about the experiential and emotional aspects of art appreciation - teachers have the chance to gain insight into the inexpressible aspects of another person's perceptual process. The aim of an exam regarding student response to visual art is to expand on this journey of appreciating art as the artist's expression of his or her inner life. This is, essentially, a matter that is nonverbal as it involves our feelings. Therefore, when considering a student's written responses to artwork, our aim as emptiness teachers is to situate the words in the context of the life of the person who has written them - the student you have come to know - and to resonate with his own inner experience of the work. This requires that, as markers, we are fully present and not dogmatic. Rather, we are fresh, flexible and willing to go with responses that are objective yet subjective at the same time. We must be willing to accept that there are many ways students might phrase
a correct answer and that these answers are not really the response we are looking for but rather only the pointers to a receptivity that cannot be put into words.

Response to art goes deeper than repeating a definition or a multiple-choice question. Rather, informed response to art is personal and heart-felt even as this response is educated and somewhat objective. I have spoken to some extent about subjective and objective response to art in this chapter but somehow, as Lyas explains, we come to a tangled end at being able to sort one entirely from the other when it comes to understanding response to creative, human expression: "These remarks (student response to visual art) are attempts to engage with one another. The question of subjective/objective simply does not arise for us. These contexts are not its home" (2000, p. 128). Sometimes the visual is best responded to through the visual itself. I often begin an exam with the question, 'Please draw a picture that shows the meaning visual art has in your life'. Students respond to this evocatively in a variety of ways that, despite differences specific to the individual, all point to aspects of the same central theme of art as a heartfelt form of emotional communication between people that enlivens empathy, a connection to the natural world and spiritual vitality.

How are we to respond to such artistic responses to the meaning of art? I respond intuitively, with brief poetry in some cases or a few words that I feel resonate with what is there. Many times I simply read the work and underline the sentences that strike me. In the arts, the use of induction seems to fit; we add on to one another's insights through a spirit of finding agreement or simply 'allowing-to-be'. We want to build our students up
and give them confidence as they develop their own way of articulating their perceptions.

Teaching emptiness is to highlight similarities and to find intersections that show ways of responding to art are not so isolated but inter-subjective. This is Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblances. Although art is not identical, but open and creative, and although our responses to art are inevitably variant, there are threads of overlap - family resemblances - throughout it all. This requires a particular spirit of interpretation - we are willing to see how student responses inter-relate so as to assist the meaning of a work of art, which is perhaps ultimately spiritual - an unsayable meaning - to somehow float up to the surface.

When I return these exams, students share their reflections with one another. They show their illustrations as well as read out their verbal responses to questions that, I believe, require a complex thought process to answer. For example, "Please discuss the life of an artist whom we have studied in class. In the context of who this person is as an individual, why is their artwork meaningful to you?" Response to art as dialogue approaches knowledge as a much more complex, non-linear means of understanding among people that is suitable to the open nature of creative work. This is knowledge for life that extends beyond any conceivable curriculum aim in its scope, which includes the possible and even the infinite. Every artwork generated in class, every exam, video and interaction is part of building up this inductive knowledge, which is essentially the flow of feeling into the relationships that infuse our lives with love. This is to live as a person who is spiritually vital, who is unafraid to be creative and sensitive, able to respond with immediacy, flexibility and emotional range to the visual environment. This requires a
whole person to be present. Exams that stimulate dialogue fit with this very broad aim of art education as a way of fulfilling ourselves as human beings alive in the world.

**Conclusion**

If a work of visual art is expressive of the inner life of the artist who made it, then response to art must be something of a meeting of human emotion - person-to-person - that animates a sense of empathetic understanding. In a holistic way that cannot be ascertained using deductive methods, the meaning of a work of art lies in these complex interstices of subjectivity and objectivity. Yes, we respond to art as the individual that we are, but this individuality must not be confused with an assertion of psychological fantasy. Although our response to art is inherently personal it must be, at the same time, also objectively informed by knowledge about the context of the work - the life of the artist as a human being and the facts of the time period in which the artist lived. Such sensitive perception cannot be forced or willfully constructed and is best supported through a teacher's non-forcing approach of *wu-wei* - providing guidance while not impinging upon a person's *kyogai*: the "utterly unique tone of consciousness from which all our reactions come" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 249). As emptiness teachers, we perhaps are most able to evaluate our students' uplifting and ineffable aesthetic experiences through our own knowledge of who these individuals are as persons.

In teaching response to art, it is not the conditioned projections of the viewer that has value, but the individual's willingness to humbly de-self so as to perceive something as it
actually exists, autonomous and separate from oneself. In the words of Iris Murdoch, "...in the enjoyment of art and nature we discover value in our ability to forget self, to be realistic, to perceive justly. We use our imagination not to escape the world but to join it, and this exhilarates us because of the distance between our ordinary dulled consciousness and an apprehension of the real" (2001, p. 88). Thus, "an education in art becomes an education in seeing, in freeing the mind from prejudice and in an opening up of the self to a more sensitive and appreciative connection with art and the world around" (Richmond, 2010, p. 11). This is to do with the traditional Eastern perspective on aesthetics, an ancient worldview modern Western thought is reclaiming today through the name of post postmodernism: "universal notions like fairness (and) equality" (Richmond, 2009a, p. 523), a spirit of simple and quiet harmonization with reality, "a sanctuary from the vexation of the outer world... (where one) can consecrate himself to undisturbed adoration of the beautiful" (Okakura, 1964, p. 41).
Part Three - Self-Cultivation

Emptiness

Photograph by Amie Wolf
Introduction to Part Three - Self-Cultivation

In Part One of this thesis, I explored Taoism and showed how the Eastern philosophy's classic text, the *Tao Te Ching*, lays out an excellent pedagogy for art instructors today. In Part Two, I went on to discuss what a practical application of Taoist pedagogy might look like in terms of the day-to-day of an art classroom. I did this by giving examples of how I work to facilitate student artistry through the principle of *wu-wei*, or non-forcing. In this section I also spoke about how students might be taught to respond to art in kind, with a spirit of emptiness - an aptitude to appreciate the other for its own sake. Finally, in Part Three, I conclude this thesis with two chapters, both of which concern the matter of cultivating the capacity for emptiness within oneself.

In the first chapter, 'Deep As My Love - Cultivating Emptiness Through Self-Acceptance', I address the very important aspect of an emptiness teacher's work to heal his or her own deficiency needs. If we are to facilitate creativity through receptivity we are obligated to take up this difficult task of seeing through our own barriers to seeing - those personal anxieties that, when left unexplored, control our perceptions insofar as we are unconscious of them, cutting us off from our potential to be fully present to reality. Breaking through self-protective and reactive emotional knots is challenging work that requires stamina and resourcefulness. Our own ego resists emptiness as it "is not normally a transparent glass through which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect itself from pain" (Murdoch, 2006, p. 77). Just as a farmer skillfully uses a plough to open up the soil, we too must persevere in our work to
disturb the habitual ways in which we have become defended and impermeable - unreceptive - even as our ego clings to "the selfish dream life of the consciousness" (ibid., p. 83). There is no one right way to do this. Rather, self-cultivation is a very personal and ongoing journey, intimately to do with one's own situation in life.

Emotions such as anger and loneliness commonly obstruct our capacity for receptivity as they are such stubborn states. However, it is upon those hard feelings caused by abandonment, betrayal or disappointment that the gate to our creativity is latched. In the piece, 'Deep As My Love', I use art, photography and poetry as a way to embrace my own hard feelings and, in so doing, access the softer emotions hidden underneath that allow people to let go of pain and to begin to really appreciate once more - to receive emotionally - the beauty that is around. As we reclaim our original self in this way we renew our perspective and are able to respond authentically to what is real, just as we did when we were children. This is to access our creativity, which Kierkegaard calls, 'the spot'. "To become is a movement from the spot, but to become oneself is a movement at the spot" (1941, p. 169). We achieve this efficacy as we enable ourselves to open a healthy imagination, one that joins us with the world as it is and as we are.

The one thing required for overcoming neurosis - a macabre repetition of the known - is our vulnerability, or Yin. "Being weak is Tao practice" (Tao Te Ching, p. 74). As we allow ourselves to own what seems to be the most worthless qualities within we become whole. This is profoundly empowering because, as authentic people, we are capable of emptiness - the ability to meet the world on its own terms that is the foundation of
creative insight. "Yes: A great carver does no cutting" (ibid., p. 36). In this way, what is the least is the greatest as it enables us to spiritually revitalize ourselves. My deepest wish is for all people to have the opportunity, as I have, to bring up through their creative knowing what seems to have no value so it might take its rightful place as their dearest treasure in life. As Karen Meyer writes beautifully in the unpublished note called, 'Warrior Gifted' (2008a):

"To be a warrior is to bring your distinct gifts to the community. But first you need to understand what a gift is. This may take most of a lifetime. And then you need to know your own. This knowing comes only from the heart. Remember this. Gifts themselves are not what make you shine. Gifts are what embody your hidden vulnerabilities and your deepest fears. You have nurtured them so well and for so long. These gifts are your power. Grace is how you share them."

In chapter two, 'Passages - Poetry for Cultivating Emptiness Through Resonance', I have tried to develop the capacity to feel at one with other, or to resonate. Emptiness teaching requires that we actively build up and exercise un-possessive contemplation, to practice "seeing the world from the point of view of the work" (Lyas, 2000, p. 71). To do this we must know how to merge into the within-ness of the other not as a thing but from the spot of its own life quality. As I explained in Chapter Six, 'Teaching Emptiness as Response to Art', this involves a special sort of objectivity that is necessarily subjective at the same time. Emptiness is not a total void but the "natural, inherent self which occurs psychologically, without a person having to construct it" (Pawle, 2005, p. 12). It is through an awareness of this quality called kyogai - the "utterly unique tone of consciousness from which all our reactions come" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 249) - that true perception, the cradle of our creativity, comes.
Applying the philosophy of Zen, or rather the non-philosophy of Zen, I worked in 'Passages' to wake myself up to kyogai - my 'original face before I was born' - and to the immersive, Zen-quality of seeing from these original eyes, where there is "no viewer and no viewing" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 160) but a satisfying, experiential sense of being "right in the midst of the ocean of becoming" (ibid., p. 255). This is suitable concerning practicing Taoism as Zennism and Taoism are forms of the same teachings. In the words of D.T. Suzuki, "the Tao is the truth of Zen" (1969, p. 74). As poetry enables "anatman - the teaching of an expression of an experience and not a logical conclusion" (ibid., p. 223), it seemed the most suitable form to communicate this self-cultivation of resonance.

I hope that these poems, inter-woven with excerpts from the writings of Zen Master, D.T. Suzuki, might also internally vivify for the reader - as the writing of them did for me - the lively spirit of Taoism as it can only be embodied in the living of one's life as 'all in the one and one in the all'. Thank you in advance for considering my personal journey to cultivate within myself emptiness as a form of self-acceptance as well as an ability to feel at one with that which I perceive. I hope that the following works, 'Deep As My Love - Cultivating Emptiness Through Self-Acceptance', and 'Passages - Poetry For Cultivating Emptiness Through Resonance', might serve in some small way as examples of how our creativity can enable us to open up to life, to remain spiritually alive and fully human, despite the disappointments we must bear.
Chapter Seven - Deep As My Love

Cultivating Emptiness Through Self-Acceptance

Whole
Photograph by Amie Wolf
You felt so near
But I moved only with my shadow
between the trees.

Oh now,

now I remember You!

at last
"97 percent of the people in this town would probably like to shoot me dead. I'm kinda miserable, as you know." I haven't seen or spoken to my Father for many years. I hold his hand, the hand of the man who adopted me at birth. Now he can no longer even breathe on his own. Eleven days later, on May 9th, 2008, my Father succumbs to lung cancer in his hometown of Valleyview, Alberta. Barry Williamson was sixty-three years old.

When I'm back at home in Vancouver I'm so tired I can't think anymore. Exhaustion forces me to let my concerns go. From my bedroom window I watch the clouds, the cherry tree in the wind, the birds traveling across the sky and the flickering light of the sunset. I sense that there is a rhythm in the world, comings and goings of all sorts that are not happening randomly but intimately syncopated without effort. I feel rooted within this great, easy orchestration of movements and fall asleep.
I disappear along with it, into the sky of sleep

my mind just floats away

undone like thread pulled from a seam
The next day I follow some paint across paper. I make rough, thoughtless brush strokes. I don't like the marks or the insipid colours. I wish the painting looked more appealing. I wish my relationship with my Father had been more appealing, too. But it was not that way. My Father didn't show an interest in me as a daughter. The picture below is not pleasant and I do not like looking at it, but at least it represents how my relationship with my Father really was for me - hurtful and dark. It depicts my own truth.

*My Father, My Self*
I have a vivid daydream about myself as a mature woman. I'm in my sixties, living with an expansive garden that opens out to the sea and a view of the mountains. I'm surprised because I've never imagined myself living for very long. Being young and on my own made me feel as if I could die at any moment. Now I finally feel as if I might be all right.

Early in the morning on my eyelids come shapes and colours. These move and ask for charcoal, chalk and oil pastels. I follow the lines that were my closed eyes. The sound of the pencil scratching on the page becomes like the life of the vision itself and the image emerges as if from within the paper. The making of this is a very satisfying experience for me.

A butterfly, the sunlight, the moonrise. I sing for you, as an opening to an opening. None other could create this. I am not doing this alone. I am recording a union, one of myself with myself with life.
My Father has died. I can't believe it. All the fantasies I held onto, wishing for our relationship to become wonderful some day, will never happen. And the burden of his terrible suffering, his alcoholism and despair, has also ended.

After the funeral my Father appears in one of my dreams looking healthy and content, wearing a beautiful pale blue shirt. He's just there. When I wake up I know: he has set me free. I feel new but how have I changed? I am inspired to explore the question. Self-portraits seem like a good way to begin.

I discover a luscious grove of self-possessed red poppies fully bursting in bloom. In many ways, I am like these poppies. I honor my Father and set him free in return by recognizing my sufficient independence, self-reliance and inventiveness. I am everything but destroyed! This world, my world, is a wonderful world. I live my life! This is My Self: I am of my Father but I am not him. I am with Me, a person, a human being in possession of wonderful regenerative and transformational creative capacities. Although I was made to feel otherwise, I am worthy of my love. *I deeply love and accept myself just as I am, in this very moment.*
Feeling invisible to my Father has become a habit of internalized self-disappearance for me. My disappointments and tears became his reasons to ignore me, so I learned that my normal, human feelings must be profoundly unaccept-able. As I was my Father's daughter, I believed that there must be something inherently un-loveable about me. In such a rejected emotional state living becomes a sort of hiding from everyone, including yourself.

Now I photograph this feeling as it manifests on my face, not in the darkness of alienation but in the bright light of a brilliant sunset through my kitchen window. The immense shame of rejection has to greet the reality of my Father's death. I am determined to acknowledge myself. "The visible has come through the darkness like a message" (Berger, 1991, p.177). It's a new day, my day. I am in the process of being here.

\[\text{I refuse the fear and go toward the darkness. I start to discover the way of love: total acceptance that contains all. This is the freedom from suffering I have been seeking.}\]
Once there was a morning
and I awoke
I felt so alive!

Once when it was raining
every drop swelled my heart
and I became light as the air!

There is no actual shortage of love in the open world. I've learned that every existing thing will adore you unconditionally if you imagine that you could be that worthy. All that is required is a daring reversal of thinking. For example, I do not look at the tree to admire it. Instead, I realize the tree is admiring me. Thus my gaze becomes a response to loving acknowledgement. So, I am a wildly beloved daughter after all! Even the clouds claim me as their own child. I have admired nature and honoured nature in my artwork, but

who am I when painted by the wind?
Sacred Daughter
memorize my love upon your face
and seal it to your heart.

As the light knows you
make this your own
as I have made you mine.

In the night I fold my arms around myself. Now the pain of feeling abandoned is possible to hold, but only sometimes. I am practicing! Hopefully I will be reliable one day, available to give myself acceptance whenever I might need. However deep a person's suffering, I believe love can reach in.
However deep has been your suffering
that is the measure of my heart:
Deep as My Love.

Look!

The curtains have been drawn back
and there you are...
...whole.
Chapter Eight - Passages

Poetry For Cultivating Emptiness Through Resonance

Resonance

Pen and Ink Drawing by Amie Wolf
I am writing to wake you

You are me

All of this is for you

Wake up, wake up, beloved!

The world of light

has laid a pathway

for you to follow

Go on!

Take the passage as it is taking you

This is your life

You are doing it now

Wake up!

Do not let it slip

Pay attention!

This is your child!

"Whatever teachings there are in Zen, they come out of one's own mind. We teach ourselves" (Suzuki, 1969, p. 38).
I stand at the Oceanside alone with stones

My thoughts are like boomerangs
they always come back
to just hit me in the head

My loneliness will never be solved this way

I am trying to travel
to feel free by thinking about life

but it's not working

What now?

"This coming to a cul-de-sac, where all possible avenues to rationalization are shut up, is really the true starting point in the study of Zen" (Suzuki, 1969, p. 108).
How courageous are you?

How alone can you be?

How much reality can you take?

How far will you see?

"We have to go through a great struggle to get at the truth of Zen" (Suzuki, 1969, p. 16).
Alright, then
let me be just a light
upon your hands
so we might find out
who you actually are.

"Enlightenment and darkness are substantially one. The mistake consists in splitting the two" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 15).
Now, when the morning is washed out and grey
this is the time you have been preparing for

Loneliness moves near
and in the stillness
there is nothing to do
You are alone

Now, this is the moment
of meeting
Do you, at last
have the wisdom
to face
your own
face?

"Self-nature is not to take hold of anything" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 193).
I have crossed through countries
both of desert and permafrost
  frozen my feet
and burned my fingers
but today
we finally meet.

Hello!

"Hsing - something ultimate in the being of a person, a vital force, the kernel or nucleus in which a heart or mind lives" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 172).
Your original face
shines like wood
after the rain
This feeling is genuine you
Your real response
is beautiful.
This is you in life!

"Watch every mood of your mind as it comes in contact with a world of constant
becoming" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 286).
I fall
laughing
into the arms
of myself
Like a star
in the sky
I am.

"Zen is the primary nature of experience... there is no mind standing against an external world" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 219).
I took my first steps this way

barefoot

and without a word.

"Zen is the breaking up of the restriction imposed on one as an individual being" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 107).
In the hills of grasses and red crickets
Silver leaves thrown in the wind
Each song, each flickering and wild turning
makes me into itself
Here, I am not me
Here, I am here

"Zen is man thoroughly merged in Nature" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 244).
My eyes follow

Pigeons stream across the sky

and seagull circles around.

"The truth is unfolding right before your eyes. That is all there is to it" (Suzuki, 1969, p. 42).
A duck slips over the lake
the bush stays in one spot
and the sky shows its stars
in the night.

"Zen penetrates and is finally lost in the immersion" (Suzuki, 1969, p. 42).
Bright birds
shine songs into the world
My body moves in their play
and it is wonderful!

"Not born of relative knowledge, (Zen) gives satisfaction" (Suzuki, 1996, p. 150).
I feel that I am really in life
and part of all the action!
This is what matters:
what it can mean
to live.

"To live - is that not enough?" (Suzuki, 1969, p. 71).
Conclusion

I began this thesis with a prologue explaining my personal impetus for writing about practicing Taoism as a form of teaching. I shared that my Mother is an alcoholic whom I have been unable to assist or have a relationship with. Taoism has helped me to not only hold the difficulty of such a devastating experience but to transcend it, transforming self-guarded pain into consciousness that is open and available. This is because Taoism is a way to understand one's life not as a singular, cut-off self locked in a particular context, but as a being contained within an intelligence much more vast than the self. When we are wise with the Tao we are aware that whatever we do to support life in any form supports all forms of life, including our own. Taoism helps us to live joyfully, nurturing our capacity to attend to others despite disappointments we are powerless to change. Understanding this has helped me to continue saying 'yes' to life - to forgive, to love and to be compassionate despite everything. I needed to find a way to do this and studying/practicing the teachings of Taoism helped me to find my way.

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I included a piece of inquiry called, 'I Love the Falling'. This showed how artists might work so as to personally practice the Taoist way of self-transcendent seeing that is not prejudiced but receptive. However, in Chapter One, I first provided necessary background about what Taoism is and looked at how its classic text, the *Tao Te Ching*, is very relevant for teachers today as the poetic document outlines a way of thinking about what leadership might look like when not conceived of as a pressing forward of oneself. Rather than imposing one's own vision of what 'should be'
aggressively upon others, the Tao Te Ching advocates that a good leader wins peoples' hearts by allowing them to shine according to their own abilities and inspirations. This is to gain voluntary respect and cooperation by putting oneself last, which is to restrain one's self and risk appearing non-dazzling so others may have enough room to also be, bringing out the best in everyone. Although the Tao Te Ching was written 2,500 years ago in China by many authors, the primary known being Lao-Tzu, I argued in this initial chapter that it is still relevant to those looking for an alternative to educational instrumentalism as it beautifully details a way to center curriculum aims in a humanizing way, allowing intelligence to blossom naturally within a person. Of course, this is an excellent approach for teaching creativity!

In Chapter Three, 'Facilitating Student Artistry through Emptiness Teaching', I went on to explore how the Taoist approach of wu-wei, or non-forcing, works as a way to facilitate not only creative, self-directed art production but also the active imparting of curriculum goals. It is possible to hold space and teach at the same time. However, I suggested that containing these opposites is an individual achievement in teaching that does not have a formula but is integral to who the instructor is as a human being. I thus described my own practice of emptiness teaching, outlining in this chapter how this reflects who I am as a person. I provided, among other examples, the way I apply a background in theater improvisation to lecture not in a prescriptive and possibly alienating monologue-manner but to teach by generating a responsive conversation based on reciprocal listening and speaking instead. 'Beauty For Feeling Without Words', another piece of inquiry, animated the spirit of this core principle of Taoist teaching: receptivity - education as a matter of
living relationships that concern the immediate people who are in the room as opposed to
education as an abstract, textual and unchanging information item that has very little to
do with the honest thoughts, feelings and needs of actual students present.

Chapter Five featured a compilation of my art students' work - visual pieces and artist
statements developed in a non-judgmental, flexible classroom environment with an
emphasis on art not as an object but as a means by which we make sense of and share our
lives, celebrating with one another the people we love and deepening our appreciation for
the beauty of nature. This chapter was mainly visual so as to show just how vital and
soul-sustaining art making can be for people when it is respected as a form of personal
meaning-making in an atmosphere that permits freedom of expression. This I defined as
artistry - the production of visual artwork that is not a vexation to a person's spirit but an
unselfconscious and joyful way to feel intimate with and make coherent what really
matters in life: a spiritual connection to the world that is genuinely heartfelt.

I discussed the importance of helping students to practice receptivity - de-selfing to a
dergree so as to understand art from the point of view of the work - in Chapter Six,
'Teaching Emptiness'. Student response to artwork, I argued, requires a sympathetic
understanding of the life of the artist. Aesthetic experience is very much intertwined with
this contextual knowledge of an appreciation for who the artist is/was as a person as well
as a student's own embodied capacities to viscerally respond through feeling to the
sensual aspects of visual encounter, such as colour, texture, shape and line. However, I
pointed out in this chapter that response to art cannot be broken down into subjective or
objective elements. Accordingly, I noted the importance of open-question exams intended to stimulate dialogue. In marking such an exam, the teacher interprets the student's description of aesthetic experience intuitively as such response cannot be simplified or reduced to right and wrong. Rather, projection and true perception must be sensitively discerned.

Finally, in Section Three I addressed the very personal matter of cultivating in oneself the quality of receptivity. In Chapter Seven, I explored emptiness as a matter of accepting oneself wholly so as to become more compassionate and free of projections. Specifically, I worked to unearth my most shameful face so as to allow myself to become entirely visible and claim all of who I am. This allowed me to become more authentic as I am no longer hiding part of my truth from myself, enabling me to be a better emptiness teacher as I am less preoccupied and more relaxed with who I honestly am. This illustrates practicing Taoism - the weakest thing is, in fact, the strongest. Lastly, in Chapter Eight, I continued this 'weak-work' by using poetry as a way to become aware of the experiential nature of my perception and therefore cultivate resonance. Resonance is to feel at one with the other, heart-to-heart. However, this does not mean that one disappears as a discrete self. On the contrary, it is to really know the nature of one's own mind - to be aware of perception as it forms. In this interstice between outer and inner worlds is our creativity - we do not get stuck in a loop of habitual seeing because we can see through that seeing. This awareness allows us to be present, which is the essence of emptiness.
To briefly conclude this thesis with a final thought, I believe the greatest mistake schools make today is to treat all subject areas and tasks as if they were merely stepping stones to something worthwhile, such as success or money or a prize. Exploring what it is to be alive and to experience - to feel and to relate - is a precious end in and of itself and the thing that really matters. The rest is superficial. Art is sacred because it is an emotional language, a means by which we free ourselves from the suffocating social mask we are habituated to paste over our innocence and vulnerability. Art speaks the truth that can set us free from such conditioning. To confuse art with anything other than this spiritual aspect of understanding life is a terrible mistake. The traditional Taoist worldview, communicated so eloquently in the Tao Te Ching, offers a perspective that is an antidote to consumerism that has pervaded our assumptions about what education is. If this thesis can be in some small way a real act of resistance to the ongoing, relentless commodification of everything - even the soul of the world - my aim would be achieved.
Bibliography


