The Journey of Creativity with an Asperger's Adolescent

by

Rozanna Becker

Dip. (Interior Design), Witwatersrand Technicon, 1984

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Approval

Name: Rozanna Becker
Degree: Master of Arts
Title of Thesis: The Journey of Creativity with an Asperger’s Adolescent

Examining Committee: Chair:

Carolyn Mamchur
Senior Supervisor
Assistant/Associate/Professor

Allan MacKinnon
Supervisor
Assistant/Associate/Professor

Elina Birmingham
External Examiner
Assistant/Associate/Professor, Department
University

Date Defended/Approved: March 25, 2013
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Abstract

A couple of years ago I created a mini art program for my high-functioning Asperger syndrome son. I felt as an artist and mother that his school was not doing enough to offer him art and inspire his creative being. I also suspected that he might enjoy taking art classes and possibly like interacting with other students of a similar age. My desire as a parent was to help him make friends, socialize and participate in an activity that could be enjoyable. This thesis documents my struggle to marry the two driving forces in my life: motherhood and the artist's way of being. It argues why I believe creativity needs to be part of the curriculum for children with Asperger's syndrome despite the literature indicating that these individuals lack creativity and fear change. During my library search and an analysis of his behaviour to the art-based activities, I began to question what creativity is. How did my son view creativity? Was he creative? These inquiries and explorations became part of the data for my thesis.

Keywords: High-functioning Asperger’s; single-minded focus; mini art program; creativity; mother; artist and educator.
To Evelyn, you are loved.
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My love for you Darren has made this thesis possible. You have taught me to be a better mother, artist and educator. You brought awareness and courage to the meaning Asperger syndrome, allowing me to see the normalcy of your unique existence. A life you live and accept daily.

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My love and thanks go to my daughter Shawna who allowed me to be a student first and then a mother, and my father Jack for assisting me in the many parenting activity challenges I faced.
# Table of Contents

Approval ................................................................. ii
Partial Copyright License .................................................. iii
Abstract ........................................................................ iv
Dedication....................................................................... v
Acknowledgements .............................................................. vi
Table of Contents .............................................................. vii
List of Tables ................................................................... x
List of Figures .................................................................... x
Glossary and Acronyms ....................................................... xi
Prologue: An Asperger’s Eye ................................................. xiii

## Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................... 1
Milieu for Study .................................................................. 2
The Artist’s Possibilities ....................................................... 4
Theory becomes Worth Identifying ....................................... 5
  Theory Develops............................................................... 5
  Modes of Interpretation .................................................... 6
Synopsis ............................................................................ 8

## Chapter 2: Mini Art Program ............................................. 9
‘Friday Art’ ....................................................................... 10
  Interpretations of ‘Friday Art’ ............................................ 10
    Awareness of Research Project Develops ......................... 12
    Interviewing Darren ...................................................... 13
    Modes of Gathering Information ................................... 14
    Finding Meaning .......................................................... 14
    Developing Themes ...................................................... 15
    A New Perspective ........................................................ 17
Theoretical Frameworks Evolves ......................................... 19
  A Deeper Understanding of Creativity ................................. 21
  Examination of Creativity ................................................. 23
  Modes of Creative Measurement ...................................... 28
  Creative Dialogue in Education ....................................... 31

## Chapter 4: High-Functioning Asperger’s ............................ 35
The Evolving Research Question .......................................... 36
List of Tables

Table 1. Mini Art Program Creativity and Behavioral Transformations (January 7-March 18, 2012) ................................................................. 63
Table 2. Overview of Evaluation Process ................................................................. 94

List of Figures

Figure 1. Darren Showing an Interest in his Neighbour’s Art for the First Time ................................................................................................. 60
Figure 2. Students Relaxing during the Creative Process ........................................ 67
Figure 4. Darren’s Contour Flora Drawing ................................................................ 79
Figure 5. Darren’s MYP Project, a Computer he Built, after the Mini Art Program, Reflecting Creativity and Technology ............................................. 91
Figure 6. Darren’s Shell Animal ................................................................................. 93
Figure 7. Darren’s Interpretation of Fall .................................................................. 98
Figure 8. Darren, 2013 won his schools first robotic award. An award for creativity ................................................................................................. 130
**Glossary and Acronyms**

**Asperger syndrome**  Asperger syndrome is often considered a high-functioning form of autism. It is characterized by difficulty interacting socially, repetitive behaviours, and clumsiness. Retrieved from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002516

**Aspie**  A term used to describe an individual with Asperger's syndrome.

**Case Study**  Is a variation of ethnography in that the researcher provides an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, an event, a process, or an individual) based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2011).

**Ethnographic Research**  When used as a method, ethnography typically refers to fieldwork (alternatively, participant-observation) conducted by a single investigator who lives with and lives like those who are studied, usually for a year or more Van Manen, M. (1990).

**Field**  The social and cultural aspects of a profession job or craft.

**Flow**  Csikszentmihályi’s (1997) definition of flow is that there are four components of an activity that tend to make it enjoyable: we must feel like we are confronting tasks we have a chance of completing; we must be able to concentrate on what we are doing; there should be clear goals associated with the activity; and there should be immediate feedback provided. Activities that satisfy these conditions produce the sense of a deep and effortless involvement that takes us away from everyday life; give us a feeling of having control over our actions; take us away from our concerns for our self (which then emerge stronger after the experience is over); and alter our sense of time, such that hours can pass by in minutes.

**High-functioning autism (HFA)**  Used synonymously with AS by many researchers and is on the high end of the autism spectrum (Attwood, 2007; Baron-Cohen 1995) Individuals with HFA are often indicated as possessing cognitive abilities above standard score of 70 (Tsatsanis, 2004).
In vivo codes are labels of categories (or themes) that are phrased in the exact words of participants rather than in the words of the researcher or in social science or educational terms (Creswell, 2011, p. 621).

Journals can be defined as the permanent records of thoughts and ideas that an individual has processed and clarified through the act of writing or otherwise recording their experiences (Killion, 1999).

Lived experience is used in phenomenological research to communicate the experiences of the participants as authentic individuals (Van Manen, 1990).

Mindblindness is the ability of most humans to effortlessly and nearly unconsciously understand another person’s thought process. One of the conditions that prevent this ability is autism, which creates a condition of ‘mind-blindness’ (Baron-Cohen, 1995).

Narrative Research Designs are qualitative procedures in which researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individuals’ lives, and write narratives about their experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Participant-observer is an observational role adopted by a researcher in which they take part in activities in the setting they observe. (Creswell, 2011).

PSP is Sony’s PlayStation portable gaming device.

The Element is the point of which natural passion meets personal passion (Robinson, 2009).
Prologue: An Asperger’s Eye

Unable to maintain eye contact, highly intelligent,
socially inept, single-minded in their focus, interesting, imaginative, determined,
and creative.

Viewing life with a different eye,
Aspie’s are lethargic or should I rather say appear unmotivated,
frustrating, lovable, challenging and imaginative.
My son has forced me to look at life through a different lens, an altered way,
to see things in a new light, to want to do better, be better.
Being a naturally creative person, life has inspired me to celebrate diversity,
but sometimes I crave normalcy, nuances, inferences and simplicity.
The first time my son created his Lego sculpture I stared as his tower loomed above
his peers, each connection carefully thought out and assembled,
I was so proud.
I watched as his “Thomas the train” intricate track layout designs weaved between
the cushions and furniture of my living room;
my "little professor."¹
I was fascinated as he lined his cars up on the living room floor each car at a perfect
angle to the other.
I shifted one slightly as he left the room only to witness his outburst upon his return
as
he immediately noticed my action.

¹ Little professor, is a term used to describe Asperger's due to their advanced cognitive abilities.
Tightly clutching his figurine in his hand our life consisted of rigid routines, little sleep, fussiness and endless screaming.

I knew when he recited all the dinosaurs’ names and habits to the ENT\(^2\) specialist at two years old that he was different, articulated early, sounding like an encyclopaedia, something was amiss.

Overtime his angry screams formed into words, his desires clearly expressed as he refused to dress a certain way—no jeans, no wool, nothing around his neck...

and slowly my eyes opened wide in understanding as I realized how the fabric hurt his sensitive skin, how my smell comforted him and how his numerous tics were stress releasers.

As we grew together he discovered his "flow" and "element" in blogs, wikis, videos, PSP’s\(^3\) and the X-box and life for a while was peaceful.

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\(^2\) ENT specialist is an abbreviation for a physician who specializes in the ear, nose and throat.

\(^3\) PSP- Sony PlayStation Portable.
“Mom, do you want to use the art pieces that I created at school for your thesis?” My sixteen-year-old son asked as he proudly showed me his portfolio.

“I would love to,” I replied. “I will showcase each of your drawings over the past year at the beginning of every chapter.”
**Milieu for Study**

I am a mother of a child with what has come to be called high-functioning Asperger's syndrome.

I am an artist and an educator who believes the creative spirit lives in and can guide all of us.

This thesis documents my struggle to marry the two driving forces in my life: motherhood, the artist's way of being. This thesis argues why I believe creativity needs to be part of the curriculum for children with Asperger's syndrome despite the literature indicating that these individuals lack creativity and fear change (Craig & Baron-Cohen, 1999).

What follows are my journeys and my examination of the literature that has frequently misled me and those working with my son.

My journey and my attempts to help my son adjust to society started when he was born. Prior to my son's fifth birthday I had never heard the word "Asperger syndrome." I had taken him to numerous doctors and psychiatrist and could not understand why he was such a restless, unhappy and difficult child. As a baby I had paced the room holding him in my exhausted arms attempting to rock him to sleep. Sleep deprived and desperate I bought a play swing and assembled it next to my bed, disregarding all the parenting advice my family and self-help books were so ready to share. I had become undone by his unrelenting crying, leaving me feeling resentful and inadequate that I, his mother, could not appease him. Fewer and fewer people came to the house; we seldom left it, for fear of his unpredictable and embarrassing behaviour. Nothing I had read or witnessed said that raising a baby could be so challenging. Feeding my child endless bottles of gripe water I hoped to soothe the 'colicky baby' he was said to be. I believed that there had to be something wrong with his stomach; he seemed in pain as his screams tore across the still night. As I stared out the window at the streetlight shadows on the snow-blanketed ground, I knew that I was barely present. I questioned if this was how child abuse
occurred. Would my weary arms release him if I dozed off? Would he plummet to his death? Would I accidentally roll onto him as he nursed, smothering him with the very thing that provided nourishment? Or would I simply lash out as his cries finally released the demons inside of me? And so for many years I became two people - the ‘good mother’ and the ‘guilt ridden one.’ “Remove everything from his room. He is being over stimulated. Hold him swathed in blankets to resemble a womb. Move his legs up and down as he lies on his back so that you can release the gas build up in his stomach” and so I blindly followed the experts’ advice. He would not allow anyone but me to hold him. Exhausted I lay in bed, watching my son fall asleep to the rocking motion of the swing. His blankets securely tucked around him as the wintry January night wore on. Turning the motor to its lowest speed, I hoped that at some point I could turn it off and gather my child in my arms as I placed him in his beautiful crib, the one I had eagerly prepared for him- like all good mothers do. This was never to be. I should have known that the soothing motion of the swing and my worn out arms rocking him were a sign that something was amiss.

One of my fears is his constant dance with depression. As my son ages my need to help him become accepted by his peers is enhanced as I witness his solitude, aggression and frustration increase. There are times when I question his scant regard for the “opinion of others” and doubt my motifs for writing this thesis and sharing my intimate story. I realize that my personal connection to my son could challenge my objectivity, however, similar to Piaget who conducted studies on his children; my intent is to give an unbiased account of a subject I am passionate about. I have witnessed the lack of comprehension and understanding of the importance of societal expectations in my son’s life, and I have seen how this has created undue stress, tension and anxiety for him.4

4 As indicated by Baron-Cohen, Safran, Asperger, Fitzgerald and numerous other psychiatrists.
Finally when the much needed label came identifying my son as having Asperger’s syndrome. I felt a sigh of relief.

The focus on routines, single-minded behaviour and the assumptions that arose in the literature, triggered doubts and many more questions as I turned to the experts to help me in my struggle. This thesis documents that literature search.

The Artist’s Possibilities

Then the artist in me kicked in, as years of being forced into the role of advocate throughout my son’s elementary school years encountering opposition from his psychologists, educators and play therapists, resulted in my desire to create and discover solutions that could enhance his education, self-esteem and social skills.5 I believe that most peoples’ views on the relationship between HFA/ASP and artistic creativity are incompatible and may have been influenced by early articles written by Frith’s (1972) study on autistic individuals being less creative and a similar article by Lewis and Boucher (1991) implying autistic individuals lack creativity (as cited in Craig & Baron-Cohen 1999). As an artist and educator, this declaration on the part of the experts troubled me deeply. But the experts knew, didn’t they?

Then in his secondary years, I was encouraged by some of Darren’s experiences when educators were cognizant of HFA/ASP individuals; and included and encouraged him to explore non-traditional, imaginative avenues, such as computer generated programs. Based on this probing attention, while not functioning as therapists the educators appeared to respond positively to the social, behavioural and emotional issues he brought to the classroom setting which in turn resulted in boosting his self-esteem and confidence. I continued to observe changes in his behaviour and an interest in the arts developed which brought awareness of

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5 Teachers in elementary school frequently encouraged him to focus on science and math as he appeared uncreative.
universal concerns documented that HFA/ASP individuals are too single-minded in their focus.

**Theory becomes Worth Identifying**

I decided to do some of my own research after reading Fitzgerald’s (2004) book about the many features of HFA/ASP\(^6\) that enhance creativity, the ability to focus intensely on a topic and enormous capabilities of curiosity and compulsion to make sense of the world.

Hunt’s (1962) belief that:

> Newly explicated theories require experimentation and validation just like any other theories. When you try them out in your practice you may find that some are false, some may be trivial, and others are quite valuable. Identifying your theories is essential before such validation can occur. In a similar way, self-knowledge does not automatically produce changes in your actions; it must be put into your practice. (p. 517)

Thus I decided to investigate and improve my practice and beliefs about Darren. I consequently created a mini art program called *Friday Art* for my son and five of his acquaintances. I taught this art program every second Friday for three months with the intention of supporting my son’s diverse needs, examining his relationship with his peers and documenting his explorative journey through and with creativity. During the program I found myself grappling with how to evaluate his creativity as I did not have clear definitions on this process. Thus the development of this program forced me to examine the literature on creativity.

**Theory Develops**

During my data analysis stage I chose to explore additional theorists’ views of creativity, believing that I could re-design and improve my curriculum to

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\(^6\) This is the abbreviation for high-functioning Asperger syndrome.
recognize, embrace and encourage Darren's diverse talent. My research question changed, allowing me to channel my energy into alternative ways to articulate Darren's unique abilities, single-minded focus, and unconventional way of problem solving. No longer was I trying to 'fit' him into a few theorists preconceived frameworks but I found myself looking for methods of changing my own perceptions and understandings of creativity and methods of evaluation.

**Modes of Interpretation**

Van Manen (1990) believes that we cannot "separate ourselves from the text" (p. 180) and this became apparent as the experience unfolded. My narrative is authenticated by its interweaving of theorists' views of why creativity is important in education and whether HFA/ASP individuals can express this form of language. I came to believe that in order to establish genuine learning as depicted by Greene (2001) in her book “Variations on a Blue Guitar” we do need to ask “does art bring us in touch with ourselves?” (p. 22) And, if so, by understanding him or herself better can a HFA/ASP individual become a better communicator and thereby develop a greater awareness of his or her social behaviour?

Greene (1995) writes:

> As Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre have both written when we understand our lives we do so in narrative form, and clearly, our stories while different are nonetheless connected by the same need to make sense, to make meaning, to find a direction. (p. 165)

In this thesis I *incorporate* theoretical frameworks that discuss the origins, nature and significance of creativity and why I believe it is essential in pedagogy to embrace and discuss leading theorists’ perspectives on creativity. Among the questions I ask is, “What are the benefits of introducing creativity into the lives of

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7 Max Winters, a New Zealand teacher, describes his experiences with HFA/ASP individuals as they approach a problem from a completely different angle than the rest of the class often due to their musical, artistic or dramatic untapped talents (p. 14).
HFA/ASP individuals?” and “How do we assess and define creativity?” Finally, I discuss my belief that it is essential to introduce and promote creativity and the arts in education for these individuals at an early age, basing my thesis on research results that tend to stereotype HFA/ASP individuals as concrete, literal thinkers (Craig & Baron-Cohen, 1999). I examine the relationship between Asperger's and creativity.\(^8\) The awareness I experienced based on this non-linear approach to my research influenced the presentation of my thesis itself which I believe has allowed me to reflect and create an interwoven and tangled persona, using narrative as described by Connelly & Clandinin (1999) to best articulate my work.

Narrative inquiry as explained by Clandinin & Connelly (1999) is said to have a long intellectual history, both in and out of education, and is frequently used to study educational experience as humans are ‘storytelling organisms.’ These researchers believe that the study of narrative is the study of human experience, and how we relate to the world. Therefore education and research are seen as being the construction and reconstruction of personal social stories. Van Manen (1990) suggests using personal experiences as a starting point for investigating phenomena. I was convinced that this is what I needed to do to allow my thesis to reflect greater legitimacy as I found that there was a strong correlation between narration and ethnography. The similarities between these two methodologies encouraged me to express my research genuinely and to view it from diverse perspectives as I believe that both research methods captured a form of living inquiry, a way of life that expressed intimacy of relationships and a desire to make sense of the life as lived (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It was this very intimacy that I searched for both as a researcher and a participant, and I became cognizant of the fact that narrative inquiry was more than just looking and hearing a story. The framework of storytelling permitted my son to talk about his experiences in the form of accounts, \(^8\)

\(^8\) The rhizomatic or tangential approach of my thesis appeared to embody Irwin's and Springgay's philosophy of a/r/tography and a similar concept of art based inquiry/research by J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole at times. However I selected only parts of this concept, the use of poetry, art and other graphic mediums to best articulate my thesis.
thus allowing me, the researcher, to embrace a broader everyday familiar form of data collection and to retell my son’s story - and at times my own. In choosing to conduct empirical research, I included the richness of personal perspectives and relationships concerning my area of interest - how the arts act as an instrument to nurture inclusion and acceptable social behaviours for HFA/ASP individuals.

Throughout my thesis I introduce dialogue as his perception and my understanding of him in relation to his environmental development. I believe that these conversations will improve the inherent understanding of how he perceives situations, giving him voice, the reader his perspective, and me a way of refocusing on the subject and motivation for this research.

**Synopsis**

I conclude my thesis by offering implications and recommendations for future research. Each section of my thesis begins with a narrative detailing my son’s and my experiences using quoted responses, prose, art work or poetry to demonstrate authentic observations and accounts. It is this creative inquiry approach that helped to depict Darren’s and my own experience authentically, and invite the reader into some of the many challenges HFA/ASP individuals are confronted with on a daily basis. I trust that this experience illuminates the portraits I painted of myself, each brushstroke another layer of colourful memory.
“Darren why don’t you ask Tyrell to come over and you can play x-box with him?” I asked my then fourteen-year-old son.

He stared at me puzzled and responded, “Why would I do that. I am around him all day at school why would I want to bring him home?”

“Well, hon. perhaps another child then?”

Mum, you just don’t get it, being around kids all day is too exhausting. I need to be alone” he patiently explained to me.

“But hon, don’t you get lonely and want to be with friends?” I anxiously asked him.

“No, mum those are my school friends, you and Shae-Shae (his sister) are my home friends.”
'Friday Art'

The students called the art program, “Friday Art.” In creating this program I focused on student input, adaptations that would support Darren’s diverse needs, examinations of his relationship with his peers and a documentation of his explorative journey through, and with, creativity. This two-hour art program was held twice a month for three months on a Friday afternoon. The setting, my home studio, is located in a garden environment and laid out to comfortably accommodate six to eight people. The studio has a black leather love seat, a large oak table and chairs placed in the middle of the room. Two drafting tables are situated near a large glass fusion kiln; one of the drafting tables was used during the art lessons. The studio has an en-suite bathroom, a kitchen and a sleep loft. The floor is unfinished stained cement and at times too cold to sit on. A few lounging beanbags were scattered on the floor. Shelves line the south and west walls displaying numerous colourful artefacts that I have collected over the years. A large glass retractable garage door and French window permit sunlight to infiltrate the space. The studio’s atmosphere is welcoming, warm and inviting.

Interpretations of 'Friday Art'

I began the lessons by welcoming the participants with refreshments after their full day at public school. This proved to be an ice-breaker. In order to foster a sense of inclusion and ease, the students were encouraged to become involved in the decision-making process by deciding which projects they would like to start with and how they would render them. The studio’s diverse materials allowed my son, who had numerous somatic sensitivities to explore tactile objects safely without excluding him from the activity. The class had five other randomly selected adolescents who were selected via word of mouth and through art classes that I had previously taught. They consisted of both female and male participants who ranged between the ages of 13-15 years. During the selection process I met with each individual’s parent and explained my reason for creating the program. The parents responded positively and were excited that their children would receive “free” art
lessons. The students’ involvement and socialization during the art making process was important to illicit and encourage creativity and appropriate behaviours for my son. Although I was not observing and measuring reactions of the participants, their involvement and interaction with Darren was relevant to produce the desired/non anticipated spontaneous outcomes. Darren was fifteen at the time of the mini art program. He is a tall youth, with a slender frame and has a pleasing appearance. His appearance does not reflect signs of a disability. He speaks with a strong, clear voice when conversing and appears confident. He is able to maintain eye contact for short periods of time and his quick quirky humour hides his pedantic speech and feelings of unease.

The students were provided with a variety of choices to enhance a productive atmosphere, the format was informal allowing the participants to listen to music, chat freely and thereby establish a sense of camaraderie and trust. If the student did not feel like "making art" they were permitted to relax and observe the process. During the class all the students participated in art making, however some chose to finish their projects early and either observe the group or create another design. A typical class consisted of an assortment of materials such as coloured tapestry cottons, coloured papers, fabrics, felts, paints, canson/watercolour paper, pastels, markers and other drawing materials that I had placed on the table. The first lesson began with students drawing foliage that they had selected from the garden. The drawing technique I used for this process was called blind contour drawing. They were not permitted to look at their page during the drawing stage; the intention was to outline the plant life that they had chosen. They were asked to narrow their focus on what they were holding, truly seeing every shape and texture of the plant and not to be anxious about their skill level. After the first lesson, I began all the other classes with a story about a famous artist’s biography and illustrated the artist’s specific technique and artistry. Depending on the day the students would either select their subject matter or choose artefacts, arranging them in a display that they would later paint. The painting/drawing technique would resemble that of the artist whose story we had discussed i.e. Picasso, Van Gogh, Gauguin, or Rembrandt. Some
lessons would extend into the following weeks and students would continue to work independently on their projects.

**Awareness of Research Project Develops**

I realized early on during the mini art program that what I was doing was actually a research project, using purposeful sampling. This sampling allowed me to take advantage of “unfolding events that [could] help answer research questions” (Creswell, 2011, p. 209). After reading Creswell’s examination of opportunistic sampling, I proceeded with caution as this form of sampling could have “divert[ed] attention away from the original aim of the research” (p. 209). I had chosen my son as the central phenomena because not only is he a true representative of the HFA/ASP individual population but, as his mother, my love and desire to explore creative avenues that could ultimately facilitate success and well-being for him was my objective. The qualitative central question I examined was how I as a mother and future educator could help my son, a HFA/ASP individual express his creativity and nurture socially acceptable behaviours. I then narrowed this central question down to answer and address sub-questions that arose. One of my key sub-questions was;” What does creativity look like for my son, a HFA/ASP individual?“ After establishing a framework defining creativity based on leading theorists definitions I attempted to assess if Darren’s artwork was creative. I tapered this assessment to encapsulate Eisner’s (2002) analysis, “the technical quality of the work produced the extent to which it displays an inventive use of an idea or process, and the expressive power of aesthetic quality it displays” (p. 182). Additional sub-questions arose to help me, better understand this process. I asked what process occurred that reflected creativity and behavioural transformations for Darren. How did the process unfold? What were the events that led up to this change? How were the changes noted, and what were the outcomes?

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9 In a later study this could be an example of opportunistic sampling. During one of the lessons a student brought her younger brother and this highlighted my son’s expression of empathy and displayed other emotions with greater clarity.
Interviewing Darren

A month into the program I conducted an interview with Darren in a comfortable, familiar, private room that was free of distractions. No time limit was assigned to the length of the interview. His behaviour and willingness to be interviewed was the determining factor. I used a video camera and tape recorder to record his responses and expressions, or lack of, to my questions. My ultimate goal was to reflect the essence and spirit of my research by using inquiry in its utmost authenticity. I commenced with open ended probing questions that reflected his views of the central phenomenon and my understanding of it (Creswell, 2011, p.132). The first few questions were based on three pre-determined themes: inclusion, affective behaviour and self-awareness/reflection; however I encouraged the conversation to take on a life of its own.

- How do you enjoy creating art with the other students? (inclusion)
- How do you feel during the art-making process? (affective)
- What can I do differently, what could you do differently? (self-awareness/reflection)

At times I verbally probed Darren to help him elaborate and provide additional information. I said little during the interview and allowed him to speak. No notes were taken during the dialogue, as a video recorder was positioned to document his body language and our conversation. I asked Darren to journal during this three-month period, similar to what I was doing in my studies at the time. Based on his advanced computer skills, I encouraged him to keep it in an electronic format and gave him specific instructions regarding the layout and approximate length of each entry. The recordings of my observations, our conversations and his journal entries were discussed and shown to him. I invited him to delete, change or add words to our conversations at any stage during my thesis. My intent was not to collect data from interviews; instead, I aimed to understand Darren’s perspective and experiences through his own words.

The data collection for my research will primarily be collected through empirical research, combined with narrative inquiry, interwoven with the ethnographic case study.
depict anything that could embarrass or cause him harm. His involvement, willingness to participate and trust me was my ultimate objective.

**Modes of Gathering Information**

Data were primarily collected through on-site participant-observation that included visual field notes, casual conversations, and informal interviews with Darren, journaling, videotaping and photographing his art work. I used these diverse data sources for qualitative inquiry to establish greater rapport with the text and to situate my research. My observations focused on collecting data in the specific setting, the art studio, thus allowing me to study my son’s creative process and actual behaviour. At times during the two-hour sessions, my role became that of a changing observational role, (Creswell, 2011, p. 214), as Darren included me in his conversations and art-making. I adapted my role to the situation and focused on good listening skills by attending to visual details during my observation time, and by further photographing him and his art work. Observational field notes were taken to document whether Darren engaged in the art making process, appeared to enjoy the creative assignments, participated in conversation, and responded appropriately to his peers. In the evening I transcribed my notes and reflected on my experiences. I used symbols and brackets to group like concepts together and to develop codes and themes. Transcribing by hand proved to be long and tiresome.

**Finding Meaning**

Adopting a qualitative ethnographic approach allowed me at times to convey my own perspective and interpretation. I achieved this by questioning the authenticity of my study, viewing my analysis with a theoretical lens in mind and trying to remain transparent at all times; thus ensuring that my findings and conclusions were comparable to Fitzgerald’s literature stating that HFA/ASP individuals were creative. My intention was to investigate existing literature that stated more conclusive evidence was needed to prove this theory.
I concentrated on observing if Darren’s creativity was on a par with his peer group and if his art reflected signs of creativity as outlined by Eisner (2002). During this procedure I simultaneously coded the text for themes that were used in the research report, by creating charts of each interview session and lesson. I adopted Creswell’s example of writing notes in the margin to document my first impressions, hunches, concepts and ideas. Writing memos in the margin helped me to later explore the data and label segments of information with the use of the codes and symbols. Creswell’s (2011) suggestions of the codes reflecting "processes, activities, relationships and students perspectives" (p. 244) were incorporated. Quotes reflecting what Darren said were documented in vivo11 as I believe the little professor’s (Safran, 2002) choice of words isolated him and this was ultimately reflected in the work he produced. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded for patterns and compared with patterns found in field notes and field memos. I included images of his art and photographs of the group’s activities to provide multiple perspectives of evidence collected. The photographs of the group’s art making process reflected field notes relating an incident to an event or activity i.e. “what happened to cause him to respond in the way he did?” Furthermore document review included an examination of my own visual and poetic responses to observations, experiences and events that occurred while I was a participant-observer.

**Developing Themes**

I did not make use of existing computer programs but chose to use a computer to create a chart of statements made by Darren. A description of the context in which the quotation was made and a section identifying quotations and potential themes were later identified on the chart. The chart was taped to a wall that I could glance at frequently and search for additional possible themes and/or findings. I used a separate page for each lesson and interview and then synthesized

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11 In vivo codes are labels of categories (or themes) that are phrased in the exact words of participants rather than in the words of the researcher or in social science or educational terms (Creswell, 2011, p. 621).
the data to ameliorate one chart that included all potential themes. Some of the themes as suggested by Creswell were "ordinary or recurrent themes, unexpected patterns, behaviour themes or hard to classify themes and situations" (2011, p. 249). Initially I chose to use Crewell’s suggested themes but then adjusted them to suit my data. I noticed that one theme would encompass several of the identified codes from across the interviews and lessons. At times this created the appearance of "grouping like-concepts" together (p. 234). Sub-themes were managed by using coloured paper stickies or symbols. For example I circled or underlined a common thread in the transcript thus grouping and arranging the themes, ultimately having the bigger picture in mind, however consistent with an ethnographic case study the themes and subthemes did not overlap. Throughout the process, I ultimately articulated five central themes with a variety of sub-themes. I grouped these themes and sub-themes and used them to triangulate the data by once again returning to my transcripts. Using the multiple methods of data collection and triangulation I validated my findings. I used triangulation as it is a common form of inquiry in qualitative research and is used to adopt and ensure that the study remains authentic and trustworthy. Eisner used a similar form of triangulation that he called “structural corroboration.”

Eisner (1991) uses the term "structural collaboration" to describe:

Confluence of multiple sources of evidence or the recurring of instances that support a conclusion [and suggests that in order] for a study to be structurally corroborated the researcher must put together a constellation of bits and pieces of evidence that substantiates the conclusions one wants to draw. (p. 55)

Eisner explained structural corroboration as allowing the researcher to relate "multiple kinds of data to either support or contradict the interpretation or evaluation of a state of affairs” (p.110). He achieved this by collaborating data methods and separating the collection process into themes and descriptions by drawing on multiple sources of information, theories, individuals and processes (p. 259). How this appeared in my research was indicated by corroborating types of
data e.g., observational field notes and interview or documents and interviews, thus validating each against at least one other source and/or method (Creswell, 2011).

**A New Perspective**

Whilst analysing the data I realized that the evaluation framework that I had chosen and altered to use to assess creativity appeared restrictive and unconvincing. I became cognizant that I was trying to "redesign my son" by attempting to accommodate him in my apparent linear structure. Slowly my focus on the creative evaluation process began to change. I developed a curiosity to research and embrace alternative theorist’s philosophies. After examining a variety of theorist’s definitions I chose to revisit, reflect and re-evaluate my data, carefully scrutinizing my numerous notes, interviews and recordings, hoping to view the material with a more enlightened perspective. This fresh look resulted in my research question changing— from ways to enhance my son’s self-concept and social skills, to how effective the program was for Darren, and what changes could be recommended to best accommodate his needs. I express my major findings, identify limitations of the study, make suggestions for future research and interject a personal reflection about the meaning of the data in a later chapter.
"Mum I am so good at break dancing; I can do almost all the moves" my eight year old son happily told me.

I smiled; he was oblivious to his tics and odd body movements and happily too were the other students in his dance class. They thought his movements were part of the dance and Oh! So cool.
Theoretical Frameworks Evolves

Creative: Creativity: Create.¹² The diverse interpretations of these words came to the fore for me while I was conducting the mini art program. I realized that I did not know how to assess if Darren was creative, and I needed a greater understanding to determine this presence and degree of creativity. Craig & Baron-Cohen, (1999) leading researchers in the field of autism, wrote “what do we mean by creativity?” (p. 319). Their statement that it is a “common certainty” that HFA/ASP individuals, based on their narrow minded focus, proved too linear in their thinking and were thus uncreative individuals (pp. 319-326)¹³ differed with Fitzgerald’s (2004) argument that it is this very narrow minded focus that does make them creative. Perhaps it was this difference of opinion concerning creativity that encouraged me to study the philosophies of other educators such as Dewey, Greene, Eisner, Robinson, Csíkszentmihályi, and Cajete who all recognized the benefits and importance of creativity.¹⁴ During this process I discovered that the word creativity often leads to lengthy debates on how we define it.

¹² To cause to exist, bring into being, originate, to give rise to, bring about, produce, to be first to portray and give character to a role or part (appropriate to creating fictional characters and writing stories? Creation: An original product of human invention or imagination (Webster’s online dictionary).

¹³ This article does not give a definition of how creativity is perceived by the authors, also the HFA/ASP individuals were tested using psychological evaluation forms that I believe were not inherently created to reflect creativity but deficits in the individuals behaviours.

Csíkszentmihályi’s (1994) suggests that:

To say that creativity is relative to the conditions of the social system does not mean that it is any less important, or less real, than if it had an independent, objective existence. But it does mean that if we wish to understand creativity we must search for it outside the boundaries of the individual person. The usual question of creativity research –What is creativity? – may have to be replaced by a different question - Where is creativity? (p. 145)

At first I was confused by Csíkszentmihályi’s suggestion that we need to search for creativity outside the boundaries of the individual. His belief caused me to ponder, then wonder what his question “where is creativity?” implied. The concept, that creativity could be viewed as not only being intrinsic but also cultural and social, captured my interest and encouraged me to research how I could best incorporate this philosophy into my teachings, simultaneously observing if there was a relationship between creativity and high-functioning Asperger’s. Some of the questions that surfaced during the mini art program were: How do theorists articulate creativity? Who decides what creativity is? How do we measure or evaluate creativity? How is creativity reflected in education? And does our environment influence our creative abilities? Finally my thoughts centred on why I believe it is essential to introduce and maintain creativity in the lives of individuals, especially HFA/ASP individuals at an early age. My desire to explore these questions led me to expose a multitude of interpretations. I felt the need to illustrate that there can be more than one interpretation of a theory, depending in whose domain you were situated, and that we as homo sapiens, need to be receptive to the concept of potential. My first inclination, based on prior learning, was to dismantle the word and explore the prefix, suffix and root. I assumed that in doing so, based on my medical terminology training I would be able to establish the origin of the word and thus succinctly confine the definition- a neat little lexicon. My discoveries

15 My medical word training has taught me that all medical words are composed of one to three roots; and if you are familiar with the root of the word the idiopathic becomes clearer.
were unsuccessful as the word’s origin is Latin, \textit{kre-at}, \textit{kre-}, a verb that has multiple meanings thus steering me to a world of literature and philosophies that I had not known existed.

\textbf{A Deeper Understanding of Creativity}

Sir Ken Robinson has had more than 8,649,158 viewers to his site for his presentation on creativity that aired on TED.com - more hits than any other presenter in 2012. This significant number of viewers, indicate society’s interest and desire to understand creativity and recognize its importance or lack of, in our education system. His creative use of caricatures to illustrate his ideas while he spoke highlighted his theories. These caricatures produced both a visual and humorous component to a somewhat serious subject matter and changed what could have been a mundane theoretical presentation into a concept that captured the audience’s attention by its sincere relevance and practical sense of purpose-creativity at its best. During my research on how theorists viewed creativity his talk came to mind and my interest was piqued by how he defined creativity, “the process of having original ideas” (Robinson & Aronica’s, 2009, p. 67). His effortless explanation of how imagination and creativity differed intrigued me. He maintains that creativity takes imagination to another level, as imagination can “be entirely internal” (p. 67). You could be “imaginative all day long without anyone noticing” (p. 67) compared to creativity, where, if you did nothing in the given moment you could not be viewed as being creative. Incessantly I have heard that if you truly love what you do, you do not consider it work. You do it because you want to. I listened as my friend explained why she travelled three hours a day to teach music to elementary school children for only two hours. “I am so happy when I am there, it does not feel like work. I feel so inspired to compose my own music after teaching” she exclaimed. “The children\textsuperscript{16} forget who I am every now and again and call me ‘mommy’ by mistake. It’s so funny, and I feel so welcome. I am so happy.” Robinson &

\textsuperscript{16} The children’s ages are 3-5 years old.
Aronica’s (2009) explanation of being in “The Element” enhanced my understanding of this concept by the following phrases “people who work creatively usually have something in common: they love the media they work with” (p. 73) and that creative work can be seen as a “delicate balance between generating ideas and sifting and refining them,” involving different processes “that wind through each other” (p. 73).

In order to establish creative authenticity for my son I felt I needed to explore how creativity in the workplace appeared. My findings led me to Naiman and VanGundy’s 2003 work. Naiman is a pioneer of art based learning, renowned for her introduction of creative philosophy into the workplace. Her practical approach, comparable to Robinson’s, whereby imagination is argued as being separate from creativity, alerted me once again to my lexicon complacency. Until then I had assumed that the two words were interchangeable. This new partitioning of the word creative encouraged me to taper my focus and pinpoint components relating to how creativity was theorized and practiced. Csíkszentmihályi’s (1996) elaborate explanation of creativity as being a “preparation, incubation, insight, valuation, and elaboration” (p. 80) a process that is difficult to investigate due to researchers tending to “look at the issues only from their own perspective based on his or her discipline” (Feldman, Csíkszentmihályi & Gardner, 1994, p. 154) interested me. His stance that creativity needs to be seen as a holistic process, not appearing as an individual domain as it has the ability to “change an existing domain” (p. 28) and transform it into a new domain highlighted the concept that creativity is not something that can take place “inside the head of a person but is the product of a far larger and more mysterious process” (p. 155).

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17 Creativity involves two processes: thinking, then producing. Innovation is the production or implementation of an idea. If you have ideas, but don’t act on them, you are imaginative but not creative.” This view of creativity reminds me of Edison’s statement that creativity consists of one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration or perhaps as Robinson would say- creativity (Feldman, Csíkszentmihályi & Gardner, 1994).

18 Csíkszentmihályi clarifies this by saying that in economics it is seen as being ‘entrepreneurship, ‘in sociology as innovation,’ and in psychology or education as ‘creativity’ (1996).
Examination of Creativity

During the mini art program I observed my son deriving pleasure from creating art work; the process appeared to make him feel good. I, on the other hand, felt the restrictiveness of my creative definitions and developed a strong desire to explore Csíkszentmihályi’s (1994) philosophy that creativity has several procedural groupings that operate at numerous levels. In order to understand the procedural grouping, he states one needs to recognize the interplay development of the interrelations of three systems, field, domain and person (p. 21). The field, (p. 16)\(^{19}\) he writes consists of a group of experts who validate and recognize originality. The domain, (p. 16)\(^{20}\) a culture that contains symbolic rules and the individual person, (p. 21)\(^{21}\) is a person who brings originality into the specific domain. If the information is deemed valuable by society (field), it will be included in the domain and will provide a new starting point for the next generation. However, he writes this concept does not always follow a given path. Examples given of his theory were Van Gogh and Bach.\(^{22}\) They were not recognized by society in their time and therefore were not included, until years later in their respective domains. And so I began to listen to my inner voice and broaden my stance on creativity, embracing the works of both Csíkszentmihályi (1996) and Robinson (2009). Their belief that creative people find joy in a job well done and that learning for its own sake is rewarding even if it fails to result in public discovery has altered my perceptions of creativity. Their emphasis that in order for something to be called creative it needs to encompass more than the individual, (p. 26) resembled Emily Carr’s life. Although she had found joy in her job well done, lack of validation proved too much for her,

\(^{19}\) Field: The social and cultural aspects of a profession job or craft.

\(^{20}\) Domain: Structure and organization of a body of knowledge evolved to contain and express certain distant forms of information.

\(^{21}\) Person: The site of the acquisition, organization, and transformation of knowledge that has the possibility of changing domains and fields.

\(^{22}\) There are many more creative beings not recognized in their time as being creative who died paupers. I listed two of many examples Fitzgerald states, based on his findings that both artists had Asperger’s.
resulting in her ceasing to paint for more than fifteen years. This lack of recognition of her talents by the gatekeepers in her field quashed and subdued her needs, forcing her to find alternative means of supporting herself. It was only when the group of seven recognized her innovative brushstroke and unique subject matter that they began to include her in their exhibitions. This culminated in attention by gallery owners and gatekeepers who exposed and highlighted her work, and in doing so opened the field to acceptance. Unfortunately like for so many other creative individuals, success came too late. Financial hardships had taken their toll and so like many other creative people, she died unaware of the eminence she holds today.

Csikszentmihályi (1994) notes that in the scholarly community there are two voices defining creativity. The first voice claims that creativity should not be studied as a separate psychological phenomenon. It would be best to imagine creativity “as a common sense word… a perfectly ordinary process” (p. 2) - a process that explains the act of creating “something out of nothing is not possible” (Feldman, Csikszentmihályi, & Gardner, 1994, p. 3). He articulates this by saying if "all that is necessary for even the most grand of achievements already exists in the person’s capacities for growth, then it is in principle not possible for anything really new to be constructed" (p. 3).

The second voice stems from the field of cognitive science, and declares that creativity is not a distinctive process but a mundane one. It is a process that is able

23 This reminds me of the children’s story book “Something from nothing” by Phoebe Gilma. “When Joseph is a baby, his grandfather makes him a wonderful blanket. After a while his mother tells him that the blanket is worn out and should be thrown away. Joseph does not want to give up his blanket and tells his mother that his grandfather can fix it. Sure enough, Grandpa has “just enough material” to make a wonderful jacket. Over time, Grandpa uses the material to make a vest, then a tie, then a handkerchief, and finally a button. When Joseph loses the button, his mother declares that even Grandpa cannot make “something from nothing.” The next day Joseph goes to school and starts to write. He realizes he has “just enough material” to make a wonderful story.”
http://www.scholastic.ca/bigbooks/BB_Something.pdf
to problem solve formulations resulting in the “construction [of] some of the most profound laws in the history of science” (p. 3). This mundane process is partly achieved because inspiration is viewed as problem solving, leading to innovative concepts, such as -the apple falling from the tree inspired the universal law of gravitation. Therefore we need to be open to possibilities regardless of where the spark is ignited (Feldman, Csíkszentmihályi, & Gardner, 1994). Both of these voices, although stemming from different sources, reflect acts of a creative process. An act of being, in which identity and existence appear at times to overlap, making each one no less valid than the other.

During my son’s elementary school years I observed how his motivation to engage in creativity diminished. I observed how he was given fewer opportunities to explore, take risks and seek out novel prospects. Behaviours Csíkszentmihályi (2004) maintains essential elements of creativity as we are born with contradictory sets of instructions; on the one hand we have instincts derived for self-preservation, and on the other instincts for exploring. The first impulse, to explore, needs little encouragement, however the second, taking risks can wilt if not cultivated, and thus high levels of curiosity; he writes are seen as the starting point for creativity (Csíkszentmihályi, 2004).

As I sit here and write, feelings of contentment overwhelm me. I clarify my thoughts on paper, softly reading aloud to myself. Mackinnon’s words filter through my mind “we write to learn” and I think how appropriately theorists articulate finding joy in a job well done. My paper might never be published or make a cultural difference but to me the sense of achievement I will have accomplished reflects yet another of Csíkszentmihály’s postulations on creativity. In order to understand the absolute concept of how Csíkszentmihályi viewed creativity I realized that I needed to examine another section of his philosophy, the three categories that define creativity. He explains these categories as being firstly, personal creativity, individuals who experience the world in novel ways and who
makes important discoveries that only they know about, people who will never “contribute a thing to the culture” (1996, p. 27). Secondly, brilliance, (p. 25) individuals who appear unusually bright, experience unusual thoughts and have varied interests. And finally, creative, (p. 25) individuals who change the way we see things, change our culture in some way, and who frequently have no qualifications. Csíkszentmihályi’s third category, creative, described as having developed from the previous two categories, highlights individuals who often display the following characteristics; reclusiveness, compulsive behaviours, tiresome bores, and being colourless and driven” (1996, p. 26). This appeared to contradict, for me, the very notion of how I understood creative tendencies. Upon further examination of the connection between this category’s description and Fitzgerald’s depiction of creative HFA/ASP (2004) individuals I understood both theorists’ definitions. Warhol and Einstein came to mind, individuals who were and are still considered to have been creative, reclusive, driven, at times bores and were known to have exhibited compulsive behaviours. Creativity does not describe the individual’s personality but the actions of the person.

In exploring Csíkszentmihályi’s (1996) third category, creativity, he divided it into two parts- talent and genius. Claiming that they differed in that talent focused on the “innate ability to do something well” (p. 27) and genius, a synonym for creative, implies a “person who is both brilliant and creative at the same time” (p. 27). As a culture we are frequently exposed to the odd behaviour and touch of insanity that geniuses regularly display. Great writers, philosophers, musicians and painters suspected to be HFA/ASP are often familiar to us, almost household names.

24 “Brilliance,” a person who is unusually bright, having varied interests and is quick minded.
25 “Creative” individuals who have no qualifications like Leonardo, Edison, and Einstein who changed our culture.
26 Examples of this would be Ervin Laszlo, Bill Gates, and Steve Jobs.
27 Csíkszentmihályi wrote when referring to Leonard da Vinci’s behaviour characteristics.
28 Csíkszentmihályi wrote when referring to Thomas Edison and Isaac Newton.
29 Csíkszentmihályi refers to Michael Jordan as being a talented athlete without implying that he was creative.
Lewis Carrol, Hans Christian Anderson, Mozart, Beethoven, Van Gogh and Warhol are just a few. Fitzgerald presents numerous case histories of male savants supporting the link between creativity and genius, individuals intrinsically talented. However, he does not claim that all savants have HFA/ASP nor are all HFA/ASP savants.

Fitzgerald, Ross (2006) believes, was however able to show the connection between HFA/ASP and philosophers:

Philosophy, with its heavy emphasis on logical and systematic thinking, would seem to be a particularly hospitable field for individuals with Asperger syndrome. Kant and Spinoza, whom Fitzgerald discusses here, and especially Wittgenstein, whom Fitzgerald has considered in depth elsewhere, could be textbook cases of high-functioning autism.

(p. 296)

Fitzgerald posits that the experience of having difficulty understanding both themselves and the behaviours of others, appearing detached and independent of their personal socio-emotional history, allows HFA/ASP individuals to develop massive imaginations and to seek novelty in their specialized spheres (2004, p. 13). This concept that they are "novelty seekers" mirrors Csíkszentmihályi's (1996) definition of what categorizes a creative person (p. 25) and partially incorporates Eisner's (2002) definition of creativity being the "extent to which it displays an inventive use of an idea or process" (p. 183).

Efforts to further understand creativity surfaced as I reflected on the changing winter/fall garden, reminding me of Garberich’s (2008) thesis. I welcomed

30 Eisner (2002) claims that there is a story that says “the two woman were talking about Vincent van Gogh and one said, “Isn’t it too bad that they didn’t have psychiatrists around in those days?” “Why?” asked the other. “Well, if he had been treated by psychiatrists he might not have cut off his ear.” “Maybe so,” her companion replied “but he wouldn’t have painted either.”

31 Creative person; a person having the ability to change our culture in some respect, i.e. Michelangelo, Einstein and Picasso.
his point of view on creativity; the way we educate students in the creative arts is core for the attainment of ideas and is a garden for the development of new thoughts, and understanding and thus sufficient to justify investigation. His use of the word garden to express creativity is a metaphor I find pleasing with regards to how pertinent the arts are in education. A garden is always in a state of transformation, so too is creativity and similar to a garden, creativity initiates as a seed, an idea, and as time goes by; the process develops from imagination to creativity and ultimately results in a completed project. The idea that creativity can activate enhanced potential embodies avenues of pursuits that recognize individual educational requirements inspiring greater efforts more prevalent than before. This pursuit of recognition by adopting theoretical views of creativity and the transformation of practical applications one devises from them can often lead to interpersonal and personal enrichment, resulting in programs and curricula that permit creativity to be perceived as extending into our lives beyond talent.

**Modes of Creative Measurement**

Proposing to evaluate and measure a discipline in the arts, proved to be of greater challenge than expected, as each field and theorist has their own interpretation and methods of assessment. One cannot establish a singular definition of creativity as to how we assess and verify the results. Eisner, Csikszentmihályi and Fitzgerald designed theoretical assessment frameworks in the hopes of exploring how one could successfully eliminate personal opinion and bias from the evaluation process, especially when one is both mother and researcher. Eisner’s (2002) evaluative framework alleges that we can extricate our authentic responses and objectively measure the level of creativity expressed. I struggled with this premise and found myself returning to Gladwell’s (2005) theory. In his book Blink he discusses the term ‘rapid cognition.’ He describes this as a sort of snap decision-making, referring to it as thin-slicing. An act performed without thinking, a part of the brain operates faster than the logical section of the brain, performing opinions based on past experiences and expertise. Although this concept appears to be unstructured, I consider thin slicing or gut instinct when viewing creativity to have
value. This became evident once I read his chapter on, ‘The Statue That Didn’t Look Right.’ He writes how the Getty museum after fourteen months of investigating the authenticity of a kouros sculpture- a sculpture of a male nude standing with his left leg forward and his arms at his side, decided to purchase it. Only after the statue went on display for the first time did a few leading experts look at the kouros and feel an “intuitive repulsion,” leading to the statue being re-examined. Their intuition was correct; in the first two seconds these experts were able to discern something was amiss, unlike the Getty specialists.

I used both Eisner’s suggested evaluation theory, a framework that is easily identifiable, and Gladwell’s ‘thin-slicing’ notion. I have in previous art programs used a rubric\(^{32}\) as a foundational evaluation instrument. This assessment instrument can eliminate the emotional component from a somewhat poignant moment. However, I find rubrics at times too “cookie cutter” as they appear to lump student competencies into specific categories and are not able to effectively provide feedback to students. As a parent I am aware of how I and my son frequently focus solely on grades, believing that this is what education is about. Over the course of my research I became conscious that in order to change my methods of evaluation I needed to recognize that the "real world is about giving feedback and showing students what they need to do to improve" (Littsky & Grabelle, 2004, p. 154).\(^{33}\)

Eisner’s final description of creativity concludes that “the expressive power or aesthetic quality [the artwork] displays” is the deciphering factor (2002, p. 183). His theory leads me to query the process of novelty, originality and/or shock value as a creative measuring instrument. Freeland asks if Hirst’s shark, suspended in vitrine is art. Her question led me to examine creative works such as the photograph

\(^{32}\) Although I have suggested using rubrics I do not believe that they too can measure creativity accurately or without bias.

\(^{33}\) http://www.bigpicture.org/dennis can view videos of the schools success and philosophy.
of the *Piss Christ* by Serrano (1987). This photograph emits a translucent yellow glow, as the image was created using the artist's own urine. The photograph was a novel and creative portrayal of art being used to make a statement about the misuse of religion. If we are then to attribute the provocation of a positive or negative response as having achieved the desired effect, ‘expressive power,’ then both Hirst and Serrano according to Eisner’s evaluation process, would receive high scores. Does ‘originality’ or ‘shock value’ in art imply expressive power or aesthetic quality? Or is personal judgment partially based on the influence and emotional effect the design has on a person, as illustrated by Gladwell?

As I continued to research different ways to evaluate creativity my thoughts centre on Hume’s belief that “‘some people ha[ve] better taste than others’” (Freeland, 2001, p.9) and that people with taste tend to agree with each other. I am uncertain if people agree with each other or are in agreement based on their environment and culture. Taste could depend on one’s socioeconomic culture, domain and field as a person’s perspective is often viewed through a pre-determined lens resulting in general accord being formulated-how else could so many abstract paintings be described as reflecting talent? This process encourages me to reflect on whether my cultural background, identity and personal experiences have subconsciously influenced my evaluation process.

Sometimes after a ‘thin-slicing’ moment I pause and listen to a detailed explanation as to why the student created what they did. I can be swayed and will alter my evaluation after hearing the individual’s creative endeavour and thus observing the artwork through a different lens. A perspective that could encompass a greater understanding of aesthetic quality than first perceived. Littky and

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34 Piss Christ is a 1987 photograph by artist Andres Serrano. It depicts a small plastic crucifix submerged in a glass of the artist’s urine.

35 It was exhibited numerous times in France before finally being attacked with hammers and destroyed.

36 Heilmann’s (1983) abstract painting of Rosebud reflects this concept. I see no beauty in the painting yet others see the dots as reflecting talent.
Grabelle’s (2004) highlight that in order to truly evaluate a student one needs to get to know them better. Knowing a student involves writing a narrative explaining why the mark was assigned and how the student could improve, a process that indicates you care about the student and their process. This belief reinforces Eisner’s theory that assessment is not a “fixed set of rules” but should only act as a “guide in helping us evaluate creative endeavours [thus] allow[ing] one to assess and appreciate creativity in its numerous varied forms” (2002, p. 184).

Creative Dialogue in Education

We don’t grow into creativity...we get educated out of it.  
(Robinson, 2009, retrieved from http://www.ted.com)

After numerous months of examining the literature and attempting to understand how this word, “creative”, in its diverse fields, was initially interpreted, proved to be challenging. A proverbial everyday word provoked a personal response when used in diverse disciplines -my understanding was influenced and challenged depending on whose literature I read. Finally I was able to establish an essence, a foundational ground within which I felt secure. I envisioned perceptions of creativity shifting from theoretical to practical applications in education\(^{37}\) segueing to the norm and I began to further question how creativity manifested in education. I needed to elucidate that creativity in education appeared two-fold. Firstly how were educators reflecting creativity in their teachings, and secondly why should we encourage students to partake in the arts?

Robinson (2001) in exploring the first concept, teachers reflecting creativity, emphasizes that a common belief is, if you have some idea of how to teach you can teach anything. He elaborates his findings by explaining that there are two types of creative teaching - teaching through creativity and teaching for creativity. Teaching

\(^{37}\) In education this would appear as collaborative work, student involvement, critical thinking, getting to know the individual student, what inspires them and reflect on ways to improve your teaching.
through creativity is explained as inspiring and engaging students, resulting in learning. Students are involved in creating the curriculum as it evolves; they are codesigners and participants in their learning process. Therefore educators are hired based on their personal knowledge of the domain and their skills to engage students.

Teaching for creativity he asserts is facilitating other people’s creative efforts, (2011). This appears as incorporating three tasks of teaching: encouraging, identifying and fostering. This form of teaching is often the norm as educators teach to rigid curriculums and standardized testing in a predetermined time frame. However he posits it is beneficial if an instructor exhibits expertise in a domain, as the attention of students allows for the instructor to reflect on their practice, answer questions knowledgably and instruct lessons with ease and composure. Creativity in education is thus illustrated as reflecting open-ended questions, group work, collaboration, group projects, brain storming, making connections between different ways of working, seeing things, and exploring the “ambiguities and tensions that lie between them” (2011, p. 269).

Robinson’s view of creative education is similar to Littky & Grabelle’s. He also views it as personalizing education; building achievement by discovering the individual talents of each child and creating nurturing environments, which in turn provide keys for transformation (Robinson, 2009). Educators, he says who are able to appreciate and recognize student diversity and who are able to provide and meet a wide variety of needs will seek out and nurture creativity. However, educators that see their strengths as sameness and view diversity as threatening frequently use blatant tactics to discourage creativity (2009).

Greene (1995) explains in exploring the concept, why we should encourage and include students to partake in the arts:

at the very least, participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experiences, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed....when we see more and hear more, it is not only that we lurch, if only for a few
moments, out of the familiar and the taken-for-granted but that new avenues for choosing and for action may open in our experience; we may gain a sudden sense of new beginnings, that is, we make\(^{38}\) take an initiative in the light of possibility.

(p. 123)

It is in this light of possibility that allowed Hewlett-Packard's, *Rules for the Garage* philosophy to develop. The company was able to successfully illustrate that by incorporating the intuition and aesthetic processes, encouragement of personal ideas, play with ideas and conjecture about possibilities they could facilitate critical evaluations of ideas. This novel concept led to a creative and winning work environment; (Robinson, 2001) highlighting the belief that creativity is essential both in education and the work place if people are to succeed. As many young people who are not exposed to creativity at an early age but who are only "molded in the service of technology and the market," will find unsatisfying jobs (Greene, 1995, p. 124). Exposing students to the arts provides an avenue of possibilities as one releases students "imaginative capacity [by] giving it play" (p. 125). However, this "change of life" or "aesthetic experience" does not appear as the student is simply being exposed to and in the presence of art forms (p. 125). Greene explains that conscious participation with the arts helps students to "think in relation to what [they] are doing" thus becoming conscious of their struggles to make meaning. We communicate a consciousness of alternative possibilities to our students, helping them to see that that reality is multiple perspectives and that construction of it is never complete (1995). Cezanne referred to this concept in his rendering of Mont St. Victoire and how it should be viewed. Similarly Green (1995) writes, diverse encounters with the arts nurture students' growth as they reach out to each other seeking a greater understanding of their experience and trying to be more enthusiastic with and in the world.

Creativity summarized by Greene (1995) is being able to imagine, extend and renew. Her belief that human freedom is achieved by finding the intrinsic source of

\(^{38}\) This quote including the word 'make' is taken directly from Greene's book.
learning mirrors Cajete’s (1994) in that we should not separate art from education, as art is a mode of valued expression, a recognized expression of the soul, connecting people to their inner sources of life.
Chapter 4.
High-Functioning Asperger’s

“Darren could you please see Jenna to the door” I asked my eight year old son as his friend prepared to go home.

“Why Mum? She knows where it is?” he naively replied.
The Evolving Research Question

My study of creativity led me to take a closer look at Fitzgerald’s (2005) definition that HFA/ASP individuals could be creative;

Persons with the syndrome are often workaholics, highly persistent, content with their own company and solitary artistic occupations; they focus on detail with massive curiosity and total immersion; they are novelty-seekers in terms of their art, with massive imagination in their specialized spheres. They are also far less influenced by previous or contemporary artists in their work than are ‘neurotypicals’. It appears that the autistic artist, because of his or her rather diffuse identity and diffuse psychological boundaries, has the capacity to do what the artist George Bruce described as being necessary for art: ‘one must not just depict the objects, one must penetrate them, and one must oneself become the object.’ (as cited in Fitzgerald, 2005, p. 239)

If, as Fitzgerald contends, creativity is about encapsulating the following tendencies; extraordinary levels of motivation, energy and tremendous capacity for observation, concentration and vast curiosity levels that drive the creative individual to understand the world in artistic ways, then I questioned how my son, who emulates many of these characteristics, fits the profile (2005, p. 12). I found solace in his literature describing people with Asperger syndrome as living "very much in their intellects" (p. 10) and that "certain forms of creativity benefit greatly from intellectual interests" (p. 10). He posits that the ability to focus intensely on a topic and resist distractions, “... must work hard, be content to work for months at a time without making any progress and must be content to travel over the same field again and again and are indefatigably" (p. 12) are dominant Asperger syndrome qualities. Therefore, if creativity defined by Csíkszentmihályi (1996) and Robinson (2011) is about focus and implementation, the element of an inexhaustible work ethic, and an obsession to achieve a desired outcome, then it must be said that Asperger syndrome, too, is about creativity.
AS (Asperger’s syndrome), HFA (High-functioning Asperger), HFA/ASP (High-functioning Asperger) the acronyms are endless. Some believe the terms are interchangeable, others not so. A number of researchers, not recognizing the extent of how high-functioning the individual is, continue to lump individuals in the same category as autism. In my thesis I have chosen to adopt the HFA/ASP acronym, as no two Asperger syndrome individuals are alike, I believe that this abbreviation best describes my son’s behaviours on the autism spectrum.

Asperger’s

If, as Attwood (1998) declares, Asperger syndrome is about intense segregation, then it could be said, that being a parent of an Asperger's child, the same segregation applies. Undiagnosed my son was seen as a naughty, ill-behaved and/or a bad child. I was perceived as lacking parenting skills for not punishing his outbursts, resulting in both of us being repeatedly excluded from social activities. Darren’s steady screaming, unpredictable outbursts, frustrations and discomfort were expressed as he saw fit, irrespective of his surroundings. As a consequence I chose to spend more time at home, protecting my son and myself from the piercing, judgemental stares, disapproving looks and unkind "advice" from family and strangers.

At the point of utter exhaustion living with a child who demanded precise routines, slept little and showed an apparent lack of sensitivity to others, I sought hope and comfort in understanding the disorder and continuously scoured books searching for answers, hoping to find a cure.
**Definition & Name Origination**

Although key characteristics of Asperger's were simultaneously first identified by both Hans Asperger, an Austrian paediatrician and Leo Kanner\(^{39}\), an American psychiatrist in 1943, the disorder was named after Hans Asperger\(^{40}\) after "Wing used the phrase 'Asperger syndrome' in a research paper to describe a distinct sub-group of patients that she had been seeing” (The National Autistic Society). Although having never met, both physicians were considered leading experts in diagnosing this disorder. Equally, they described conditions on the autistic spectrum; Asperger described “more able children” while Kanner implied a conspicuous lack of responsiveness to other people and severe language impairments-the classic silent and aloof child” (Attwood, p. 15). Their diagnostic skills were also very different; Asperger adopted an intuitive approach known as a ‘medical art’ skill\(^{41}\) and Kanner used the customary intellectual approach.

Asperger’s intuitive diagnostic skill was considered to be important “not only for physicians but also for all those working in the field of education, particularly special education" choosing to base his diagnosis on the older and less verbal 'retarded' child (Klin, Volkmar & Sparrow, 2000, p. xii). In using the intuitive approach he found that his favourite poem by Lynkeus guided him in his observations: (Lynkeus, the tower watchman in Goethe’s *Faust*).

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\(^{39}\) “Kanner started from the premise that these children were experiencing childhood schizophrenia. In time he became aware that they were not exhibiting all the symptoms of schizophrenia and used the phrase ‘infantile autism’ to describe their condition.” Retrieved from http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/autism-and-asperger-syndrome-an-introduction/high-functioning-autism-and-asperger-syndrome-whats-the-difference.aspx

\(^{40}\) Asperger’s “acute identification of autism was extraordinarily ahead of its time considering he was among the first people to chart it” Retrieved from http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/autism-and-asperger-syndrome-an-introduction/high-functioning-autism-and-asperger-syndrome-whats-the-difference.aspx

\(^{41}\) “The ability to reason physiology and pathophysiology from careful and unbiased observation” Retrieved from J Gen Intern Med. (2008).
In comparison Kanner (2005) chose to describe this disorder as being “early infantile autism” and he based his findings on younger and more ‘impaired’ lower functioning individuals.

The profound withdrawal from contact with people, an obsessive desire for the preservation of sameness, a skilful relation to objects, the retention of an intelligent and pensive physiognomy, and either mutism or the kind of language that does not seem intended to serve the purpose of interpersonal communication.

(as cited in Fitzgerald, 2005, p. 9)

Even though, Asperger (1943) published an article in “Die Autistischen Psychopathen im Kindesalter” summarizing characteristics of high-functioning Asperger’s syndrome (HFA/ASP) his findings only became well renowned after Wing, an English doctor, read the article, and chose to use the term Asperger’s syndrome in a paper that she published in 1981 (Attwood, 1998). She had observed children displaying classic autistic features when young, but having fluency in speech or more advanced social skills later in life. She wrote that;

On the one hand they had progressed beyond a diagnosis of classic autism (according to the criteria based on Kanner’s work); on the other hand, they still had significant problems with more advanced social skills and conversations. They more accurately resembled the original description of Hans Asperger. (Attwood, p. 15)

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The literature I examined concerning HFA/ASP individuals indicated that diagnosing this disorder can prove to be challenging, as children at a young age can often be confused with having ADD (attention deficient disorder), autism, depression or Tourette’s.\textsuperscript{44} The changes Wing proposed to Asperger’s original work was primarily based on her modifications of early developmental and clinical presentations (Klin, Lang, Cicchetti & Vokmar, 2000) and did not clearly clarify the distinctions between Asperger’s syndrome and autism. She did however; summarize Asperger’s original main characteristics as showing:

1. A lack of empathy
2. Naive, inappropriate, one-sided interaction
3. Little or no ability to form friendships
4. Pedantic, repetitive speech
5. Poor non-verbal communication
6. Intense absorption in certain subjects
7. Clumsy and ill-coordinated movements and odd postures

In 1992 “AS\textsuperscript{45} became a distinct disease and diagnosis when it was included in the tenth published edition of the World Health Organization’s diagnostic manual, \textit{International Classification of Diseases} (ICD-10), and in 1994 it was added to the \textit{Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders} (DSM-IV), the American Psychiatric Association’s diagnostic reference book” (Attwood, 1998).\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} HFA/ASP individuals however frequently do have many of the above mentioned conditions as well.

\textsuperscript{45} An abbreviation for Asperger’s syndrome.

\textsuperscript{46} This disorder was only officially recognized in 1994, my son was born in 1996 and it took five years after that for a diagnosis, I had taken him to numerous doctors and no one was able to diagnose him. A personal friend of mine who happened to be a developmental paediatrician was visiting from Australia and I asked her to observe my son. She immediately told me to have him tested for HFA/ASP and it was only based on her insight that my son was finally diagnosed with this disorder and I could begin to understand what he was experiencing and how best to help him.
**Diagnosing Darren**

Darren never arrived with a handbook saying "I have Asperger syndrome." I had never heard the words prior to Dr Silove, a friend and developmental paediatrician and paediatric oncologist's diagnosis of him. In desperation, after he was accused of bullying a fellow classmate, his anxiety level escalated and he ate a hole in the sleeve of his woollen sweater. I turned to Dr Silove for help. She observed him at home over the course of five days. At that time Darren had been under the care of a psychiatrist and a paediatrician, they had been treating him unsuccessfully for attention deficient disorder and anxiety.

Prior to diagnosis, I was at a loss as to why Darren would scream hysterically when we left the house, refused to wear certain clothes, would not eat particular foods, or why smells bothered him, why his toys had to be lined up in a specific manner and why swaying from his rigid routine sent him into a panic resulting in tantrums. Those were my most challenging and dark days. Intuitively I knew my son was different- I just did not know how or why. I was at a loss, yet when the diagnosis finally came it was a mixed blessing.

**Potential**

Baron-Cohen (1995) poses the question of the potential that Asperger syndrome individuals have. Although they have ‘mind blindness’ (the individual is unaware of others’ mental states) they are not able to mind read, and do not conform to the “one size fits all analogy” (p.60). He believes that once they are able to learn social norms the outcome can be predictable, but until then inferences, assumptions and reading between the lines prove challenging for them (p. 60). Why?

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47 Fifteen years have passed and I occasionally still catch him sniffing me, his sense of smell so intense, at times comforting, other times disabling.

48 Mind-blindness. The term ‘mind-blindness’ was first coined by Baron-Cohen (1990) to provide a description of how individuals on the autism spectrum perceive others.
Baron-Cohen writes that in the early years of life HFA/ASP individuals’ play lacks imagination, pretence and flexibility, social and communication development is abnormal (p. 60). Together with Uta Frith and Alan Leslie, (1985) Baron-Cohen (1997) proposed “abnormalities in social development, in communication development, and in pretend play—might be the results of a failure in the development of mindreading” (p. 53).\(^{49}\)

Asperger syndrome, Asperger Hans (1993) theorizes, is not a disease, but a developmental condition. The diagnosis is primarily based on specific characteristics that are on the autism spectrum and it is the lack of comprehension and understanding of the importance of expectations of societal rules that create stress, tension and anxiety for the HFA/ASP individual. With time, the natural development of the individuals personality and intelligence, intervention, and autistic traits, while they never disappear, have been known to be significantly ameliorated (Fitzgerald, 2005). Moving towards a greater awareness of this disorder, in which HFA/ASP is studied not as a cognitive disability but, rather, as a significantly different perceptual profile, for example as creative\(^{50}\), then perhaps the behaviours of the HFA/ASP individual suddenly could appear as logical, acceptable and intellectual.

**Empathy**

Asperger's (1944) words describing the Asperger individual and in my world, my son, as not being able to “understand the world from the heart,” which is the

\(^{49}\) Mindreading. The ability to think about mental states including both the state of self or of another, and contemplate actions in terms of the mental states of the self or 12 others. Mental states include a variety of states such as beliefs, longings, and ambitions (Baron-Cohen & Hammer, 1997, p. 53).

\(^{50}\) Csikszentmihályi’s third category, creative, described as having developed from the previous two categories, highlights individuals who often display the following characteristics: reclusiveness, compulsive behaviours, tiresome bores,\(^{50}\) and being colourless and driven” (1996, p. 26).\(^{50}\)
basis of true humour (Die 'Autistischen Psychopathen' im Kindesalter, 1944)\textsuperscript{51} has been a distressing acknowledgment for me. In categorizing Darren as lacking empathy I have struggled to accept that this could imply an undermining of his capacity for affection and profound understandings.\textsuperscript{52} Attwood (1998) shed light on the word 'empathy' when he wrote that it should not be "interpreted as meaning that the child completely lacks the ability to care for others" (p. 56). His words mirrored a conversation I recently had with Professor Mamchur who expressed empathy as being different from compassion. She described a con artist as having empathy but not compassion and that Asperger's although not showing empathy can experience compassion. Her words sharply penetrated the depth of my being as I understood the power of language.

In shifting my perception of empathy it was necessary for me to recall the early stages of behavioural therapy that Darren underwent. I found myself coming to terms with my suppressed denial and accepting and acknowledging what I already knew, Darren does lack empathy. Behaviours his therapist had described as 'lacking empathy' came to mind, her words highlighted the relationship between Asperger's and empathy, comparing them to Pavlov's dog. Her rational was that Asperger syndrome individuals obtain their cues from extrinsic sources. For years I struggled with her words, refusing to accept that my son had 'no heart' and lacked empathy. No mother wants to hear that her son lacks empathy. I was comforted by the thought that empathy does not define us as human beings, therefore Darren, although lacking empathy is still a compassionate being.

Throughout the years I have witnessed his compassion, how he lovingly shares his candies with me, offers to bring me tea after a busy day at work and how he teaches his younger cousins, who are less knowledgeable, how to play his

\textsuperscript{51} Autistic Psychopathy of Childhood.

\textsuperscript{52} After exploring the word 'single-minded focus,' I was surprised to discover that a synonym for 'focus' was the word 'heart' - how ironic. We recognize the single-minded focus of these individuals, characterise them, and then state they have no heart - oxymoron?
precious computer games. I observed how, as a junior camp councillor, he formed unique relationships with younger children, appearing eager to help resolve awkward and difficult situations, taking on a leadership role by spending time with an unhappy or awkward child. His compassion included direct body contact with the younger children. Touch, an attribute that does not come natural to him, was freely given and accepted. However once surrounded by the comforts of home again, his barriers went up and no physical contact was allowed, unless it was on his terms.

Coincidentally whilst writing this thesis the movie ‘The Social Network’ was released. The movie is a biography of how Zuckerberg created Facebook. Watching the movie I was struck by how Zuckerberg mirrored the six typical features defined by Asperger (1941), and alerted me to how Darren’s behaviours mirrored Zuckerberg’s. As a result, I went on-line and explored a question that was on my mind - did Zuckerberg have Asperger’s? At that moment, although I knew on a cognitive level that Darren had been diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, I realized that I was still in denial that he had this disorder. Somehow seeing Zuckerberg’s obvious lack of empathy made me aware that theoretically I had understood the disorder but emotionally I was still struggling to admit that my son was not perfect. One particular scene played ad naseum in my mind. It was when Zuckerberg showed lack of empathy towards his girlfriend. Her attempts to end the relationship were met with insults on how she could meet more people dating him than if she was alone, therefore she should choose to continue to date him. Her obvious physical distress at his unkind words appeared to have no impact on

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53 At times Darren becomes frustrated at how slow people learn.
54 This later led to a discussion of whether the creator of Facebook had Asperger’s (Martyn, 2011).
55 He reduced his best friend’s share in Facebook from 30% to 0.3% after he became successful, because he did not feel that his friend, in later years, had contributed as much as he had (Martyn, 2011).
Zuckerberg; he appeared oblivious to the hurt his remarks caused or how upset she was, and narcissistically focused only on his beliefs and needs.

Narcissist behaviour is not a trait society readily favours. Darren frequently displays naïve, unawareness of the damage and hurt his uncensored, forthright verbal language causes. He says exactly what is on his mind, yet continues to surprise me when showing that he can execute self-control. When asked to complete a task he appears to be weighing the benefits. Over time I have come to realize that what appears as cruel and 'heartless’ to the recipient, is actually Darren responding from a place of deep pain, confusion and unfortunately not having the behavioural tools or 'know how’ to respond in a socially acceptable manner. Society makes adjustments for diseases which we can see, the visually impaired, wheelchair bound, auditory impairments, by providing individuals with larger print, higher volumes, and wheelchair ramps, but few accommodations are provided for atypical behaviours.

Perhaps my son habitually asking me if I am happy, sad, tired or excited in the hopes of gauging my response so that he can determine how long he will be allowed to spend in front of the computer, T.V. or Gameboy can be seen as him trying to achieve a level of comfort. Predictability of my responses creates routines he can follow and the recognized outcomes reduce anxiety and expectation. Frequently I witness his body relax as he structures his day or evening schedule.

In the early stages of diagnosis, I adopted the happy face sheet56 to correlate how Darren felt. Darren was unable to read facial expressions and generate the appropriate body language to express his mood. Helping Darren express his sensory or behavioural impairments was of utmost importance to me as I discovered due to his outward 'normal' appearance his behaviour was seen as rude and obnoxious. His peer group was isolating him.

Coordination

I can perform one motor activity very well. When I operate hydraulic equipment such as a backhoe I can work one lever at a time perfectly. What I cannot do is coordinate the movements of two or more levers at once. I compensate by operating the levers sequentially in rapid succession. (Grandin, 1984, p.165)

As a parent, I suspected something was amiss with Darren at a very early age as I observed him struggle to tie his shoelaces and adapt to his surroundings. Early behaviours portrayed an active child who exhibited anxiety and depression that manifested itself in the form of numerous tics. The severity of his tics disabled him at times; he would walk three steps, bend down and tap the ground ritualistically three times with the back of his hands. As he walked along a fence he would hold onto it as if grounding himself. He started to make “ummph” noises and developed facial and neck ticks (Attwood, 1998). At first I thought his responses were cute as he muttered ‘yessuh’ when responding to a question but overtime I came to learn that these sounds were uncontrollable symptoms and a vocal feature of Tourette syndrome (Attwood, 1998). I was at a loss. I read, researched, took him to psychiatrists, play therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, anyone who could possibly explain my son’s strange behaviours. I was consoled that with age and behavioural therapy his anxiety and depression would be ‘controlled,’ and hopefully his tics and clumsy body movements would disappear. There were no guarantees. I encouraged frequent psychological DSM IV and cognitive testing, hoping for the ‘cure.’ However, results continued to confirm that he was situated towards the high end of the spectrum, academically gifted but socially delayed with numerous sensory sensitiveness. His motor clumsiness presents as awkward, challenging and poorly coordinated in swimming and cycling, whereas in other sports such as speed skating and tennis they appear as somewhat normal (when his

57 A motor sign behaviour of Tourette syndrome.
58 There are three major categories of Tourette syndrome, motor, vocal and behavioural.
59 Diagnostic criteria for Autism.
tics are minimal). I was informed that the tics had to run their course; there was nothing I could do to interfere with his odd behaviours. And so I chose to embrace them, at first enrolling him in karate then break dancing and hip hop classes. The students in the dance classes loved having him there as not only was he usually one of two boys, but his erratic movements and lack of coordination went unnoticed as he jerked to the music making him appear to them as a talented dancer. His self-esteem grew, he had found a new way to express himself and my desire to 'cure' him lessened.

Although many Asperger individuals show problems with manual dexterity (Attwood, 1998), this has never been an issue for Darren. His handwriting at times appears indecipherable; however his skill and love of technology and advanced computer skills has allowed him to express himself without the need of a teacher aide. Furthermore, Darren's love of non-fiction encourages him to read and stay informed on the rapid advancements in technology. Darren excels in classes that interest him and he shows no signs of having any learning disabilities. 

**Speech and Fixations**

Grandin (1995) discusses the rhythms of speech and mentions that she never fully understood the electricity that goes on between people. She speaks of speech in group settings, as having a rhythm. People are laughing, sharing ideas and having a good time. These are rhythms that she is not able to identify or recognize, thus she finds herself interrupting these rhythms of conversation without realizing what she has done. It is these very cues of knowing when to start talking or interrupt the flow of conversation, and understanding the feelings of the other person that Darren continues to struggle with. His tendencies to disrupt the conversation with unrelated comments emerge as though he is saying the first thing that is on his mind (Attwood, 1998). His inability to understand the momentary pause, end of topic

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60 In karate he could not stand still and appeared to wiggle around, annoying his instructor.

61 Many HFA/ASP individuals also have written output, reading and verbal challenges.
conversation, body language and eye contact of the other party leads to confusion, not only for Darren but also the other person and results in Darren being ostracized.

Darren’s sophisticated, formal speech patterns, his widely used vocabulary at a very young age, combined with his obsessive-compulsive behaviours and intense interest in a single object or topic to the exclusion of any other, made him seem like a ‘little professor’ (Lovecky, 2004, Attwood, 1998). His obsessive need to discuss and investigate facts about his favourite object, oblivious to his surroundings and the rhythms of his peer’s interactions, at times appears random with no end in sight. His frequent interruptions, talking over the other person and appearing not to be listening, prevents him from seeing the big picture. Yet, this egocentric behaviour allows him to come up with solutions to problems that his peers are unable to see. Asperger (1944) noted that it is not uncommon for these children to have multiple fixation subjects and highly specific interests that involve a "large degree of memorized fact" (Paradiz, 2002, p. 67). Darren’s ability over the years to memorize and fixate on a handful of topics ranging from his childhood love, 'Thomas the Train,' to his present day interests, computers and PSP’s is blatantly obvious. At times, he will ramble on about his favourite subject unaware of a non-receptive audience. As he matures I have noticed him pause after a while and look at the other person, hoping to determine if they are as captivated and intrigued in his special topic to the same degree that he is. Recently he turned to me and asked if I am interested in what he is saying and commented "Mom, you’re not listening again." His natural ability to absorb and remember nearly every word that he hears or reads, then have long detailed conversations about his fixation makes him sound like a walking encyclopaedia (Volkmar, 2000). This ability to memorize facts helps him achieve successful grades at school - but only if he is interested or sees value in the subject.

"Little professor" many people who are experts in Asperger syndrome such as Dr. Teresa Bolick, Dr Toney Attwood, & Dierdre Lovecky write about the positive aspects of Asperger syndrome without focusing on the idea of genius.
**Interventions at School**

Fitzgerald (2004) writes that HFA/ASP students experience hardships in school due to their intellectual ability often exceeding that of their peers and their inability to articulate their knowledge and behave aptly. Furthermore, their unconventional learning styles, concentration to specifics, conduct, and lack of social skills often result in them having below average academic scores. Boredom, he believes, plays a large factor in this equation. He documents that these individuals are often mediocre students due to their passionate desire to attach relevancy to their leaning and indicates that there is “little or no relationship between IQ and achievement in any sphere of adult endeavour yet studied” (p. 6). Fitzgerald continues to assert that Nobel Prize winners and adults that show great originality such as Darwin, Wittgenstein, Einstein, and Van Gogh were typically B+ students. A student worked hard when the topic interested them and fired their imagination, everything else was a chore requiring the minimum attention. He claims that by allowing HFA/ASP’s to “discover instead of assimilating knowledge created by others” these students would attain greater success (p. 6).

In grade five, I accompanied Darren on field trips. One particular outing was to China Town. His teacher refused to acknowledge that Darren had Asperger syndrome and refused to make any exceptions for him. I knew Darren would have trouble on this field trip, not only with the amount of walking that was required but also having to walk in groups with the other children. He did not like being touched and the shoving and jostling of the other children against him resulted in him having aggressive and emotional outbursts. At one point during the tour we stopped and listened to the guide as he explained our historic surroundings. Darren was complaining and whining. He wanted to go home. He had had enough of what

63 I question if this would apply to all students.

64 Eventually, the principal who fortunately also had an Asperger syndrome child insisted that the care aide remain in all classes with Darren. He was moved to a seat away from the noisy door, had help writing in his planner and at recess was permitted to stay indoors.
was for him a very challenging day. Trying to console him, and not disturb the
group I had taken him aside. The teacher chose to involve him in the conversation,
or as I believe, embarrass both of us by drawing further attention to him in front of
the other parents and children. She asked him what the guide had said. Darren
turned, stared into the distance, and repeated word for word the guide’s
information, then turned to me and continued whining to go home.

**Behaviour Modifications**

At school, Darren’s teachers and I would discuss hand signals that would
alert him to his interruptions and talking over. Hand signals included the teacher
touching his nose or scratching his ear. He responded well to these signals and his
outbursts in class lessened. With maturity, his need for hand signals has tapered and
in class, for the most part, he is able to gauge the appropriate rhythms of
conversation, but unfortunately chooses to remain silent at times, projecting
boredom. On our way home from elementary school, Darren would talk incessantly
about his school day, detailing exactly what had transpired, what the teachers had
said, quoting, never paraphrasing the conversations. He had "held it together for the
entire day and now [needed to] release his pent-up symptoms" (Ottinger, 2003, p. 4).
Interrupting him, led to him talking over me as words poured out of his mouth as
though he was unable to retain his thoughts. Now and again he would ask me a
question, but before I could reply, he would proceed with additional information or
launch into explicit descriptions relating to his obscure findings and interests.
Clearly he was not interested in my thoughts and appeared oblivious to my wanting
to partake in the conversation. I would interrupt his monologue and remind him
that he needed to give me time to answer his questions, maintain eye contact, even
though I was driving he needed to look at me, and show an interest in what I had to
say - that was the ‘polite way.’

I was so used to living inside my own world that I answered with
whatever I had been thinking. If I was remembering riding a horse at
the fair, it didn't matter if a kid came up to me and said, "Look at my
truck!” or “My mom is in the hospital!” I was still going to answer, “I rode a horse at the fair.” The other kid’s words did not change the course of my thoughts. It was almost like I didn’t hear him. But on some level, I did hear, because I responded. Even though the response didn’t make any sense to the person speaking to me. (Robison, 2008. p. 20)

Darren’s life changed the day I enrolled him in a technology mini school where advanced software was used to support and educate students. This program was advertised for motivated and creative students entering Grade 8, said to be "challenging and unique in its academic, computer enriched subject’s curriculum design and promotion of advanced student assessment” (http://kgdragons.vsb.bc.ca). I felt that he would be challenged in this creative environment, comfortable with the use of computers to help problem solve, and this pedagogical model would provide an authentic learning experience for him. Homework was assigned and viewed online, discussions conducted through forums as well as conferencing and blogging. Online animation programs were used to improve French skills and science experiments were downloaded and posted to his peers and teacher. Previous issues concerning the upkeep of his planner, lack of friends, and being weird, no longer caused him undue stress and anxiety. Due to the multitude of resources available online he was able to develop his own research skills and become "responsible for his own learning" (Eisner, 2002, p46). This environment of creative IT skills attracted like-minded students who were encouraged under the guidance of teachers, to develop interrelationships between disciplines. I observed how the art and science program incorporated a design element on-line and how the language arts required a book cover diagram in combination with a summarized narrative. Students and educators manipulated the creative environment to encourage inspiration as suggested by Sternberg (as cited in Robinson, 1998, p. 99). I watched as over time he

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65 Darren throughout elementary school struggled to write his homework in his planner much to the frustration of his teachers. His teachers would grade his planner and sign off that he had written all the homework in it. Finally they had to have a teacher aide assist him in this task. Darren saw no need for a planner as he would memorize exactly what he had to do for homework.
flourished, his learning connecting and simulating current events, his peers welcomed his extensive knowledge base, appreciated his quirky humour and formal, pedantic style of speaking. He was inspired, engaged, and I observed how “good teaching” presented itself (p. 269).

As my sixteenth birthday approached, I found myself spending less time in school ... I was failing every subject. Working with John and Fred in the AV department was the only activity that interested me.... reactions like that would just reinforce the feeling that I did not belong in school... I was frequently criticized or ridiculed for inappropriate expressions. These attacks seemed to me to come out of the blue, and they usually made me want to run off and hide.

(Robison, 2008, pp. 85-86)

No longer lonely at school, recess now a welcome transition, he finds solace in being able to join a group of his choosing as they explore the many lunch options the city school offers. Perhaps the schools downtown location and the number of teenage immigrants that attend it, make his differences less obvious. But, at the end of the day Darren finds it taxing to understand his peers’ emotional expressions and less exhausting to converse with them online, as gauging the conversations rhythm and nuances online, does not require eye contact or other body gesture distractions (Attwood, 1998).

Darren still hates being touched; I am the only one who appears to be able to physically comfort him. As a baby I would hold him tightly, swathed in my arms, the room stripped bare of all accessories. At day-care he would fall, scratch his knee and scream in pain, showing a low pain tolerance. Often the mere sight of his blood would send him into a frenzy. He would scream and throw himself on the ground,

66 “Good teaching” implying teachers knew who he was, took an interest in his abilities, and encouraged him.

67 The schools location downtown has allowed Darren to explore the stores by himself. He is no longer perceived as being different should he chose to be alone. He still finds school noises over stimulating and overwhelming and welcomes solitude.

68 Asperger syndrome individuals are known to have heightened sensitivities.
not allow any of the day-care attendants to physically comfort him. Early on I learn’t
distraction was the key to settling him. Lego or information about his special topic
proved to be calming. He would sit for hours playing Lego both at home and at the
day-care centre, building structures advanced for his age, highly focused and
absorbed in his project, oblivious of his surroundings and resentful and irate when
interrupted.

Attending elementary school proved challenging. Before the bell rang I
would make my way to his classroom, he insisted that I collect him after school. He
hated leaving school, especially when all the other children rushed shouting down
the corridors after the bell rang. His severe hypersensitivity to the noise baffled me;
at that time I was unaware that Asperger syndrome individuals were hypersensitive
to sound (Attwood, 1998). Gradually I learnt that the noise Darren was experiencing
at school was similar to that of finger nails being drawn down a blackboard
(Attwood, 1998). The effects of such hypersensitivity resulted in Darren's inability to
express what was bothering him. If I chose to try and leave the building when the
bell rang he immediately became distressed, extremely anxious and acted out both
physically and verbally. Embarrassed by his lack of self-control\textsuperscript{69} I came to learn that
if I gathered him from the classroom and immediately went to the library, where it
was quiet, he appeared to calm himself. However, once in the library he would
ignore me and make his way to his favourite spot where he would sit and read. He
was able to read at an early age and always gravitated to particular books, reading
them over and over as if they comforted him.\textsuperscript{70} Neither the librarian nor I could
entice him to change his subject choice. Only when he felt that he had exhausted the
non-fiction subject would he make the change as if the previous topic never existed.

\textsuperscript{69} Darren would scream, hit me, have a full blown tantrum and simply not care what his peers
thought of him as he expressed his needs both physically and verbally.

\textsuperscript{70} Today Darren frequently sleeps with a couple of books in his bed, as if they project the
comfort of 'teddy bears.'
In the library\textsuperscript{71} we would wait until the cacophony of noises subsided, and he felt safe to leave.

In elementary school some educators attempted to include him in the classroom environment; however, that being said they were in the minority. At that time many of Darren's teachers had never heard the term Asperger syndrome. Children, predominately boys who had the syndrome, were still in the minority and their behaviour was seen as that of a disobedient child (Fitzgerald, 2005). In kindergarten, grade one and two, Darren attended a private school. I had thought that due to the small class sizes and cultural familiarity he would be able to integrate with more ease. That was not to be. Academically he adapted well, hungry to absorb as much knowledge in as short a time as possible. However, there were times in the day where he was required to wait for his peers to catch up to him which resulted in his disrupting the class. In kindergarten he received numerous time-outs and unbeknownst to me was frequently sent to the principal's office for a ‘talking-to.’ One day I discovered my five year old son sitting outside the principal's office, quiet, stiff and terrified. The moment he saw me he ran to me sobbing hysterically, grabbed my waist and refused to let go of me. His strength overpowered me, as fear shook his small frame. This so called safe environment began to unravel as I witnessed a lack of understanding, tolerance and recognition for my son's unique differences. The schools charming persona over the next couple of years diminished as I observed the authoritarian teaching, overcrowded playground and administration's inflexibility unfold. Recess became a feared activity for Darren, I underwent a paradigm shift. Darren saw recess as having no structure, boundaries or regulations; it became a nightmare of torments and a maze of social behaviours that were difficult to interpret. I tried to convince the principal that my son, like many other students at the school should not be forced outside at recess. My request fell on deaf ears. "Children need to play outside" he insisted. Had I had more experience with Asperger's and the educational system at the time, I

\textsuperscript{71} The library was not always open after school.
would have removed Darren from the school immediately. Instead, I overcompensated by creating a Lego club for the school. I spent Darren’s recesses with him either in the Lego room or the library. We sat and spoke for hours about what he would do outside, if I could not make it to school and we finally agreed on a spot, weather permitting, where he would feel safe to spend the time outdoors.

Today, in high school, Darren is one of the first people out of the school building at the end of the day, still struggling with the commotion of the day-end activity, but having found a way to adapt to his sensitivities without drawing negative attention.

**Inability to Draw Inferences and Eye Contact**

And now I know it is perfectly natural for me not to look at someone when I talk. Those of us with Asperger’s are just not comfortable doing it. In fact, I don’t really understand why it’s considered normal to stare at someone’s eyeballs. (Robison, 1998, p. 3)

As a parent, Darren’s innate ability not to recognize the importance of maintaining eye contact confused me. I felt he was not listening to what I was saying; my feelings were echoed by his teachers who referred to him as being ‘disinterested’ in class. Yet, when they asked him what was discussed he replied verbatim. Wing (1992) gives an example of an Asperger syndrome individual saying people gave messages with their eyes and he did not understand what the messages were; therefore he did not maintain eye contact. Looking at a person’s face broke his concentration (as cited in Attwood, 1998). Darren too struggles maintaining eye contact and will often stare unblinking as he partakes in conversation. He will readily admit that he fails to see the importance of maintaining eye contact as he is not always able to comprehend the other person’s mental state or feelings. He only attempts to do so because he has been told of its importance, and he wants to appear "normal."

72 An author "don't look me in the eye" who has HFA/ASP.
Attwood (1998) discusses a diagnostic session when a teenager with Asperger syndrome became anxious when talking about his topic of interest. In closing his eyes he was able to reduce his anxiety and continue with the conversation. However, Attwood relates that when the comment was made that it was difficult to talk to him with his eyes closed; his response was "why would I want to look at you when I know where you are?" (p. 54). This comment caused me to chuckle as I was reminded of earlier conversations with Darren. I would signal to him to look me in the eyes. His conversation would frequently come to an abrupt halt and he would make a non-related remark such as "mom your one eye brow is larger than the other" before re-focusing his gaze elsewhere and continuing with his conversation, looking but not seeing.

Darren’s unawareness of the rhythms in communication spill over into his struggles to draw inferences and integrate information that would allow him to derive meaning. I believe this inability to derive meaning is a major reason why he chooses to be alone. When he was younger and eager to do something I would unconsciously remark "hold your horses." The first time he heard this idiom, terror washed over his face, his body stiffened as he anxiously glanced around. Finally he muttered, "Where are the horses Mummy?"

**Socializing and Inclusion**

HFA/ASP individuals do not ‘fit in’ or get along with their peer groups. Frequently they have difficulty relating to their peers and are most comfortable spending time with adults or younger children who appear to exhibit predictable behaviours (Attwood, 1998). In elementary school, Darren when frustrated would turn enraged, blindly shouting at the child who provoked him. He displayed little if any consideration for the consequences, injuries, suffering, or damage he might cause; this being another example, although negative, of his single-minded focus. I witnessed his body contorted in anger as he raged about a student who he believed had lied. He was personally insulted and furious when his class was bodily checked to see if any of them had stolen their classmate’s money. For Darren, honesty and
integrity are extremely important. For the most part, Asperger syndrome children do not understand the rationale behind cheating and lying as the fine lens on how they view life and its many rules frequently restricts their behaviours and outlook on life (Attwood, 1998). This restricted outlook can often result in their demise as their self-induced isolation has been known to lead to depression and possible suicide.

Sadly, most HFA/ASP children tend to play alone; as their lack of understanding surrounding inference, modelling and recognizing appropriate social skills is known to disturb their peers (Attwood, 1998). As a parent, I was often left entertaining Darren’s playmate as he disappeared. I would go to extreme lengths to ensure that the child had an enjoyable time, frequently buying candies, toys and visiting fun places in the hopes of buying the child’s friendship for my son. Finally in grade three, Darren made his first friend - a little girl, like him, who was not accepted and was excluded by her peers. They became inseparable, their humour in sync, their interests and dialogue abundant as they accepted each other's anxieties. This friendship lasted for two years and then towards seventh grade after his peers made numerous snide remarks, Darren came to me and said that he could no longer be friendly with Jenny,73 his peers were making fun of him and she had developed a crush on him. She was embarrassing him by telling everyone that she was his girlfriend.

**Normalcy Perspective and Hopes**

With maturation, I have observed Darren’s Asperger affectedness markedly change as he projects less debilitating symptoms of the syndrome. Since first being diagnosed and tested, I have observed lesser degrees of impairment in pedantic language and communication skills, as well as fewer repetitive or restrictive patterns of thought and behavior. Thus his 'placement' on the spectrum continues to vary and psychiatrists continue to inform me his potential is still unknown. One of the most

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73 I have changed her name to protect her identity.
difficult challenges that Darren continues to face is his awareness of being different. At fifteen he continues to be in denial about having no friends, believing that his numerous online interactions are friendships. Perhaps they are, but as a mother I have not given up hope that he will one day bring a friend home or find a person, in his peer group whom he can effortlessly relate to.

Different, Not Less.
(Grandin, 2012, p. 4)
“Mum, mum I got all ‘A’s at school” Darren excitedly shouted at me.

“All ‘A’s’ well done” I replied. “Can I see your work? What did you draw? Did you bring anything home that you could show me?” As I glanced over his report card I noticed that he had only received A’s in four of the six subjects. I queried this by asking “what about socials and gym?”

“No mum I got a ‘C’ in social studies” he nonchalantly stated, dismissing the subject as though it had never existed.

“A ‘C’, I probed, did you not understand the work or what was required of you?” “I notice here the teacher says you never handed anything in”

“Yah, well, I just don’t like learning about Napoleon so I didn’t do the work, and I can’t remember what I was supposed to do, it was so boring.”
Journey

This chapter chronicles my annotations as a mother, an artist and an educator. As this process unfolded, I discovered that the chronicled journeys were in themselves a creative progression, and that much of the data gathered was intuitive, non-linear and experiential. This led me to once again reflect on the question, "what is creativity and how do we assess it?" As a mother I had wanted to ensure that my son was included and felt secure during the art process, as an artist I had hoped that he would find a new way of 'seeing' that could have ultimately suggested a new behaviour of 'being', and as an educator my desire was for him to not only transform his proficiency but become conscious of the creative component within him.

Figure 1. Darren Showing an Interest in his Neighbour’s Art for the First Time

Methodological Approaches

In order to present accurate and authentic data I had investigated methodological limitations and potential issues I could face prior to starting my research. I was alerted to Oliver's (2008) belief that ethnographers like myself who
investigate a setting which is familiar to them can fail to notice significant social
events due to becoming part of the routine. He believes one needs to learn to
"mentally withdraw" from the field, to "observe social interactions with the eye of a
newcomer" (p. 115). I further discovered that many researchers believe that data
collection in ethnographic research is viewed as being less structured; more flexible
and open-ended than in quantitative research and that ethnographic language is too
similar to natural language therefore at times it appears biased and non-objective.
The ethnographic research is time consuming and requires a well-trained researcher,
as the data collector’s first impression can bias the collection. Having not done
research before I was aware of these concerns and of my inexperience in this area,
thus choosing to use a combination of methods to explore these complex issues and
formulate a balanced multi-perspective approach.74

**Gathering Information**

The initial method I used to collect data was based on Creswell’s (2011)
observational protocol (p. 17). His definition of observational research as being the
"process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by observing people and
places at research sites," (p. 213) alerted me to the advantages and disadvantages of
using this method. However, I believed that I could overcome some of his pros and
cons, based on the strong rapport I had with my son and in my choosing of a
familiar site. I believed that by being familiar with Darren’s nuances, ultimately my
keen desire to listen and assist him would overcome unforeseen circumstances and
potential challenges. The disadvantage I foresaw was my subjectivity, as I had an
overwhelming desire to help Darren "fit in with his peers and succeed." I was aware
that my subjectivity could at times cloud my point of view. However, awareness of
this possible disadvantage encouraged me to create three observational lenses;
mother, artist and educator. Over time my observations and keen awareness of my
involvement alerted me to challenges that I had not foreseen. The first lack of

74 I outlined in chapter 2, based on Creswell’s model of participant-observer the reasons why I
needed to become involved with the participant.
objectivity was when I became aware that my lenses were not as distinct as I had predicted. I discovered that the mother, artist and educator’s analysis were too tightly intertwined.

Creswell (2011) defines an observational protocol as:

A form designed by the researcher before data collection that is used for taking fieldnotes during an observation. On this form, researchers record a chronology of events, a detailed portrait of an individual or individuals, a picture or map of the setting, or verbatim quotes of individuals. As with interview protocols, the design and development of observational protocols will ensure that you have an organized means for recording and keeping observational fieldnotes. (p. 227)

In using Creswell’s qualitative approach I was able to record descriptive information of Darren’s activities during the mini art program and then reflect on how I perceived him personally as a mother, then as an artist and an educator. I designed my own five column recording form for my observations. 'Friday Art' always occurred every second Friday after school between 4:00pm and 6:00pm. It was held either in my home studio or, weather permitting, in the garden. My first column recorded the session numbers. My second column described the process, creativity and the third column behavioural changes observed. I jotted down in a journal thoughts, reflections, hunches, insights and personal experiences that came to mind during the sessions. Each session’s observations were recorded as text, and photographs of both Darren’s art work and peer interactions were documented. I recorded all our interviews and compiled a video recording of Darren during the first interview. My intent at all times was to record Darren’s behaviours, ability, perceptions and nuances as precisely as possible. Darren was asked to keep a journal and record some of his thoughts after each session which allowed me during my final analysis to better understand his experience and how he perceived the mini art program.
Table 1. Mini Art Program Creativity and Behavioural Transformations (January 7-March 18, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons</th>
<th>Observations Reflected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Choice of colours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Built a 3 dimensional structure where his peers only saw the possibility as 2 dimensional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>• Abstract painting balanced, pleasing and adventurous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>• None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>• Interesting choice of colour combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>• Good use of tints, tones and shading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The other students had not been informed about Darren’s diagnosis as I wanted to observe how he responded/did not respond to both positive and negative stimuli in a bona fide setting. When I presented Darren with the idea of 'Friday Art' including his peers, his immediate response was "No!" "I won't attend." "I don't know the people and I don't like art and I can't draw." His outburst was not uncommon; fear of change, or introducing something new is one of the defining characteristics identified by Asperger (1943) and frequently experienced by Darren. As a mother primarily, then an artist and educator, I felt that I could help him overcome the initial hurdle of attending the class. I believed that I could hook him and conquer some of his many fears. I have frequently worked on either a reward system or a promise that I would stay with him for as long as needed and found that this helped reduce his anxiety. In this scenario I chose a reward system. Rewarding Darren financially helped to entice him into situations he would not normally
attempt. We agreed on ten dollars to attend the first class and would discuss the 
reward system associated with attending the other classes at a later stage.

**Friday Art Observations**

The students arrived after school and Darren exuberantly engaged with them 
hoping to show off his prowess in computer games. He appeared comfortable and 
relaxed; however, my familiarity with his body language alerted me to the reality of 
how nervous he was. His rapid eye blinking and shoulder shrugging were 
movements associated with his nervous habit. His gestures were fast and he 
appeared over excited, unable to keep still, talking loudly and trying to appear 
'cool'(Attwood, 1998).

I steered the participants to the outdoor studio to begin the project soon after 
I had provided them with cookies and juice. Everyone appeared keen to commence 
the session, excited to be together and to create. I had noted that Darren stood 
cautiously and awkwardly aside. He watched what the other students were doing, 
trying to take his cues from their actions. At times he became overly animated 
drawing attention to himself by appearing silly. Some of the other students asked 
him to stop shouting as he became over excited with all the goings-on. In order to 
help him adjust to the situation I began the session with a casual introduction and a 
couple of house rules, and encouraged the students to participate. Darren quickly 
overcame his aloofness showing his quick wit and verbal skill. In his excitement, he

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75 Tourette syndrome includes a motor disorder known to have these repetitive, involuntary 
movements.

76 Unable and unaware of voice control in diverse situations is very common for Asperger 
individuals. They are unable to gage a suitable volume in many situations. Prior to the mini 
art program and based on the literature, I was aware that HFA/ASP individuals face many 
challenges when interacting with their peers. They frequently appear to lack filters and blurt 
out exactly what they are thinking, unaware of the rudeness and damage their remarks can 
cause. Small talk is another difficult concept for them to grasp, and seen as a waste of time. 
This became apparent during 'Friday Art' when asked about the conversations that had 
transpired he recited them back in his monotone voice verbatim.
was eager to blurt out grammatical errors other students made, revelling in his new found attention, unaware of the discomfort his remarks caused. The atmosphere in the studio rapidly changed from enthusiasm to unease. I steered the conversation towards discussing the art project. It was almost as if a light switch had been turned on for Darren. He immediately calmed down and listened quietly; every now and again sneaking a glance at one of his peers before lowering his gaze. As soon as I completed the project’s instructions, he appeared oblivious to his surroundings and seemed to withdraw. I observed him as he stared at the materials on the table, ignoring his peers. In watching Darren, I interpreted his silence as confusion and not knowing what to do. In comparison, his peers were laughing and chatting as they struggled to find the 'right' technique or idea to begin the project. As a mother I felt the urge to assist Darren. My motherly instincts wanted to offer him protection. I recognized that my artist’s desire was for him to succeed. I leaned over to help him, he abruptly pushed me away saying, "leave me alone." Eventually, he began the project and I witnessed how his single-minded focus and lack of conversation, which was to the point of rudeness, permitted him to complete the task in less time than allocated. I noted how his behaviour not only isolated him from his peers, but also induced his peers to be curious about him. In observing Darren, he appeared to have a blueprint in his mind; his sole objective was to carry out the plan to the best of his ability and his surroundings were inconsequential.

At that time I was not aware of this intense focus mirroring 'flow' or 'the element' outlined by Robinson and Csikszentmihályi. However, I was aware that it was another definitive characteristic of HFA/ASP illustrated by Asperger, Kanner, Attwood and Wing. I had assumed that Darren’s intense focus was due to his being uncomfortable and wanting to finish the class. Initially, Darren ignored all side bar conversations and when asked a question would respond curtly appearing irritated at being interrupted. He appeared to know exactly when to stop working on his

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77 Although I had frequently observed Darren’s intense focus, I had never observed it in combination with his peers.
project and said "I am finished, can I go now?" I observed how visibly restless he was and how he struggled to quieten himself once the task was completed. How the process of completion appeared almost cathartic for him and that the inability to leave the immediate vicinity evoked anxiety. His longing to leave immediately after completion is a behaviour that Darren has exhibited throughout his life. At the dinner table he immediately wants to do something else once he has eaten. He becomes agitated, belligerent and restless as if the activity of eating, a cathartic process he was previously 'engaged' in, is now over. My tactic to keep him at the table relies on distraction. I am hopeful that I can draw him into a conversation. I am not sure why Darren feels urgency to leave the area or why distraction and bribing can sometimes help change his mind and calm him down. What I do know is that this lack of small talk and social engagement allows Darren to focus intensely on what he prefers to do.

**Observed Behaviours**

Once Darren realized that he would not be able to leave the studio until the full two hours were over, he settled down and attempted to avert both positive and negative attention towards himself, endeavouring to 'fit in.' At no time did he initiate small talk. He appeared satisfied with what he had created, yet unlike his peers who questioned if what they had done was 'okay' and 'right,' he appeared confident in his ability and astonished that we would be discussing his or the other students' work. During the discussions he would stand aside and appear disinterested in his peers work, he showed no desire to comment or validate his own abilities, appearing bewildered when told how much his peers liked what he had done. He showed even further surprise when his peers gave his art work a high rating. His initial naive unfiltered response was "well, why wouldn't you like my work, I think it is good."
Changes in Behaviour

During subsequent sessions, I noticed Darren’s behaviours fluctuating from childlike mannerisms to intense focus to narcissistic outbursts when disturbed or interrupted. His manner at times took on the persona of someone suffering from an addiction. If his peers interrupted his concentrated focus during the execution of his project, or if another student touched his space or chosen items, he glared at them, grabbed his things, raised his voice and snarled “those are mine.” Then just as quickly he would lower his head and once again intensify his focus on finishing his project. I questioned, as a mother, artist and educator when reviewing the data if this ‘flow’ or ‘element’ that Robinson and Csíkszentmihályi had spoken of implied that one could only achieve it when alone and uninterrupted. I had noticed that the interruptions of Darren’s creative flow frequently resulted in his being perceived by his peers as arrogant, egocentric and narcissistic. Steptoe (1998) writes that the temperament of HFA/ASP individuals is known to be hypersensitive, aggressive, autonomous, and independent and that Asperger syndrome individuals are usually "preoccupied with work to the exclusion of social activity" (as cited in Fitzgerald, 2005, p. 13). Darren’s preference for solitude whilst creating became obvious to all.
His behaviours echoed the single-minded focus, arrogance and egocentric behaviour Fitzgerald (2004) and Csíkszentmihályi (1996) depicted when referring to creativity and Asperger’s syndrome. There are many features of high-functioning HFA/ASP that enhance creativity. The ability to focus intensely on a topic and to take endless pains to produce is a characteristic feature of this syndrome. People with HFA/ASP have an enormous capacity to focus on a topic for very long periods, days on end without interruptions even for meals. They do not give up when obstacles to their creativity are encountered. For this reason they are termed workaholics and show a remarkable capacity for persistence. ...In this respect they often come across as being childlike and having immature personalities (Fitzgerald 2004). Csíkszentmihályi (1994) defines creativity as being a “preparation, incubation, insight, valuation, and elaboration” (p. 80) process, which is difficult to investigate as researchers tend to only look at “issues from their own perspective based on his or her discipline” (p. 154). Furthermore in his third category, creative, he mirrors Asperger syndrome characteristics in his depiction of creative individuals as being; “reclusiveness, compulsive behaviours, tiresome bores, and colourless and driven” (p. 26).

Darren became more socially aware as the art sessions progressed and his comfort level with the participants grew. Towards the end of the sessions his behaviour began to partially reflect that of his peers. He calmed down before and after the sessions realizing that the group would include him without his having to act silly or perform. This became apparent as he repeatedly engaged in conversations, glanced at his peer’s work and sat calmly once he had completed his project. He appeared to have developed an awareness of his voice’s projection, conversed in a quieter tone. Only once during the art making did I notice him showing interest in his peers’ art project as he glanced over to see what they had done before completing his own. He never commented on their work unless prompted and appeared disinterested in their projects. At no time was he influenced by any of their art making, neither did he assimilate elements from their

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78 Csíkszentmihályi wrote when referring to Thomas Edison and Isaac Newton.
work into his design. He appeared at all times to know exactly what he was going to create. However, during the last class, he blurted out his frustration at the choice of conversation, which had little interest to him. "You are all airheads" he shouted. He appeared to need a greater creative challenge and wanted to explore three-dimensional designs. His needs were further articulated in an interview I conducted with him. He explained that he preferred to work on three-dimensional projects and surround himself with like-minded individuals. Darren's desire for learning is similar to Greene's (1995) analysis, authentic learning takes place when students are motivated and construct their own learning. Based on this observation and interview, I realized that I needed to create a more sophisticated environment, adopt projects that inspired him and select students who had similar interests.

![Figure 3. Darren’s Finger Print](image)

**Reflections of Empathy**

My desire as a mother was to depict Darren as empathetic. This resulted in documenting any signs of empathy during the art program. I recognized in Darren,

79 Many of the participants were girls and they chatted about clothes, friends, shopping, and boys.
Attwood’s (1998) certainty that the Asperger individual is "confused by the emotions of others or has difficulty expressing their own feelings" (p. 56) and that individuals do not display the "anticipated range and depth of facial expression nor body language" (p. 56). This difference of facial expression and body language had frequently resulted in Darren being perceived as lacking empathy. I witnessed this belief unfold after observing him during the first couple of sessions. He showed no indication that he was capable of displaying empathy towards his peers. However, my perception of him soon changed. Prior to a class his cat rubbed up against him during snack time; he bent down and started stroking her ears, cooing gently as he cradled her in his arms and rubbed her stomach. This tender side of his nature became apparent as he unselfconsciously interacted with the animal. Sobel (1998) declares that one of the best ways to foster empathy during childhood is to promote relationships with animals whether they are real or imagined. If empathy were defined as caring, my son displayed it in spades to our family cat. During subsequent observations I noticed how Darren became aware of the other children gravitating towards him once he had an animal in his arms. This learnt behaviour of understanding what attracted his peers to him is echoed in Robison’s (2008) narrative. Robison writes that at age nine he suddenly had a life changing revelation. He finally figured out how to talk to his peers. When a child said "look at my Tonka truck" (pp. 20-21) he no longer responded by saying “I have a helicopter” or “I want some cookies” or "my mom is mad at me today” (pp. 20-21). I witnessed Darren’s dialogue having a similar disconnect. If empathy is defined as the ability to

80 Darren appears to have an unspoken understanding with animals. At twelve years old he wrote “At the ranch there was a petting zoo that had a llama named. For some reason she let me pet her and put random objects on her but chased and spat at everyone else.”

81 I recently found an essay Darren had written for school. He wrote “…around the same time I was afraid of animals so my mom bought a family cat. My sister wanted to name her after one of her Barbie Dolls or something but we finally decided on the name Pepper. Pepper helped me to completely conquer my fear of animals, in less than a week. It felt great having less anxiety in my life.”

82 These would be the normal responses of a child with HFA/ASP as although they are listening they are inwardly focused and blurt out their thoughts appearing insensitive and uncaring.
understand what the other is feeling and the ability to let the other know he understands, then empathy is something I rarely see in Darren's behaviour.

During another art session, I witnessed Darren's perceived lack of interest and empathy for his peers. When one of the participants remarked "my grandmother is getting old and sick," his response was "Did you know that I got the new Hero Scape game today?" After class I questioned if he had heard what Harriet had said about her grandmother. Anxiously and visibly distressed, he replied "Mum I don't want to talk about that now." Truth be said, at that time I was not sure if his response was due to Harriet having a sick grandmother or if Darren was upset because he had to think about something he preferred not to dwell on. Later that day, I asked Darren why he did not want to discuss Harriet's sick grandmother and why he appeared anxious and upset about discussing it. He responded by saying that in hearing someone was sick he immediately related it to me, his mother, grandmother or grandfather and it became too hard to handle. He felt really scared at the thought of us dying. If he did not think or talk about it then it was not real, and he could 'make believe' this would not happen. Voicing his concern, he said, gave him additional anxiety. Since then I have attempted to broach the subject but am always shut down as Darren becomes visibly disturbed and upset preferring not to discuss any anxiety provoking subjects.

I began to search for other signs of empathy and apparent distress that he projected during 'Friday Art.' I noted his response when one of his peers mentioned that she hated the 'in girls' at her school. "They were mean and bullied everyone." I witnessed how he quickly shot her a glance, appeared nervous, seemed to regain control but other than that showed no sign of having heard the conversation. At one point he unexpectedly turned his head to me, our eyes locked and then just as quickly, almost afraid of being transparent, as he too had experienced bullying,

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83 I have used pseudonyms for all the participants.
84 Darren when he is ready will come to me and discuss a subject that causes him anxiety; however I have since learnt that he has to be the one to initiate the topic.
lowered his head, and remained silent. Darren had been bullied in elementary school. He had had to undergo several months of counselling and as a result ultimately changed schools. Changing schools for Darren and disrupting his routine is almost as frightening as being bullied.

During subsequent sessions, I was made aware of how willingly he shared his treats with the other students and how he offered to let them play with his precious computer games- possibly in the hope of forming a connection with them? Somehow, he had come to realize that doing an activity with his peers reduced small talk. Darren had frequently mentioned to me that he found small talk pointless and confusing. "A person," he said, "should only say what is important. Why, would you ask how someone was if you could see that they were okay?" Towards the end of classes one of his peers brought her younger sibling and asked if it would be okay if he joined the class for the day. I was hesitant but soon changed my mind as I noticed my son immediately gravitate towards the younger child and created a space next to him at the table. He appeared almost motherly in his concern as he instructed the younger child in the project, providing him with the necessary materials. I was astonished to witness him allowing the child to touch him. Touch was always instigated on his terms. Touching he had told me, felt like sandpaper rubbing against his skin and unless he was prepared for it, it hurt him. Yet, here he was showing empathy as he carefully adapted and altered the class's structure to embrace the younger child's comfort and comprehension level. His intrinsic compass guided him. A learnt behaviour perhaps, but enacted no less with gusto and heart. Previously I had observed how interactions with younger children or adults appeared seamless and less upsetting for him, compared with those of his peers. As a result of this, I meticulously observed him during the art program trying to find the missing piece to the puzzle. I noticed that the younger child appeared non-judgemental of Darren's somewhat eccentric behaviours. When Darren engaged in conversation and his answers made no sense, the younger child did not correct nor isolate him but just continued the conversation as though it were normal. Consequently, I was made aware of how adults frequently modify their
conversations to accommodate what he said but his peers got frustrated at his apparent display of egocentricity (Robison, J. 2008).

**Interviews: Perceptions of Creativity**

Another qualitative method Creswell (2011) suggested is the 'one to one' interview process (p. 217). I adopted this method as I felt as a mother I was most familiar with Darren’s behaviour patterns and would be able to cautiously analyze them. I applied the technique of open-ended questioning to reflect Darren's answers as truthfully as possible. After each interview I proceeded to transcribe the information and then reflected on what had transpired. My intent in asking open-ended questions was to allow Darren to best voice his perception and experiences of the mini art process. Once again I was alerted to the pros and cons of the interview process. Some of the challenges I encountered were technical issues with equipment, handling Darren's lack of interest, not wanting to talk at that moment or his frequent desire to change the conversation. Advantages I felt in using this process was our familiarity with each other, our ability to laugh and joke at times about a question that I had asked, or me being able to quickly recognize the cues to stop or prod him on. I chose to interview Darren to reflect his level of articulation, his ability to share his ideas and his love of conversation, even if at times it appeared only one-sided.

The three interviews I conducted with Darren took place at the end of each month and initially attempted to focus on specific themes. The first theme I examined with Darren was how he perceived himself as creative. The second- what importance he placed on creativity in education. And the third focused on what the word ‘creativity’ actually meant to him. The interviews proved to be non-linear and I encouraged Darren to feel free to discuss anything that came to mind. My analysis repeatedly encouraged me to acknowledge alternative methods of examining the data, embracing new ways of seeing creativity thus steering me to reassess my findings. In doing so I was reminded of Loori's (2004) profound words:
"Creativity is our birthright. It is an integral part of being human, as basic as walking, talking, and thinking. Throughout our evolution as a species, it has sparked innovations in science, beauty in the arts, and revelation in religion. Every human life contains its seeds and is constantly manifesting it, whether we're building a sand castle, preparing Sunday dinner, painting a canvas, walking through the woods, or programming a computer. (Loori, 2004, p. 1)

My mother's, artist's and educator's lens needed to be broadened to embrace alternative points of view. Gazing at my data I found myself conferring and finally understanding why so many leading experts had, and continue to, struggle to recognize Asperger syndrome individuals as having creative tendencies. The question an old Zen Koan asked "how do you go straight ahead on a narrow mountain path which has ninety-three curves?" kept coming to mind (p. 9).

First Interview

Darren we have just finished two art club classes and are about to start the third class, will you share what you enjoyed and learnt in the classes?

Darren stares at me, and then slowly says I learnt, well, how to work in a positive learning environment and how to accept compliments and to reflect on my work and how to improve on the next time I may do something. I am not used to being in such a positive environment it was really enjoyable. I look at him again and start laughing. I can see he is giving me answers I want to hear. He also starts laughing. However, upon reflection and re-listening to the recording I realize that at times his tone was genuine, it just sounded rehearsed.

Darren, could you explain what you mean by a positive environment?

Oh! It's so much fun spending time with my mom 'cos my mom is usually working; time with her is the best, he mockingly replies. As a single mother I am aware that my days at work and at school are long and often take me away from spending time with Darren. Darren and I have frequently discussed the possibility of me withdrawing from school to spend more time with him. He loves and hates the idea, concerned that I might 'cramp his style.'
At this point both of us are laughing and playful with each other. Okay, Darren on a more serious note, what did you actually learn?

I learnt how to draw without using my head, just using my heart, and to draw something without thinking first and to just jump in. I had given the class a contour drawing and asked them not to look at what they were drawing. They had to focus on the leaf in front of them without even glancing at their sketch paper.

Darren, that’s interesting, do you always think about what you are going to draw ahead of time?

Usually I like to think it over and plan steps ahead, but in art class we had to go without thinking first and I am not used to doing stuff like that, he responded pensively.

You’re finding that acting spontaneously is challenging?

Yes, I usually like to plan things out first.

So when I see you sitting quietly in the art class you are actually planning what to do? Although I suspected this was what Darren was doing, I am surprised to hear him have such a keen insight into his actions.

I sit and I think and I plan the whole project in my head before I start, he mumbles.

The process you used in art class to draw, is it a similar process used when building computers and robots?

I suppose so; it’s just that I prefer building a robot, because it reflects greater human ingenuity. It’s more enjoyable and honestly the only thing I really like to do in art is sketch as that is more realistic and it’s more thinking through and that’s probably why I like it more.

Were you comfortable in the class with the other students?

Yeah! I was comfortable, but I would rather be doing something else.
Could I improve the program by incorporating robotics and computers?

That would be impossible because you know a lot less about robotics and computers than I do.

And if I hired someone to teach it, would you enjoy that more?

It depends on the teacher and the learning environment, I can’t predict what will happen but I will say that the subject matter interests me more. I can’t say that the whole learning environment and the teacher is going to be better.

What do you love doing that is creative that I could bring into the art class? I see you play the piano for hours, computers and technology for hours ...is that not creative within itself?

I like to play the piano, I like learning new songs.

And you sit there until you master the song, is that not being creative?

Nah! Not most of the time only when I like the song, if I am not interested in the song I won’t sit there long.

What about when you build robots and computers?

I am good at what I am doing, he responds earnestly.

So you only like to do things you are good at?

Generally, yeah! Doesn’t everybody?

How do you know that you are good at something?

You compare yourself, your work to the people around you, and you get a professional’s opinion, like your teacher’s. I consider my teacher to be a professional, like if your teacher says you are doing well, you are ahead of schedule and he focuses more on your group because he sees more potential than other groups he knows that you are good at what you are doing.
So if I introduced more realism into the art class and you did well would you believe me as a professional when I said that you were doing well?

No, you are my mom, what I don’t like about art is that it is so opinion based. One person can like it and another person can hate it. If you are building something in computers or a robot there is only one right answer, it’s not like there are a million opinions about it. It works or it doesn’t wor…[mumbles on]...two groups of the five that will be going, three groups haven’t finished, ummm started and determining who is going to be competing we are going to do an in class competition that is also based on our grade, so I have to practice doing...oh! I have to also give you the form to fill out on Tuesday and in the afternoon at about 2pm I am going to go stand up paddle boarding at Jericho beach I need someone to pick me up at Jericho because they won’t provide a way back they will only provide a way there, Darren has gone off topic as another thought crossed his mind.

Okay, we will figure something out.

Oh! I have to...

Darren what is the robot you are going to be doing, I do not fully understand what you are saying, I said, hoping to draw his attention back to the conversation.

By the way for Christmas I am going to be asking for a Vex, that’s the robotics kit we are working with about eight of them and other parts that order but I would like to have the controller and....Darren talks on and on about robotics and what he would like to build, how they function, what to order. I have learnt to usually let his conversations run their course. Interrupting him is futile as his train of thought is still focused on his previous concept.

Darren when you talk about robots and all the things you would like to build do you see the process as being creative?

No, the creativity hasn’t started yet, because it depends what level you are at and if you follow instructions it’s not creative. It will be creative soon because I will have to be designing something from my own ideas, and that is creative....Darren has refocused on our interview; he is giving me his full attention even though he is gazing to the side.
So, for you if you follow instructions you do not consider it creative? Creativity is coming up with your own ideas? Is that what you are saying? I paraphrase.

Creativity is that there is not leeway. Creativity is your own idea, if it is someone else’s idea you are not creative but you are copying something. I’m not saying you can’t build on that and be creative; it’s a big subject that you should not cover it so lightly....Darren becomes distracted as he glances over and sees his skating bodysuit hanging over a chair. He starts to talk about another of his passions, skating.

What I am trying to do at the beginning is working on my technique so I will be going a little slower I want to improve that before I go faster if you go faster while learning technique you just land up falling and hurting yourself...

Darren lets go back to the art classes. Could you name one thing that you enjoyed doing?...He looks at me seriously, I am not sure if he will answer me genuinely or mockingly. However we are having fun, somehow the light carefree mood is drawing him closer to me. He is sitting next to me now almost leaning into my body.

I liked being in a positive learning environment and spending time with my mother, he quietly responds.

How about drawing, was there anything you enjoyed drawing?

I do not like to spend time with giggly friends, I don’t like drawing art unless it’s realistic, but I don’t mind looking at it if it is not realistic. Generally I would prefer to build stuff; this does not mean I don’t want to spend time with you, he responds pensively, lowering his eyes at the last sentence.
Second Interview

I could see Darren did not want to be interviewed. He feels that the interviews are a waste of time. Although he is proud of his art work, he refused throughout the three months to admit that he liked "Friday Art," and at every opportunity he put the program down. Privately he brings his art work to me and asks what I really think about his paintings and do I like them.

Darren let’s talk about when you are creating... (Darren interrupts the question).

No, we have to follow a kit when you are starting and then you still have to program it with a flash drive and then after this we are going to be competing and he is ordering $1500 worth of new kits in (Darren is very excited as he tells me about the robotic class at school) and it’s not that big a class and we are, “DON’T.”...Darren shouts at me as I lean over to touch the photograph of the robotic image he is showing me and then he continues the conversation by saying that they will get more parts and ...

Then we get to go to Washington and Surrey and stuff and other schools.
Why do you like to create robots so much?

Are you recording me?

Yes.

I am not answering you until we can start another recording.

Darren tell me, why do you like creating so much?

Turn it off.

No, Darren I will not turn it off. I need it to remember what you say. Tell me, why do you like creating so much?

Ahm....I like to create because it gives me freedom...

To do what?

It lets me go where I want to, ahmmm (he appears to be getting bored with the interview).

Do you have a partner when you create the robots, build the robots? I search for the correct terminology knowing that incorrect use of terminology frustrates him.

He is visibly agitated with me as he replies " of course you have to it’s a course, you can’t just build it by yourself.

So your teacher teams you up with somebody?

I’m with my friend I don’t want to be with some random person, he impatiently responds.

Your friend? What’s his name?

Why would I tell you his name, he’s some random person so there really is no point?
Who is he? Have I met him?

A kid who is my age, he now responds aggressively.

Is he in your class?

I don’t know, he says looking away.

In your other classes? I push on, knowing but wanting him to say the answer aloud.

Maybe, I don’t know I don’t pay that much attention.

So how did you meet him? (I am curious as Darren has no friends and I desperately want Darren to have a friend. I want to know as a mother who this child is).

I don’t know, maybe at schoooool, where I go eeeevery day, he sarcastically responds.

Please don’t be rude to me, I ask. Lately Darren has enjoyed been sarcastic and rude. He is a typical teenager.

I met him at school, he politely replies.

How did you get friendly with him? I push on.

I’m not that friendly with him, he is the only kid I know in the entire class, he finally says.

Did he participate in the middle year’s project fair, where you built the computer?

You know that I did that by myself.

Yes but that is not what I am asking, did he participate in that fair?

You had to, it was required, no he left for a year I think, or something, I don’t really know. I then realize my suspicions are once again correct. This is a red herring. There really is no friend. Darren has no real connection to this child other than building a robot with him and perhaps knowing his name.
Okay, can we talk about the work that you did for the art club? What were you drawing here? I hold one of Darren’s pictures up for him to see.

I can’t see the picture, he mumbles.

Okay, then why don’t you stand up or come closer to the picture.

Ammmm...I don’t know, oh! A tree, is this when you wanted us to close our eyes and draw whatever picture we wanted? Yeah! You’re like don’t look at the page and draw what’s in front of you. Yeah! It’s like closing your eyes.

Okay, and look at your final product, I say to him as I hold up another image.

Okay.

It’s quite beautiful.

I don’t like abstract art so, I like realism.

Yeaaah! Why don’t you like it?

I generally now do not like doing art; I like to do constructive things and productive things to reach a final goal. Building ah...I like having a project that builds up that leads to a goal that you can see that is not just a flat picture on a page that you can reflect on that you feel accomplished on. I don’t feel accomplished by drawing a picture on a page because that’s something you can do in five minutes I like to see something that is more along the lines of human ingenuity. I am very interested in electronics more so than in art. Which is why I am not such a huge fan of the art club, or art cage or whatever you want to call it?

Okay, when you drew this picture at school how did you feel about that? (I show Darren the image of the child on the beach).

I don’t remember drawing that picture.

Do you remember how you managed to mix the paints so well?

I experimented with layers until I got the right combination.
Do you remember these images from the Friday Art?

Yes, you wanted us to draw eyes.

What made you chose the oranges and the blues? Are they your favourite colours?

I like yellow (I am aware that Darren is deliberately playing with me).

Darren when we look at these students’ work which one out of all of them is your favourite?

Probably my own because I draw what I like. I wouldn’t draw something I wasn’t interested in. I draw ...the stuff that I draw is a picture that I like, does that make any sense?

ahmmmm...

I am drawing for my own taste or perspective so that would make what I draw what I am most interested in. That’s what I am aiming for, I am not aiming for what someone else would want on a picture and if I get it right then I like it. I seem to like at least one of my pictures.

Oh! I love them, I say as I point to two more pictures Darren drew.

I don’t like abstract art; I mentioned that more than a couple of times.

Okay, and if we looked at all of this work displayed and you had to give constructive feedback to your peers what would you suggest they could do diff...

Darren interrupts me and says... “You are not supposed to suggest what they could do different, because in art apparently you are right and everybody can do what they feel is right whereas in realistic art when it is supposed to look like something you could give feedback, but this is abstract, you can’t give feedback on abstract, it’s completely opinion based.

You mean you cannot give feedback on any of the work in front of you?
Pretty much, if this was like draw a face and you showed us a picture, like copy this face then you could probably give feedback.

Now this one student says she has drawn her eye, is this abstract or is she just a bad drawer? She is asking me how she can improve. If you were me what would you say? Darren examines the picture carefully before saying.

Draw more pictures until you like one, its abstract art. Use different brush strokes, use different colours, different shapes I don’t know it’s completely up to her. I guess there are certain guidelines you should follow, but those guidelines are pretty broad you know...he seriously responds.

Thank you Darren.

We’re done; good I’m going to sleep. Mum, would you like to hang that picture of mine in your room?

Is it your favourite one?

Yes, I like it.

I would love to, I respond. Darren has already left the room without hearing my answer.

**Final Interview**

The final interview I conducted with Darren occurred in the studio, after the last art session, once everyone had gone home. We sat opposite each other. At first he appeared defensive, sarcastic and thought it would be a joke to be interviewed again. His behaviour differed from previous interviews and I chose to change my strategy and started to make small talk. I discussed video games and slowly this led to chatting about his day. Once I sensed that he was settled and willing, I began the interview. After the interview and while writing the thesis I questioned his behaviour during the final interview and wondered if it was a reflection of him being unable to express sadness or relief that the sessions were over.
The primary focus of this interview was to understand how Darren had understood the creative process and if he now viewed himself as being creative. Many of his answers surprised me at how similar they were to leading theorists views of creativity. For example Csikszentmihályi (2004) concedes that if society deems creativity valuable and includes it in the domain a new starting point is acknowledged. Darren, in his own words said "other people think you are creative and so the more people who think you are creative the greater chance you have of being perceived as being creative."

When we talk about creativity how and what does it look like for you?

Ha, ha, ha......starts it again stops, ha, ha, ha starts it again. (Becoming agitated) starts it again. (Becoming aggressive and trying to snatch the tape recorder from my hand).

Its okay I am not going to be playing this recording to anyone. I will be typing the words out in my thesis and you will read it over to make sure you like what we have spoken about. Don’t worry I am not going to do anything to embarrass you (he immediately settles down trusting that I will not harm or embarrass him).

Creativity is originality.

What do you mean by originality?

Doing something different that hasn’t been thought of before or building on an idea and making it better.

Is being creative only drawing, building your shell animal or building your computer?

That’s boredom.

That’s boredom? So are you saying being creative is being bored?

Csikszentmihályi (2009) states, in order to be creative you need to be recognized by society who determines if you are creative.
I didn’t say I was being creative when I was doing those things I was following instructions.

So is being...

(Over talking me) no one can instruct you to be creative that kinda defeats the whole purpose.

Do you enjoy being creative.

Well it’s not if you enjoy being creative or not, generally people are creative whether they want to be or not.

Do you consider program designing creative.

Well it’s like I said it depends if you are building on an idea, inventing something new that’s creativity, if you’re just copying someone else’s ideas that’s learning but not being creative.

How do you feel when you are in the creative process, making the shell sculpture?

Aagh! (Appears unable to express himself).

How does your body feel?

I am not thinking about that, I just wanted to put random pieces together so that I could leave.

Aha! It didn’t interest you doing that?

No it didn’t interest me at all (he replies with a smirk, waiting for a reaction from me).

So then building a computer is that creative?

No I view that as having great ingenuity, being progressive, it’s a learning process. The design might be creative but the actual building of it is not creative at all.
So what would be something that you would consider creative?

My idea.

Such as?

My idea for my project.

So in your eyes anything like the drawings you did, the figurines you built are not creative because you received instructions that you needed to create?

You’re trying to take create out of the word creative. I know what it means.... (Whispered very softly, mumbling).

What does it mean?

I just told you (stubborn, defensive, and appearing to have enough of the conversation) you asked me this already why are we going around in circles?

I am trying to understand how you truly see creativity.

I already told you.

Okay so when you are being creative how will I know to recognize that you are being creative? What does it look like?

You’re serious? (He looks at me genuinely surprised, as if I was teasing him).

Yes.

(He realizes that I am being genuine and suddenly I have his interest) Well creativity doesn’t look like anything; it’s what someone thinks of something. It’s how another person sees something for example (voice starting to get animated) seeing something you saw before and saying oh wow! He is being so creative. The truth is I could be copying right out of a magazine so creativity is more of an idea so then you can’t see it. It’s like something that will just happen and different people would experience it in different ways, their memories and thoughts in relationship to those....(mumbling softly) Other people think you are creative and so the more people who think
you are creative the greater chance you have of being perceived as being creative.

The question of how you look when you are creative is something that he appears surprised to hear. Why would a person look creative? His starts talking logically and provides no information as to how a person appears physically during the creative process. That is of no interest to him.

When you were drawing nobody else had the same images that you created.

I was told to draw.

Yes, I gave instructions to draw but you created something totally unique from your peers.

You don’t know that.

I looked at your peers work and it was totally different.

It was a mouth, that’s your opinion that it was creative it’s how someone sees it, that’s your way of seeing it. I have a different way of seeing it.

How did you see it?

I knew you would ask me that, I’m not answering that because I don’t see it as being creative. The activity also has to interest me; if I am not interested I am not creative.

Do you see yourself as being a creative person? (I notice that I suddenly have his attention again he appears focused, serious and deep in thought).

I am creative I have different principles than what you would call the general creative person you can’t be creative its how the person sees that person. So if someone was to be creative then everyone who knew him would have to see him as being creative not that he is creative but ....creative is an idea of how you see that person.

Did you enjoy the art classes and being with the group (This question distances him and he finds humour in knowing that his answer will possibly offend me. He is carefully watching me when he responds waiting for a reaction from me).
No I couldn’t wait to leave (I was unsure how to read his expression to decipher if he was being genuine, however later on I realized that he was making fun of me).

Do you care about being creative?

No, not exactly.

How do you see yourself having Asperger’s in relation to being creative?

I don’t see myself as having Asperger’s I see myself as an individual person who thinks very logically, I can’t explain how I think, it’s how I think.

Do you have anxiety when you are thinking this way?

No. I did for a couple of years but it went away.

When you were building your computer what did that feel like?

It was fun.

And what does fun feel like?

What does fun feel like...you know what fun feels like, fun is not an idea, it’s an emotion and everyone feels it, maybe just not the same way?

How would I know if you were having fun during the creative process? What would it look like?

(Unsure) smiling? (I can see thinking about how his body would appear is confusing to him).

Do you think that the mini art program helped you to understand people better?

Yeah aha!

In what way?
It helped me to understand how different people ...well firstly I didn’t even know these people at the beginning so understanding them wasn’t possible but it just meant getting to know them better and sure I got to know people better therefore I understood them better.

How could I change the mini art program to make it more interesting, what could I do differently next time I work with HFA/ASP students?

What makes you think that people with Asperger’s are interested in being creative?

I don’t but that’s what I am hoping to find out.

(Once again he suddenly gets very serious and pensive) well if they are like me they somewhat care about art and being creative but not that much, I don’t know— I enjoy sketching, to sketch things that I have seen before or are frequently around. I like to keep one subject in my mind and I like to think about that and that subject gives me comfort.

Would you like to be as creative as Bill Gates, or the Facebook Creator?

Creative or famous they are two different things...do you not know the Facebook creator’s name, you have got to be serious (he looks at me cynically, as if to say, how could you be so stupid).

Either one, what are your beliefs about Asperger’s.

I don’t know anyone with Asperger’s, I’m done. (The interview is over and he abruptly leaves the room).
Art Work Fun

Although Darren, during the interview appeared confused by the idea that he could have had fun during the creative process; my observations of him proved otherwise. In assuming Fitzgerald’s theory that many HFA/ASP individuals develop massive imaginations and seek novelty in their specialized spheres, (2004, p. 13) combined with Csíkszentmihályi belief of what categorizes a creative person (1996, p. 25) and Eisner’s definition of creativity, I believe Darren’s behaviour oftentimes reflected creativity when he appeared fully focused on the task at hand. My definitions of creativity at the time of the research did not enable me to recognize this behaviour or to accurately analyze the information. Only after reading the literature on creativity was I able to determine that based on their single-minded focus, most HFA/ASP individuals were considered to be creative, although

86 Creative person, the ability to change our culture in some respect, i.e. Michelangelo, Einstein, Picasso.

87 The “extent to which it displays an inventive use of an idea or process” (Eisner, E. 2002, p. 183).
they might not perceive themselves to be so. Although I showed images of the artist’s technique during each session, I did not instruct the students to conform to a specific practice, and allowed them the freedom to create at will. This freedom of choice became evident during lesson three. I had placed numerous shells and beads on the table. Most students immediately glued the shells to their paper, sketched around them, painted them or made a shell and beaded bracelet; typical uses of the materials. Darren stared quietly at the beads, his face expressionless; he appeared bored, disinterested and confused. Finally he asked me if he could use the glue gun. I watched as he silently glued the shells and beads together, his focus intense. As he neared completion he placed the shell legs on the animal type body and the room became suddenly silent. His peers curiously leaned over cooing and praising him for his unconventional and original selection and use of materials. The more they commented on his unique talent and original idea, the more he appeared to glow in their praise, relax and join in with their laughter; a distinct display of fun. He appeared proud of his ability and after class showed his shell creature to his grandmother who showered him with additional praise. However, during the interview when asked about this experience he appeared to mock and deny his feelings of enjoying the creative process. Creating a shell object in his eyes was not being creative.
Tempering Critique

At the time of the mini art program I was using Eisner's three-step definition as described in chapter four, on how to best evaluate creativity. I was cognizant of the fact that at times I struggled to adapt my beliefs on how to mould creativity into this rigid framework. After each class I asked the students to look at each other’s work and provide three suggestions as to what they would have done differently i.e. possibly drawn a fish instead of a dog or used blue instead of grey. I then asked them to collectively assign a number out of five, five being the maximum number, to their peer's work. I based this assessment on Eisner's creative framework. With the student's permission I photographed their work and after class focused on what I determined at the time was the most creative art piece produced during that lesson. Being a visual person, I chose to create a graph to display both his peers and my scoring. At times evaluating the work proved challenging as some students took longer to complete their work than others. I did not tally the scores but found it interesting to see how students evaluated each other's artwork and how their
opinions differed from mine. This difference of opinion once again led me to question how we evaluate creativity.

Table 2. Overview of Evaluation Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session: Focus of analysis based on Eisner's evaluation process</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Peer score Darren's work</th>
<th>My score of Darren's work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1: Technical quality of the work produced</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>1/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>2/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2: The extent to which it displays an inventive use of an idea or process, and the expressive power or aesthetic quality it displays</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>1/5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>1/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3: The material with which the student worked had been handled with control and understanding</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>5/5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Photographs</td>
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<td>Discussions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Student work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initially Darren was curious and paid acute attention to my instructions about the evaluation process. However, as soon as we began our discussions he acted silly when giving his evaluation to his peers. His behaviour changed once his peers evaluated his creative ability and he showed genuine surprise when told that his work was artistic. He smiled hesitantly, looked at me to ensure that he was not being made fun of and then reflected both pleasure and pride. This unexpected positive attention gave the impression of boosting his creative streak as he would frequently ask me if I had reminded the other students that there was art on Friday and he would question me as to what we would be doing in the class. However, when asked "did you enjoy the art making?" his response was "I hated it, I couldn't
wait to leave and I even offered to do house chores instead.” After the first couple of sessions on giving positive feedback, I noticed Darren carefully selecting language as if aware that his comments could offend his peers. His evaluative comments were welcomed by his peers and they appeared to respect what he said. At no time during this process did he appear insincere.

During the first session Darren remained silent and observed his peers giving feedback. At the following session I witnessed him repeating almost verbatim his peers’ comments when it came time to give feedback. The appearance of repeating almost exactly what his peers had said I would like to emphasize was at no time intended to mock them. Verbal copying or role-playing is a learnt behaviour Darren was taught by his behavioural therapist. When Darren was younger she would role play with him how to respond to social situations. Although he can recite anything of interest in a heartbeat, when it comes to making small talk he is frequently at a loss for words. As a result Darren has learnt to observe what his peers are doing and then inject learnt comments, parrot like, at appropriate times into the conversation. However, if he does not agree with what has been said he will either not respond or change the phrase to suit his analysis of the situation.

Peer: Oh! I love it. Will you show me how to do that?
Darren: No comment.

Second and subsequent sessions.

Peer: Your brushstroke is really good.
Darren: Your brushstroke is really good.

Peer: That is so cool, how did you get that colour combination?
Darren: How did you get that colour combination?

Peer: I like how you used orange and pink here.
Darren: I like how you used red and yellow here.

Peer: I really like how you drew the eyes, your work looks just like Van Gogh’s.
**Darren:** Your work looks like Van Gogh’s.

**Darren:** I think you could improve if you used more paint on your brush and your pastels were darker.

**Darren:** Do you like what you did? Then why improve it. All that matters is that you like it. It’s your art.

**Journaling**

Killion (1999) stated that journaling at its simplest is “writing to learn” and unlike “thinking about” ideas, which eventually evaporate, journals are permanent records of those thoughts or ideas (p. 37). The process of transferring an idea into language forces the mind to process and clarify the idea. When a learner is required to apply language to an idea, the idea takes shape and form. (as cited in King & LaRocco, 2006).

I had asked Darren to keep an electronic journal during the three months of 'Friday Art' with the hopes that it would enhance his reflective practice. My desire was to use reflective practice as a method of self-examination for Darren. My intent was to document if he had understood the core concepts of what I was instructing and how he internalized the sessions. I also believed his journals would provide a window of opportunity for me to 'see' some of his thoughts and 'hear' his voice. Initially I provided him with an opening and closing sentence in his e-journaling but he took one look at them and said "No." "I want to write my thoughts and not yours." Killion (1999, p. 37) writes that "reflecting through journal writing gives learners the opportunity to shape their ideas, create new ideas, and connect them to what they already know” (as cited in King & LaRocco, 2006).

I would have liked Darren's journaling to be more substantial and informative. The mother in me wanted to show his English prowess, but upon reflection I realized that was my desire and ultimately I was grateful that he had agreed to write.
Entry 1

One of the things that I enjoyed doing at art class was painting leaves. It was very different to anything that I had done before because we could not look at our page. We had to just look at the leaf in front of us and then draw from what we were looking at. I like to plan things out so this was a great challenge for me. When we were done drawing out the leaf we had to fill it in with paint. At this point we were actually allowed to look at our page. It was a lot of fun!

Entry 2

There were many things in which I learned at my mother’s art class. One of the things that I had learned was to work well with others. I am generally a very solitary person who does not wish to socialize with other people to often. My mom helped to create a calm atmosphere through her teachings which really helped me to grow as a person. I also learned good team skills in where I had to work with and rely on someone else. Doing this is usually very difficult for me but art class made things a lot easier for me. So far I would rather do other things than art but the environment in which I am put into is really great. So far it’s nice.

Entry 3

One of the most valuable lessons that I learned in art class was to live in the moment. I had always been thinking ahead about what I wanted to do and I wanted to plan everything out. Art class helped me to relax and instead of planning things out to just go with it. This caused my art work to also look very different. At first I didn’t like the change but eventually I came around. I realized that just because my new art was made out of my comfort zone does not necessarily make it bad. In fact in many ways it was really good. This life lesson which I learnt I will surely carry for the rest of my life. Without Art class I wouldn’t have realized lessons like this one. Art class has taught me a lot.
Figure 7.  Darren’s Interpretation of Fall
Chapter 6: Discussions & Implications

“What did you have for dinner last night? How many children do you have? And did you have sex last night?” Darren at five asked the school janitor, Ben, who had befriended him. I was immediately called to the school’s office to deal with my rude and inappropriately behaved son. I found Darren visible shaking and terrified, waiting for me outside the principal’s office.

In the principal’s office I asked her if she had asked Darren what he had meant by the question “did you have sex last night?” “No” she replied tightlipped. I turned to Darren, ignoring her and said “Hon, what did you mean by your questions?”

He stared up at me bewildered, tearful and confused and said, “Mum, I don’t know, Jessie and Avi told me that is what you ask people when you want them to be your friend.”
Review of the Study as Understood by a Mother, an Artist, and an Educator

Most creative persons don’t follow a career laid out for them, but invent their job as they go along. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 107)

As a mother, in designing the mini art program my thoughts initially centred on ways to best assist Darren in adjusting to his peer group. After reading Fitzgerald’s books on creativity and Asperger syndrome, the mother and artist kicked in, and I believed that if I created this mini art program, through creativity, Darren would be able to demonstrate the benefits of the arts in the curriculum and ultimately make a friend. However, as the program unfolded, I was faced with many questions and recognized that although most of the literature indicated that Asperger syndrome individuals lacked creativity and feared change (Craig & Baron Cohen, 1999), I was coming to a different conclusion. I began to document these changes via interviews, journaling and observations and noted Darren's feelings and behaviours during the creative process. I explored how creativity presented in the artist's consciousness by observing Darren's engagement in the activity, how he perceived himself during this process and what he understood to be the meaning of the experience (Robinson, 2011 & Csíkszentmihályi, 1996).

"Friday Art" was conducted within the boundaries of a specific place, predetermined learning objectives, and a finite number of students, with a structure derived from Creswell’s (2011) case study approach. This method helped me organize and report my narration as accurately as possible. Reflecting on my data, I realized although my narration was accurate and all-embracing as a mother, artist and educator, the nature of the evaluation phenomena I observed and documented, as well as the data collected limited the possibility of interpreting my findings as conclusively as I had anticipated. My initial attempts to separate my results into the three distinct perspectives, mother, artist and educator proved more challenging than I had imagined- possibly due to their marriage, and fuzzy margins. In many
ways this obscurity parallels Springgay’s, Irwin’s, Leggo’s & Gouzouasis’s (2008) a/r/tography process in that my research was not "subject to standardized criteria" but appeared to be in constant motion due to the "simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time" (p. xix). This chapter highlights some of these obscurities, and based on my findings, suggests the changes I would make to the program. My aim is to incorporate into 'Friday Art,' many of these changes with the hope of drawing attention to the need for creativity as an essential part of the curriculum for children with Asperger's syndrome.

**As a Mother**

As a mother, I want Darren to succeed both socially and behaviourally. I hoped he would make a friend, someone who would come over and *hang out* with him. During the mini art program in order to accomplish my goal and eliminate bias as his mother, I based my student selection on Creswell’s (2011) standard model of student selection. At the time of selection, I was unaware of the benefits of including children of a variety of ages; children who were unlikely to judge Darren's pedantic voice or disjointed conversations.

After the sessions I realized that my focus had been too specific, and as his mother I had been more concerned with helping Darren make a potential friend his own age than one who shared a similar interest. Somehow I had thought having a friend, be it only that one special friend would make him less lonely. 'Friday Art's' findings highlighted the advantages of selecting students of different ages for both the success of the program and Darren's well being. This becoming apparent when the sibling of one of the participants unexpectedly joined the class and Darren gravitated to him, helping him 'catch up' and comprehend the lesson. Literature supporting the rewards of grouping different students together supports this theory in its articulation that successful schools group students together based on their interest levels and not their age groups. Littsky and Grabelle (2004) claim that scholarly experience and authentic learning is initiated as students gravitate to those areas of curiosity and acceptance, irrespective of the member’s age. Thus in altering
the mini art programs’ sampling to include varied ages, Darren could potentially be accepted by his school friends based on a common interest. This observation has now encouraged me, his mother; to explore areas of potential interest to him, instead of encouraging him to find age appropriate activities. Reflecting on Darren’s experiences at school I would have preferred to have seen him being able to attend classes that were of interest to him, regardless of the age of the students and educational assessment requirements.

**Empathy**

As a mother, I struggle with the literature stating Asperger individuals lack empathy. His apparent demonstration of empathy was I believe best depicted when he was interacting with our cat. His awkward, rough, but loving approach demonstrated a connection and understanding between human and animal that needs further investigation. Somehow, when he is around animals and is touching them, feeding them, and lying beside them, he is able to calm himself. I cannot explain this phenomenon but he shows no signs of irritability or anxiety. There appears to be an almost unspoken language between him and the animal- the animal sensing his syndrome, remains calm, tolerant and gentle towards him and Darren becomes caring, mindful and aware of their needs.

Darren avoiding being drawn into emotional issues is largely due to his body producing an uncomfortable reaction upon hearing the distress of another person’s situation. He becomes oversensitive and agitated when hearing their distressing news, his body unable to cope with the emotional component that the situation demands. An example of this behaviour was exhibited during the mini art classes when topics that related directly to him, such as his grandfather’s illness, were mentioned. His sensitivity to these issues is perhaps one of the many reasons why he

88 Darren while attending a grade five school camp formed a very unusual friendship with the camp’s lama. I was informed by the teachers that he was the only person to have ever had this connection with the animal.
chooses to gravitate towards safer, less emotional and predictable ground. I found his response similar to when he physically exerts himself; sweating, heart palpitations, anxiety, uncontrollable emotions that distress him. As a mother, I wanted to see this as empathy. As a researcher, I wasn’t so sure.

_Transformative Behaviours_

I repeatedly scrutinized Darren’s behaviours in the hopes of reducing my bias as his mother. After a couple of sessions I noticed that his one-sided conversations lessened. He gave the impression of listening to his peers, maintaining moments of intense eye contact. At times this unblinking stare lasted a few minutes, but on other occasions continued until his peer had finished talking. His peers appeared unconcerned by his intense stare, and I realized, due to my close attachment, that perhaps I was being oversensitive. On the odd occasion he spoke ‘over them’ as his impatience to impart his knowledge overcame his control and his voice once again exuded loud unmonitored agitation. The more optimistic feedback he received the greater his self-efficacy appeared. I was able to witness his transition of fluctuating behaviours, timid to loud outbursts, and observe this pattern become predictable. He willingly showed his paintings and sculptures to his peers and family, proudly displaying his belief that he was creative. This simple act gave me hope as I felt that he was starting to connect with his peers and reflect on his abilities. I did not view his behaviour as narcissistic. He reflected positive talk, keenness to socialize and eagerness to attend the art sessions. However, his inexhaustible drive and competitive edge became apparent when he was given the opportunity to create a three dimensional project. Now that his interest had been piqued, he wanted his project to be the best. Until then he had shown little enthusiasm in painting and drawing, but once his curiosity was ignited, his focus intensified, and he appeared single-minded. The concept of formulating new ideas and challenging himself led me to believe that he was going outside his boundaries by taxing his mind to develop new concepts, which ultimately appeared as rewarding and creative for him as the task itself. This behaviour led me as an artist to once again question the meaning of creativity.
As an Artist

The men and woman we studied made up their rules as they went along, combining luck with the singleness of their purpose, until they were able to fashion a life theme that expressed their unique vision while also allowing them to make a living.

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 208)

As an artist it was important for me to decipher if Darren had creative tendencies, and how his talent compared with that of his peers. As both an artist and his mother, I recognized that I could be biased in my evaluation of Darren’s abilities. I believe I took many precautions to avoid this and maintain my objectivity. Darren’s art teachers at school would encourage him to take their courses as an elective; they appeared to enjoy having his unusual position in the class. Darren also appeared to want to spend time in their classrooms stating that he found them relaxing. At home he would proudly show me his many art works, beaming when I displayed them on the wall or praised his skill. We had in many ways found a common dialogue and his recognition that his ability pleased me was obvious.

Freire (1970) writes that new dialogue begins in recognizing the need to discard old ways, embrace ‘new spaces,’ new learnings and harmonious possibilities of pedagogical practice. As an artist the thought of creating new spaces and learning is an exciting concept that I believed would be beneficial for the mini art program based on its less linear and more inclusive format. Ways in which I plan to introduce dialogue would be prior to the conceptualization process when the students were experimenting with the artist of the day’s technique. I believe that dialogue plays a role in how Darren perceived both himself and others; because as Freire (1970) claims, "dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people"(p. 89). Love he declares is the "foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself as it is, [is] an ...act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others” (p. 89).
Engaging in dialogue as an alternative avenue of exploring creativity and seeing it as being multifaceted could result in Darren being willing to embrace and explore his creative ability, and allow me as an artist to further appreciate how his different modalities of creativity are reflected. This could be achieved by using dialogue to illustrate philosophical discussions on creativity; a practice Darren enjoys. It is a time when his peers overlook his 'peculiarities' as his wealth of knowledge is articulated and his unique insights are admired. Therefore, in creating the mini art program the arts introduced Darren to recognition of his humanity; develop a deeper awareness of the arts and artists and an appreciation of the creativity of others (Dewey, 1934). Perhaps this is also due to the arts not only being a "problem solving experience, but ... a fusion of a mental and emotional process" (p. 101). This fusion of Darren's humanity was further illustrated in his artwork. His illustrations reflected his lived experience how he felt about himself. In designing the abstract eyes Darren commented on how he had been teased about his almond shaped eyes, and that he was now happy to draw them as they are, he utilized the whole canvas. This resulted in Darren being able to communicate his vision "through the medium of [his] created product" (p. 101).

**Assessment**

A part of me, the artist, wanted to explore if Darren had any creative abilities. My intent was to demonstrate that all individuals regardless of their diagnoses have beneficial creative aptitudes, should this pedagogical practice be nurtured at an early age; the arts being a powerful medium of exploration and healing. I was also curious about Eisner’s (2002) evaluative framework of creativity and how it paralleled Fitzgerald’s (2004) belief that Asperger syndrome individuals are creative. At first I assumed if I focused exclusively only on Eisner's framework of evaluation and Gladwell's snap judgement decision making, this process would be easy to evaluate. I was at the time unaware of alternative creative evaluative philosophies

89 Lived Experience explained by Van Manen (1990) is our personal experience, history and culture.
such as those of Csikszentmihályi, Robinson's and Greene's, but conscious that assessing a person’s work could have disadvantages with psychological dynamics leading to severe ramifications. In trying to apply Eisner’s three step assessment theory to my mini art program in the hopes of eliminating bias, I found myself struggling to fully embrace his theories, concerned that I might not give Darren the affirmation he deserved. I questioned how I could effectively incorporate Eisner’s (2002) premise of evaluation and assess creativity, while simultaneously divorcing my emotions, focusing only on the “technical quality of the work produced, the extent to which it display[ed] an inventive use of an idea or process, and the expressive power or aesthetic quality it display[ed]” (p. 183).90 Furthermore I struggled with trying to apply his subsequent assessment theory of “the material with which the student worked had been handled with control and understanding” (p. 183).91 Observing Darren in “flow,”92 or engaged in his imaginative endeavours I became cognizant of my dilemma, questioning how he was executing control and understanding 93 in relation to himself and his environment. I found that I could not separate him from the activity in order to focus on his technical ability, control and understanding. Observing him 'make art' appeared to be a holistic process; he became one with his materials, deep in concentration and showed a need to express himself. Separating him from his product and process proved too challenging and my initial wish to see him, the creator as being creative apart from his environment and inherent artistic nature was unsuccessful. The challenge I faced was later articulated by Csikszentmihályi (1996) and Robinson (2011) in their belief that

90 One of Eisner’s three steps in assessing creativity.
91 Control and understanding have two meanings for me. I understand that the more experienced you become the greater control you have over your media. The second meaning is a negative connotation whereby one prevents the imagination and process unfolding creatively and naturally.
92 Flow defined by Csikszentmihályi is not happiness - when we are in flow, we do not usually feel happy –for the simple reason that in flow we feel only what is relevant to the activity.
93 Another step in Eisner’s assessment theory.
creativity needs to be viewed as holistic; the creator cannot be separated from the creation.

In searching for a way to evaluate creativity for Darren I found that as an artist if I was to adhere to Csíkszentmihályi’s (1996) ‘system model’, then I should accept that creativity is not solely based on the individual’s creative ability but dependent on the domain and field’s “recognition and diffusion of novel ideas” (p. 31). Reflecting on the evaluation processes, predominately the one I used in the mini art program has allowed me to conclude the following: our authentic identity leads to a deeper understanding of ourselves and the insight that not all creativity can and should be assessed.

Consequently, owing to my single-minded focus, evaluating Darren’s creativity in the hopes of recognizing that he could be creative, incorporating this theme/belief into the curriculum proved to be both a frustrating and challenging process for me. This became apparent while I was writing the literature review after the mini art program. The more I explored how to evaluate the layers of this process the less familiar I became with the concept of creativity. I acknowledge that I do not have an absolute truth on how to best evaluate creativity; my philosophy continues to modify, echoing Springgay et al. (2008) theory that a/r/toprahical research is fluid, dynamic and in constant motion (p. xix). And even though Eisner's framework proved valuable as a starting point, I would now include Gladwell’s concept of snap judgements, listening to your gut feelings and would also propose that in assessing creativity it appears parallel to making a judgment. While watching the TV show “Lie to Me,” I was influenced by the lead actor’s decision making process in determining whether someone was lying. He created a base line to institute dissimilar individuals’ emotions leading me to imagine the possibility of establishing a creative base line articulating an individual’s creative attempts. This timeline of

94 A system Csíkszentmihályi created to measure creativity.
95 Tim Roth stars in this TV show about a scientist who reads peoples facial muscular movements, thus determining if the person is telling the truth.
students’ work, or should I say progression, could possibly help establish the
assessment framework I desired. Cajete (1994) alludes to the fact that it’s the effort
that needs assessing and not the product if we are to determine true learning and
creativity; I believe both effort and product need to be recognized and appreciated in
evaluation.

Creativity

My artistic attention was drawn to Darren’s interviews and how they related
to Csikszentmihályi’s (1996) belief. Darren’s understanding of creativity "other
people think you are creative and so the more people who think you are creative the greater
chance you have of being perceived as being creative” mirrors Csikszentmihályi’s in that
in order to understand the procedural grouping of creativity one needs to recognize
the development of the interrelations of three systems, field, domain and person (p.
21). I realized as an artist and educator that the creative process for Darren was not
multi-levelled. He saw creativity as being only a visual process; visual in that it
produced a product on paper. Initially, I too as an artist did not view creativity as
being otherwise. Only after completing the literature review did I recognize that by
sitting quietly, appearing disinterested, having no facial expression and giving the
impression of being disengaged from learning was for Darren a cognitive creative
process. His apparent withdrawal and motionlessness has since begged the
question-perhaps what I witnessed could be called creative, and whether this
inclusive environment influenced his decision making and behaviour? I was
surprised at how content in his stillness he appeared, and then, just as intent, he
appeared driven as he began his creative task. Csíkszentmihályi’s (1996) refers to
this behavioural pattern of stillness, as the incubation or imaginative period, the
phase before creativity. Darren’s expressionless face did not foretell how much
learning, understanding or acuity was occurring. Consequently, I need to centre
part of my observations specifically on his negligible body cues that were
undetected due to his deadpan gaze, and intense concentration. This additional
insight has allowed me to further investigate how society perceives diverse forms of
creativity and concentration as well as how it is portrayed in the art community. Csíkszentmihályi (1996) findings indicate that a person’s drive/focus combined with his curiosity is seen as being the yin and yang of creating something new. "Curiosity, [he describes as being] playful, dealing with objects and receptive to outside stimuli, [while] drive [is seen as being] serious [and] competitive, determining achievement and projecting inner focus" (p. 185). It is this comparable drive Fitzgerald (2004) emphasizes as one of the characteristics that links creativity and Asperger syndrome.

**Acceptance**

After the mini art program, I introduced Darren to alternative forms of creativity, regardless of the format and student’s age. Darren is currently involved in designing and building robots, computers, software and photography. Engaging Darren in conversation around any of these topics has allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of his creative interests, accept him for who he is and recognize the satisfaction I get from seeing him actively participating with his peers, students who have a similar interest. I realize that spending time with him gives me intense pleasure. His view of the world is unique; he notices and understands concepts in a distinct manner, drawing my attention to his unusual perception of life. Darren and I engage in dialogue and in so doing allowed me to understand the importance my decisions and opinions concerning his creativity and education have on him; resulting in a profound level of bonding.

**As an Educator**

As an educator I incorporate ‘ice-breaker’ games, a form of play into my classes as a segue to help students overcome initial discomforts and social difficulties. The concept of play for Darren appears different, play for him occurs in his head, his imagination. He sees no reason to interact or making small talk with another child if he is immersed in an activity. Play, he perceives is equivalent to building a computer. While watching him create and invent his shell creature I was
reminded of Cooijmans (2009) word ‘invent.’ A word he said conjured up imagination, imagination leading to creativity. His theory permitted me to appreciate that creativity was not only limited to paper and two dimensional tasks but extended to incorporate alternative forms. Therefore in changing my perception of how imagination leads to creativity I could improve my pedagogical practice by introducing games that unfold as a diversion, assisting Darren in relating better to his peers, reassuring him of the likelihood for less chance of an ‘elephant in the room’ perception. This form of play could also reduce his ‘silly’ behaviours which at times have resulted in him being ostracized from his peer group. Moreover, I would select games that would help him effortlessly examine his peers' body language. An example of this would be a rapport-establishing play such as charades, with an exaggerated emphasis placed on body language (Attwood, 1998). Offering Darren this playful introduction into an activity could reduce his dislike of spontaneity and transitional difficulties, as his apprehension is reduced and his thoughts become clearer.

Greene's (2008) question:

"How can we commit ourselves to [teaching and] learning in times like these?" (p. 18). Giroux (2005) answers this question by saying, “everything is possible…but it can only happen if you imagine the unimaginable, think differently in order to act differently.” (p. 217)

Thus in deciding if creativity needs to be part of the curriculum for Darren, despite the literature indicating that Asperger syndrome individuals lack creativity and fear change, (Craig & Baron Cohen, 1999) my evaluation procedure would focus on the process that he does reflect many of the traits suggested by Csikszentmihályi (1996) "when necessary creative individuals can focus [their energy] on like a laser beam" (p. 58) and they are "smart but naive" (p. 59)… and

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Cooijmans, Paul has been designing and administering intelligence tests for students who have high IQ’s. He is also a composer, writer and musician. He has a keen interest in Asperger’s syndrome and creativity.
"willing to spend long times in thinking" (p. 61). Most importantly, Csíkszentmihályi (1996) claims "because we are used to thinking that creativity begins and ends with the person, it is easy to miss the fact that the greatest spur to it may come from changes outside the individual (p. 31). A good example is the Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg (Martyn, 2011). As an artist I believe Csíkszentmihályi’s view mirrors Fitzgerald’s (2004) and Attwood’s (1998) belief, in that some of the characteristics defining HFA/ASP are similar to those attributed to what society recognizes as creative. I agree with Csíkszentmihályi’s (1996) hypothesis that by authenticating creative individuals in our "technologically express-paced society", we need to re-evaluate how we streamline these individuals into our school system (p. xvii).

As a parent and educator Darren’s behaviours and creative abilities during 'Friday Art' were influencing my pedagogical decisions. His conduct during the art process reflected Freire’s (1970) words that education is "a human act" (p. 85). With these words in mind I realized that my pedagogical practice needed to be humanized in a way that was relevant for him. I began to explore what a creative environment should look like and how I could achieve my ultimate goal- provide Darren with tools that will allow him, not only to better himself but encourage him, via the arts, to improve his social interactions, consequently becoming an active participant of society.

Csíkszentmihályi (1996) believes that it is the right milieu and not the environment that develops creativity. The difference being, the right milieu refers to being close to major research laboratories, journals, departments, institutes, and conference centres, and thus the chance of being creative is greater. Whereas the environment relates to the creative individual finding themselves in a beautiful setting, often resulting and influencing new connections among ideas and new perspectives develop. I experienced a lived example of this when Darren's artistic spirit surfaced during the art process. I observed how he, in the milieu (colony of budding artists) that I had created relaxed him and he was receptive to learning and participating. He was able to transition easily from one assignment to another and
appeared eager to emerge himself in the activity. I came to explore new positions and to think in a different light about introducing creativity into the curriculum for Asperger individuals and would like to further explore Darren's relationship with Csíkszentmihályi's theory that creativity is mobile.

In order to continue my investigations I would need to incorporate alternative sites into my mini art program, with the intent of investigating how Darren's heightened sensory process would interfere with his artistic process. I successfully eliminated many of his sensory sensitivities, as cited by Attwood\textsuperscript{97}, in the art program, however Attwood does mention that the mere "anticipation of the experience [could] lead to anxiety or panic" (p. 129) and this is where the arts, I believe hold unique potentials for reducing stress. Even though Attwood suggests that these sensitivities are reduced with age, Darren at fifteen continues to struggle with touch, aromas and noise. My intention would be to design a classroom, incorporating my interior design experience to reflect an atmosphere that reduces many of these anxiety generating distractions.

\textit{Classroom Design}

Darren's tactile sensitivities mirror those of Grandin, in that he too resists being touched. He dislikes the feel of many fabrics, has no interest in style or appearance and chooses to wear a limited selection of clothing ensuring that the sensation of the fabric against his skin is familiar. This tactile sensitivity is reflected in the classroom by common place items such as the desk, board, books and paper. Darren prefers to work alone; teachers must not touch him. Therefore, in creating the ideal classroom for him, he should be able to select his own desk, which is situated away from everyone else's- never in the middle of the classroom or near a door. This was one of the minor layout changes that I initiated in the new mini art

\textsuperscript{97} About 40 per cent of children with autism have some abnormality of sensory sensitivity (Rimland, 1990). There is now evidence to suggest that the incidence may be the same for Asperger's Syndrome (Garnett & Attwood, 1995).
program. A single desk, for Darren, was positioned at the head of the larger
worktable, resulting in his territorial behaviours being modified, as he had
independent space and less physical contact with a neighbour, yet still maintained
the illusion of being part of a larger group.

Noticing how Darren enjoyed snuggling into the security of the bean bags
has encouraged me to purchase more of them, so that all students could enjoy this
comfort. When Darren was younger I would visit the autism catalogue site to
purchase materials that could possibly reduce his sensory and tactile discomforts.
One of the items suggested by his physiotherapist was a bean bag chair. She
mentioned that the cocoon effect applied deep pressure touch evenly across his
body, stimulating a neurological response within the central nervous system. This
stimulation calmed Darren and was similar to the one Temple Grandin calls the
'squeeze box or hug machine.' During the mini art program classes I witnessed
Darren, due to the soothing atmosphere and reduced noise, relax and appear to day
dream as he snuggled into the bag. As a result of this phenomenon I have allocated
time for dreaming and imagination into the art curriculum, welcoming it as being
part of the experience, as I now believe this could further encourage his creative
responsiveness. Many of Darren’s teachers have not understood or been able to
empathise with the severity of the effects the school’s day to day noises have had on
Darren. To them the noises appear common and not unduly unpleasant. It was
only when I was accidently given an overdose of codeine and as a result my sensory
perceptions heightened- to the extent that the air conditioning sounded like drums
pounding non- stop, did I realize what Darren must be experiencing on a daily basis.
A classroom that allows students to calmly engage in learning, with gentle

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98 Temple Grandin is an adult with autism who has written two books about her life -
Emergence Labeled Autistic and her recent book, Thinking in Pictures. In her books, she
describes her severe anxiety and how her discovery of deep pressure ultimately helped her
reduce the anxiety’s debilitating effects. (S. M. Edelson, Ph.D.Center for the Study of
Autism).
transitioning between activities instead of blaring bells suggesting the end of the lesson, would be the ideal environment for Darren.

**Pedagogical Reflections**

In order for me to understand how to change my pedagogical attitude and encourage teachers to alter theirs, I needed to reflect on Darren’s elementary school years. During those years I tried relentlessly to reduce Darren’s apprehension by drawing him into 'busyness'; break dancing, soccer, swimming and acting, in the hope that he would 'adjust' and have a well-rounded education. I gave him little time for imagination and play, believing theorist’s views, similar to those of Baron-Cohen’s (1999) that in the early years of life HFA/ASP individuals' play "lacks imagination, pretence and flexibility" (p. 60). As an educator, I now question this analysis by arguing that perhaps we are too set in our expectations and our evaluations, and our objectives lack a broader outlook. I remember Darren, when he was younger playing alone for hours. He always had a favourite toy in his hand, an object that appeared to ground him and he would frequently recite the history, storyline, habits and any other information he had gleaned regarding his favourite toy of the moment, to anyone who would listen. At the time, I did not recognize that this could be part of Greene's theory of imagination and that I needed to encourage his differences and not attempt to suppress them. As adults success is often achieved by enhancing our single-minded focus, and as adults we frequently welcome solitude and the ability to complete a task unaccompanied. Why then, do we fault this solitary behaviour in young children? These “little professors” are ahead of the game and instead of trying to fit them into boxes let’s encourage their imagination to be infinite as we develop a greater understanding of their fixations. Perhaps then an example of this 'fixation' would be to become 'an expert' in a specific field.
Acceptance

I observed Darren’s fixations or single-minded focus during the mini art program and came to realize that if I allowed him to complete his project in his own time and terminate his train of thought, at his own pace, he would transition effortlessly between activities. Throughout elementary school one of the principle goals of his individual education plan (IEP) was to help him transition between activities in a more timely manner and with greater ease. I find as educators due to time constraints we force students to adhere to a fast paced curriculum instead of, as Kahn endorses, mastering the individual subject before transitioning on.

Kahn (2012) illustrates his theory by saying:

I give you a bicycle ... and I give you that bicycle for two weeks, and then I come back after two weeks. And I say well, let’s see, you’re having trouble taking left turns, you can’t quite stop. You’re an 80% bicyclist. So I put a big C stamp on your forehead. And then I say here’s a unicycle. As ridiculous as that sounds, that’s exactly what’s happening in our classrooms right now. And the idea is you fast forward and students, good students start failing algebra and calculus all of a sudden, despite being smart, despite having good teachers. And it’s usually because they have these Swiss cheese gaps that kept building throughout their foundation. So our model is: learn ... the way you would learn a bicycle. Stay on that bicycle, fall off that bicycle, do it as long as necessary, until you have mastery.” (Retrieved from ted.com)

Therefore, what I am proposing is not only a change for Darren in the school system but a change that I believe could benefit all students-master a subject before moving on, how similar this sounds to the way Darren has always behaved; intense focus, interest in a subject until he has mastered it and satisfaction before he moves on to something else.

Darren’s introspective analysis became apparent in the interview’s transcripts. A depth of self-awareness and intuition that I had not known he possessed reflected insights into his single-minded focus. He mentioned that if an
activity had no interest for him he saw no reason to exert an effort. Greene (1995) confirms that education needs to be authentic and reflect the individual’s needs, engaging the student’s attention. Her belief that students need authenticity and engagement in creativity and learning for there to be successful outcomes is a pedagogical stance I now adopt. Darren's understanding that creativity is an idea of how you see the person showed a profound perception that at the time I had not entirely grasped. His words appeared to mirror Csikszentmihályi theory that creativity is something that is determined by others. As the interviews progressed I wondered how Darren understood himself as an Asperger individual. This was a discussion Darren and I had never had. His ability to reflect and be aware of his differences encouraged me to realize that perhaps I had focused too specifically on behavioural attributes and overlooked his philosophical understanding of how he perceived himself. I had assumed, based on existing literature, that HFA/ASP individuals were incapable of self-awareness and self-efficacy. Yet, as Cooijman (2009) posits the moment these individuals are able to create their knowledge and relate it to themselves they are hooked; relevancy is essential to their learning. The question, he states should rather focus on how do HFA/ASP individuals learn? They learn by themselves, from within, contradicts the belief that they are incapable of self-awareness and self-efficacy. Furthermore, he declares that they invent their own methods and will have learning difficulty experiences if instructed and automated by their teachers.

After the first interview with Darren I was caught off guard. Once the tape recorder was turned off he leaned over to me and cynically asked. “Did you get from my answers what you needed to for your work, mom?” and “did I say what you wanted to hear?” Based on this response I realized that further insight into the interview process and conversations with him were needed as I became conscious of how perceptive he actually is.
Implications for Schools

It is my belief that implementing change in schools such as the act of encouraging HFA/ASP syndrome individuals to be more involved in the arts would allow Darren to integrate with more ease into society. In education, financial challenges, student overcrowding and staff shortages are often cited as the reasons for not encouraging students to participate in the arts. I find that unless I become consistently proactive in Darren's educational choices, he is often ignored and his eccentricities are seen as disturbances. The less engaged he becomes at school the more he acts out. There have been many instances where the teachers have chosen to not make accommodations for Darren, at times appearing frustrated at his visible lack of interest but obvious talent. Although we rewrite his IEP every year, somehow the communication between paper and the classroom is lost. Darren’s shyness and awkwardness frequently prevents him from approaching a teacher for help and results in him withdrawing and trying to hold himself together as best he can until he comes home.

The arts have a calming effect, and I have often found that if teachers change their teaching styles, reduce the amount of traditional instruction they can creates an environment that fosters a culture of sensitivity, caring and understanding, pedagogical practices both Greene and Eisner adhere to.

Greene (1995) writes:

If we are indeed to make the margins visible and accessible, if we are to encourage dialectical movements from margins to text and back, we ought to open larger and larger meeting places in schools. We ought to reach out to establish ateliers, studios, and other places where music can be read, where drawings and paintings and poems and

99 I am frequently surprised at a teacher’s response to my informing them that Darren has Asperger’s. Comments such as “he doesn’t look like he has Asperger’s to what is HFA/ASP’s continue to force me to believe that change and awareness of this disorder is needed in our education system.
sculptures can be made. There might be new collaborations among questioners, as teachers and students both engage in perceptual journeys, grasp works and words as events in context of meaning, and undertake common searches for their own places and significance in a history to which they too belong and which they invent and interpret as they live....

(p. 133)

Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light

(p. 150)

Eisner (2002) posits, "the arts invite children to pay attention to the environment's expressive features and to the products of their imagination and to craft" a material so that it expresses or evokes and emotional or feelingful response to it" (p. 23).

Elkis-Abuhoff (2008) confirms in her writings that over an eight month period of creating art her HFA/ASP student became more communicative and comfortable with social interactions. She states that initially her student could not maintain eye contact or engage in social interactions and that through art she became autonomous, spontaneous and confident. The Asperger syndrome individual feels "fully heard and deeply understood” during the art process, she explains (p. 266). She cites Malchiodi, (2003) stating that "art expression creates a tangible outcome that taps into personal strengths and resources that can then be incorporated into positive, successful life changes" (p. 266). Art is tangible, insightful, and can change ones perceptions and behaviour "simultaneously strengthen self-esteem and regard for other" (p. 269). This became apparent as Darren’s desire for social interaction increased, his tactile sensitivity challenges decreased and his need to express his art through both dialogue and non-verbal communication became apparent. As a result of my research I believe that we need to start a dialogue on how we can implement art education into the curriculum to best support these students in school and help foster their unusual talents, skills and abilities.
Reflections and Recommendations

In reading Darren’s journals I realized that one of the errors I made, as a mother, artist and educator was that I did not know my son as well as I thought I did, and therefore had not captured, as Greene (1995) articulated, what Darren’s true interests were. My study had been too focused on my intent with little understanding of Darren’s view of the creative process. I now question if many of the defiant answers Darren gave were simply normal adolescent behaviours. At fifteen he is in the process of discovering who he is, testing the waters. If were to conduct another study I would initiate my research to encapsulate a younger age group and then compare the data. However, from my observations Friday Art’s inclusive practice played a role as a system of support in his perception of creativity, skills, and ability and brought awareness to the importance of support for Darren, as he develops in his own way and in his own time.
"Muummmmm, tell Shawna to leave the room, her oatmeal stinks."

"Muummm, tell Shawna to stop making that noise with her mouth when she swallows her food."

"Shawna, stop chewing like that, I can hear you."

"I’m done; I can’t sit at the table. I am leaving." Darren abruptly gets up and leaves the table.
**Reasons for Conducting this Study**

People are always looking for the single magic bullet that will totally change everything. There is no single magic bullet.  
(Grandin, retrieved from Izquotes.com)

*Friday Art*

I too was looking for that magic bullet, and turned to the arts as they had repeatedly proved to be a solace for me. In creating 'Friday Art' I believed that I could find a way to 'make Darren whole,' whole seen as being happy, accepted, and talented, recognized by his peers as 'normal.' The artist in me acknowledged the benefits of art in education, familiar with how the act of doing invited people to share, communicate and create. Perceptions of Darren's loneliness were always at the forefront of my mind, and my desire for social intervention my ultimate goal. Robinson’s (2006) popular graphic video came to mind during the early stages of 'Friday Art.' Whether it was the humorous cartoon images relaying the visual message, or my subconscious thoughts, I will never know, but the desire to find a means to support Darren in relating to his peers through creativity became clearer as I conducted the mini art sessions.

Darren's behaviour can be emotionally draining resulting in people not wanting to spend time with him. By inviting him into the arts, I encouraged him to experience my world, my perspective and ideas. This simple act opened a portal for Darren, an insight on how I perceived life and in return he developed a level of depth in reflecting on how he connected with the emotional aspects of his own personality. Through the arts he appeared to broaden his way of seeing, feeling and learning.

However, my struggle to find one absolute solution to my research was compounded by the fact that I wearing three hats- mother, artist and educator. My need as a mother and artist to articulate the importance of creativity for Darren crystallized with my new found definitions. Trying to adapt and relate Darren’s
distinctive behaviours with his creative endeavours and secure them within a familiar artistic framework proved challenging. In attempting to compartmentalize Darren within Eisner’s (2002) creative evaluative framework I was alerted to how linear my thinking of theorists’ definitions on creativity was. I acknowledged that I needed to revisit the mini art program with newfound concepts and perspectives. Through this exploration I came to think differently about how creativity and the evaluation process materialized and now believe that creativity is in part achieved by societies perceptions and evaluations rather than talent and ability alone.

As a mother I wanted to shield and protect my son, permitting him easier adaptation and acceptance by his peers, as well as self-efficacy to society's expectations and norms. As an artist uncovering his creative abilities and recognizing and acknowledging his many exceptional talents was my aim. As an educator I recognized that I had blindly steered him towards those subjects that appeared 'safe' and 'normal,' as it made life more predictable and easier for both of us, or so I had thought. Discouraging Darren from partaking in the arts, beliefs based on prior understanding that Asperger syndrome individuals lacked creativity, was my blueprint for Darren's future. My lack of prior knowledge that Asperger syndrome individuals' behaviours and tendencies were not all similar surprised me. I recognized how ignorant I was by my continuous acceptance of the same ground, rather than having embraced new learning. Increasingly, I explored new definitions collected from diverse viewpoints; Darren, Asperger's syndrome, assessments, the mini art program and creativity.

**Linear View of Creativity & Asperger’s**

Csíkszentmihályi (1996) writes that there is a difference between talent and creativity. Talent is viewed as being an *innate ability*, people can achieve success without substantiating talent, while creativity is seen as being “involve[d] [in] changing a way of doing things, or a way of thinking, and that in turn requires having mastered the old ways of doing or thinking” (p. 155). His definition of creative individuals highlighted that for most artistic people the early years
provided no glimpse of extraordinary abilities in the domain that they would eventually gravitate towards. I interpreted this information for Darren as meaning that at age fifteen there was no easy understanding of his unique abilities. Was he talented or creative? I simply don't know. I don't dwell on it as my quest now is to develop a means that could best facilitate him in attaining his aspirations. Analysis of the documentation of my interviews and subsequent conversations with Darren during the mini art program, discussions on Asperger's syndrome and creativity, has encouraged me in believing that the process has helped him formulate an altered perception of his position and capabilities in society.

As the mini art program progressed I recognized why I had unquestionably welcomed advice to steer Darren towards math and science. Exploring the creative avenue allowed me to delve deeper into my fresh theories, and I embraced literature on the subject of Asperger's and creativity. Csíkszentmihályi's (1996) belief that a creative person has many challenges as a person's livelihood is often thwarted as they depend exclusively "upon public acceptance" (p. 208) at first compounded my stereotypical qualms for my son. I had feared that if Darren perused a creative path he would be financially less successful and emotionally lost without the clearly defined outlines of expectations. Over the years I have seen many artists struggle to make a living, often suffering from depression and hardship as they tried to remain true to their passion. However, I came to appreciate Csíkszentmihályi (1996) analysis; similar to Fitzgerald's, that creativity is reflected by a variety of appearances, and that even though the early years reveal individuals as "awkward, unpopular and curious," (pp. 151-182) the later years often emphasizes the individual's craft. Thus introducing Darren to creativity at an early age initiated a new way of thinking and being and not a predetermined profession.

Creativity, I learned, unlike other professions frequently has no 'office', 'job' or 'administration' to go to, and as a result many individuals, like my son, are encouraged by both parents and educators to secure positions that offer a greater sense of stability. As parents and educators we are tempted to look for easy answers to complex problems. Darren's intense need to remain focused on a task until
completion, regardless of time constraints, resulted in me, when he was younger, searching for a method that would 'cure' him by providing flexibility to his self-imposed rigid schedule. His inability to transition easily, breaking his intense focus did not adhere to the school's curriculum arrangement and resulted in his teachers becoming frustrated at his refusal to shift effortlessly between tasks. Unconditionally I succumbed to prescribed strategies believing that others knew best.

In initiating the mini art project my thoughts at times were flooded with theorists' views that creativity for my high-functioning Asperger son would be ineffectual to his development. I had compartmentalized Darren, branding him with the Asperger label and had blindly allowed myself to follow the prescribed map outlined by the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) criteria, believing he could never amount to more than what had been documented.

**Discoveries**

Asperger's literature proved helpful in raising Darren and I would scrutinize theorist’s writings such as Attwood, Asperger, Wing, Baron-Cohen, Robison and Grandin, reading anything and everything relating to Asperger’s in the hope that something new had been discovered and that life for all of us would be calm. Although at times similar, many of the theorists had contrasting views. For example, even though eye contact, intense focus and routines dominated the readings, the understanding I developed was that their beliefs were approached from different points of views. Some of these viewpoints were scientific, clinical, emotional or personal.

Fitzgerald’s definition allowed me for the first time to begin to think outside the box and recognize Darren's potential notwithstanding his diagnosis. I developed a greater understanding of this syndrome during the mini art program and no longer felt the need to attach importance to wanting to control Darren’s behaviours. I outwardly accepted that he had no desire to bring 'friend's' home, no interest in
socializing with his peers other than online via video gaming or the internet, and no interest in spending time with his 'friend's at recess, except to join them for lunch; a necessary, not social activity. As a result of my coming to terms with his quirks it has become easier for me to change my behaviours to suit his, rather than struggling to manage his.

Furthermore, my understanding of the word creativity changed throughout the duration of 'Friday Art' and resulted in an alteration to my assessment practices' altering. I came to acknowledge that the word creativity was debatable and inconclusive and that a singular definition encompassing the fundamental nature of the word might never be attained. My repeated questioning and probing for a definitive creative framework succeeded in blurring the outlines of connectivity that encompassed diverse theorists perspectives, resulting in me no longer doubting Darren's creative proficiency. He is able to artfully express himself in whatever medium he chooses, without interference, recognizing that he is creative. Darren said;

“I am creative I have different principles than what you would call the general creative person. You can’t be creative it’s how the person sees that person.”

My approach towards Darren changed from first seeing him as a victim with a condition called Asperger syndrome; a condition that I must cure to one of unlimited holistic potential.

**Need for the Arts in Education**

It was due to restraints in our educational system that I was further inspired to create the mini art program. My desire to encapsulate Greene's (1997) fundamental belief that the arts make social change more possible because they encourage participation, create communities and elicit change were the inspiration for ‘Friday Art.’ At the time I felt a disconnect between Darren's education system and his surroundings. Greene’s (1995) lectures on Wallace Stevens’ poem “Man
with the Blue Guitar” influenced me to throw out my old beliefs and start anew; release my imagination, instigate new dialogue, perspective and possibilities. Her belief that you needed to name your world, and then change it, I believe I did by creating the mini art program I took a small step towards a better understanding of Darren’s behaviours and ultimately some Asperger syndrome idiosyncrasies.

I noticed that the arts followed a similar development to Harris’ (2002) belief that critical pedagogy is about self-discovery, community, writing, composition and society. My fear of initially involving Darren in the arts echoed one of Harris’ questions "and what do we do afterwards?" (p. 91). It was this simple sentence that instigated inner turmoil for me, forcing me to inquire how Darren would be able to seamlessly adjust to society’s norms if he involved himself in the arts. How would I be sure that Darren had learnt something of value? Harris writes that "life after and within critical consciousness is a life of more than just intellectual value and institutional dissertations" (p. 91). It was this search for meaning and value that I strived for in my educational practice and that I desired for Darren. Art is a way of uncovering our sub-conscious and understanding of who we are without the use of language, Allen (1995) posits. She writes that a way of knowing is a way of interpreting who we really are, a map that can lead us back to our culture and once again allow us to partake in life (p. xvii). If I am to truly understand Darren and creativity then I need to recognize that there is a common thread in deciding how a creative person presents. I had wanted Darren to adapt to our system, our way of doing things; it had appeared easier for me, the right thing to do. However, as the mini art program progressed I came to realize that although I believed I was successfully integrating him into the class, I was in fact just altering one aspect of his acceptance of our system whilst the rest remained intact. This became apparent after reading each theorist’s definitions on creativity. Creativity was repeatedly described as the sum of its parts, not to be viewed in isolation, and that true creativity was holistic. Therefore, the importance of distinguishing a creative person was one who had successfully altered the fundamental nature of individuality to one of mutual reciprocity; creating a systemic result instead of a “linear, mode of thinking…” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996, p. 300). This holistic lens challenged me to relook at
creativity and explore how I could possibly reconnect my changed perceptions with my pedagogical practices. I wanted to understand how Darren was affected by Asperger's, recognizing difficulties that separated him, as authentic learning required integrating different domains, cultures and bodies to enhance authentic learning.

Reflecting on the data allowed me to revisit my narratives, student's work and photographs, helping me find ways to further expand my pedagogical practice. Theorists constantly reminded me that successful pedagogy relies on knowing your students, understanding process, creating a secure environment and relating to your students on more equal footings. I heard them and embraced their knowledge, but ultimately my questions returned to “what would happen to Darren after the teachings?” What legacy would be imprinted on his mind? What awareness could I cultivate to enhance his learning environment? How could I best inform him that what is being taught at school could be approached in different ways and that learning did not have to encompass a ‘one size fits all’ model?

Kelly, an Indigenous professor at SFU, introduced me to Cajete’s and Eisner’s similarities in teaching philosophies between the Western World and Indigenous peoples. Her comment that she had one foot planted in the West and the other in Indigenous culture allowed me to appreciate that you do not have to be situated in only one sphere. I could simultaneously be a mother, artist, and educator. With their words in mind, I embraced the idea of mutual reciprocity, systems, individualism, intuitiveness, altruism, reflection and understanding as being the true makings of a creative person; creativity being something that could not be established as a separate entity.

[Indigenous teachings] honours the fact that true learning builds your self-confidence by coming to understand who you really are, [ ] living to your full potential” and “recogniz[ing] [that it is] as an expression of the soul, ... a way of connecting people to their inner sources of life.  
(Cajete, 1994, p.29)
Throughout the years, I have been an active parent, frequently meeting with teachers and working on improving Darren's individual education plan. We have spent hours discussing ways that would best benefit him and allow for easier transitioning between subjects, classes and environments. Darren's ability in high school to adjust to his school's code of conduct, either by fading silently into the background or projecting aloofness, has protected him from earlier years of bullying. He attends school as something he must do, neither liking nor disliking it. At times his lack of comprehension and anxiety becomes excessive and intervention on my part is required. The few educators who are willing to engage, inspire and acknowledge his syndrome are the ones to whom Darren gravitates, they are willing to experiment with alternative forms of teaching. As he progresses through high school his creative outlook is replaced by required university entrance courses and grades, creativity not being a university prerequisite.

**Final Thoughts**

During one of my courses at SFU I was asked to create an art piece relating to the course readings. As we discussed the authors’ works I found myself drowning in their dialogue. Many of the words I had never heard before and the ‘major league’ feeling of academic vocabulary showered me, at first gently and then more intensely until I felt the weightiness of discourse. This feeling reminded me of the first time I had seen snow. It too had initially fallen at a delightful tempo only to unexpectedly transition into an unpleasant experience. Images of these unfamiliar words falling like snow reflected this tempo and appeared to stir memories of how dialogue’s pace had always been of importance; so too for Darren, too much too quickly overwhelmed him.

Csíkszentmihályi (1996) book on ‘Flow” articulates artfully my experience of snow. “…each had a shape that no other flake duplicated exactly [and] the same is true of human beings” (p. 7). This sentence of the flakes’ uniqueness awakened suppressed memories and I was reminded of the time I had first been in snow. I was living in South Africa with my family and my parents decided that we would all
visit New York. As we approached Central Park I ran ahead of them, my red tartan parker with a lining of imitation sheepskin providing little protection for my twelve year old body as I delightedly danced in the snow. It was the first time I had ever touched or seen snow. As I stood beneath the snowflakes I was dumbfounded by the stillness, gentleness and beauty of each flake as it elegantly fell upon and around me. At first the gentle falling of the snow reminded me of the fairy tale snow queen picture I had seen where the snowflakes melted into a white carpet. I remember feeling relaxed, happy as I greedily gulped in breaths of frosty air, absorbing the tireless language of the land. In tune with my surroundings, I recognize now that for a brief moment I was in ‘flow’ and then without warning the flakes started to fall faster, bigger and heavier. I could feel my inexpensive coat thirstily drinking in the large snow droplets and I became uncomfortably soaked; my short ankle boots anchored by the weight of the white covering. Water seeped into my socks and I no longer enjoyed the pace of Nature’s communication. I felt myself gulping in the wintry air; flooded with anxiety I hurriedly sought shelter. I questioned how something so beautiful could so quickly change to fear and apprehension. Standing under the shelter of a bridge, I gazed at the rapidly falling snow, memories of a television show I had seen a couple of days earlier about each snowflake having its own unique crystal formation came to mind. I was reminded that no two snowflakes were identical. This too I have learnt can be said of Asperger syndrome. No two individuals project the same traits, similarities yes, but not indistinguishable. Simply knowing what is right for Darren does not mean that I am able to determine the same path for another Asperger syndrome individual. Therefore, my desire is to listen and celebrate the diversity amongst us instead of trying to label and mould all into preconceived frameworks, and only then perhaps will I be able to develop greater understanding and tolerance for dis-abilities, or lack of ‘normal’ abilities.
Figure 8. Darren, 2013 won his schools first robotic award. An award for creativity.
References


