RE-DRAWING THE LINE:
WHOLE INCLUSION THROUGH THE ARTS

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Abstract

Within the classroom today, teachers are increasingly being asked to find ways to effectively teach a diverse range of students, including students with developmental disabilities, autism and behavioural challenges. This thesis focuses primarily on two groups of students; adolescents who are designated as being behaviourally at-risk and teens who are labelled cognitively challenged. At first glance, it may seem that these two groups of students have little in common. However, both groups present a challenge to educators as we struggle to find meaningful ways to include and educate them in our school system.

This thesis will focus on discovering the unique role that the arts can play in encouraging voice and whole inclusion. Both engagement with the imaginative arts and development of aesthetic literacy are needed because there is interplay between the two. Developing aesthetic literacy provides a means to learn the language and vocabulary of art, whereas participation in the imaginative arts offers opportunities for meaning making, and expression of that meaning. A great number of good ideas can come from opening up spaces for students with diverse needs and abilities to explore their imaginative capacities because as educators we often put limitations on students who are capable of a lot more. Providing spaces for students to be immersed in this process is key, because immersion provides a more in depth exploration and offers a much-needed social component. The opportunity to experience this immersion is needed both in school and in the community because it can offer spaces for social interaction.

In this thesis, I argue that participation in the arts cannot only facilitate a stronger sense of self and community, but can also help to develop empathy for people who are perceived as being different from the norm. I put forth the notion that participation in the arts can encourage our students to form a stronger aesthetic and ethical sense of the world and themselves. Even though this thesis focuses on ways to empower and include students with diverse needs and abilities, the theory and curriculum put forth in this thesis can potentially benefit all students.

Keywords: arts; voice; disability; at-risk youth; empathy; Plato's Good
Subject Terms: art education; inclusion; aesthetics; visual art
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To all parents, students, and educators
who work tirelessly, with deep commitment and grace,
to create a kinder and more inclusive society.
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Glossary

ASD          Autism Spectrum Disorders
BCACL        British Columbians for Community Living
DS           Down Syndrome
IQ           Intelligence Quotient
NSNH         North Shore Neighbourhood House
UBC          University of British Columbia
VSA          Very Special Arts
WS           Williams Syndrome
Introduction

One of the biggest lies we believe is the belief that we do not matter that we do not have value.

That it doesn’t matter what we think feel and say.

The biggest lie is “no”. No—you do not matter—you have no worth. I choose to believe in Yes.

What you think feel and say matters.

Yes—you have worth.

I want to listen I need to hear you You can say it through words written and spoken.

You can say it through a poem a song a dance or a painting.

You can say it through a look or a touch But please say it.

We need the voices that have been shushed and told “no” We need the voices in ourselves that have been shushed and told “no” These are the voices that will tell us the truth.

In this thesis, I will look at the role that the arts can play in moving us away from drawing lines that designate and divide students, to drawing lines that encircle and
encompass. Throughout this thesis, I will be arguing for increased participation in the imaginative arts as a way to promote inclusion of students with diverse needs and abilities, as well as students that we categorize as being “at-risk”.

At first glance, it may not appear that students with diverse needs and “at-risk” students have much in common. However, I believe the commonality these two groups share is that students given these designations are typically placed outside of mainstream education. Consequently, this means these students are often educated in a less enriched manner than students without these labels. To my mind it is critical that students who are placed in these categories (and really all students), be given the means to be co-authors of their identities. I believe that increased engagement with the arts could potentially benefit all students regardless of ability; and that through the imaginative process of art making, each student can be given the opportunity to discover and articulate his or her own distinctive voice.

I believe that every story and each voice matters—therefore I have decided to take a risk in this thesis and tell my own story. In the spirit of advocating the arts as a way to include voices that have been traditionally marginalized, I have decided to include my voice as a parent of a son with an intellectual disability. This was not an easy decision to make. Throughout my many years of working in the field of arts education, especially as a facilitator of art activities that promote inclusion in our schools and communities, my “parent’s voice” is a voice that I have consciously muted. I have been particularly careful not to bring it out in academic settings because I have feared that the work I am doing as an artist, arts educator and scholar will somehow be diminished if I speak from this place. My concern has been that once my “parent’s voice” enters the mix, the work will be taken less seriously. This hesitation might very well stem from my
perception that this voice is too emotional, too revealing, and ultimately just too human to be part of the seemingly clean, logical world of academia. However, I have come to realize that this fear is at the very crux of what my thesis is about—fear of difference and how this fear can silence us. Therefore, the writing of this thesis has been more than articulating my thoughts on why I believe participation in the imaginative arts promotes inclusion; it has also been an exploration and expression of some of my deepest feelings surrounding this topic.

This story is one that wants to be told—it has been knocking on the door of my subconscious since I began to think about writing this thesis. It is letting me know that all voices offer something valuable, especially the ones that we are afraid to speak with. It is my hope that by including this perspective in my thesis it will enrich and deepen understanding of the complexities and concreteness of this subject. I have chosen to write in this manner because it will allow me to tell the thesis as a story and really that is what it is—it is a personal journey with unfolding realizations along the way. One that covers over twenty five years of working as an artist and arts educator with students with diverse needs and abilities as well as students who have been designated as being “at-risk”.

An additional reason I believe it is important to include my own story is because what I have personally experienced can never be disconnected from my culture. In many ways, our personal thoughts and feelings are a barometer of what is happening in our larger culture—the two are inseparable. The final and foremost reason I have decided to include this approach is that I believe as Toril Moi (2003) does that “to turn intellectual work, at certain critical points, into a first-person narrative is a very important thing to do
because it situates that work, it announces the critical reflectiveness of the person whom you are reading” (p. 148).

The experience of writing this thesis has made me aware that that my educational journey has been partially motivated by the need to have my thoughts on this topic taken seriously. Even though we are living in a postmodern time and say that hierarchies of thought are being replaced by lateral conversations, I have noticed that these conversations still privilege the academic voice. Having said that, I recognize that it is theory that keeps us connected and grounded, and in a sense, it keeps us on course. As rigorous and demanding as theory is, it is also a way to have a “shared language”, even though that language takes a long time for fluency to be achieved. For this reason, I have striven to be cognizant of theory and philosophy, but I have challenged myself not to hide behind it—rather I have aimed to use it as a structure to shape and frame my own layers of understanding and experience. On this note, I believe it is important to point out, that at times my discussion may seem to be "at odds" with postmodern thinking. However, my understanding of postmodernism is that there is room for a range of tastes, opinions and interpretations (Eagleton, 2004). Therefore, notwithstanding postmodern affinities towards approaches to inclusion, I have ventured into a kind of therapeutic rethinking of certain older concepts such as Plato's Good. The urge to "re-think" older concepts has arisen from the recognition that in education, and human caring situations, there is a need for some kind of moral attachment; a need for shared beliefs and values to live by.

The approach I have taken in writing my thesis was influenced by Sara Delamont’s (1992) book, Fieldwork in Educational Settings: Methods, Pitfalls and Perspective. I was inspired reading her book, not only because of the content, but also
because of its writing style. Delamont successfully interweaves theory, personal narrative and excerpts from literature. In following her lead, there will be three components to this thesis that will interweave and overlap. I have made the decision to structure the thesis this way because I am aware that we use different voices in different speech communities and therefore we use different languages to express our thoughts. The primary voice I will use throughout the thesis is personal narrative. The second element I will utilize is Foucault’s (1997) concept of constructing fiction using authentic elements as a way of telling my story as a parent of a son with a developmental disability. These pieces of “constructed fiction” will introduce each chapter.

The third strand I will be adding is theory and philosophy. I very much believe that theory and philosophy, especially in the field of education, must at some level connect with individual lives and realities. Otherwise, theory becomes a diversion rather than a direction. Therefore, these three areas - the parent's voice that will open every chapter, the voice of personal narrative, and the grounding force of theory will be the three strands that will tell the story.

**Overview of Chapters**

The overview of chapters is as follows.

In Chapter 1, I will ask the question “What does inclusion mean in our postmodern time?” and “what does inclusion mean to me personally?”

In Chapter 2, the key ideas and questions discussed are “What role can the arts play in developing a more effective model of inclusion?” I will also discuss the reasons why I believe that thinking in the arts is a valid form of cognition and why I believe that
aesthetic literacy and imaginative art making should be offered to students with intellectual and language disabilities in the same way that students are offered numeric, written, and oral literacy.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the study I conducted titled The Story Project. It should be noted that because of the complex nature of this study, I employed a multiperspectival method or the bricolage approach (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) in the research conducted and presented for this study. I chose this approach primarily because I wanted to avoid restricting or reducing the research to fit a specific method. In this chapter, I will also discuss the tension between being assigned an identity and being the co-author of your identity and why I believe it is critical that each student is given the opportunity to be co-authors of their own stories.

In Chapter 4, I will focus on students who are designated as being emotionally and behaviourally “at-risk”. In this chapter, I will explore the relationship between ethics and aesthetics and ask the questions: “What role could the arts play in making the good matter for our students?” and “In what ways can students develop a more ethical sense of the world and themselves?” I will put forth the idea that the imaginative process of art making offers students a means to attend to the good, thereby increasing their potential to develop and increase an ethical sense of self.

**Concluding Thoughts**

A major theme in my thesis is the idea that the labels we put on our students are largely social constructs and that classifying students according to the challenges they face can serve further to exclude an already marginalized group. I am aware that I have
set up an interesting quandary for myself because at the very core of my thesis is the idea of promoting inclusion of students with diverse needs and abilities, while I am simultaneously questioning the practice of classifying students by their specific challenges. However, I believe it may be worthwhile not to rush to resolve these seemingly opposing notions and to let the dissonance be present. I say this because sometimes in our haste to reconcile opposing ideas or ideologies, we latch on to resolutions that divert us from coming to a deeper understanding of our subject.

It is also important to keep in mind that what I am advocating is an ideal, and therefore it is inevitable that my discussion will be tempered with the realities of our present time and situations. And one of these realities is that we do classify our students according to their specific needs and we use language to indicate these categories. I liken this quandary to art making—as artists we learn to live with seeming contradictions and come to see them as signposts rather than stop signs. It is my hope that by acquiring a deeper perception on this dilemma I will enrich rather than diminish my discussion.

In a sense, I see this thesis as an exploration and discussion of theories, practices and experiences rather than an argument. And true to the arts, this discussion is capable of simultaneously holding disparate ideas and embracing, rather than rejecting them. This seeming dichotomy has emerged as my ideas have evolved and changed and as I have brooded upon, dreamt, and written about my topic. However, I believe this development is a positive one for as Foucault asks, “Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?” (Horrocks, 2005, p. 33). Surely, the same can be asked about writing a thesis.
Chapter 1.
Pulling on the Thread

The air vibrates an electric blue.
The sound of rushing water.
Underneath the sound she hears her son crying.
She hears him, but she can’t see him.

Panicking, she calls out his name, “Danny!”
She looks down and sees an ocean of deep blue.
Underneath the water she sees her son caught in a tangle of black sea weed.

The weeds are wrapped around his neck and they are strangling him.
He is frantically trying to break free.
Desperate, she dives into the water to free him.
She tries with all of her strength to drag him out of the weeds.

A feeling of dread
She cannot hold her breath any longer.
And she cannot leave him.
No matter how hard she tries, she cannot lift him out of the water and into the air.

I come to with a sudden start and hiss at my husband “Get the baby, he’s crying!”
My husband looks at me with confusion and does nothing.
“Didn’t you hear the baby crying?”
“No, Danny has been asleep the whole time.”

My heart pounding, I jump out of bed and rush to where my son is calmly sleeping.
I see that yes, after hours of trying to get him to stop crying, my newborn son is finally sleeping peacefully in his crib.

I slowly climb back into bed. Outside rain is falling and I try to calm myself by snuggling up against my husband’s warm body.

We left the hospital 12 hours ago and I am feeling weary, anxious and excited. I tell myself I am just having bad dreams because the delivery was so complicated and exhausting. After awhile I go back to reading my book and my heart beat slowly goes back to normal.

Even though I file the experience away, it takes a long time to shake off the uneasy feeling that something is very wrong.
Five years have passed and there are many worries on my mind. Although seemingly alert and normal looking, our son doesn't talk. In place of talking he draws for hours at a time. He sketches at a tremendous rate; it is hard to keep him in paper. Friends arrive weekly with boxes of recycled paper from their work. He furiously draws action figures filled with life, speaking the parts for all the characters. But his speech is gibberish—no one but Danny knows what it means.

Our son is a very outgoing and social little boy and he doesn't let the fact that other people don't understand what he is saying, slow him down. While we sit in coffee shops, he cruises from table to table engaging the other patrons in conversation. People are charmed and think he is speaking Greek or Italian.

During this time, we visit specialist after specialist, trying to find out why he doesn't talk. Our son endures what seems like endless testing. The doctors are baffled because he doesn't have hearing problems, but clearly something is wrong.

One day we are visiting a doctor at Children’s Hospital and he says he knows what the problem is. He tells us that Danny has something called aphasia. We have never heard of this condition so we ask him to explain it to us. The doctor thinks about it for a moment and then says that the best way he can describe it is that it is as if our son is under water and he can hear us, but what he hears is completely garbled, so that is how he in turn speaks.

The moment I hear this, the hairs on my arm stand straight up as I realize he is using the image of my dream to explain my son’s condition to me.

I understand in this moment that I have known on an intuitive level all along what was wrong.

Thirteen years later:

It is the middle of the night—3:28 am—again I can’t sleep. I don’t want to think about what I don’t want to think about.

Danny is about to make the transition from Grade 7 to Grade 8. He will leave the safe nest of his elementary school to enter high school and I can hardly breathe.

I am not so much worried that he will be bullied or mistreated. I am worried that he will be alone. I fear that this will be the beginning of an isolated life. I am worried that panes of glass will be thrown up between him and
everyone else.
I can only do so much.

I pray to God, angels, spiritual masters and wise guides to please, please, please don’t let him go through this life forever on the outside.

Recently in the media, there was a story about an 11-year-old girl named Sadie whose coach barred her from playing competitively with her soccer team. It was reported that the coach told the mother that her daughter “could practice with the team, but on game days she would be a liability” (Austin, 2007, p. 8). Footage on the news showed that girl clearly had the appropriate soccer skills and understood the logistics of the game. What became evident though was that the girl wasn't being excluded because she was playing at the wrong level; she was excluded because she has Down Syndrome.

This story received a flurry of media attention; from newspaper articles to coverage on the evening news. There was huge public response to the story; many of these responses took the form of “Letters to the Editor” and e-mails that were published both in the print and online version of The Province and The Vancouver Sun newspapers. A great deal of the reactions expressed the point of view that the girl should be included. One of the most articulate responses came from Kurc Buzdegan who works with Special Olympics B.C. states, “Kids don’t realize they’re different until they are excluded” (The Letters Page, 2007, A21).

However, not everyone felt that Sadie should be allowed to play with her teams on game days. Approximately a third of the responses expressed the point of view that Sadie should “get over it and accept that you can’t always get what you want” and that “if she wants to play soccer she should play with Special Olympics” (The Letters Page,
I find it interesting that this story caught the public imagination to the extent that it did. I believe this story received so much attention for a number of reasons. One reason is the underlying desire to root for the underdog, but an additional, and to my mind more powerful reason, is that the majority of people seemed honestly to care whether the girl was included or not.

Another example of public concern for inclusion comes from an unlikely source; The Queen of England. The following is an excerpt from the speech she gave on December 25, 2007.

The Christmas story also draws attention to all those people who are on the edge of society—people who feel cut off and disadvantaged; people who, for one reason or another, are not able to enjoy the full benefits of living in a civilized and law-abiding community.

For these people the modern world can seem a distant and hostile place.

It is all too easy to ‘turn a blind eye’, ‘to pass by on the other side’, and leave it to experts and professionals.

All the great religious teachings of the world press home the message that everyone has a responsibility to care for the vulnerable.

Fortunately, there are many groups and individuals, often unsung and unrewarded, who are dedicated to ensuring that the ‘outsiders’ are given a chance to be recognized and respected.

However, each one of us can also help by offering a little time, a talent or a possession, and taking a share in the responsibility for the well-being of those who feel excluded.

(Queen Elizabeth, 2007)

I find it striking that so many people and even the Queen of England, are concerned with finding ways to make our culture more inclusive. Why are we, at this particular time, so concerned with “letting the outside in”? 
What Does Inclusion Mean in Our Postmodern Time?

Overall, I am optimistic that we are making progress towards becoming more inclusive in our schools and our communities. In my view, the growing concern about becoming more inclusive in our communities and culture is a direct result of a generation of students having grown up being educated alongside peers with diverse needs and abilities. One of the strongest indicators of this progress is that over the last 30 years we have seen a shift away from discussion on integration of students with special needs into our schools to conversations on whole inclusion of students with diverse needs and abilities. What is the difference between these two dialogues?

One of the leading theorists in the field of Disability Studies, Jenny Corbett (1997), addresses this issue in the following passage:

There is much impatience with the post-modernist bandwagons in education, which can be seen as pretentious and of minimal relevance to applied theory. Where I found it of value was in opening up diverse ways of conceptualizing constructions of integration/inclusion, which then helped me to recognize that there were many different meanings of what, at face value, seemed to be a relatively simple concept. (p. 55)

I agree with Corbett that looking at the models of integration/inclusion through the lens of postmodernism can be valuable. Personally, I have found it very useful to examine the models of integration/inclusion in this manner, as it has helped me to come to a deeper understanding of my own experiences working in this field. Other educational theorists such as Scot Danforth and Keith Ballard also consider inclusive
education through the lens of postmodernism but they do not focus on the specific
differences between the two models of integration/inclusion.¹

It is worth noting that during my research for this thesis, I found many worthwhile
discussions on inclusion but I found very little that specifically addressed the theoretical
aspect of the models of integration/inclusion and the arts. Even though the field of “arts
and inclusive education” is flourishing, I have come across very little material that goes
beyond documentation and reporting, which is one of the primary reasons I decided to
do my research study The Story Project (I will be discussing this study in more depth in
Chapter 3).

This is not to say there are not educators, academics and artists involved in
creating innovative approaches to inclusive learning through the arts. There are a great
many people undertaking valuable and exciting work in this area, both locally and
internationally. Locally, there is Theatre Terrific, a group of artists who are committed to
creating and performing works generated and performed by individuals with a range of
disabilities. In Vancouver, we also have The Society for Disability Arts and Culture
whose mandate is to present and produce works by artists with disabilities, as well as
promote artistic excellence among artists with disabilities working in a variety of
disciplines. Internationally, groups such as VSA (formerly Very Special Arts) are an
example of a thriving network of artists and educators who are devoted to exploring
ways in which the arts can act as a form of expression for children and youth with
disabilities.

¹ See, for example, Danforth (2004) and Ballard (1997).
Throughout my career as an artist and art educator, I have been very involved with a number of these arts organizations. I worked with VSA as an artist and educator for many years and I have taught for Theatre Terrific. As well, I have presented my work on “The Arts and Inclusive Education” locally and internationally at conferences in Taiwan, Belgium, Hawaii and California. I have also designed and implemented arts programs for British Columbians for Community Living (BCACL) and Connexions (formerly the North Shore Association for the Mentally Handicapped). In addition, I have collaborated with many artists to create and implement programs and projects in the schools that promote integration and inclusion through the arts.

It is also worth mentioning that when I presented my paper “Whole Inclusion through the Arts” at the International Education conference in Hawaii in 2005, I was asked by Dr. Stanley Vitello, a professor of Education at Rutgers University, if he could include my paper in his syllabus for a Special Education course he was teaching. He relayed to me that he had not been able to find many academic papers that dealt with the arts and inclusive education.

Reflecting on my own practice in this area, I have observed that there seem to be two fairly distinct approaches to including students with diverse needs and abilities. Even though it is a form of simplifying, I have come to think of these two approaches as “modernist” and “postmodernist”. At this point, I wish to make it clear that I agree with Corbett (1997) that there are “many different meanings of what, at face value, seemed to be a relatively simple concept” (p. 55) and that clearly there is no one “postmodernist” or “modernist” approach to inclusive education, but rather there are multiple variations within these terms. However, rather than enter a discussion on the pluralistic nature of
these terms, I would like to proceed with a discussion of what I think modernist and postmodernist approaches to inclusion mean.

I would argue that a modernist approach is concerned with integrating students into the existing structure, rather than the existing structure having to change in order to include different approaches and attitudes. I very much agree with Freire (1994) that “the solution is not to integrate them [people on the fringes] into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’” (p. 74). A modernist view is built on the idea of the authority or schools “letting” a student with a disability exist in the system. It is based on a kind of hierarchal thinking that the larger, more powerful system, is allowing a marginalized group to join, but the needs and viewpoints of the newly integrated group are not placed centrally in the existing system of power. The new members are the ones who need to adapt and adjust rather than the existing system having to change in order to include the other.

Conversely, a postmodern view of inclusion is one that encourages individuals who have been traditionally silenced or marginalized to form and express their own distinctive voice; thus becoming “‘beings for themselves’” (Freire, p. 74). In my view, a postmodern model of inclusion is built on the idea of reciprocity. It is based on the notion that the marginalized group brings something valuable to the established model. Thus, the process of inclusion means that the existing structure is shifting and expanding in order to include.

One of the keys to a postmodern version of inclusion is that the idea of “one size fits all” does not apply. Inclusion does not mean uniformity; it means having a voice and entering into the ongoing conversation and at times leading that conversation. My idea of a
A postmodern view of inclusion means accepting and encouraging an individual’s need to become a fully formed human being. This would mean that in addition to including students with diverse needs and abilities into mainstream activities, we would offer them the means to become human beings who are capable of expressing their own distinct sense of being alive.

**The Tension Between the Models**

We cannot assume that we all live in a postmodern world. It may be helpful to view modernist and postmodernist approaches to inclusion as being on a continuum that is constantly shifting and being redefined, depending on what is taking place in our day-to-day lives. When a group of actors with disabilities in England declare that they are going to run a theatre company independently, with no help from their non-disabled peers, they are defining what an inclusive culture is. Alternately, when a school district, such the one in Queensland, Australia, decides to move students with disabilities towards a segregated model of education they are also defining inclusion.

Clearly, there is no universally accepted concept of inclusion. Differing perspectives exist simultaneously and we see evidence of the two models I am describing in our education system. Inevitably, though, tension exists between modernist and postmodernist approaches to inclusion. We see examples of the modernist approach with the "back-and-forth" funding for specialized help for students with disabilities. Parents, educators and other advocates continually have to “fight” to gain and maintain funding for programs that support students with different learning needs. This conflict is ongoing largely because students with diverse learning needs are viewed as “add-ons” to the existing system; their needs are not seen as being at the centre.
In my view, rather than assigning students with disabilities “visitor” status, we should be searching for ways to create new spaces within the larger system so that students with disabilities can become more “beings for themselves” (Freire, 1994, p. 74). This point is critical because as long as students with diverse learning needs are seen as guests they are vulnerable to an uneven economy and an ever-changing political and social climate. Being a visitor means that these students are not on par with their non-disabled peers, as it is assumed that the school system is not necessarily their home. This is made evident by the current discussion within our Education Ministry in B.C. on sending students with disabilities to alternative schools and programs. In many ways students with disabilities are given a nomadic status; their place in the system is nebulous, and rests on a number of factors: the economy, the philosophy of the school and classroom teacher and the temperament of the student. All of this makes for a very anxious learning environment, an environment in which it is a challenge fully to be yourself, for not only are you often seen as a “visitor”, but also, to a large extent, you are identified by what is characterized as being “wrong” or different about you.

In my view, the tension between these two approaches is one of the factors that make being an educator in today’s classrooms challenging. We see evidence of the tension between the two models in our individual teaching practices as none of us thinks, acts or speaks from one perspective at all times. I am aware of this in my own teaching practice. Within the span of an hour, I will in all probability, observe myself shifting back and forth between the two approaches. An example of this is when I say to a group of students “my hope is that you will find what excites you in this art activity and explore that in depth” and, within minutes, I am steering students towards a product I wish them to create and I hear myself “telling” students to create something that
represents their identity. I am giving this example, not to be overly self-conscious, but because I believe, it is worthwhile to note that there is a tension between the two models and the educator’s position is continually shifting and being negotiated.

**Why Are We Concerned with Inclusion at this Time?**

Whether we lean more towards a modernist or postmodernist perspective, I find it interesting that so many people seem to be concerned with making our communities and culture more inclusive. I have begun to suspect that as a culture, we have a stake in fostering inclusion that goes beyond the surface thinking that inclusion is good and therefore exclusion must be bad. Through my research on *The Story Project*, informal conversations and interactions with parents, educators and self-advocates (a term that individuals with disabilities often use), I have begun to form the view that inclusion is not just something we desire because it is politically correct. For many of us it is something that we have a very real emotional stake in, and I would even go so far as to say that it is something for which there is genuine longing.

Having thought about this for some time, I have formed some ideas why this may be so. I think one of the primary reasons so many people are advocating for inclusion at this time is because there is a yearning among some individuals in our culture for a way of life that is not hooked into the linear “get ahead mentality” that most of us live with. Having a disability may mean that you are placed on the “the other side of the line” but there is also a freedom that comes with that positioning, as expectations shift both externally and internally. I also suspect one of the principal reasons we are actively seeking to make our communities and schools more inclusive is because *we ourselves*
are longing for the kind of acceptance that we extend to people we perceive and accept as being different and in need of our help.

It could be that we are looking for new ways to include and be included because as Charles Taylor (1991) tells us, we have left the “old orders” behind and we are left in the uneasy position of finding and forming new communities of belonging. Taylor states:

Modern freedom was won by our breaking loose from older moral horizons. People used to see themselves as part of a larger order. In some cases, this was a cosmic order, a “great chain of Being”, in which humans figured in their proper place along with angels, heavenly bodies, and our fellow earthly creatures. This hierarchal order in the universe was reflected in the hierarchies of human society. People were often locked into a given place, a role and station that was properly theirs and from which it was almost unthinkable to deviate. Modern freedom came about through the discrediting of such orders. But at the same time as they [the old orders] restricted us, these orders gave meaning to the world and to the activities of social life. (p. 3)

Taylor makes the case that as many of us identify less with groups that have traditionally signified authority in our lives, we are feeling an increased sense of isolation and disconnectedness. The result is that individuals are left on their own to form new groups in order to experience a sense of belonging. This affects deeply how each of us imagines and participates in our culture. It also influences who we see as “us” and “them” and who we identity as being worth protecting and accepting “as is”. Is it just our friends and family that deserve our acceptance or does our empathy extend beyond that?

To be human means that we crave relationships, but maybe what is shifting ever so slightly, is that some of us are craving different kinds of relationships. It is probably fair to say that many people experience a sense of isolation in their own lives, so perhaps we are identifying more with people who are being excluded, especially as we
seem to be identifying less with the ideals that are being marketed to us through mainstream media. It could also be that many of us are identifying more strongly with the “outsider” because fewer people see themselves as being part of the “mainstream”, perhaps because the mainstream has become too narrow. This is evidenced by the decline in numbers of people watching TV, listening to mainstream radio and reading major newspapers (Watson & Jones, 2005). Increasingly, people are turning to the internet to create their own forms of communication through venues such as YouTube, podcasts, blogs and so on.

Along with the declining interest in mainstream media, there are intimations of a drive for more meaningful connection in popular culture. While not conclusive, there are some indications of a changing view of self and community. We are also witnessing an increased interest in Eastern mysticism. People such as Eckhart Tolle (1997), who was once considered fringe, is now, partially due to Oprah Winfrey, more prominent in our cultural imagination. His book The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment (1997) has sold over 50 million copies and his second book A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose (2005), has been pod cast to millions of people through The Oprah Winfrey Show (2007). However, it is not only Tolle who has brought an Eastern sensibility into the mainstream consciousness; the Dalai Lama has also become a household name in North America. The Dalai Lama gives talks in North America, attracting crowds in the same numbers as rock stars. In addition, there are newly packaged versions of the Tao that are being widely marketed such as the book, Change Your Thoughts—Change Your Life: Living with the Wisdom of the Tao by Wayne W. Dyer (2007). Even though there are many differences in how these messages are being conveyed, they share a commonality, in that they are bringing an Eastern sensibility to
the West. It is a sensibility that questions our “win at all costs” mentality and promotes a kinder, more compassionate approach to all beings.

**Overview of How Societies Have Historically Viewed Disability**

In order to answer the question more fully as to why our culture is concerned with inclusion at this time, I believe it would be worthwhile to look at how societies have historically viewed the subject of inclusion and exclusion. And more specifically, I wish to examine why we feel such a strong need to label and categorize people that we perceive as being different.

According to Henri Jacques Stiker (2006), a renowned French historian, throughout western history, people with disabilities have traditionally been viewed as being mistakes or aberrations and at times they have even been thought of as being subhuman, animal-like, or of a different race altogether. However, there have also been times in history when people with disabilities have been placed at the opposite end of the spectrum and been perceived as being “saint-like”. For example, Egypt held a shamanistic view of disability; that is, instead of seeing disability as a sin they saw it as a “magical phenomenon” (2006, p. 42).

When we look back at how people with disabilities have been viewed from a western cultural perspective, what stands out is that they have generally been placed on the outer edges of what it means to be human. Stiker (2006) states, “In the final analysis, we cannot distinguish cultural eras. We find fear, rejection, exclusion as well as the belief in special gifts of the disabled. They bring good luck and bad; they are beneficial or harmful” (p.20).
By placing them in the extreme categories of subhuman or superhuman, we are essentially positioning them on the outer margins of society. As Stiker points out, rarely have individuals with disabilities been placed on equal terms with non-disabled people and allowed to be seen as being merely human.

Stiker asks us to imagine what our culture would look like if we could allow disability to exist within the lines of what we see as natural or normal. To do this would require an internal shift, because how we respond to the outward signs of difference is a reflection of our inner lives. In other words, how we behave towards people we perceive as being dissimilar to ourselves, is an indication of our ability to accept what is different or unknown in our own psyches. As we become less exclusionary in our thinking we simultaneously become more accepting of difference in ourselves and others. This leads to more acceptance of diversity in others, thereby creating a cycle that ultimately leads to a more inclusive society. In my view, this is why it is so crucial that our students have the opportunity to partake in the imaginative experience of art making because as Taylor (1989) points out, the arts allow us to know ourselves in ways that have previously been unarticulated.

Stiker makes the point that we tend to inscribe individuals with disabilities with meanings that serve our collective or individual purposes. This is something that I have certainly done over the course of my career. For many years I believed that people with disabilities must be “old souls” who have chosen to have a disability, not only as a way for them to grow spiritually as individuals, but also to afford non-disabled people the opportunity to learn how to endure adversity from them. What is worrisome about this way of thinking is that it is essentially an instrumental view. For by assigning people with disabilities with an identity that is designed to benefit me, in essence I am colonizing a
whole group of people and denying them their complete personhood. This kind of perspective, even when it is embedded with good intentions, serves to rob the individual of agency. Even though we can certainly learn something from each person we meet, I have arrived at the perspective that it is far too self-serving to see people with disabilities as being born to teach people without disabilities. This thinking serves to underscore why it is so vital that people be seen as individuals instead of members of a specialized category. It also highlights why it matters that all individuals be given the opportunity to be co-creators of their own identity. If we agree that individuals with disabilities are not blank slates waiting to be inscribed with meaning by us, it would follow that we need to offer them the tools to construct their own self-meanings. In Chapter 2, I argue that the arts offer an educational avenue for such self-development.

To accept disability as natural would mean accepting the parts of ourselves that are outside of our logical control. I believe that acceptance of parts of ourselves that “make no sense” could eventually lead to a transformation of what we think it means to be human. Stiker states “if disability can be theorized as essential to our definition of what constitutes the human, then the integrable must take a back seat to the integral” (p. xi). I agree with Stiker’s view that people with disabilities are necessary to the completeness of the whole. I find this statement to be very provocative because it implies that as a culture we require each member’s participation and presence in order to be truly complete as a culture. We need people with disabilities to become fully actualized subjects and in order to do this we have to provide opportunities, such as engagement with the imaginative arts, in our education system for them to form and express meaning.
Perhaps it is worthwhile to pause and consider what Stiker is proposing because we are living in an age where outward signs of difference and disability, can to a certain extent, be removed or hidden. In the last few years, a trend has emerged in North America for children with Down Syndrome, for example, to have plastic surgery performed in order to remove the physical signs of their condition. When parents were asked why they were getting this controversial procedure done, the reply was that they were doing it in order to protect their children from the suffering that comes with being discriminated against when one has a visible disability. Parents of a 5-year-old London child who has already undergone three operations to alter signs of Down Syndrome said, “We live in a society that judges people by the way they look. Society is not going to change overnight, so Georgia [their daughter] has to fit into society, rather than society fitting into the way she is” (Dobbin, 2008, p. 1). This example serves to underscore the fear that parents have concerning how their children will be treated by society simply because they are identifiably different. I do not mean to underplay the discrimination that exists toward people with disabilities, but perhaps instead of putting effort into trying to remove disability through such drastic means as plastic surgery, or hiding it through segregation, we should be exploring fresh ways to express and accept what is distinct about us as individuals. What would it mean to our culture if we could accept disability as simply one more way to be human? I believe this question is worth pondering because as Stiker points out, there has never been a time in western history when disability was accepted as being natural.

Stiker tells us that acceptance of diversity could lead to the “development of more flexible social systems, values and expectations” (p. xi). I agree with Stiker and would add that rather than trying to absorb, erase or hide difference, we should be looking for
ways to express and appreciate diversity. In my view the arts can play a significant role in promoting acceptance of difference both in ourselves and others.

**Where Do You Situate Yourself?**

Having discussed some of the ways that our culture positions itself in relationship to inclusion, I think it would be worthwhile to examine what inclusion means to me personally. I believe it would be valuable to relay my story for a number of reasons. The foremost reason is that as my career has spanned over 25 years, I have experienced first hand, the modernist and postmodernist perspectives towards including students with disabilities. My thoughts on what inclusion means have developed gradually over the course of my career as an arts educator working with children, youth and adults with a wide range of disabilities. In a way I see myself as a kind of academic “Forest Gump”; I am deeply affected by what is happening in society; my thoughts and ideas can never be separate from what the rest of culture is experiencing. Moreover, as I mentioned in the Introduction, I do not see personal narrative and theoretical ideas and philosophy as being separate. Theory informs practice and practice informs theory. There is a constant interplay between the two, whether we are aware of it on a conscious level or not. An additional reason to include my personal account is to illustrate that I am aware that the arts do not necessarily promote inclusion. They can be engaged for this purpose, but as most people know, the arts can also be an elitist and exclusive domain. Therefore I think it is worthwhile to consider how I have come to be so passionate about promoting the arts as a vehicle to encourage inclusion.

My story began when I was 19 years old and I was hired to assist with “movement therapy” classes for children with autism. I was very much drawn to this work
and sought it out mainly because I often felt anxious and unsure of myself in the ‘real’ art world. My days were consumed with becoming a professional dancer in the field of modern dance; two classes a day, six days a week with rehearsals, auditions and so on. Even though I loved to dance, I constantly questioned if I was good enough, talented enough, or just plain worthy enough to be there. These feelings were reinforced by those around me. Teachers emphasised that this was a hard ‘business’ in which to make it in—only a handful of people succeeded. Friends and colleagues evaluated themselves and each other on how much money was or wasn’t being made. Recognition and fame also played a significant role. For a young artist, the goal was very much to rise above the rest, and be recognized as an exceptional person. However, it seemed the only way to be acknowledged and given a secure place was to be become not only better than others in my field, but to become the best.

As a dancer, my worth was measured in additional kinds of numbers—weight and age. The goal was to weigh as little as possible and succeed at as young an age as possible. This was because as a dancer, my worth would be greatly diminished as the pounds and years increased. It seems strange to me now that artistic and creative growth were measured and weighted so heavily by numbers. Numbers that all too often indicated how far off I was from measuring up to what felt like an unobtainable ideal.

Throughout those years, I felt an underlying sense of unease about pursuing an art form that perpetuated this kind of perfectionism. I couldn’t quite shake the feeling that participating in the arts must have a purpose beyond this ideal. And so I began to look to the larger community to see if art had a place beyond the dance world that I was so immersed in. I was very fortunate in that I was able to find work assisting with movement therapy classes for children with autism. There was room for me in this position to
develop my own approach and I started to use dance improvisation as a way of relating to my non-verbal students. The art form of dance enabled us to have a kind of conversation.

During this time, I was also hired to work on a grant that funded a small group of us to teach modern dance to adults who were visually impaired. Working with this group, I learned how dance can be used to transform an individual’s sense of self and the world. From these experiences, I began to see that there were sides to art that I hadn’t known existed. I saw that art could be used to not only promote and encourage individual excellence, but that it could also be a means to express and recognize each person’s unique way of being alive. In addition, I realized that you didn’t have to be the ‘best’ in order to be assured a place in the group and express your distinctiveness; you only needed to be willing to participate.

Working with people with diverse needs and abilities greatly impacted my practice as an artist. Internally I began to be more accepting of who I was as a person and an artist and gradually, my goals began to shift. Instead of focusing so strongly on being accepted by an established company, I began to collaborate with other independent artists and in some cases, we formed our own companies. I still performed other people’s choreography, but increasingly, I created my own dances.

These experiences signalled the beginning of a long and rich career creating and teaching arts programs and classes to individuals with diverse needs and abilities. As I grew as an artist and expanded my dance work to include theatre and visual art, I was able to incorporate these disciplines into my practice. Eventually I created an interdisciplinary approach to teaching, combining movement, theatre and visual art as a
way to explore and express ideas. I led these activities and programs in the community as well as in the schools, at times collaborating with other artists and also working closely with teachers and special education assistants. I was involved in this work before my son was born, but as one would expect, I became even more deeply committed as a parent of a child with a disability.

**Integration to Inclusion**

The shift from focussing on integration to inclusion occurred gradually in my practice. In the beginning of my career as an arts educator, the focus in education was very much on integration. As recently as the 1980s, many students with disabilities were still being educated in segregated settings so the idea of having students with disabilities work alongside students without disabilities was fairly innovative. As mentioned earlier, for a number of years I worked with Very Special Arts, an international organization dedicated to providing arts programming for people with disabilities. During this time, I facilitated projects in schools that focused on “using the arts as a tool for integration” and offered professional development workshops for educators and special education assistants on developing art activities and projects that promoted integration. The goal was to bring students with various challenges into mainstream education as much as possible, if not academically, then at least socially.

This approach was successful to a certain extent. I saw that art was indeed a useful means for integration, but to my mind, the ways in which integration were taking place was not as effective as they could be. What became clear to me was that even though all of the students were reaping the benefits of participating in the arts on an individual level, the students with disabilities were benefiting less, as too often they were
taking a passive role in the activities. What I began to observe was that the relationship between the disabled and non-disabled students was not as equal as it could be. This occurred because invariably the students without disabilities took on the role of “helpers” and the students with diverse needs settled into the role of being “those being helped”. On a larger scale, I saw that through this assignment of roles, the stereotype of individuals with disabilities as being “lesser than” and “lacking” was being perpetuated.

I began to question my own role in this dynamic. As an artist, I had found a sense of purpose in using the arts to help people with disabilities express themselves through the imaginative process of art making. I consciously use the word “help” here because I truly believed that by teaching dance, art and theatre skills to individuals with disabilities I could somehow drag them into mainstream society. I began to see that the urge to pull people with disabilities into the mainstream is at heart, a modernist approach. It is an impulse that is based on claiming oneself to be the specialist or authority and deciding for the other person what is best. It may appear enlightened and benign, but underneath these good intentions, one is still assigning a lesser identity to the other. I also realized that I was investing a lot of energy into developing my own identity as “specialist or expert” and I questioned how valuable this was to my students. Looking back on this now, I see that it was a disquieting, yet necessary stage.

Over time an interesting thing happened to me. By taking a step back from the role of “expert” I began to realize that though I was in the role of teacher, I was very much the one learning. Rather than bringing individuals with disabilities into my world, I started to see that as much as, or more, I was the one being brought into their world. A reversal of sorts had begun to take place. Once I relinquished the role of expert I was able to be honest with myself as to why I was so drawn to working with people with
disabilities. I had to admit that I was seeking this work out because I liked creating art in “their world”. It was an environment that was unlike anything I had experienced in my dance training or the art world. In the simplest terms, it seemed like a much kinder, gentler, less judgmental place. A place where you can spend all the time that you need to do what you have to do and expectations are the opposite of what we generally live with, which is “we can do everything and we can do it right on time—actually we can do it ahead of time”. Where is the pleasure in that?

This questioning led me to take a close look at my own art practice. I noticed that I only made art when there was an instrumental value attached to it, such as for courses I was taking, demos for teaching, exhibiting in a show, illustrations for a children’s book or building my portfolio in order to get a job teaching art. Seldom, did I make art for the intrinsic joy of it. As a result of this realization, I began to give myself permission and space to “play” in the arts.

This internal shift was also reflected in how I taught, and the projects and programs I initiated. I began to question what inclusion really means in terms of education; does it simply mean to be allowed to participate alongside those without disabilities, or does it mean something more? During this period, I completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts in visual art and I was very excited by the readings that I encountered. I was inspired by artists who were using the arts as a way to build community; artists such as Susi Gablik (1991, 1995a, 1995b) and Suzanne Lacy (1995). One article in particular: “To Search for the Good and Make it Matter” by Estella Conwill Majozo (1995) had a major impact on my thinking. In this article, Mojavo discusses the power of using the arts to build and redefine community. Inspired by the theory I was learning, I began to imagine how art might be used to challenge the stereotype of what it means to have a
disability. In order to explore this notion more thoroughly, I initiated a community art project that involved adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

In the beginning stages of the project, I worked closely with a group of teens with a range of disabilities for a number of months, teaching them art skills that they would eventually share with others in the community. We began the project with the question, “Who am I and what do I bring to my community that is uniquely me?” We explored this concept through movement, drama, music, and visual art. A significant part of the process was the ongoing discussions we had surrounding this question. The work eventually evolved to creating a series of self-portraits that represented how the teens saw themselves in the community. Going through a process of selection, participants chose their favourite image and traced and hand painted the images on to banners. Throughout this process, the teens were able to build a vocabulary of art-making skills and techniques, which eventually they taught to others.

In time, accompanied by youth workers, and myself, the teens ventured out into the community to lead banner-making sessions for children in after school and summer day camp programs. We began our sessions with the teens showing their banners and saying a few words about them. Some of the teens though, had very little language, so they simply showed their banner to the group, and the banners themselves acted as effective tools of communication. We began by asking the participants the same question we had asked the teens, “Who are you, and what do you bring to the community that is distinctly you?” The teens then assisted in the banner making workshops. The students with disabilities were able to take on a leadership role because they were very familiar and confident with the process. The response from the children who took the workshops was very positive, and they were very appreciative of
the help they received from the teens. The teens took a lot of pride in their role as teachers. We paid repeated visits to a number of centers and eventually we ended up with a large assortment of banners. Each person who participated in the project, created a banner depicting a unique self-portrait that included images of the community.

The final stage of the project was to share what we had been doing with the larger community. The banners were first displayed in the lobby of a local theatre and were eventually moved to the reception area of a new community centre. The banners created a highly colourful and striking collection of portraits of young people in the community. They were displayed in such a way, that there was no way of knowing which banners were created by the teens with disabilities, and which ones were created by the students without disabilities. The banners stayed up in the community for over two years, and their visual presence, along with the story of why and how they were created, became part of the daily lives of people who encountered them (MacLean, 2004).

For me personally, this project signalled a shift from taking a modernist to a postmodern approach to inclusion. Through this experience I saw that the students with disabilities were able to be active agents in their own learning process and that they were even able successfully to take a leadership role in their community. I wish to emphasize that even though I was exploring a postmodern approach in my work with the teens, this experience was very much a beginning stage for me with respect to finding new ways in which to be inclusive. One of the outcomes of working on this project was that I began to wonder what the next step would be for me taking a more postmodern approach to encouraging inclusion. I also began to contemplate how the positive elements of this project could be transferred to learning practices within the schools.
This project led to other programs and eventually to the study I initiated titled, *The Story Project*, which I will be discussing in Chapter 3.

**Shifting Lines**

By examining the concepts of inclusion/exclusion on a deeper level I believe we can move closer to understanding what our next steps should be in terms of inclusive education. Stiker (2006) states that people with disabilities “are the thorns in the side of the social group that wants to identify with one model” (p. 4). I believe this statement is significant in relation to education because so much of our education system is based on what Stiker refers to as the “culture of sameness” (p. 5). Part of living in a “culture of sameness” means that we bring ourselves to want what everyone else wants, so that we set up a competitive atmosphere wherein we are continually comparing ourselves to others, and they to us, and someone has to be found lacking. In our heavily mediated culture (meaning that our culture is in large measure processed and shaped through various forms of advertising), we are often led to believe that our desires and goals are homogenous. Advertising and other cultural images reinforce the belief system that "being the best you can be" means being perceived as being young, sexy and wealthy. Within the highly complex world of school, young people adhere to a very strict and complex “culture of sameness.” This is enforced with bells, rules, and policies all designed to regulate and “make regular”. And for the majority of teenagers, personal choices in music, and fashion styles, are selected from a narrow set of choices. Adolescence does not offer many safe opportunities to express how one is unique or different. One of the prime reasons that the arts are so important is because they do not
insist on ‘one way’ being the ‘right way’. In the arts uncertainty and ambiguity is not only tolerated, they are cultivated (Eisner, 2002).

When speaking of people with disabilities Stiker writes “they are the tear in our being that reveals its open-endedness, its incompleteness, its precariousness” (p. 3). Stiker goes on to challenge us to love “the tear in our consciousness” (p. 3). However, it is not easy to accept, much less love, irregularity because it can cause a kind of panic in our psyches. But what are we so afraid of? In the past, fear of difference was based on the primal desire to protect and preserve society, and ultimately the species. However this fear does not pertain in our current age. One of the reasons this part of our consciousness is shadowy and uncomfortable is because on a deep level all of us fear being cast out of our social group. It may be that the antidote to this fear is an acceptance of difference that goes beyond the concept of sheltering and helping. What would it mean to relinquish the role of being the “stronger, more able” person and acknowledge that we ourselves have vulnerable qualities? What would it mean “to love the difference”? Stiker tells us that “the love of difference, especially if it becomes socially contagious (through education, cultural action, political action)—leads to human life” (p. 5). I agree with Stiker and would add that, if we could begin to accept the parts of ourselves that don’t make immediate sense, we might discover fresh ways of experiencing and “making” sense.

What would it mean to embrace what we perceive as the aberration or imperfection in our consciousness and culture? What would it mean to love the “tear in our consciousness?” It is possible that the tear could be an entrance to another way of experiencing and expressing what it means to be human. Instead of rushing in to sew up the tear in our consciousness, perhaps we could pull on the thread so that the tear
becomes an opening, allowing new spaces to emerge. What would happen, if instead of stepping away from the discomfort these new spaces brings us, we stepped further into it? If we could live with the initial discomfort, perhaps we could allow light to shine through this opening in order to see this issue more clearly. Conceivably one of the things we might come to see is that we don’t need to change or fix people we perceive of as being different or flawed. This is an easy suggestion to make, but in reality I believe it is difficult to do, because we are a culture obsessed with makeovers and fixing as is evidenced by our fascination with shows such as *Extreme Makeover* and *Nip and Tuck*. For most people the immediate response to supposed imperfection is to fix it or remove it. However, one of the dangers with trying to remake people into versions of what is considered typical or normal is that because it is inauthentic; it encourages people to become shadow selves instead of fully realized human beings.

If we were to continue to pull the on the thread I believe there might be a questioning of what we hold normal and therefore acceptable. “Loving the difference” could lead to a challenging and questioning of our established values and beliefs. What would it mean if our concept of community extended beyond who we perceive as having the same values, physicality, sexuality, income, education, ethnicity to become a “culture of difference”; one that is united by the essence of what makes us human? Perhaps shifting from a “culture of sameness” to a “culture of difference” could serve better to teach us how to be more fully human.

I am reminded of an experience I had recently at a local coffee shop. It was about 8:00 pm and the coffee shop was quiet with a number of people either reading the paper or working on their laptops. A man who appeared to be a street person with mental health problems was sitting by himself at a table. Even though he hadn’t
purchased anything at the coffee shop, the staff didn’t seem to mind that he had made himself at home; rocking back and forth and occasionally talking to himself. About every 15 minutes or so, he would get up and circulate through the room, ask each of us what our name was and introduce himself. One by one, each one of us would pause in what we were doing, shake his hand and he would go on to the next person. He would then sit down and proceed to rock back and forth and talk to himself for awhile and then the process would start again. I found it interesting that no one seemed the slightest bit annoyed or afraid of him. They simply accepted that he did this and didn’t question it or feel threatened by him. The other thing that struck me about this incident was that there were no ‘knowing looks’ being passed between the patrons. I also noticed that he actually seemed to bring out the best in people, as each one of us paused in what were doing to smile and have a brief exchange with him. I realized that we were important “markers” or stakeholders in his life and perhaps he in ours. Even though we weren’t having a typical interaction with him, it was no less genuine, and in fact perhaps it was more meaningful because we were stepping outside of our usual habits.

This simple story illustrates the point Stiker is making about how the love of difference could lead to a more humane way of life. None of us in the coffee shop was trying to rehabilitate, change or glorify the man; we were simply following his lead and accepting him on his own terms. I also couldn’t help but notice that most of the patrons were in their early 20s which led me to think that their accepting behaviour towards the man must, at least in part, be due to the more inclusive environment that they grew up with and experienced in their classrooms.

This experience also made me aware of how we shift our expectations for someone we perceive as being more vulnerable than we are ourselves. If a cashier or
clerk is really slow and inefficient, at first I will be annoyed, but if I surmise that they are being inefficient because they have some sort of impairment or disability, I will completely reverse my position from one of critical judgement to empathy and acceptance. I wonder what it would be like to respond with acceptance and empathy whether the person has a disability or not? Furthermore, what would it mean if we extended that same acceptance and empathy to ourselves?

I propose that we continue to pull on the thread and see if we can unravel the curtain that we have placed between who we see as disabled and non-disabled and on a deeper level who we perceive as “us” and “them”. If we continue to tug, the curtain would eventually disintegrate, and then there would no longer be such rigid categories of “us” and “them.” Ultimately, this would mean thinking in a less exclusionary, self-interested way. This would mean that rather than trying to “fix” individuals with diverse needs and abilities we would offer them the tools to form and express their own meaning. If each of us had the means to do this, and especially if it was encouraged in our education system through the imaginative arts, I believe we would be moving towards a more truly inclusive society. It would be a more inclusive culture because each of us would have a place and this place would not be marked as a subset or category of difference.

Concluding Thoughts

In my view, the growing concern in our culture surrounding inclusion is at least in part a result of a generation of students having grown up being educated alongside peers with diverse needs and abilities. Perhaps it is time to build on this positive foundation and go further. I believe that most educators are strongly committed to the notion of inclusion, which means that we are secure enough in our commitment to delve
deeper and question whether we are including in the most effective manner possible, or whether learning needs are sometimes being ignored when we take inclusion as a blanket response. For example, that in addition to integrating students with different learning needs into our existing model, by adapting and modifying the existing curriculum, we should also be looking at ways to create new curriculum; curriculum that will be better able to include and nurture diverse ways of thinking.

A postmodern view of being human means to move away from the idea that there is only one way to be human. Therefore, I believe we need to take some risks and, in true postmodern style, offer a number of approaches to encourage a more comprehensive form of inclusion. In the next chapter, I will be discussing why the arts are particularly suited to this task.
Chapter 2.
The Art of Inclusion

The table is large
Solid and mahogany
It is as dense as the pile of papers beside the doctor
The papers, thick with testing and signatures, will be reduced to a three-word phrase
This phrase or label will map out the direction of our son’s education

My husband and I sit waiting for the verdict
My throat is dry
I am alternating between listening to what the doctor is saying and silently spinning the words “please let it be good news, please let it be good news”

I stop spinning when I hear the words:
“Educationally Mentally Handicapped”
My mind becomes as big as the room
“What exactly does that mean?” my husband asks
There is a pause
A barely concealed sigh
The sound of papers being shuffled

“It means that your son will be placed in a program where he will learn life skills but he won't have to struggle with any of the academics”
Trying to understand what the doctor means I repeat back “He won't have to struggle with academics—what does that mean? Do you mean he won't be taught to read?”
“What we mean is that your son is incapable of learning to read and write. He will never learn those skills and it would be cruel to push him in that direction”
“How do you know that?”

The doctor answers by providing us with a long list of things that our son will never be able to do
The doctor tells us that he will never be able to read, write, ride a bike, learn math skills, or have complex thoughts
The list goes on

I see a broad line being drawn in the room—the doctors are on one side and we are placed firmly on the other.

My husband responds with “You yourselves said that because it is brain damage you don’t know exactly what is wrong—how do you know what he won't be able to do? Wouldn’t it make more sense to give him the
opportunity to learn before we decide that he can’t? Who knows—maybe he will surprise us all.”

The doctor stands up and gathers his papers. He looks at us with sympathy and says, “You are parents—it is natural that you are in denial.”

According to the Vancouver Sun journalist, J. Steffenhagen (2005), a new category of students with learning challenges is emerging in our school system. These learners have been labelled ‘grey-area students’, as they do not fit into any of the established categories such as ‘special needs’ or ‘learning disabled’. The article defines “grey-area students as being the 20% who fail annual tests of reading, writing and arithmetic” (p. 1). Steffenhagen goes on to state, “these students will likely form a large part of the 21% of B.C. students who don’t graduate with their peers” (p. 2). The article also states, “grey-area students cause almost 90% of teachers’ stress”. This would seem to be a very unhappy situation for both teachers and students. It seems that with each new generation of students we are gaining more categories of learners, or rather ‘un-learners’. This leads to the question: Is there really that much ‘wrong’ with our students, or is there something wrong with how we are expecting our children to learn?

In our present system of education, we are able to label and place our students into a number of categories, based on how well they test. One of the primary concerns I have about so many of our students being labelled as being ‘difficult learners’, is that these labels profoundly affect how students see themselves. I would argue that by placing our students into these categories we are mirroring Plato’s view that people are “gold”, “silver” or “bronze” and to my mind, we are in danger of creating an invisible class system. Instead of expecting our students to change the way they think, in order to
succeed in our existing system, I believe we should be questioning what and how we are teaching.

Within the classroom today, educators are increasingly being asked to find ways effectively to teach a diverse range of students. Expectations are placed on educators to find learning strategies designed to address the distinctive needs of each student. Most educators agree every student, regardless of their level of ability, should be included in our schools, but it is not entirely clear what is the most effective means of inclusion. In order successfully to include and educate all students it seems sensible to ask the question, “What should the aims of education be in relation to these students?” The B.C. Ministry of Education states:

The goal of the B.C. School System is to support the intellectual development of all students including those with special needs. Enabling all students to achieve the goals of human, social and cultural development is a responsibility shared by schools, families and communities. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 1)

If we agree that the aim of education should be to give students the appropriate tools for perceiving and making sense of the world, as well as the ability to participate fully in our culture, we have to question the nature of the curriculum with which students with diverse needs and abilities are involved. Curriculum matters, because, as Elliot Eisner (2002) points out, “curriculum builds minds” (p. 9). The curriculum in our schools reflects what we value as a culture. Consequently it is not surprising that academic subjects are placed firmly in the centre as ‘core’ subjects and the arts are relegated to the status of ‘electives’. The arts are seen primarily as a kind of relief from the rigorous demands of academic subjects. Hence, the majority of a student’s time in schools is spent on academic subjects such as science and math. In order for students with
intellectual disabilities to engage in these subject matters with their age related peers, the material almost always needs to be ‘modified’, ‘adapted’ or otherwise altered. The abilities of these students are looked at through the perspective of what they ‘are not able to do’. In my experience working as a Special Education Assistant in both elementary and secondary settings I have observed that much of these students' time, is spent struggling with an approach to learning that is not particularly suited to them.

I would suggest we need to offer additional ways to engage and motivate our students. One of these ways might be a more arts-based approach to learning. What I am advocating is not new. In some ways I am calling for a return to an earlier time when an arts-based approach to learning was more prevalent, before the scientific model became the dominant approach for teaching and learning. The difference between then and now, though, is that in the 19th century the arts-based model was provided specifically for the elite or leisure class and I am proposing that arts-based education be offered to all students, but especially students who are placed on the fringes of education.

The Roots of Modern Education

In order better to understand why so many of our students are struggling within our system, it might be helpful to look at how our current educational system has been formed. Our present model has been heavily influenced by the ideas of Herbert Spencer and John Dewey. In the 19th century as education became more available to the masses, a utilitarian approach was adopted that signalled the birth of the scientific

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2 See for example, Dewey (1944) and Spencer (1966).
approach to learning. Largely because of Spencer, our present curriculum is built on this approach to learning. Spencer believed in the authority of science and modern efficiency. His main concern was for students to gain the kind of knowledge that would help them to live productive lives and to see the world in rational terms. This instrumental way of thinking has greatly influenced our curriculum.

Elliot Eisner (2002) writes, “Although we seldom think of the curriculum this way, parents send their children to school have their minds built” (p. 9). The result of so many generations of minds being shaped by “results oriented” curriculum is that our culture is permeated with a scientific consciousness. This kind of consciousness is apparent in almost every aspect of our culture. As a society, we tend to invest heavily in activities that will bring us measurable results. Even activities such as meditation are promoted in a scientific way, as evidenced by recent research, which argues meditation increases the thickness of the brain, which in turn increases our ability to concentrate (Kerr et al., 2005).

Even though I am somewhat critical of the scientific model of education that Spencer espoused (1966), I give him credit for bringing about many much needed changes to education in the 19th Century. Spencer argued that the developing needs of children and their expanding activities should be central to the curriculum and to the teacher’s efforts. Consequently, Spencer is responsible for freeing children of that era from the mindlessly dull task of memorizing information that did not relate to their current circumstances. Spencer believed that we should be concerned not just with producing scholars in the traditional sense, but also with providing students with the skills that they need in order to perform their duties in life.
Spencer’s (2006) argument is that curriculum should be of direct relevance and utility to the lives that the students would actually lead. The key word here is ‘utility’. I would argue that the idea of utility has been taken to the extreme in our culture and has become the cornerstone of our modern education. The concept of utility was a freeing notion during Spencer’s time, but today we see that utilitarian thinking can be restrictive and comes with its own set of problems. One of the most evident features of the scientific approach to learning is that as students fail to meet the set standards, they are labelled as being deficient or lacking. The other concern I have with the utilitarian model, is that students do not seem to value the intrinsic nature of learning. In my own teaching experience, I have come across many students who do not see the point of learning something unless it is going to be on the test, or it will help them get a better job in the future. We seem to be living in a time not dissimilar to Spencer’s, in that there are too many facts, and not enough personal knowledge. In our computer age, students have access to endless amounts of information, but we lack a background of meanings, with which to assimilate this information and turn it into knowledge.

Even though Spencer made a powerful argument for science-based education, not everyone agreed with him. Matthew Arnold (1882) presented a very different view of education. Arnold stressed that the value of the arts in relationship to education is that they help us to develop the ability to perceive beauty and choose right conduct. Arnold argued that the aim of education should be “to know ourselves and the world, we have, as the means to this end, to know the best which has been thought and said in the world” (p. 7). Arnold did not object to science’s rationality but only to the rigid view of life that this thinking can bring; the thinking that every aspect of life could be evaluated on a
narrow quantifiable basis. Arnold (1882) argues for a balance between science and the arts in the following passage from *Literature and Science*:

> Interesting indeed, these results of science are, important they are, and we should all of us be acquainted with them....But still it will be knowledge only which they give us, knowledge not put for us into relation with our sense for conduct, our sense for beauty, and touched with emotion by being so put; not thus put for us, and therefore, to the majority of mankind, after a certain while, unsatisfying, wearying. (p. 8)

Like Arnold, Wordsworth argued that education should encourage the kind of learning that does not stifle artistic or spiritual imagination (1888, *Prelude, Book V*).

Arnold and Wordsworth saw that in education there are losses as well as gains. Both thinkers were concerned that the trade-off for gaining knowledge could come at the cost of losing a sense of one’s spirit. This is why both men argued that the arts were vital in education, as they nurture a person’s ability to create and perceive what is aesthetically and ethically desirable in human beings. Wordsworth believed poetry was key to creating a society that is liveable. In the following passage, found in the preface of *The Lyrical Ballads* (Wordsworth, 1798) describes how the Poet is the best defender of the arts:

> It is the honourable characteristic of Poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind. The evidence of this fact is to be sought, not in the writings of Critics but in those of the Poets themselves. (lines 1-4)

I agree with Wordsworth that the arts are crucial to keeping our spirits alive and our culture humane.

> Wordsworth feared that the industrial age would narrow and restrict how we view the world, as he saw the danger in the modern tendency to measure all things by narrow
utilitarian standards. Wordsworth believed that the goal of education should be to keep
the experience of the sublime alive and that childhood is a valuable phase of life in its
own right. Wordsworth writes in *My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold* “The Child is father
of the Man” (1802, line 7) meaning that the essence of what is sublime in childhood
should be preserved and cultivated throughout our lives. Wordsworth saw poetry and the
arts as the best way to cultivate this ‘spark’ and keep it alive. I strongly agree with
Wordsworth, as I believe that the arts provide the kind of atmosphere that helps us to
recognize and articulate the immeasurable and transcendent parts of ourselves.

By contrast, all of the subjects deemed important in our “results oriented” system
have strict criteria with which to measure and evaluate student performance. Because
the rating system for these subjects is so firmly based on testing, students who view life
in a more poetic or sublime way, are in danger of being placed on the margins of
learning. Instead of nurturing students who have the potential to become poets, artists,
orators, or visionaries, we are labelling them as failures.

The argument between goal-oriented and process driven-curriculum seems to be
at the heart of our modern day dilemma in education, which is the confusion over
whether education should be for intrinsic or instrumental values. Is a balance possible,
or is the split between art and science so deep that the two cannot exist as equal
partners? It is important to keep in mind that seeing the two areas as being diametrically
opposed to one another is also a result of our education system. We see examples of
this with how funding for the arts in our schools needs to be continually fought for and
justified in terms of its usefulness to our students. Recently there have been ads on the
radio by Canadian artists such as Nelly Furtado and Michael Buble making the point that
they would not be the successful musicians they are today if they had not participated in
music programs in school. Seldom do we see science programs having to defend why they should be part of our curriculum. The system itself puts strong divisions between the areas, and we are ourselves products of the same system we are raised in. This may be why it is so hard to argue and implement changes within our educational system. Because many of our ideas are tied into the existing structure; we tend to support it or disagree with it, but in any case, all of our thinking is in relationship to it. In my view, the two educational goals; one to produce a citizen who is useful to society and the second to lift people’s consciousness towards the transcendent qualities in life, are both worthwhile, but one should not exist at the cost of the other. It is interesting to note that Arnold was not advocating for the arts to completely dominate, he was calling for a balanced curriculum; one that gives equal consideration to both science and art. Like Arnold, I am not arguing against the sciences, but I believe that the arts are equally important. Science enables us to understand the elements and structures of life, but art shows us more its meaning and value.

Arnold made an impassioned plea for education that is based on the idea that the arts offer us a means to learn the best that there is to learn. He believed that the current interest in science was only a passing phase and soon everyone would return to sanity, he states:

And therefore, to say the truth, I cannot really think that humane letters are in much actual danger of being thrust out from their leading place in education, in spite of the array of authorities against them at this moment. (Arnold, 1882, p. 12)

Today we know that Arnold was sadly mistaken.
In our current era, there are a number of articulate and passionate educators who argue that the arts should be more central in our curriculum. However, one of the most difficult challenges for advocates of the arts is how to frame their arguments so that they will be accepted by our scientific culture. The value of the arts cannot be easily quantified, but this does not mean the arts do not serve a vital role in our culture. It simply means that arts activities and achievements are difficult to predict and measure. How then do we make a compelling argument for the arts in education? It seems there are two possibilities; one way is to use a results oriented model to justify the arts. The other approach is to articulate the value of the arts using the language of art. I will speak of this more in depth in Chapter 3.

Moving Toward the Transcendent

One of the legacies of the scientific model is that we have created a system that is based on measuring and testing proficiency. We have gained the ability to measure the world, but in many ways, we have lost the desire to nurture the sides of ourselves that cannot be easily quantified. This contributes to a system that is focused more on “exclusion” than “inclusion”. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, by placing so many of our students on the edges of educability we are creating an invisible class system. This class system is not so much based on the ability to make money, but on who will be encouraged to grapple with the higher concepts in life.

All of our students are affected by the instrumental approach to learning, but secondary students with intellectual disabilities are among the ones who are impacted the most. I am identifying adolescents who have ‘intellectual challenges’ as students who have an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) of less than 70% as a result of Down Syndrome,
brain damage or other organic causes. The reason that I have chosen to focus primarily on secondary students is that throughout my practice I have noticed that there are significant differences between elementary and secondary school settings. Generally, I have observed that in elementary school settings, students with diverse needs and abilities are more easily included in the classroom community, whereas in secondary settings these students are often given the more marginalized status of ‘visitor’ to the mainstream classrooms. I am also concerned with how these students spend their time in resource room programs. From my experience as a Special Education Assistant, teacher and parent, I have observed that much of their time is spent performing manual tasks such as doing the recycling, stocking the pop machines and so on. There is nothing inherently wrong with these tasks, but I believe that their imagination and transcendent side is often being ignored in favour of these practical tasks. In order better to understand the thinking behind how we currently educate students with developmental disabilities, I think it would be useful to give a brief overview of how students with intellectual challenges have traditionally been educated.

Before the 19th Century, there was only sporadic interest in educating children with intellectual disabilities (Moltena, 2006). However, this began to change in the early 19th Century, largely because of the work done by Dr. Jean Marc Itard. Jean Itard is considered a forerunner in the field of special education because of his groundbreaking work done with Viktor (a child who was supposedly raised in the woods by wolves until age 12) otherwise known as “Wild Boy of Aveyon” (Moltena, 2006). Itard spent five years developing a program to educate Viktor in basic skill areas such as speaking, listening, feeding and toilet training. Today it is widely believed that Viktor may have had serious autism and/or an intellectual disability. Itard’s program established the principles
of “instruction by domain,” used almost universally today (Carter, 2006). 'Instruction by domain' means that a child’s learning needs "are examined and met within logical categories like speaking, reading, spelling, feeding and toilet training" (Carter, 2006, p. 9).

Dr. Edouard Seguin, a student of Itard, is also a pioneer in the education of people with disabilities. Seguin, inspired by the work done by Itard, created the first school in France dedicated to the education of individuals with developmental disabilities (Carter, 2006). In 1846 he published, “The Moral Treatment, Hygiene, and Education of Idiots and Other Backward Children”. This book was the earliest special education dissertation dealing with the diverse needs of children with intellectual disabilities (New World Encyclopedia, 2008).

In 1849, Seguin moved to the United States where he continued his work by establishing schools for individuals with developmental disabilities. These schools were known as “training schools” because the focus was on training students with intellectual disabilities to be productive members of society (Carter, 2006). Following Seguin’s example, institutions or schools were created throughout North America and Europe to house individuals with developmental disabilities. These “training schools” were created largely to separate people with intellectual challenges from criminals and paupers.

Seguin's work had a major impact on how individuals with intellectual disabilities were perceived, especially because the predominant thinking of that time was that people with disabilities were not actually full human beings; they were thought to be sub human or even part of a separate species (Stiker, 2006). Seguin put forth the radical notion that people with disabilities were human (cited in Carlson, 2005). Seguin states,
when speaking of a person with a developmental disability, “He is one of us in mankind, but shut up in an imperfect envelope” (p. 48). Seguin felt that people with intellectual disabilities were humans but they were at a lower level of development, which is why we often refer to such individuals as having a “developmental” disability. This view signalled a major shift away from the thinking that people with disabilities were “idiots who were human only in form, empty shells of humanity” (Stiker, 2006, p. 9). Consequently, Seguin has had a profound influence on how people with intellectual disabilities are educated because he believed that low IQ could be cured or improved. Eventually, Seguin became the first president of the “Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feebleminded Persons”, which would later be known as the American Association on Mental Retardation. His work with students with developmental disabilities was a major inspiration to Italian educator Maria Montessori (Neufeldt, 2003).

In many ways, Seguin is the forefather of inclusion or integration because he believed that individuals with intellectual disabilities could be trained to be productive members of society and should therefore attend school in the same manner as children without disabilities (Carlson, 2006). The way students with intellectual disabilities are educated today is based largely on the “training school” model that Seguin created the in the 19th Century. This model is based on the thinking that even though individuals with intellectual disabilities are not able to grasp higher intellectual concepts, they can still be taught to perform menial tasks and therefore be of use to society.

Since that time, students with intellectual disabilities have become more included in our schools, but generally, the focus has been to train, rather than educate. It is good that students with intellectual disabilities are trained to be contributing members of our society, but too often, their transcendent side is neglected, as generally they are not
seen as being capable of imagining and choosing. Maxine Greene (1995) addresses this issue in the following passage:

The stigma of “disabled” or “low IQ” too frequently forces young people to be seen as recipients of treatment, sometimes from the most benevolent motives on the part of those hoping to “help”. Far too seldom are such young people looked upon as being capable of imagining, of choosing, and of acting from their own vantage points on perceived possibility. The supporting structures that exist are not used to sustain a sense of agency among those they shelter. (p. 41)

I agree with Greene that imagination can act as a critical opening for individual voice and perspective to occur. It is my conviction that students with intellectual disabilities have the potential of becoming fully realized human beings, capable of making worthwhile contributions to our culture. However, I think it is unlikely that they will realize their full potential, given the way that they are presently being educated. In my view, it is time to expand the training model to include a more complex and nuanced form of education; one that offers the means for students with intellectual disabilities to form and express meaning in order to become fully formed human agents capable of authoring their own identities. In my view, this would be a step towards a more inclusive culture because it would offer opportunities for students with disabilities to author identities that are not related to having a disability.

Instead of these students being placed on the margins of the learning experience, their needs, abilities, and strengths should be placed in the centre. It is vital that these students be given opportunities to engage in the imaginative process of art making because participation in the arts, as Taylor (1991) has argued, can promote a stronger sense of agency and a fuller sense of self. Therefore, we should be thinking of promoting not only numerical and written literacy, but also literacy in the arts.
Throughout this thesis, I am proposing that the arts are an ideal vehicle for meeting the diverse needs of these students and promoting fuller inclusion in both the classroom and the larger community. In the following sections, I will aim to justify this claim.

**Why the Arts?**

The arts are ideally suited to meet the diverse needs and abilities of these students for a number of reasons. One of the key reasons is that diversity and variability are celebrated in the arts (Eisner, 2002). This is particularly relevant for students who are having difficulty performing in academic subjects where they are expected to acquire knowledge in a more formal manner. In the arts, individual perspective is important and multiple interpretations are encouraged. There can be more than one answer to a question and more than one solution to a problem. Variability of outcome is not only expected, it is encouraged. A student cannot be told that what they are seeing in their imagination and expressing through art is ‘wrong’. The fact that there can be any number of ‘right’ answers to a question posed through the arts can be very freeing and empowering for students who struggle academically. By reinforcing that the students' ideas have validity, students are far more likely to want to engage in cognitive processes such as problem solving. An example of activities that encourages problem solving would be “compose a self-portrait that does not include your face” or “create a painting without using paint”. These activities encourage students to explore possibilities that are based on different ways of thinking. There are many solutions to these problems, so consequently there is less likelihood of students ‘shutting down’ because they feel it is hopeless to try. This creates a much more equitable learning situation, as each student feels capable of making a worthwhile contribution to the activity.
As well, participation in art activities promotes “tolerance for ambiguity” (Rogers, 1976, p. 300). The experience of tolerating a certain amount of uncertainty is advantageous because often these students are uncomfortable with changes to routine and sometimes display less than flexible thinking towards their surroundings. In addition, the ability to tolerate ambiguity may increase the individual’s capacity to adapt to new and stressful environments and situations outside of the art realm. The ability to accept that there can be more than one “right” answer and to enjoy the uncertainty of the moment encourages students to take risks, mentally, emotionally and physically. These ‘risks’ help to build self-confidence as students feel more secure in stepping outside of their “comfort zones”.

Another important reason why the arts are so well suited to this task is that art activities offer an ideal opportunity for participants to play spontaneously with disparate ideas and concepts. Koestler describes this process as the “bisociation of unconnected matrices” which is essentially “a coming together of two realms of thought that had previously been considered incompatible” (Bailin, 1994, p. 65). The arts offer many opportunities to make these connections. In visual art, you can juxtapose complementary colours, imagery, contrast textures and so on, to create a composition with unity and balance. Painting scenes from nature, or looking at artwork by artists such as Jack Shadbolt, can provide students with ways to explore these elements. In drama, you have games such as ‘anything but’, where students use an everyday object like a drum, as anything but what it was intended. Students might use the drum as a bowl, a mirror or a hat. In dance, you can pair unlikely verbs with adverbs such as ‘push softly’, ‘skipping aggressively’ and ‘stomp softly’ and explore these combinations through movement. These are just a few examples, but there are many more.
In the arts you have the opportunity to take an ‘interdisciplinary approach’ to learning, by combining elements of music, dance, drama and visual arts in order to explore a concept in multiple ways thus encouraging students to be active learners. In addition, art activities offer students the opportunity to become absorbed in the ‘flow’, which increases the ability to concentrate. This is because as Eisner (2002) states, “in the arts a special level of focused attention is realized, a form of attention that is seldom called upon in most of the situations we experience” (p. 23). Eisner also makes the point that besides offering a means to increase concentration, the arts help to develop sequential thinking and promote intelligent planning.

**Thinking in the Arts**

In our culture, we tend to equate intelligence with the ability to reason well and express ourselves in a literal, propositional manner. This way of thinking of intelligence can be traced back to the turn of the century when Alfred Binet invented the Intelligence Quotient Test as a way of assessing people’s mental capacities. This seemingly scientific approach to measuring the mind’s potential has resulted in a rather one-dimensional view of intelligence (Gardner, 2006). And, as discussed earlier, it has also resulted in a curriculum that heavily favours subjects that follow set rules and offer measurable results.

In general, the students to whom I am referring, have restricted expressive and receptive language abilities. This in turn affects their ability to process and express written and verbal information. These factors are significant, because it is primarily through the use of language that we are able to participate in our culture. As well, because we principally base intelligence on doing well linguistically and logically, we
tend to assume that individuals who are weak in these areas are destined to perform poorly overall. This is especially true for students with developmental disabilities, because they are described as having a ‘global’ disability, meaning that their thinking is thought to be impaired in all areas. In my view, this does not mean these students are incapable of developing as intelligent beings, what it means is that it is unlikely that their intelligence will be developed within models of learning that depend on linguistic and logical skills.

In his book, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons*, Gardner (2006) offers the view that the mind is multifaceted and that ‘linguistic and logical’ skills are just one form of intelligence in a range of intelligences. Gardner offers a number of intelligences that include linguistic, logical, mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Gardner urges us to take a different view of how to educate the mind. He makes the case that “no two individuals - not even identical twins - have exactly the same intellectual profile” (p. 23) and therefore, schools should be places where students can develop diverse cognitive styles and strengths. I agree with Gardner that the purpose of schools should be to ensure that each student receives an education that maximizes his or her potential. Therefore, I would argue that it makes little sense for students with intellectual and language difficulties to focus such a large share of their time on subjects based on logic and linguistics.

Gardner also points out that scientific thought and logic are but one of the symbol-making systems that we use to frame and make meaning of the world. Like Gardner, Eisner argues that the arts contain a unique symbol system. In *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002), Eisner makes the case that artistic activity is a form of inquiry that depends on qualitative forms of intelligence. Learning to paint, to draw, to
compose music, or to dance requires learning to think. I agree with this point of view and I would offer that the arts could provide students who struggle with learning logic and linguistics an alternate form of language. Language is crucial, because as Taylor points out “we cannot be inducted into personhood except by being initiated into a language” (1989, p. 35).

Gardner argues that artistic cognition is on par with scientific cognition (by cognition I mean the act or process of knowing; how we come to know what we know) and stresses that we need to acknowledge forms of thought other than those held by proponents of the sciences. Gardner is not alone in his thinking. In *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (1953), Suzanne Langer argues that there is meaning in art just as there is in science. Langer proposes that we possess a basic human need to symbolize, invent and invest meaning in our world. Langer goes on to say that, it is the property of the human mind to search for and to find meaning everywhere and to create new meanings from experience. She tells us that as humans we need to engage in the process of symbolic activity in order to make sense of our world.

With so many thinkers eloquently arguing this point of view, why is ‘thinking in the arts’ generally not seen as being on par with ‘thinking in science’? As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, it might be because we live in a culture that tends to see scientific thought as inherently superior to other forms of symbolic expression and therefore we tend to see thinking in the arts as a ‘talent’ rather than an ‘intelligence’ (Eisner, 2002). I would add that it is also because as a culture we see science as being intellectually superior. We generally see science as having instrumental value and the arts are seen as having intrinsic value, meaning they are valued for their own sake. In addition, in science is generally of a quantifiable nature and research that employs the
arts is usually qualitative. In our Western culture, we tend to value what we can see and measure.

The argument that ‘thinking in the arts’ is of equal value with ‘thinking in science’ holds substantial implications for students with intellectual disabilities. This is because there exists a strong possibility that students who struggle with linguistic and logical tasks may not necessarily struggle as much with aesthetic development in the arts. Some skills and abilities in the arts can exist independently of verbal and written skills. Claire Golomb (2002) makes the case that “linguistic skills and art-making skills may be independent of one another” (p. 137). Golomb conducted a research study that looked closely at the drawing and copying skills of eight children with developmental disabilities and nine children with autism and matched them for intellectual age on five copying and drawing tasks. The activities took place over eight consecutive sessions resulting in 20 drawings and 16 copies per participant. Golomb found that the copies and drawings were on par with their non-disabled counterparts and in some cases were even further developed. The findings from this study are significant because they suggest that art-making skills could develop along a path that is independent of general IQ (MacLean, 2002).

These findings resonate with my son’s experience with language acquisition and drawing. Danny spoke only gibberish until he was six years old, and when he did begin to speak, it was a very gradual process. Even though Danny didn’t speak before he was six, he spent many hours a day drawing profusely. Drawing in fact was his way of making sense of the world. Drawing for Danny was an activity that engaged him physically, emotionally and imaginatively. His drawings were gestural in nature and told a story. As he drew, Danny would speak animatedly (in gibberish) for all the characters
that he was drawing; his speech was incoherent at first, but eventually developed into language that others could understand.

Dr. Bob Steele from UBC met with Danny on a number of occasions and included some of his artwork in his book *Draw Me a Story*. Steele (1998) writes:

Danny’s drawing output is prodigious and reflects the frustration he feels at not being able to think and communicate effectively with words. While Danny’s drawings appear to be scribbles to most observers, they were actually charged with meaning. (p. 56)

Danny clearly wanted his drawings to be specifically understood and function as an actual language. As parents, we understood that Danny’s drawing played a major role in fulfilling his need for expression. Therefore, we took paper, pencils and crayons with us wherever we went so that Danny could draw whenever he chose; which was often. If he was not able to draw while we were out, he would become agitated and indicate that he wanted to go home. The moment we walked in the door he would race to his drawing table and furiously draw for the next hour or so. He would often draw between 20 and 30 drawings in an hour. I find it interesting that as Danny began to acquire enough language to understand and be understood through verbal language, he gradually began to draw less. It is clear to me that drawing acted as a catalyst or bridge for acquiring language and it also gave Danny a vehicle with which to make sense of his inner and outer world. Drawing provided him with a way to make meaning and express that meaning to himself and others. Essentially, he was “thinking in art”.

Through his research on brain-damaged adults, Gardner has also come to believe that painting and linguistic skills can exist independently of one another. He proposes that skills in musical and visual tasks could be at least partially disassociated
from linguistic skills. Gardner argues that like verbal language, the arts contain a unique symbol system, one that can be ordered to express meaning and sense. He states in *Art, Mind and Brain*:

> The arts are integrally and uniquely involved with symbol systems—with the manipulation and understanding of various sounds, lines, colours, shapes, objects, forms, patterns—all of which have the potential to refer, to exemplify, or to express some aspect of the world. (Gardner, 1982, p. 211)

Gardner (1982) goes on to suggest, “Such shared capacities might be marshalled to aid individuals communicating with other persons” (p. 216). I would argue that similar to learning a verbal language, participation in art activities can increase the individual's ability to make rational, ordered, and conceptual sense of the world.

**Teaching for Inclusion**

One of the most important features of creating an environment that fosters ‘thinking in the arts’ is the role of the educator. Because she is responsible for creating an environment that is conducive to learning, the teacher has many decisions to make, including how she will physically set up the space, what materials she will make available, and the best way to plan.

In addition to setting up an environment that encourages creativity, it matters that the teacher foster her own sense of creativity and imagination for as Greene points out, “imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of students” (1995, p. 36). Imagination is significant because it allows us to develop empathy for our students. As educators we need to imagine what it would be like not to be able to express ourselves effortlessly with verbal and written language. Furthermore, by
modelling compassion, the teacher is encouraging a setting where students feel they can take creative risks. A warm atmosphere allows the teacher to offer constructive criticism because students know their work and ideas have value. A supportive environment also encourages students to engage in positive self-criticism, as students are not overly concerned with making mistakes.

A further reason an open and compassionate attitude on the part of the teacher is significant is because all too often as educators, we have expectations that can act as a defence line against the openness that we are trying to nurture in our students. Sometimes this comes from concentrating too much on the final product, which may be a fixed idea that we have in our minds. This rigidity on our part may prevent students from making their own discoveries. As teachers, we have to be careful that we don’t insert our judgments and opinions onto our students, but that we encourage students to build and monitor their own sense of aesthetic judgment and preferences.

The shift to basing your judgment on what you think rather than what you think others think of you is subtle yet critical. I would offer that art making is one of the few activities that can facilitate the shift from outer to inner evaluation. In order for this shift to occur, artistic process and product must work together. Process is vital because it offers the individual the opportunity to learn the skills, rules and knowledge that are necessary in order to create a product that he or she can look upon and feel a sense of accomplishment. The shift from external to internal evaluation has implications far beyond participating in creative art activities. The ability to make choices and decisions for oneself is especially important for this group as they often fall into the category of ‘followers’. By developing a stronger sense of self, these individuals are more likely to develop a sense of agency and the capacity to lead.
It may seem paradoxical, but I believe that this ‘internal shift’ in evaluation comes about through outside stimuli. In my view, artistic product can act as a source of motivation to continue the creative process. I would argue that an identifiable product is necessary in terms of the individual’s self-confidence and identity. This is because artistic product can act as a type of mirror, reflecting the message back to the individual that they are capable of creating something of worth.

One of the most significant reasons to create artistic product is that it has the circular effect of the more artwork you produce the more artwork you want to produce. The energy, drive, and motivation derived from creating artwork should not be underestimated, for it is these very qualities that need fostering in individuals with intellectual disabilities (Zigler, 2000). The experience of success is particularly significant for these individuals, as meeting with consistent failure erodes motivation and contributes to lowered aspirations and diminished engagement. As Zigler states, “Motivation [for individuals with intellectual disabilities] may prove to be the more important factor, especially for those who have experienced a long string of failures” (p. 1418). In addition, creating artistic works is important, in that it serves as a form of communication with the larger community (MacLean, 2002).

**Learning Concepts**

In *Getting it Wrong from the Beginning*, Kieran Egan (2004) challenges Piaget and Spencer’s view that children’s minds develop in the same manner as their bodies. Egan asserts that children’s imaginative lives defy Spencer’s simple to complex argument. Like Egan, I believe that what we are able to express through words is not the sum total of what we are experiencing imaginatively. Piaget and Spencer’s belief that
learning goes from the simple to the complex is evident in current educational practice, in that we assume that students are not likely to grasp higher concepts if they have not yet mastered lower ones. It is my belief that Piaget’s ‘building block’ view of learning has negatively impacted students with intellectual disabilities because we assume that they are incapable of grasping more complex forms of thought until they show written or verbal evidence that they have mastered simpler ones. For this reason, we tend to view these students in relation to what we perceive their ‘mental age’ to be. We have to keep in mind though, that this mental age is being measured primarily in relation to their linguistic and logical intelligence. In my opinion, we are diminishing these individuals by assuming they are forever ‘childlike’ in their thinking.

One of the outcomes of this way of thinking is that it is very difficult to find age appropriate material for these students, as the subject matter of most of the material written in simpler language is not aimed at teenagers. I feel it is essential that we do not under challenge these students by our assumption that they are not capable of thought that is more complex.

Concluding Thoughts

One of the most compelling reasons the arts are so well suited to meet the diverse needs of students is that the arts offer students with intellectual and language based disabilities a means to form their own unique voice in order to tell their distinct stories. This point is crucial, for as both Eisner and Taylor tell us, it is primarily through narrative that we are able to understand and make sense of our lives.
What is effective with the arts is that they offer a venue for the imagination to take root and flourish. This matters because the imagination provides the space to experience the sublime or ineffable parts of ourselves. It is vital that we nurture the imaginative lives of all of our students, but particularly students with intellectual disabilities, because even though some cognitive abilities may be impaired, in my experience the imagination is still whole and functioning. Therefore finding ways to articulate and express what is in their imagination is critical to these students being able to tell their own stories.

Through my work in this area, it has become evident to me that imagination is useful in terms of not only art making, but also in terms of how one imagines oneself in our culture. I feel that it is essential that we remain open to what Maxine Greene describes as the “untapped possibility of previously unarticulated voices and sensibilities” (1995, p. 43). Greene proposes that imagination can nurture a sense of worthiness and agency. I agree with Greene that imagination can act as a key opening for individual voice and perspective to occur. For through the imaginative process of art making, students are more able to construct their own meaning and form their own unique voice in order to communicate these meanings. The beauty of the arts is that they can provide the means to express and articulate what cannot be said literally with words. The key is active participation in telling your own story, along with developing an alternate form of language when verbal language fails us. In my view, this is one of the primary reasons it is so important that we offer students who are struggling with written and verbal language alternative modes of expression.

The notion that all students, even students without sophisticated linguistic and logical skills need to be able to form voice in order to become co-author of their identity
is at the crux of a study I initiated titled *The Story Project*. In the next chapter, I will describe and discuss the findings from this project.
Chapter 3.

Telling Our Stories

*In many ways she felt displaced*
*The person she was*
*and the family she had imagined were gone.*
*She realized she needed to learn to breathe in this new world.*

*As the panic and fear started to lessen*
*she began to see that she was far from alone.*

*Her story was just one of many threads in a massive tapestry.*
*Again and again, she saw her own fears, dreams and hopes*
mirrored in the stories that others shared with her.

*Surprisingly, the best support—both emotionally and practically*
did not come from specialists in the medical field or trained support
workers
*it came from other parents sharing their stories.*

*As well, she saw that school was the most successful when genuine partnerships were formed between the student, parents, teachers, special education assistants, administrators and school board officials.*

*Real dialogue emerged as each person spoke and was listened to*
*As the voices of the students and parents grew stronger.*
*it became clear*
*that the specialist was not the only expert.*

*It matters that we know*
*but it matters more that we are known.*

The consequences to not being “known” in the school community when you are identified as “different” can range from mild to dramatic. On the mild end of the scale, not being known in your school community may mean you are the target of mild bullying. It can also mean that you do not exist as a whole person, so that it is easy to treat you as if you are invisible. Examples of this can be seen when students and teachers address the special education assistant and refer to the student with a disability in the third person instead of talking directly to him or her. A more extreme consequence of not being
known is that an identity can be assigned to students that place them in a learning situation that further marginalizes them and restricts their ability to become fully formed human beings.

Recently I was hired as a District Resource teacher for Aboriginal Programs. My job was to regularly visit a number of secondary schools and offer academic support to aboriginal students who needed it. One of the first students I worked closely with was a 17-year-old student named Bill (not his real name). Bill was a soft spoken, polite young man who had never lived with his biological parents; instead, he had lived in a series of foster homes. Bill had a history of absenteeism and getting very low marks in his academic subjects. When he had arrived at the school a year earlier, he had been placed directly in the Access Program. The students placed in this program have a range of developmental disabilities and even though they do some academic work (mostly in the form of worksheets), a large part of their time is taken up performing manual jobs such as recycling the garbage, filling the pop machines or taking the coffee cart around to classrooms at break times so that teachers and students can purchase snacks. Bill had expressed repeatedly to his teachers that he hated being in the program (especially collecting garbage and selling coffee). He said that it made him feel stupid and that there was a group of boys who continuously taunted him by calling him “the retarded Indian”. To top it off, Bill said he was bored with the academic work. As a result, a team of professionals, as well as his foster mother, met regularly to discuss his disengagement and poor progress. When I took the job over from another teacher I asked her what she thought might be the best way to work with Bill. She told me that as he was really poor in academics, she had worked primarily with worksheets and simple
The first time Bill and I met was a beautiful sunny day, so rather than stay cooped up in my little office, I suggested we work outside. Bill agreed, so we took some pencil crayons and paper with us, so that if he wanted to, Bill could draw while I read to him. I had brought a number of books (novels and short stories) for different reading levels. I asked Bill to choose one that appealed to him and he chose *Three Day Road*, a novel written in the first person by the aboriginal writer Joseph Boyden (2005). We sat on a bench under a large tree; and as I read, Bill drew. After reading for a while, I paused and asked him what he thought of the story. Bill responded in a very animated manner saying that he “could totally relate to what the author was saying because he too, had gone from foster home to foster home and never felt like he belonged anywhere”. I asked him if he would like to write down and/or draw images of what he had just told me. He said “sure” and started to write non-stop for the next 20 minutes. Because of the label he had been given, I was expecting to read very poor writing. However, upon reading what he had written I was surprised to find it very clear and cohesive, even though it had many grammatical and spelling mistakes.

The next time we met, I asked him if he would like to read to me and I would draw while he read. He agreed and again I was surprised to discover he was a very good reader and handled the sophisticated text fairly well. There were many words he was unfamiliar with, but he either looked them up in a dictionary, or asked me to provide a definition. After each chapter, he would write a response, relating what he had read to his own life. After about a week, he asked me if he could take the book home to finish. I had borrowed the book from a friend and I wasn’t able to lend it to him, so I suggested
he take it out from the library. He told me that he didn’t have a library card and had in fact never been to a library outside of the one at school. Therefore, our next task was to get him a card, so that Friday we went to the library near the school, got him a card and took the book out. The following Monday Bill came to see me and to tell me that he had finished the novel and needed “another book to read”. From there, he chose poetry and short stories written by aboriginal writers. Once he started reading the poems, Bill began writing poetry and drawing pictures to accompany what he had written. Because he seemed to enjoy reading autobiographical works, I asked Bill if he would like to write a story about his own life experiences and he said “yes”.

During this time, Bill had stopped attending the Access Program and he had gotten in the habit of coming only to our sessions and then skipping school for the rest of the day. Consequently, a team meeting was called with Bill, his counsellor, the Access Program teacher, and his foster parent. With Bill’s permission, I had brought some of his writing and artwork to share with the team. Everyone was surprised and excited by what Bill was doing. As a result of this meeting, the wheels were set in motion and Bill was removed from the Access Program and placed in a more appropriate alternate program (a learning support program that was aimed at providing students who have a history of absenteeism with academic support). Plans were also made for him to attend some art and English classes.

This experience served to deepen my understanding of why it matters that every student be given the means to tell their own story and to engage in curriculum that allows them to develop an authentic sense of self. In the case of Bill, when his teachers assigned an identity to him that he disagreed with, his resistance to the assigned identity perpetuated the belief that he couldn’t learn. It is worth noting that Bill’s willingness to
engage with the curriculum increased significantly when he could relate to it on an emotional and imaginative level. Conversely, when Bill wasn’t engaged with the curriculum, he resisted participating and consequently refused to do any work at all. He also refused to talk about why he didn’t want to do the work and would often say only that he “hated it” or it “was boring”. The same thing happened when he was given proficiency tests to determine his level in reading and writing; because he didn’t want to be doing the test, he would leave sections blank as a way of making his dissent clear. Resistance was his way of having a voice in the situation. Consequently, it was all too easy for teachers to make the assumption that Bill wasn’t capable of doing the work and should therefore be placed in a setting where he would be more “trained” than educated.

Bill’s story underlines how important it is that all of our students, regardless of how poorly they perform on tests, are offered the opportunity to engage in and express the transcendent or sublime aspects of themselves. Otherwise, it can be difficult for them to become known even to themselves. We cannot assume that students are being given these opportunities outside of school. Curriculum is critical in relationship to forming identities that are able to encompass the full depth and breadth of who we are. Moreover, if we place students in alternative programs and then do not offer them curriculum that allows them to “mediate their own personal vision and understand their life as a quest” (Taylor, 1989, p. 7) we are marginalizing them further.

Taylor states, “We are able to make ethical sense of the world and ourselves by seeing our own lives as an unfolding story” (p. 7). However, in order to understand our lives as “unfolding stories” we have to find ways to engage each of our students imaginatively, even if, or maybe especially if, they are struggling academically. This point is critical because we are only able to articulate our personal vision through engagement
with the imagination (Taylor). When Bill was given the opportunity to understand and express his life in narrative form, he was able to see that his journey was not dissimilar to the personal journeys of the characters he was reading about; therefore, he was able to see that he too, was the hero of his own story.

In order to be author of our own story we need to be given opportunities to form meaning regardless of perceived intellectual ability. Carlson (2005) states:

Foucauldian analysis challenges one to interpret the history of mental retardation and current practices and categories in light of the power relations and games of truth that contributed to its definition and evolution. Yet a Foucauldian analysis need not lead to a denial of the lived realities of people who are labelled “mentally retarded”. Rather, the promise of a Foucauldian approach lies in the unmasking of certain power relations that directly affect the extent to which certain voices are silenced, and exposing the dangers of defining and speaking for an entire class of individuals. (p. 16)

What stands out for me in this passage is the idea that certain voices are silenced and that an entire class of individuals have traditionally been spoken for and about by others. Knowledge about individuals with disabilities is typically generated by experts, too seldom do people with disabilities speak on their own behalf. How would it affect our present and future culture if these voices were encouraged to speak? Like Foucault, Freire (1994) argues that it is the system itself that needs to shift in order to provide spaces for marginalized people to develop agency and voice. Freire states, “The solution is not to integrate them [people on the fringes] into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’” (p. 74). Freire goes on to say that, the shift from being on the fringes and moving to a more central place in our society can only occur if marginalized individuals take control of their identity and history on their own terms. Freire also tells us that the fringes of society
have the most power to transform society. This is an exciting idea, but one that can only be actualized if the people who are currently on the margins of society acquire the means to form and express their own distinctive sense of being alive.

In terms of education, how can we encourage these voices to have agency? For Freire, literacy is key because it offers a way to develop voice and the ability to listen to others, thereby encouraging both individual agency and empathy for others. I wholeheartedly agree with Freire and would emphasize that this is why the day-to-day practices taking place in our schools are so potent because they can be sites for small but meaningful transformations to occur. These practices matter because what takes place in our classrooms ultimately shapes our social and political structures.

In order to function as fully formed agents, individuals need to have the means to reflect on and choose which identities and voices they wish to develop and express. If we agree that individual voice and agency matter, then we need to offer multiple forms of literacy to our students. All literacy development is dialectic by nature; it cannot happen in isolation; community is formed and re-formed through relationship and dialogue. However, I do not believe that dialogue is only through the spoken word; it can be manifested through art and especially through relationships formed while creating art with others. Therefore, I would argue that along with offering students the means to develop written, oral and numerical literacy we should also be offering opportunities to develop aesthetic literacy. I believe this is true for all of our students, but especially students who are struggling with traditional forms of literacy.
The Story Project

Maxine Greene (1995) tells us that imagination is vital because it is through developing the ability to imagine new possibilities that we are able to re-imagine ourselves. And it is in this process of “re-imagining” ourselves that we are able to shift from being someone who passively accepts an identity that is assigned to them, to becoming someone who is an active participant in creating their own identity. There is inevitably struggle and tension between being assigned an identity and authoring your identity. However, I believe it is a struggle worth undertaking, as becoming co-creator of our identity is crucial to becoming co-author of our own story. I am choosing to say "co-author", because as Taylor (1991) points out, identity is formed in relationship to others; none of us become who we are in isolation. This struggle is especially challenging for individuals with restricted cognitive and language skills as it is not easy for these students to negotiate an identity that goes beyond the powerful label of disability. One of the key reasons is that labels such as “developmental disability” are such an authoritative assignment of identity that often it does not even occur to the one being assigned the identity to protest or rebel. However, I believe it is a struggle worth undertaking, as becoming co-creator of our identity is crucial to becoming co-author of our own story.

The belief that all students but, especially students who are struggling with traditional forms of literacy, need to be able to form voice in order to be the author of their own story is at the heart of a study I initiated titled The Story Project. Even though the stories told by the teens are not stories in the traditional sense, they are stories in the sense that they convey how the teens view and interpret themselves, and the world around them. As many of these students struggle with verbal and written literacy, a
primary goal of the project was to explore ways in which art can be used to both form and express meaning while promoting whole inclusion in our schools and communities. Findings from this study are intended to serve as a resource for teachers to assist them in finding additional ways to include students with diverse needs and abilities in their classrooms. An additional purpose of the study was to learn more about what motivates students with diverse needs and abilities to want to learn and in turn develop curriculum that excites and engages them. Even though this study was carried out in a program in the community, it is my belief that the findings from this study can be transferred to classrooms, especially resource rooms in secondary schools. I will be discussing this more in depth in the final sections of this chapter.

The Research Site

*The Story Project* took place in a Ministry Run Program titled Teen Club. The program itself is situated in a large room of North Shore Neighbourhood House [NSNH]. NSNH is located in an area of North Vancouver, which is partially residential and partially commercial. It has a playground and community garden located adjacent to it. The centre also houses a day care centre, serves many groups, and offers programming for seniors, adults and children. The teens who attend Teen Club come from both North Vancouver and West Vancouver. As the program is run by the Ministry of Children and Families, there is minimal cost to the families.

As mentioned in the Introduction, I used a mutiperspectival or bricolage research approach (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004) toward the research conducted and presented for this study. The majority of the data was collected through video tape, audio tape, photographs, artwork and sketchbooks/journals kept by the students, staff and myself.
The project began in June 2006 and continued until July 2007. Approval was gained from all agencies involved and two sets of permission forms with letters were sent home with the teens, and returned with signatures of parents and guardians indicating permission for them to participate in the project.

The sessions were video taped and some of the discussions were recorded on audiotape. As well, all participants were given sketchbooks to draw and write in whenever they wished (both during our sessions and on their own time). Along with giving the teens sketchbooks to draw and write in, the staff were given sketchbooks as well. The staff and volunteers were encouraged to write their observations and thoughts on the teens' involvement in the project. Staff and volunteers were also encouraged to make art in the sketchbook whenever they wished. In addition, I interviewed parents and staff verbally and with written surveys. I have included transcribed selections from the video, audiotapes, sketchbooks and written surveys throughout the description of the project. However, because of the extent of the project, I have used the excerpts sparingly in order to illustrate key elements. I have also included images of some of the artwork created and photographs taken by the teens during this time along with images of the teens participating in the various art activities.

**The Participants**

This project involved 12 adolescents whose ages range from 12 to 17 years old. The participants have a variety of disabilities, including Down Syndrome, autism and autism spectrum disorders (ASD), such as Asperger's Syndrome; some of the teens have multiple diagnoses as well as physical challenges. A small percentage of the teens have English as an additional language and some of the participants do not speak at all.
None of the actual names of any of the participants (teens, staff, volunteers and parents) have been used in this thesis, therefore I have used a pseudonym when referring to anyone involved in the study. The following is a brief description of the teens:

- Michael is a young man with autism. He is nonverbal and spends some of his time “stimming”. (Stimming is a term used to describe self-stimulating behaviour that people with autism sometimes engage in. It can be hand-flapping, spinning or rocking, for example. It usually occurs during times of stress. (AllExperts, 2008)
- Rae is very shy but really enjoyed the activities. Rae has Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD]. ASD is described by the National Institute of Mental Health as causing “severe and pervasive impairment in thinking, feeling, language, and the ability to relate to others” (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2008, ¶1).
- Robert also has ASD. He is very thoughtful, articulate and enthusiastic young man.
- Tim has Down syndrome. He is a quiet young man with a very playful sense of humour.
- Ming has autism with English as an additional language. His first language is Chinese but he speaks very little in either language. He was very quiet but happy to participate.
- Kelly is a young woman with ASD. She was somewhat anxious about doing activities on her own, but as the project continued she became more confident.
- Geoff is a young man with autism and a mild form of cerebral palsy. He is nonverbal and usually requires support for activities.
- Sarah is a very sociable young woman with Down Syndrome.
- Lee is a young woman with Williams Syndrome (WS). WS is a rare genetic disorder characterized by mild to moderate developmental delay or learning difficulties (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2008). Lee is also prone to mood swings.
- Trish is a very enthusiastic and eloquent young woman with Asperser’s Syndrome. She is very articulate and writes well, so it was very valuable having her insights and observations about the project.
- Willie has ASD and mild cerebral palsy. At times he exhibited challenging behaviour towards the staff and other teens. At those times the staff would give him a time out and then he would rejoin the activities.
Roger is a young man with Down Syndrome. He likes to work independently and is not keen on social interaction; however he has a very playful side.

**The Staff**

Along with the supervisor and program manager, three staff members work with the teens on a regular basis. As well, there are a number of people who volunteer for the program. One of the volunteers, Edward has a developmental disability as well as being visually impaired. He participated with the teens in the art activities and was also given his own sketchbook.

When I first thought of doing a research project, I spoke with the supervisor of this program to see if Teen Club would be open to me coming to their centre over a period of time to carry out research with the teens. I met with the supervisor and program manager a number of times to talk about the project. As well, I consulted with the staff and discussed the project and the teens’ participation in the research throughout the course of the project. As mentioned earlier, the staff recorded their thoughts and observations about the teens and the activities in the staff journal at the end of each session. As well, I interviewed them via a written questionnaire at the end of the project. I appreciate how available the staff made themselves to me and I often chatted with staff before and after the program and as the staff knew the teens much better than I did, their input was invaluable.

The staff was also invited to participate in the art activities alongside the teens. I encouraged the staff to be part of the artistic process for a number of reasons. One reason was that I felt that the more the teens saw the staff being engaged in the process, the more likely they would be to engage themselves. Another reason is that I
wanted to discourage the staff from stepping in and “helping” the teens with the activities. This did happen on occasion, and at those times, I would gently remind the staff that in terms of the study, it was important that all the work be done exclusively by the teens. On the few occasions when the staff did “help” the teens with their art, I would encourage them to make art themselves because in my experience, educators often step in to help students because they themselves want to be part of the art making. The final reason I encouraged participation is that I believe it is advantageous for whoever is involved in facilitating the imaginative process of art making, to experience the process themselves in order to be more intuitively and intellectually connected to the work.

In our preliminary meetings the staff and I also discussed how best to present the project to the parents. I very much wanted to include parents in the project so I sent a letter to each of the parents describing the project and letting them know that their input and insights would be appreciated and valued. The staff acted as a wonderful liaison to the parents and I had many conversations with the parents during the course of the project. As well, we exhibited some of the artwork and photos that the teens took at their Christmas celebration and I was able to meet and talk with the parents then. At the end of the project I also interviewed parents. Overall, the parents were very positive and enthusiastic about the teens’ participation in the project.

**Preparation**

Preparing for this study involved reading a number of articles and books on and about field-based research. I also met with professors who have successfully conducted this kind of research in educational settings. The research I undertook is qualitative rather than quantitative. For people who are already sympathetic to the arts, qualitative
research is seen in a positive light, but for those who are more comfortable with the scientific model of discovery; this kind of research can seem suspect. In my own life, my sister, who is a math and science teacher, stopped talking to me because she was so upset with the approach I was taking. One of the last things she said to me was “This is why no one takes the arts seriously!” There may well be some truth in what she says, but I believe the answer is not to defend the arts using a scientific model, but to allow the arts to speak for themselves and commit to finding the best ways to do this. As discussed in Chapter 2, I believe “art speaking for art” is a very positive thing because it encourages us to develop ways of knowing that extend beyond scientific ways of knowing. And even though there is no scientific way to “prove” the value of imaginative art making, qualitative research that employs the arts can have great value.

During the project, the only writing I did pertaining to the research was in my journal and I wrote in that continually and profusely. I made the decision to wait for the project to be completely finished before I wrote about it in a more formal manner, because I did not want to start moving the research in certain directions in order to support my theoretical ideas. However, what proved interesting is how the research affected my understanding of theory; certain theory came alive for me in ways it never had before, especially the work of Foucault and Freire.

As this is qualitative research that utilizes the arts, I very much wanted the project to be in line with the indeterminate nature of art itself; meaning that just as the artist cannot decide ahead of time what will be expressed through her art, I did not want to enter the project with preconceived outcomes and answers. Therefore, even though I had partially formed ideas concerning how I wanted to proceed with the research, I had much clearer ideas of what I didn’t want to do. Primarily, I wanted to take a step back
from being the expert or leader and go further with a more process based approach to
encouraging inclusion. This proved to be fairly challenging because it meant that I had to
introduce ideas and activities in such a way that they could be open ended enough for
the participants to take them in their own creative directions. Basically, I wanted to follow
the teen’s lead as much as possible. However, this was a complicated position to
negotiate, because everyone (staff, volunteers, parents and students) expected and
wanted me to take a “teacher” role in the project. This was especially true, as a great
deal of the enthusiasm about me conducting the study was that I was seen as an arts
specialist, who has a lot to offer their program. I attempted to address some of these
expectations by meeting with the supervisors and staff ahead of time to share my
philosophy and approach. I also wanted to open up dialogue with them so that I could
include their perspectives and ideas.

Consequently, it was not uncommon for me to meet with the supervisor and staff
to talk about the students and the activities outside of the time we spent with the teens.
The main ideas that emerged from these meetings were that everyone saw the project in
very positive terms and eventually agreed that it would be more process - than product -
oriented. We also agreed that it was important for the students to discover their own
process and way of learning rather than be shown or told directly how to do something.
This point was vital because the participants were used to taking a passive role in their
learning and were subsequently obedient learners who expected to follow directions
rather than create them. Because one of the primary purposes of the study was to
discover what kind of curriculum excited and motivated the students, it was important
that I follow their lead. Therefore, it was crucial to allow enough time and space in the
activities so that we could allow the teens to explore materials and ideas and let them discover ideas and connections.

In our preliminary meetings, the staff conveyed to me that there were two teens, Geoff and Michael, whom they thought would not be able to participate in the art activities as the two young men have autism and are essentially nonverbal. Both students appear to be “off in their own world” a great deal of the time, interacting minimally with the other students and staff As well, both young men have difficulty following directions and performing tasks unassisted by staff. Along with autism, Geoff also has physical impairments which make it difficult for him to do small motor activities and Michael spends a great deal of his time “stimming”. While Michael won’t resist activities, he rarely engages with them fully. For these reasons, the staff thought these two students would not have the ability to follow what we were doing and therefore would not be able to participate. The staff also expressed that they were afraid that Geoff and Michael would “get in the way” and possibly “hurt” the project. It became apparent from our conversations that the staff thought only the students who were already “good” in art would benefit from the project and it took a little bit of discussion to convince the staff that it was actually the students who were not recognizably talented in art in whom I was the most interested. I shared with the staff that as one of the primary aims of my research was to discover to what extent students like Geoff and Michael could participate in the imaginative process of art making, it would be valuable for me to discover if and how these two teens might be able to learn the “language of art”. I am very glad that eventually the staff agreed to allow them to participate, because even though all of the teens appeared to enjoy and benefit from involvement in the project, it was Michael and Geoff’s development which stood out the most.
In the following sections, I will provide an overview of the activities we engaged in, but because of the large nature of the project, it is of course, impossible to describe every detail. Therefore, I have selected specific aspects of the project to describe more in depth. Throughout the course of the project, there were a number of surprises. For the sake of brevity, I thought rather than attempt to report all of the processes that lead to these surprises I would offer short snapshots of what I believe are the most significant elements of the project.

In order to give a sense of the creative process that the teens engaged in, I have decided to present the project as a kind of collage. There are linear threads woven throughout, but I have allowed myself the freedom to present the project in much the same way I experienced it. Therefore, I will weave description of the activities with transcribed discussion, excerpts from conversations, interviews and notes written in student and staff sketchbooks along with my own field and journal notes. I hope that the reader will not only gain an understanding of some of the outcomes of the study but also gain a sense of the spirit of the project. In keeping with the theme of “multiple voices” and for the sake of clarity, I have used a range of font styles to indicate whether the excerpts are spoken by students, staff, parents or myself.

**Beginning**

I introduced the project to the teens by telling them it was called *The Story Project* because we all have a need to tell our story but we need a language in order to tell it—talking and writing are one way to tell our story and art making is another. I expressed to the teens that I hoped that they would be co-creators of the project and that my role was to introduce them to the language of art, because just as in music or
written language, you do not expect to create something until you have a working vocabulary and the ability to speak and ‘think in it’. Excerpt from my journal:

*I gave each of the teens their own sketchbook (which they were very excited to receive) and invited them to draw anything they wished in it, both during our art sessions together and also when I was not there. I then invited the teens to draw or write anything they wished in their new sketchbooks. I deliberately did not give them any direction beyond “draw what you like” because I wanted to gain a sense of what their drawing was like before they had engaged in any of the activities that we would be doing throughout the project. I also put out a variety of drawing materials because I wanted them to be able to choose what they wanted to draw with.*

*We started by talking about the project—I recorded each student as they talked a little bit about themselves and talked a bit about art.*

*Michael enjoyed drawing in his sketchbook—his drawing took the form of scribbles with no discernable shapes. (July 10, 2006)*

Even though I did not want to take on a “teaching” role, I did provide an overarching theme for our activities in order to give a sense of directions and cohesion. I chose the theme of composition, partly to provide a framework for the activities, but also because I wanted to see to what extent the teens could learn and develop some of the basic building blocks of art making. To this end, we began our activities with an exploration of the basic elements of mark making.

The activities I am about to describe took place over a number of months with the individual sessions being approximately a 1.5 to 2 hours in length. We repeated many of the activities and I discovered that this was an important aspect of the project. Keeping in mind that the purpose of the study was to find additional forms of expression, discussion was kept to a minimum and the majority of the investigation was carried out through the language of imagination, movement and art making. In order to illustrate
what I mean by this I will describe some of the ways that we explored “line, shape and direction” and “composition”.

**Moving into the Imagination**

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects to how we approached the principles and elements of art making, is that besides brief discussion, and looking at images, we first explored ideas through the body and the imagination. The teens were not familiar with this way of working, so I was very impressed with their willingness and openness to working in new ways. The staff told me that they thought the physical exploration of ideas was very worthwhile because they said the teens tended to be “couch potatoes”.

I experimented with a number of approaches to the physical warm ups and exploration. From my journal:

*It was very hot today so I thought we would start in a different way from what we have been doing—so we brought out the mats for the teens to lie on and we started with a short warm-up going through the different parts of the body—identifying them and ‘waking’ them up, along with stretching and so on. We also did the no/yes/ maybe exercise—which the teens seemed to particularly like.*

*The teens then stretched out on the mats and we did a relaxation warm-up. We began with imagining a colour and breathing it in from the bottom of our toes to the top of our head. And then clenching and unclenching a different muscle group (which is why it was good to do the isolation warm-up exercise prior to this).*

*Then we got up and for a warm-up we tossed an imaginary ball—which looking back on it I realize was a good idea because it ties in nicely with asking the students to create paintings in the air that come from their imagination. I think the relaxation exercises are worth repeating maybe doing as the introduction to a lot of the activities that we will be doing.*

(July 14, 2006)
Photos 1 and 2 show Tim and Kelly participating in the warm-ups and movement exploration:

**Photo 1. Warming Up**

*Note.* Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006, used with permission.

**Photo 2. Tim and Kelly Reaching for the Sky**

*Note.* Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.
The following is a description of how we explored “line, shape and direction”. We began our exploration of “shape” with a physical warm-up that focused on breathing and paying close attention to various body parts. After the warm-up was complete, the teens were asked to imagine that the air in the room is a huge canvas and that they have an endless supply of imaginary paint. Accompanied by music, the teens began to paint an assortment of shapes in the air, imagining they have a paintbrush in their hands. After a few minutes, I asked them to pause and look around the room and tell me what they see.

At this point, the teens were invited to throw their imaginary paintbrushes out the window and I suggest they toss their hands out the window too, because we are going to use our bodies as paintbrushes. We proceeded to paint the room using a variety of shapes and body parts. Taking cues from students, we painted “triangles with our toes”, “squares with our shoulders” or “anamorphic shapes with our hips”. Using the same method, we explored a range of lines such as “straight”, “jagged” or “curvy” lines. We also explored direction and levels by painting lines backwards, forwards, low to the ground, and so on. From time-to-time we pause to look at what we are creating in the room and the students are encouraged to describe what they see. At the end of the session that day Tim said, “In the air I saw the colours. It was fun” (July 18, 2006). From my journal:

*After the work on the mat, we did a warm-up with shapes and pots of paints. They had a great time doing the warm-up—they were very enthusiastic about using different body parts to paint the room. Kelly kept following me around so we had to remind her about ‘personal space’ and sometimes I would suggest that she go in a different direction from me. (July 18, 2006)*
After painting the lines and shapes in the air, the teens re-created them on paper (Photos 3, 4 and 5) accompanied by the same music that we used while doing the physical exploration.

**Photo 3. Kelly Painting in Her Sketchbook after Painting in the Air**

![Photo 3. Kelly Painting in Her Sketchbook after Painting in the Air](image)

*Note.* Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

**Photo 4. Lee’s Drawing after the “Line, Shape, and Direction” Activity**

![Photo 4. Lee’s Drawing after the “Line, Shape, and Direction” Activity](image)

*Note.* Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.
The staff noted that their level of engagement was very strong during the physical explorations and art activities which followed. The supervisor said that she thought the relaxation exercises were particularly beneficial because she noticed that after the exercises the teens were able to focus for longer than usual periods of time.

From staff notes:

They [the teens] loved the relaxation exercises. Kelly and Tim were both really into “drawing in the air” with Jan. Tim seemed to be drawing very specific things and shapes. They drew with their hands and other body parts, as well as their legs, elbows, heads and feet. (Sue, July 18, 2006)
I was especially pleased to see how engaged Michael was in the activities, and the staff noted, “Michael was really focused and content during the art project.” However, there were a few surprises. From my journal:

*I looked in Michael’s sketchbook and was surprised to see that on top of his ‘scribbles’ there was a perfect circle, triangle and square. I asked if Michael had done them himself and Connie [staff member] said “no, I did it”. So it reminded me that I need to go over with the staff and volunteers that the artwork has to be only the students—and that it is meant to be a record or a portfolio of their experience doing this work. (July 18, 2006)*

Reflecting on this occurrence, I think the staff drawing a perfect circle, square and triangle demonstrated their uneasiness about Michael being “good enough” to participate in the project. To this end, I reminded the staff that I was much more interested in process than product. Eventually, the staff came on board and began to be as excited as I was by Michael’s small, but to my mind, significant progress.

However, it took a little time for the staff to step back from “helping” the students with their artwork. Even though I had shared with the staff how important it was that all the artwork be done by the students alone, some of the staff was still doing “hand over hand” drawing with Geoff. Eventually I convinced them how important it was for me to discover what Geoff could do unassisted.

Left alone, Geoff held a red pencil crayon and drew on the page (see Photo 6). A few days after the “hand over hand” incident Sue wrote,” Today Geoff did his first Art Session [unassisted by staff]…he doesn’t need hand–over-hand help” (July 20, 2006). I wrote in my notes at the time:

*He [Geoff] does not appear to have any language at all. Staff told me that he would not be able to do the art activities without hand over hand support but this actually was not the case. He was able to make marks on*
the page and he made different kinds of marks as well—I thought they
looked really quite beautiful. (July 20, 2006)

Photo 6. Geoff's Drawing

We repeated the visualization, relaxation, physical warm-ups and explorations for
many sessions. Photo 7 shows Trish painting in her sketchbook during the “line, shape
and direction” activity.
Photo 7.  *Trish Painting during the “Line, Shape, and Direction” Activity*

![Photo 7](image)

*Note.* Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

Photo 8 provides a closer view of the images in Trish’s sketchbook during the “painting the room” activity.

Photo 8.  *Image in Trish’s Sketchbook*

![Photo 8](image)

*Note.* Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.
Exploring Composition

Eventually we expanded our exploration to include composition. Composition was introduced by showing the teens images of paintings and photographs created by well-known artists such as Emily Carr and Georgia O’Keefe. Using the pictures as examples, I pointed out the basic elements of composition such as background, mid-ground, foreground and focal point. After viewing the pictures, we moved to another part of the room for our physical warm-up. Still working with the idea that the air in the room was one enormous canvas, together we moved to where the background, mid-ground and foreground of a painting would be. We then began a warm up exploring curves and circles. The teens were asked to paint a scene with curvy lines (it could be one of the pictures we had just viewed) being aware of the background, mid-ground and foreground. I demonstrated painting one of the scenes in the air—talking a little bit as I went about the mountains, etc. We then went to the tables and painted some of the scenes we had just painted in the room. From my journal:

*Michael did curves over and over again—which is interesting because previous to this he was drawing scribbles only. He is not quite ready for circles, but it will be interesting to see how that develops as time goes on.*

(July 13, 2006)

Staff note:

Michael’s development continued to grow. It was noted by Lewis, “Michael did ½ circles last session, but made full circles today”.

(July 21, 2006)

Also from my journal:

*Michael doesn’t appear to have any verbal language but seems to understand some of the concepts. The most significant thing that has*
happened so far is that his curves have turned into circles. Next we will work on making straight lines. (July 13, 2006)

A few sessions later, still working with composing in the air, I asked the teens to lie down on mats (teens with mobility challenges were welcome to make themselves comfortable in chairs). I then lead them through a breathing and visualization exercise. As stated in my journal:

I spent a long time with the relaxation exercise—we did the tensing up of muscles and releasing them and the visualizing colours coming in through our toes and filling up our whole bodies like ‘water coming in through a hose’. (July 18, 2006)

Still lying on their mats, I asked the teens to imagine a place they love to be. I told them that the place could be inside or outside; it might be beside a river, on the beach or in a particular room. Once they had a clear image of the setting, the students were asked to situate themselves inside the picture and to visualize what they are doing, feeling and so on—paying special attention to what was in the background, mid ground, foreground etc. I also suggested that they have a good look around and notice textures, smells, temperature, etc. They were then encouraged to place themselves somewhere in the picture and to notice how they were feeling and what their body was doing. I then asked them to take a “mental snapshot” of themselves in their favourite place because they would be asked to refer to the picture later in the session. Trish wrote about this activity in her sketchbook:

I made a picture of myself sitting down on a beach at the park thinking while listening to the sounds nature makes, such as chirping and birds squeaking. I think that by doing this, we got an opportunity to use our minds to make images instead of brainstorming the image that we want to make in our imagination. (July 26, 2006)
We slowly come to standing, and I asked the teens to once again imagine that the air in the room is an empty canvas. Together, we moved to where the background, mid-ground and foreground would be. I invited them to envision the picture they have just created in their minds and to begin painting the background of their picture. They were encouraged to choose a variety of colours, lines and shapes. As part of this activity, I asked them to periodically step away from what they are painting in order to look at it to decide if they want to make any changes. It is interesting to note that the teens were strongly absorbed in this part of the activity and repeatedly moved in and out of their imaginary paintings to make detailed changes. From the notes in my journal:

The teens kept stepping out of the imaginary painting, taking a look and then stepping back in to add or change anything that they thought they should. Kelly especially put a lot into it. Geoff got some assistance from the workers and it is hard to know how much he was following what we were doing—it is a question for sure—did he paint what he did in the room or were they two separate experiences?

When I asked them to place themselves in the picture, Trish noticed something interesting and that was that except for her, everyone else placed themselves firmly in the background and she placed herself in the lower right hand side in the foreground. When they went back in to show me where they were in the picture I had them hold the pose like a statue and I took an imaginary picture of them. (July 26, 2006)

Photos 9, 10 and 11 show Time and Kelly creating their “imaginary paintings”.
Photo 9.  **Tim “Pulling Down His Imaginary Pot of Paint”**

Note.  Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 10.  **Tim “Painting in the Air”**

Note.  Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.
At this point in the activity, the teens were asked to recall what they saw themselves doing in their imaginary place and to situate themselves in their painting. I reminded them that this is the ‘focal point’: a spot that acts as a door or window inviting the viewer to enter their picture. I explained that we want the focal point to stand out, so we might need to add darker colours to outline it, or find other ways to make it stand out. The students re-entered the painting and added these details. Towards the end of the activity, the teens were asked to step out of the painting and to see if there are any final touches that they wished to make. When everyone was happy with their paintings, I asked them to step inside their paintings and hold their pose. I then took a picture of the tableaux with my imaginary camera. From my notes:

*Kelly went back in to change how she looked in the painting—this was worth noting because Kelly does not usually do things on her own initiative, she likes to follow but she did this completely on her own.* (July 26, 2006)
Once they were satisfied that their paintings were complete, we sat down at a table with paper, paints and brushes and I invited them to choose the colours that were in their painting and create a palette.

I asked them if the pictures they produced on paper were like what they saw in their imagination and then created in the air and everyone said they were. I think holding the pose like a statue also helped them to remember the picture when it came time to create it on paper. (July 26, 2006)

The sessions were videotaped, so I was able to compare what the teens created in the air with what they produced on the page. We did this activity a number of times and I watched closely for similarities and differences between the imaginary, embodied paintings and the work done on paper. It seemed clear that there were strong links between the two activities and when I asked the students if they were painting what they had created in the air, they indicated that they had. Photo 12 shows Kelly creating her piece after composing her painting in the air.
It is worth noting that the teens did their artwork much quicker on the page than they did in the imaginary painting. This held true for all of the participants and was apparent in subsequent sessions. In order to see if it was simply the order of activities that caused the difference in concentration, I arranged the activities differently a few times, but I found that it didn’t make a noticeable difference. I did find however, that drawing and painting to the same music that we used for the imaginary exploration seemed to extend the teens’ ability to concentrate while painting on the page. Staff members commented that the level of concentration the students demonstrated during
the “imaginary painting” was very strong and that it was unusual for some of them to focus on an activity for such an extended period of time.

The teens appeared to enjoy this way of working and they were deeply immersed in the activities, especially the movement explorations. It is also worth noting that even though the students took the work seriously and their concentration was very high, there was a playful and joyous atmosphere throughout our sessions. From Trish’s sketchbook:

Today, we continued to use our minds to create an image using background, mid ground and foreground. Also the relaxing exercise really helps me clam down (even though today is a special day for me—my birthday!) By taking the time to relax, it’s always good for us to do that! Overall I loved doing that and drawing in the air a lot! Doing lines and curves using chalk pastels was fun too because I got to practice using them more and got a chance to play with them! I can’t wait till Jan comes again on Monday! (July 28, 2006)

Even though Trish had participated in art classes at school, exploring art ideas through the body was a new approach for her. Trish wrote:

Today we got the opportunity to paint an image using our imagination. I really thought that it was a ton of fun, and I would love to do it again. I made a picture of myself sitting down at the beach at the park thinking while listening to the sounds nature makes, such as chirping birds squeaking. I think that by doing this we got an opportunity to use our minds to make images instead of brainstorming the images that we want to make in our imagination.

Also I liked the warm-up because it gave me and the others a chance to relax our individual bodies and minds and it made me feel comfortable about myself. Art is a creative mind processor with no right or wrong ways. (July 26, 2006)

From my notes:

Some of my observations on Trish—when we did the movement work she was incredibly free and at ease in her body. Even though she is what would be considered to be obese, this did not make her at all self
conscious in the movement exploration. She seemed to revel in what her body could do—she did not seem to be self-conscious and judging or comparing herself to others. By contrast she did not particularly want to be video taped or photographed so she does seem to be aware of her body image but in the movement activities that did not seem to be on her mind. (July 15, 2006)

The staff also liked introducing the ideas through visualization and movement work.

Great participation from all the teens. They loved the relaxation exercise. Ming drew a beautiful picture of a flower today. This is the first time I have seen him draw a picture! Way to go! (Lewis, July 26, 2006)

From my notes:

Ming did a picture of flowers and he said that this was the place that he created. And on another day: Ming did a picture with stars and a moon and a sun—the objects were very well executed but they did not connect to each other so it will be interesting to see if Ming’s work moves in that direction or not. (July 26, 2006)

We spent many sessions working this way—painting in the air and then working on the page. Meanwhile, Michael’s drawings continued to develop. After a number of sessions of painting in the air and then painting on the page, Michael had a kind of “breakthrough”. Jennifer wrote in the staff notes: “Michael had a 'break out' today—he drew a background before drawing shapes on the foreground” (August 3, 2006). This was significant because at the beginning of the sessions Michael scribbled freely in his sketchbook paying no attention to background, foreground and so on. However, after painting compositions in the air, we noticed Michael doing something different in his artwork; he was creating a background of one colour and then placing marks of many different colours on top of the solid colour. Another striking development we observed, was that Michael started to get up during the painting and drawing sessions, and move
to other areas of the table in order to select particular colours and then going back to work on his artwork—again something that he had never done before. In my view, these developments indicate that he was thinking about the art he was creating and making specific choices regarding it (see Photo 13).

**Photo 13.  Michael Drawing in His Sketchbook after "Painting in the Air"**

*Note.* Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.

**In the Garden**

We made the transition from drawing and painting to photography by asking the questions: “What do you like looking at and why?” And “Why do some things catch our attention?” I also asked them to think about what they think beauty is and why. These questions introduced the next stage of the project, which was for the teens to take photographs of their environment and community. The initial idea was that each student
would have his or her own camera to take pictures with. However, due to funding restrictions, we were not able to purchase cameras for each of the teens, therefore we had to come up with another way to incorporate photography in to the project. We had a few digital cameras available to us, so we solved the problem of how 12 students could use two cameras by slowing down the picture taking process and having the teens work with viewfinders. This process proved to be very valuable, because it meant that the students spent a considerable amount of time looking through the viewfinders in order to make informed choices about what they were going to photograph. An additional advantage of using the viewfinders was that it removed the element of randomness that can come with simply ‘pointing and shooting’ the camera. From my journal:

*Today we went outside with the viewfinders—taking pictures from the back deck of teen club first and then moving on to the community gardens. The students liked it a lot—Lee took her time to find a picture that she liked and she tended to focus in on things. Kelly especially got into it and when she found a picture with her viewfinder she would yell “I need the camera I found it!” (August 4, 2006)*

Photos 14 to 17 are of the teens in the garden and show some of the images they photographed.
Photo 14.  

Tim Using the Viewfinder

Note.  Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

Photo 15.  

Tim's Sunflower

Note.  Photo by Tim Best, 2006; used with permission.
Photo 16.  Kelly Framing Her Composition

Note.  Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 17.  Kelly’s Photo

Note.  Photo by Kelly Turner, 2006; used with permission.
Even though our focus was now photography, we continued to draw and paint. The teens took their sketchbooks with them whenever we worked outside and they had the choice between using the viewfinders, photographing, creating compositions and drawing and or writing in their sketchbooks. Along with the sketchbooks, I brought pencils, pencil crayons, watercolour pencils and brushes. Most of the teens moved back and forth between the photography and drawing. It proved to be an effective balance, because the searching for compositions to photograph was fairly active, and the sitting down and sketching gave them a chance to rest and reflect on what they were doing (see Photo 18). As I noted:

*The teens were all very excited about going to the community gardens. As well, we took our sketchbooks and the water colour pencils and some water—there was a picnic table to work on there and they were welcome to sketch anything in the garden that they liked. Trish chose to write about what we did rather than draw but everyone else drew.* (August 11, 2006)

**Photo 18. In the Garden**
The teens seemed to take pleasure in these activities. Concentration was high, and for some of the teens, being in the garden and taking photographs seemed to “hook” them into the activities. Photos 19 to 23 show the teens in the garden and some of the photos they took. From my notes: “Willie really concentrated on what he was doing and he was much more engaged with his artwork than he has been in the past” (August 11, 2006). It is interesting to note that from this point on in the study, Willie was much more enthusiastic about all of the art-making activities. Our time in the garden seemed to bring out the playful side of the teens—there was much joking and laughter. From my notes: “Roger was a little mischievous—hiding a bit but he enjoyed it as well” (August 9, 2006).

**Photo 19. Taking Photos in the Garden**

*Note.* Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006
Photo 20. Sarah and Trish Framing Their Shots

Note. Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006

Photo 21. Sarah’s Photo: White Flower

Note. Photo by Sarah Wendell, 2006; used with permission.
Photo 22.  
Roger Setting Up His Shot

Note.  Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006

Photo 23.  
Roger’s Photo, Red and Purple Flowers

Note.  Photo by Roger MacDonald, 2006; used with permission.
Directly following our time in the garden, we would return to Teen Club where the teens proceeded to paint and/or draw images and experiences that stood out for them from our time in the garden. I am glad I did this simple follow-up activity because the teens seemed to be inspired to create artwork after spending time with the viewfinders and taking photos. From my notes: “When we got back to Teen Club everyone was noticeably excited to continue working in their sketchbooks” (August 9, 2006). Consequently, some of their most developed drawing emerged from working this way.

The following excerpts illustrate this:

From staff notes:

Great participation from all the teens. Tim did a great picture of Lewis...the eyes and mouth looked like vegetables from the garden. Afterwards we went back to TC [Teen Club]—Sarah did a lovely picture with vivid colours and shapes. Trish wrote a bit and did some sketching at the bottom. Tim did some pictures of people who were all happy. (Cam, August 3, 2006)

On another day, Sue wrote:

Ming is drawing some wonderful and bright pictures of flowers. Trish was super into it and was taking tons of pictures and using the viewfinder a lot.

Sarah did a lovely picture with vivid colours and shapes. Trish wrote a bit and did some sketching at the bottom. Tim did some pictures of people who were all happy. (August 9, 2006)

From my notes:

Tim did a drawing—it had a girl’s head floating in it—which is interesting because he particularly enjoyed taking Justine’s [a volunteer] picture and that is probably how he remembers it—it really stood out for him. (August 9, 2006)

Michael participated well in the garden (he used the viewfinder and took photos).
Photos 24 and 25 show Michael using the viewfinder, and Photos 26, 27 and 28 are images taken by him. It seemed that the time spent using viewfinders and taking photographs motivated Michael to create artwork once we returned to Teen Club. Cam wrote, “After coming back from taking pictures in the garden, Michael did some great drawing, and used the paint brush with the water colour pencils” (August 10, 2006).

**Photo 24. **Michael Using the Viewfinder in the Garden

*Note.* Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.
Photo 25.  *Michael’s Photo: Orange Flowers*  

![Photo of orange flowers](image)

*Note.* Photo by Justine Mars, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 26.  *Michael Using the Viewfinder*  

![Photo of Michael using viewfinder](image)

*Note.* Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.
Photo 27. Michael’s Photo

Note. Photo by Michael Johnson, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 28. Michael’s Close-up of a Sunflower

Note. Photo by Michael Johnson, 2006; used with permission.
Photos 29 and 30 are of Michael painting after taking photos in the garden. It is interesting to note that he is painting with two paintbrushes.

**Photo 29.  Michael Working on His Painting**

![Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.](image)

*Note.* Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.
One session in particular stood out. After working in the garden one afternoon, we returned to Teen Club and Michael spent a long time working in his sketchbook. At first he did what he usually does, which is to create lines rhythmically across the page and it is hard to tell if he was simply enjoying the rhythm of the sketching or if he was focussed on creating an image (or it could be both). However, on this particular day, he did something that would indicate that he was thinking about what he was doing. He started to select different colours to work with—even getting up out of his seat to exchange pencils until finally at one point he took a number of pencils back to the seat with him and then selected different pencils from the group he had.
After the students had been drawing for a while, I demonstrated how to use the watercolour pencils and the chalk pastels. I showed the group that one of the options of working this way is to use water and a brush. After working just with the pencils for a while and sometimes dipping them in water, Michael took a brush and some water and started experimenting with using washes. The other significant thing that I observed was that he again built up a background and then added more lines on top of it and today he worked on one specific area so that it looked like a flower on a branch (it was a mass of orange).

Another day I wrote:

*When we came back, Michael did something especially interesting, and that is that he did a drawing with circles and then after he finished that he started doing straight lines over it (like branches and he had never done straight lines before like that) he eventually covered the whole thing up but the staff said that they have never seen him do anything like that before and it would seem that he is getting the idea of background and depth. So that was very exciting. (August 17, 2006)*

To my mind, Michael’s actions were noteworthy because they indicated that he was “taking in” what was going on and was thinking about the choices that he was making. This would also suggest that his drawing is not random; it is thought through, and involves the process of selection and making aesthetic choices. It is also worth noting that he stayed with the art activity much longer than anyone else, and even when the others got up to play video games and shuffle board he was not distracted by these activities and continued to work on his artwork in a very focussed manner. Eventually, after approximately an hour, the staff told Michael he had to stop because it was time to get ready to go home. At this point, Michael sat on the couch, picked up an object and engaged in “stimming” until his mom came to pick him up.
The activities in the garden also seemed to inspire the teens to write more profusely. Jennifer commented:

Wow—Kelly is writing a lot more than she usually does. She also did some writing about how she took a picture of a leaf. Kelly really enjoyed taking pictures in the community garden. (July 28, 2006)

On another day, Cam notes:

Kelly wrote a story about going to the garden instead of drawing—she was very concentrated and focused. She asked how to spell words and so on and she described the experience of going to the garden. (July 31, 2006)

From my notes:

*Kelly has started a journal that is separate to her journal which she is writing in a lot. Jennifer [the supervisor] said that she is impressed with how much Kelly is writing and this is not something that she has seen her do very much of before. So that is interesting—I am not sure why doing the artwork seems to stimulate the urge to write but now I have noticed it with both Trish and Kelly.* (July 31, 2006)

**Random Acts of Art**

Most days we began our sessions by examining the photos we had taken the previous day and identifying why some photos were more effective than others. The teens would pick out photos that stood out for them and then we would talk about why this was so. We discussed technical details such as contrast, the main subject being slightly off-centre and why some photos were out of focus. The photographs demonstrated the teens’ developing awareness of composition (see Photos 31 to 39).
Photo 31.  **Sarah’s Photo: Two Daises**

Note.  Photo by Sarah Wendell, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 32.  **Ming’s Photo: Looking up from the Garden**

Note.  Photo by Ming Lee, 2006; used with permission.
Photo 33.  *Trish’s Photo: Yellow Flower*

Note.  Photo by Trish Roberts, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 34.  *Geoff’s Photo: One Onion*

Note.  Photo by Geoff Hollander, 2006; used with permission.
Photo 35. Geoff's Photo: Many Onions

Note. Photo by Geoff Hollander, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 36. Rae's Photo: Berries

Note. Photo by Rae Kennedy, 2006; used with permission.
**Photo 37. Kelly’s Leaf Photo**

Note. Photo by Kelly Turner, 2006; used with permission.

**Photo 38. Kelly’s Photo: Underneath the Leaf**

Note. Photo by Kelly Turner, 2006; used with permission.
From my notes:

When we got to the garden Robert especially took some interesting photos—he framed some where he got the background of the city with flowers in the foreground—he took a very long time with it. Willie also got into it and he liked to look for smaller more surprising things to take pictures of. (August 8, 2006)

Photos 40 to 44 illustrate this passage.
Photo 40. Willie’s Photo: Tomatoes and Flowers

Note. Photo by Willie Prevors, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 41. Willie’s Photo: Tomatoes on the Vine

Note. Photo by Willie Prevors, 2006; used with permission.
Photo 42.  Robert Framing His Shot

Note.  Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

Photo 43.  Robert’s Photo: View from the Garden

Note.  Photo by Robert Riley, 2006; used with permission.
From my notes:

*Independent from me, the teens had begun to take photos of each other, so I decided to follow their lead.*

*We went to the community garden again but this time we broke into pairs and the teens photographed each other, with the thinking that they were ‘composing’ the photo so they were finding a good composition and pose and then when they were happy with it—still using the viewfinder they could take the picture. The girls all had some fantastic composition ideas and had fun with various poses. (August 8, 2006)*

Trish wrote:

*Today we went into the community garden and took some more photographs but this time, using people aka our TC friends. I had a lot of fun taking photos with Rae and Sarah in different areas of the garden. (August 8, 2006)*

Photos 45 to 48 illustrate the above passages.
Photo 45.  David Framing Shot of Trish

Note.  Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

Photo 46.  Trish Setting Up Her Shot

Note.  Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.
Photo 47.  Trish’s Photo of Rae

Note.  Photo by Trish Roberts, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 48.  Rae’s Photo of Trish

Note.  Photo by Rae Kennedy, 2006; used with permission.
We spent many weeks taking photos in the nearby community gardens, parks and related areas. Eventually the teens made the shift from searching for and framing compositions, to creating compositions of their own. Notes from my journal:

*Trish and Rae did some great portrait photos of each other and because I saw that they were starting to arrange the petals and rocks etc in a certain way I talked to them about what we might do next—continuing with making compositions from nature—and Trish got very excited about that and started to compose compositions and did an amazing one in the water bird bath with petals [see Photo 49]. She is so incredible creative. (August 9, 2006)*

**Photo 49. Trish’s Composition in the Birdbath**

*Note. Photo by Trish Roberts, 2006; used with permission.*

As the above excerpt illustrates, some of the students, Trish and Rae in particular, had begun to move beyond finding and photographing compositions they liked, to creating their own compositions from materials found in nature.
Again, I decided to follow the teen's lead and move toward creating what I call “random acts of art”. To this end, I showed them the video of Andy Goldsworthy’s work as well as photographs of his works. The teens were very inspired by his work.

Continuing with 'random acts of art' we visited nearby parks and beaches and collected objects from nature such as rocks, branches etc. and then used these materials to create compositions. Sometimes the teens created these on their own, but generally, they chose to collaborate in pairs or small groups (see Photo 50).

**Photo 50. Tim and Sarah Working on their Composition**

![Photo 50](image)

Note. Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

After the compositions were complete, the teens photographed them (see Photos 51 to 54). Again, as noted in the earlier sessions, the staff noticed that the teens exhibited stronger than usual concentration and seemed to be very motivated when they were selecting materials, composing and photographing their compositions.
**Photo 51.**  Composition: Sticks, Leaves and Rocks

![Photo 51](image)

*Note.* Photo by Sarah Wendell, 2006; used with permission.

**Photo 52.**  Composition: Rocks, Twigs and Purple Flowers

![Photo 52](image)

*Note.* Photo by Robert Riley, 2006; used with permission.
Photo 53. *Composition: Dandelions, Rocks, Leaves and Feather*

![Photo 53: Dandelions, Rocks, Leaves and Feather](image)

*Note.* Photo by Tim Best, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 54. *Composition: Rocks and Leaves on Wood*

![Photo 54: Rocks and Leaves on Wood](image)

*Note.* Photo by Rae Kennedy, 2006; used with permission.
It took a little while for Geoff to engage with the activity, but he eventually he arranged something and he even took a photo of it (see Photo 55).

**Photo 55. Geoff’s Composition**

![Photo of a composition made with natural materials](image)

*Note.* Photo by Geoff Hollander, 2006; used with permission.

Sue noted:

Today we went outside and did some of our own nature art. Willie did a circle with dandelions, wood, leaves, rocks, etc. as did Geoff!

They even took pictures of their work. They both are going to draw what they make. Geoff was really into it! (August 15, 2006)

On another day, Sue wrote:

We started in the park, the teens gradually added to the composition which ended up looking like a face. We then went to the community garden where Sarah, Trish and Tim worked and created a composition out of flowers, rocks, grass, etc. Trish did a beautiful composition in the bird bath and Sarah and Tim did theirs by on the bench and by the entrance gate. (August 17, 2006)
Trish wrote:

I got the chance to make up my own composition in the garden using the small fountain in the garden, and added sticks, stones, flowers and petals of different flowers in the water—it looked so Awesome and I love [HEART] it so much that I wanted to add more to it and not leave it! Overall, it was a lot of fun and I want to do more of this again sometime, even on my own.

I seriously enjoyed doing this again because it gave me a chance to keep creating compositions in my mind with using other items and them creating them in different areas of the garden. (August 17, 2006)

Photo 56 shows Trish reflecting on the composition she created in the fountain.

**Photo 56.  Trish Looking at Her Composition**

*Note.  Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.*

As with the previous activities, the teens brought their sketchbooks along to draw/write in and we ended every session with creating artwork back at the centre.
Collecting, Composing and Building

Gradually the teens began to add a sculptural element to their pieces. Independent of outside direction from the staff or myself, they made the transition from creating two-dimensional compositions to three-dimensional sculptures. Photo 57 shows a piece created by Trish and Sarah.

Photo 57. Trish and Sarah’s Sunflower

In order to follow this new direction (which I had not predicted) we headed to the beach where we could collect more materials and build larger pieces.
The teens enjoyed making the compositions/sculptures with the items they collected on the beach. I asked them to first just collect materials such as rocks, shells, sticks etc. and I also asked them to look for a site that interested them.

Michael especially got into it—he collected a lot of items—mostly rocks. Trish chose a log to create her composition and Michael joined her. Michael did add to the composition/sculpture as well although he didn’t carefully place what he was adding to it—rather he sort of threw it, but it is good that he engaged in the activity. He also kept collecting materials (mostly rocks). After working on it for a time we headed back to the picnic table in the shade where we created another group composition from everyone’s collected material.

One of the things that stood out for me in this activity was how much the teens, and Michael in particular, enjoyed collecting the materials. It was especially interesting to watch Michael pick a rock up, consider it carefully, and then either discard it or add it to his collection [see Photo 58]. (August 21, 2006)

Photo 58. Michael at the Beach

Note. Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.

The teens were clearly making aesthetic and practical choices when choosing the materials to be used in their pieces. After they collected their materials, they would build
their sculptures (usually collaboratively) and then take photographs of their creations (see Photo 59).

**Photo 59. Sculpture Created by Teens**

Along with building sculptures, the teens continued to use their viewfinders and take photos (see Photos 60 and 61).
Photo 60. **Trish Framing Her Shot**

Note. Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 61. **Trish’s Photo: Looking up at the Branches**

Note. Photo by Trish Roberts, 2006; used with permission.
As with earlier activities in the garden, our time spent making sculptures at the beach seemed to act as a kind of catalyst for the art they created when we returned to Teen Club. Jennifer wrote:

Today we went to the beach and worked with our nature compositions. What a beautiful sunny day! We came back to draw what we saw visually. Michael did really well... he did a lot of painting with pencil crayons in the background. Michael used pinecones, feathers and his fingers instead of a paint brush. (August 21, 2006)

The teens brought materials they had collected back to Teen Club and together they constructed still life “mini sculptures”. All of the teens were very engaged with painting and drawing pictures of the sculptures except for Michael. He was however, absorbed in drawing with the watercolour pencils and pencil crayons in his sketchbook. He did not look up from his sketchbook at all while the still life compositions were being constructed or when the students were sketching pictures of it. But then he did a very surprising thing—he looked up at the materials he had collected and picked up the feather and started using the feather as a paintbrush. He then started to dip pinecones, shells and rocks into the paint and make imprints on top of the lines that he had painted and drawn with the feather. Michael’s concentration was very strong during this activity.

I added more of the materials that we had collected to his pile so that he had more to choose from and I also put out some paint so that he could make colourful patterns.

Similar to the last class his focus was very strong and even as those around him played cards (loudly) or danced to the music (also very loud), he stayed concentrated on what he was doing. He continued for a long time (hour and a half at least) until his mom came to pick him up and he had to stop at that point. (August 24, 2008)

I found Michael’s experimentation with the found objects especially interesting, because he did this completely on his own and once he started working this way the
others imitated him. Michael was taking the activity in a new direction—he was leading us from painting to printing. I followed his lead and in some of the subsequent sessions we did printmaking.

**Exploring Texture**

We spent nearly a month working on the aforementioned activities and the teens seemed ready to add another layer of understanding to their art making. Because Michael had begun printing with found objects thereby adding a “textural aspect” to his work, I thought texture would be an interesting element to explore a bit more in depth. Again, as with the line and composition activities, I introduced the exploration of texture in a non-traditional manner.

Sitting comfortably on the floor and couches, I asked the teens to close their eyes and with their hands, explore the area around them taking note of how different surfaces feel to the touch. As texture is something that we realize more through touch, than seeing with our eyes, I asked, “How can we draw the texture of something?” I then put out pencils and paper and demonstrated taking a texture rubbing from the floor. The teens began taking texture rubbings from many sources (see Photos 62 and 63).
Photo 62. *Rae and Kelly Taking Texture Rubbings Outside*

*Note.* Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.

Photo 63. *Rae Taking Texture Rubbing from the Mustang*

*Note.* Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.
In my journal:

The teens quickly caught on to the idea and, within minutes, they were busy taking texture rubbings, not only inside the room, but outside as well. I did have to show some of the teens again how to use the side of the pencil instead of full on, but aside from that, they worked very independently. At times I would make suggestions such as “what about the door knob, do you think that would be a good place to take a rubbing?” On their own, they came up many good ideas: the fire alarm, the automatic door button and in particular they liked taking texture rubbings from my Mustang that was parked right beside the deck. Without being prompted, the teens also went into the other part of the building and got a lot of good rubbings there. (August 23, 2006)

From staff notes:

We did texture rubbings inside and outside. Willie thought of the idea of rubbing on Jan’s car. Geoff had a bit of trouble though because he had a hard time using the pencil tilted to the side—he did get some on his own though. (August 23, 2006)

The teens particularly enjoyed this activity, largely I think because it was relatively easy to get good images. There was also a sense of discovery and adventure because everyday objects had very interesting textures—it was as if the teens were experiencing the world through the “lens of texture”.

Willie was slow to get going but the thing that especially engaged him was when I suggested that he could take his shoe off and do a rubbing of the bottom of his shoe. Willie really liked doing that and once Willie did it, then others followed as well.

Robert was very adventurous in his collection of texture rubbings—he used the Salvation Army box, the teen club van and a lot of other sources that he thought of on his own. Later when we were sitting down, Edward spent a long time doing a rubbing on the bottom of his shoe [Photo 64]—and then he drew for awhile after. It is the most engaged I have ever seen Edward with an art activity—so that is interesting especially since he is visually impaired. (August 23, 2006)
Trish noted:

_Today we got an opportunity to use texture in our compositions and got to do texture rubbings. We did texture rubbings on many things both outside in our room, such as on poles, shoes signs/buttons, ground, etc. I had a great time doing this activity because it gave me a chance to be really creative by using textures we found and then using them to make objects, portraits etc. I couldn’t believe that we can use texture in art in many ways besides drawing and painting. I hope we do it again because I love (HEART) doing this it was Very fun to do._ (August 23, 2006)

When everyone had collected a number of rubbings, we sat down at the table to create artwork from our texture rubbings. I demonstrated cutting some pieces out and creating a picture. I asked for suggestions from them of what they could create. I put out some coloured construction paper, scissors and glue and from there everyone jumped in and started to create their compositions. Trish did hers of a tropical beach—very well done and she chose rubbings that expressed aspects of the picture well for example, for
the tree trunk, she used a rubbing that showed vertical rubbings. I also encouraged the teens to play with line and shape and vary the sizes. Geoff had a lot of trouble with the scissors so I encouraged him to rip the paper instead. After Geoff completed his piece, he drew in his sketchbook.

*With Jess’s [a volunteer] help, Geoff cut out his texture rubbings (Jess held the paper up and he cut it) and then also with Jess’s help he pasted them down to create a picture—I thought it was actually a very effective composition—the main thing is that Geoff made the choices that went into creating it—from the texture rubbings to the final composition. (August 29, 2006)*

Sue noted:

Geoff...could show me where to paste the pieces. (August 29, 2006)

The teens were given the choice between using coloured construction paper or painting on white paper to create a contrasting background for the texture rubbings; thus introducing the idea of contrast. Everyone was enthusiastic about this suggestion and they did some interesting compositions, especially Tim who put the whole texture rubbing of his shoe down on the page (which he had done in blue). Then alongside the shoe rubbing, he did this interesting pattern or red shapes and as a final touch, he drew a picture of Jennifer.

Ming did a face and surprised us all by cutting out a large piece from his rubbings for the hair and it look just like his hair—at this point, it looked like a self-portrait (see Photo 65), and I asked Ming if it was a picture of him and he said “yes”.
Ming also did a drawing [in his sketchbook] and then I asked him if he would like to do a drawing of his texture rubbing piece—he did that and the intriquing thing is that he drew the shapes almost exactly like how they were in the picture—same size and he even captured the subtlety of a curve or a line. I found it interesting because Ming likes to draw shapes quite a bit and a lot of the time the shapes do not necessarily relate to each other.

Robert, Tim and Kelly chose to do compositions that were based on design [see Photo 66] and did not try to depict a picture—which is interesting because I showed them the pictures that Trish and the others had created (including the self-portrait by Ming) and they did the design (I showed them examples of the design as well). Kelly did an intriguing one [texture rubbing]—it was more abstract not so much an exact picture—a bit like a cityscape but more abstract than that—good sense of composition though. Kelly chose to write in her journal after. Trish wrote and drew pictures of texture rubbings. (August 30, 2006)
The teens seemed to love the sense of discovery in the texture rubbing and follow up activities. Trish took the activity in a new direction when she started repeating the texture rubbings to create patterns. Trish suggested that it would be interesting to make compositions out of the materials that are used in games such as poker chips, so she went and got some poker chips and created some Mandela like patterns, which were very interesting. Following her interest in this area, the next day I brought a book on mandelas and patterning to show her.

Through their creative experimentation, the teens were taking the activity in a number of different directions. Therefore, for the next step I needed to make a choice between pattern making and colour theory. As I knew we would be exploring pattern making more in depth once we focussed on printing and because the teens enjoyed working with contrasting colours so much, I decided to build on this interest and offer
more opportunities to learn about colour theory. My first thought was to bring in a colour wheel and have the teens learn about colour mixing and experiment with complimentary colours by creating landscapes, but then Geoff did something surprising that took us in another direction.

*Geoff did something particularly interesting—he picked up the contact sheet of photos on his own and looked really intently at them (which is not something that he does a lot of—usually he does not seem that focused or concentrated on things in front of him) Then he started to point at some of the photos (especially the one of Roger and Lewis [staff] and on his own, he picked up a pencil and started to draw on the individual photos.*

*The drawing he did wasn’t random it seemed quite purposeful, like he was adding to the photo or emphasizing something about it. And he didn’t draw on all of the photos he definitely selected specific photos. He also didn’t draw between the photos or over them—it was very particular.*

(August 31, 2006)

After Geoff did this for a period of time, he moved over to another area of the room and (unprompted by others and on his own) he started drawing on paper there (his usual lines/scribble) but again, very focused. He then picked up a magazine that was there and started to draw on some of the photos. Jennifer and I talked about it after and she said that this was unusual behaviour for Geoff and that she has not seen him do something like this before. So if I had to guess at what was going on with him, I would guess that he started to recognize the photos as separate things and then it is almost as if he was adding his comments to the photos—like starting a bit of a dialogue with the images.

Inspired by what Geoff had done, I thought it might be fun to explore colour theory by inviting the teens to paint on photocopies of images they had photographed. So the next session I brought in photocopies of some of the photos they had taken in the garden, including the images they had taken of each other and the staff. Working with
the colour wheel, we looked at complementary colours and then the teens were invited to choose a set of complementary colours to paint with on the photocopied images. This proved to be a big hit. The teens were very engaged with this activity and there was much laughter and excitement, especially when the teens painted on pictures of staff.

They enjoyed doing the images of nature but they were particularly excited to paint pictures of Lewis [staff]—there was much laughter and shrieking—Kelly and Sarah painted Lewis as Superman.

Pictures seem to have evolved from the first time teens approached this project 2 weeks ago. Deeper contrast between light and dark more shades of colour used. (Sue, September 8, 2006)

Geoff and Michael were both very engaged in the activity. Jennifer noted, “Michael really got into the painting and he often left his seat to go get more paint.” And “Geoff worked independently, using the red pastels for his picture” (September 8, 2006). Photos 67 to 73 show the teens working on the photos.
Photo 67. Geoff Working on His Piece

Note. Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

Photo 68. Kelly Painting Her Sunflower

Note. Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.
Photo 69.  Michael Looking at His Painting

Note.  Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

Photo 70.  Willie Painting a Picture of Lewis

Note.  Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.
Photo 71.  *Tim Having Fun*

*Note.* Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

Photo 72.  *Roger and Sarah Working with Chalk Pastels*

*Note.* Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.
We also explored mixing paint from primary colours.

*Today we painted—We looked at the colour wheel and discussed creating colours from the primary colours of red, yellow and blue. And then I put out the primary colours and everyone experimented with mixing colours [see Photos 74 and 75]. We also looked at creating contrast through warm and cool colours as well as the complementary colours. I also showed them images painted by Georgia O’Keefe, which everyone liked. Trish sat and looked through the Georgia O’Keefe book for a long time. (September 28, 2006)*
**Photo 74.**  *Experimenting with Mixing Colours*

![Image of students experimenting with mixing colours](image1.jpg)

*Note.*  Photo by Justine Fraser, 2006; used with permission.

**Photo 75.**  *Roger's Painting*

![Image of Roger's painting](image2.jpg)

*Note.*  Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.
After working with complementary colours for a few sessions, we began to explore working with warm and cool colours. I set up a very simple activity which was to first draw an outline of anything they wished and then to paint (or using oil and chalk pastes) everything inside the outline in warm colours and everything outside the lines in cool colours. The teens created some visually arresting artwork from this activity. On his own, Ming outlined his hand and then proceeded to paint the warm and cool colours (Photo 76).

**Photo 76. Ming’s Piece Using Warm and Cool Colours**

*Note.* Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.
I found it was very useful to give the teens a choice of materials to paint with. We used chalk pastel, water and brushes as well as watercolour pencils instead of paint. It was interesting to see how much of a difference the water colour pencils made because they were able to render so much more detail in their images. I also noticed that without instruction from me, they were creating gradations of colour in their backgrounds.

Because the teens were starting to paint gradations, I thought the next step could be to explore tone in more depth. The teens were introduced to the idea of tone by looking at the black and white photocopied images of the photos they had taken. I asked the teens to look closely at how dark some parts of the photos were then how light and then to look at all the greys in between. I then put out charcoal and Conte pencils (in black, white, and brown) and encouraged the teens to experiment with seeing how many different shades of grey they could come up with.

The teens seemed to like working with charcoal—initially the teens started with white and black. Using the picture of Lewis as a template they came up with some very creative pictures. Each spent time experimenting with the point and edge of the charcoal as well as smudging with their hands. Some spent many minutes rubbing and smudging. (Jennifer, October 13, 2006)

From my notes:

_They did well, it was probably only Robert that really experimented solely with the greys but the others came up with quite a range of greys too. I told them that they could work with the photos if they wanted to and put the photos out. Lewis was again a hit and a few teens decided to recreate the picture of Lewis (the result was very much their own interpretation though). Willie especially got into it._ (October 13, 2006)

Overall, the art activities and explorations were very enjoyable and rich with creativity; however, we also encountered some challenges. In the next section, I will discuss what some of these were.
Challenges

As the summer came to an end, none of us wanted the project to end, so we made arrangements for me to continue. During the fall sessions, we continued painting and drawing, but we also experimented with printing, collage and working with text and images. Overall, the teens enjoyed these activities, but there were times when the sessions were not as ‘successful’ as they had been in the summer. At the time, I was somewhat disappointed when this happened, but in hindsight, I realize that these sessions were extremely worthwhile. For even though I learned a tremendous amount when the students were clearly engaged and enjoying the activities, I learned more from the challenging sessions.

Wishing to follow up on the direction that Michael and Trish had taken in the summer sessions, I decided to spend some sessions on printmaking. To this end, I brought in a variety of materials to print with, including sponges, rollers, stamps and found objects (see Photo 77).

Photo 77. Willie Printing

*Note.* Photo by Justine Fraserr, 2006; used with permission.
I thought the teens would have a lot of fun with the activity because it was fairly experimental and open-ended. Therefore, I was surprised when the activity met with a fair amount of resistance.

Jennifer noted:

Many of the teens were not too excited about art. But after sitting down and beginning—the pace picked up and the teens got involved. Creating some amazing pieces. (October 13, 2006)

I wrote:

Today they were crabby, Fridays are not a good time, everyone is tired and it seems hard for them to listen and concentrate. On these days it might be a good idea to have more of a “free flow” art activity with lots of choice and less instruction. Nevertheless we did printing—even though it was difficult to even get through the demo, we eventually did, and then everyone got into it and actually did some great work [see Photos 78 and 79].

We printed on Styrofoam and then printed those images out in black or red and then they picked one of the images and we pasted it onto a larger piece of paper and then sponge printed around the image. The result was very striking because there was a marked contrast between the printed image and the sponges. So this week was the opposite of a lot of other weeks—the process was not very enjoyable (at least for me) but the product was great. (October 13, 2006)
Photo 78. Willie’s Piece

Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.

Photo 79. Kelly’s Piece

Note. Photo by Jan MacLean, 2006.
The next few sessions were met with more enthusiasm and we continued to produce effective images but something subtle had shifted in the process. Looking back at my entry I find the last sentence, “the process was not very enjoyable…but the product was great” (October 13, 2006) very telling, because it suggests I was taking a more "product driven" approach in my teaching. Without being aware of it at the time, I had reverted back to more of a teacher or expert role; coming in and “telling” the students what we would be doing that day, rather than waiting for directions to emerge and then following the students' lead.

Looking back, I can see that the change in my approach was partially due to changes in the program itself. The program was now essentially an ‘after school’ program which meant that we were more limited by time constraints and as the teens were coming directly from school. Consequently they were more tired than they had been in the summer. As well, there were a number of new students joining the program who did not have the same arts-based knowledge that the continuing students had acquired over the summer. In addition, I was feeling the pressure to complete the project and produce work that would ‘show’ what the students had learned. Without being aware of it, I was pressuring the students to get to a product quicker. Consequently, I had taken on more of a prescriptive and less of a “discovery” approach. For example, during the summer, I would have introduced the printing sessions by inviting the teens to collect objects that they thought would make interesting impressions and then given them the opportunity to experiment with a variety of media (as Michael had done in an earlier session).

Another interesting thing I noticed was that because the printmaking sessions were more prescriptive, new directions were not emerging as clearly as they had in the
summer sessions. Therefore, I now found myself trying to “figure out” what we should do next. Subsequently, I read through my notes on the summer activities hoping to come up with an activity that would once again “hook” the teens into the flow of imaginative art making. Reading over what the staff and I had noted about the teens writing more in connection with the art activities, I thought it would be fun to do an exercise that combined text with artwork. To this end, I brought in photocopied sheets of text from fables and fairytales and encouraged the teens to create a visual poem by circling words they liked and painting and colouring over the remaining text.

However, like the printmaking sessions, the teens were not initially enthusiastic toward the activity. At the time, I wrote in my journal:

\[ I \text{ thought they might enjoy identifying words to create a poem and then making artwork around the words, but they were very resistant to the idea (it was one of our worst days) which is actually quite interesting. It might be because the activity centred on words and many of the teens struggle with reading and writing.} \]

\[ \text{Trish got it but Rae was not into it. Sarah and Kelly did a great job with it though. Sarah actually did seem to get quite a bit out of it—she found some great words but then she coloured over the words, so it is clear that I should have explained what we were doing better (another reason why Friday at 4 might not be the best time) but Sarah did seem to enjoy it, as did Kelly—she did hers quickly and was very proud of what she did. And she wanted to act out the fairytale that she was working on. (October 19, 2006)} \]

A few days later, still trying to understand what went wrong, I wrote in my journal:

\[ \text{Maybe if I had approached it differently there might have been a different response—it is hard to say. I was also thinking about how much Sarah wanted to act her piece out and I thought that there could be choice in how the students present their stories—they could act, dance, sing, draw or paint them out—or even a combination of all of that. (October 22, 2006)} \]
We spent a few sessions on the “text and art” activity and it was nearing time to think about what to do next. However unlike the summer when I encouraged the students to take the lead and I followed new directions that emerged, I realized that I had ignored the direction that Sarah wanted to take the activity and instead “came up” with one based on what I thought would be best. Even though I read over my notes and tried to figure out what was going astray, at the time I was not aware of the shift in my approach.

Thinking that since we had already begun to move in the direction of collage (ripping, cutting and pasting sections of the texture rubbings on paper) I thought it would be worthwhile to focus on collage making next. At the back of my mind I was thinking that collage could tie in nicely with creating self-portraits which I had begun to think would be a suitable way to end the project (the planning of a final activity for the teens was further evidence of how I had reverted back to a more “product driven” approach).

Today we worked on collage—I brought in a piece that I had created from ripping pieces out of magazines to create a scary mask-like face. The teens had a much harder time with this than I imagined that they would—I don’t know if it is because the concept was too abstract or they just didn’t find it that interesting. Even Robert had trouble with it and ended up doing a piece where the pieces of the collage didn’t connect at all to create a cohesive whole. So that is pretty interesting.

Tim pretty much just cut out pictures of things he liked and then with further encouragement he added more pieces and made it into a face. I gave Michael the option of drawing so he took that option and he was pretty happy. Willie just put two slabs of magazine cut-outs down and said he was done—so he clearly was not into it. At first I felt kind of upset that the teens didn’t seem to like it, especially because I had thought of just giving them the option of painting things that scare them, but then I thought it is probably just as useful, or maybe even more so to look at things that don’t work and to try to figure out why. (October 26, 2006)
Looking back, I realize that the activity (exploring the scary side of ourselves by creating a self-portrait of ourselves as a monster) would have been better served had we done a drama, sound, movement exploration first (as Sarah had suggested earlier). Again, I see that I had abandoned my earlier approach because of the time constraint and the desire for product. I see now that in a subtle way the activities had become more about who I was as a teacher than who the students were as learners.

However, as I mentioned in the above journal entry “it is probably just as useful to look at things that don’t work and to try to figure out why” (October 26, 2006). Even though at the time these experiences felt like I was ‘failing the students’, I think the sessions ended up being extremely useful, largely because without meaning to, I inadvertently set up a comparison between a student centred or "process driven" approach and a teacher-led or "product oriented" method to facilitating art activities and explorations.

Limitations

Aside from the challenges I have just described, the study had some clear limitations. Perhaps the largest limitation to the research was the way the sessions were set up. I was not able to work consistently with one group of students because different teens attended the program on different days. The staff wanted to offer the program to as many of their teens as possible so consequently I had to repeat some of the sessions to make sure that all of the students were able to experience the activities in an order that made sense. However, there were advantages to this because I was able to observe students doing the same activities a second and sometimes even a third time. In addition, none of the students minded repeating activities, and as noted by Trish in
her sketchbook, “I am glad we got to paint the air again, I liked it even more this time” (July 28, 2006), the teens seemed to actually enjoy the repetition. Therefore this arrangement allowed me to see that the teens actually benefited by repeating sessions.

As well, it would have been valuable to work with the teens over an extended period of time. However, the time for our individual sessions in the summer was favourable, because we had enough time to explore ideas fully, and also to go on small field trips. The other limitation of the study is that because it was summer, I had students coming in and out of the project and I did not get to spend as much time with some students as I had hoped. However, I was fortunate there was a core group of students who came consistently. If I were to continue my research, and I would very much like to, I would like to work in a resource room in a secondary school. Ideally I would also like to work with fewer students, and work with them over an extended period of time (three years would be ideal) in order to follow their development more closely. It would also be interesting to include students without disabilities in this study because, as mentioned in Chapter 1, I believe that each one of us could benefit from experiencing a more patient and open-ended approach to learning and teaching.

In the next section, I will discuss what I interpret to be the significant outcomes of the project.

**Discussion**

Even though I entered the project with certain ideas that I was curious about, I found the most profound aspect of the study was the experience I was having. One of the things that surprised me the most about the project is how much I personally got out
of it. In the previous section, I discussed some of the challenges and limitations of the project, but overall the teens, staff and I very much enjoyed the sessions and in many ways, none of us wanted the project to end. As the project wound down, I kept looking for ways to extend it until I realized that it wasn’t so much that I needed more material (I didn’t) but that I simply wanted to continue. The realization that I wanted to be included in the teen’s world as much, or more than they in mine, deeply influenced the writing of this thesis, especially Chapter 1.

As mentioned earlier, I kept a journal of my thoughts, feelings and ideas throughout the project; so that I could continually reflect on the research and remember that my goals for the study were not to prove preconceived ideas, but rather to:

> explore ways in which art can be used to both form and express meaning and learn more about what motivates students with diverse needs and abilities to want to learn and in turn develop curriculum that excites and engages them. (July, 2006)

Therefore, I tried to remain as open as possible to what the teens were interested in and follow their lead.

I found one of the most challenging aspects of working or working in this manner was to allow the experience to be as ambiguous and open ended as it truly is. This was the most personally challenging aspect of the project for me. I know it was somewhat challenging for the staff too, as there were times when I asked them to accept a certain amount of uncertainty in the work so that we could see what would happen next. However, I believe the discomfort was worthwhile, because it made me aware of how difficult it can be as an educator to proceed with a stance of ‘not knowing’. It also made me realize as an “educator of teachers” that this is a very complex and challenging
approach to ask teachers to adopt. Not just in terms of how it feels to work in a fairly unconventional style, but also because at times, this approach can leave one vulnerable to scrutiny from other educators.

An interesting thing happened to me toward the end of the project. A substitute staff member, came to work with us one afternoon, and not knowing the reasons behind why we were taking the approach we were (she did know however, that it was a research study being done by an arts education PhD student), she told me that what I was doing was “wrong” and that I “should be showing the students what I wanted their art to look like”. I found the exchange particularly interesting because the young woman was an artist, so she felt that she knew how art should be taught. I handled the situation by asking her to wait until the session was over and then I would share my philosophy with her. However, she continued with her criticism, so it was rather disruptive to our session. I have mentioned this incident because it made me aware of how different this way of working can appear and how teachers choosing a “discovery” rather than a “prescriptive” approach to learning are vulnerable to this kind of scrutiny. This exchange was especially worthwhile for me as a an educator of teachers, because it allowed me to see that, in order for teachers to successfully work in this manner, they need to be given opportunities to explore and deepen their own sense of aesthetic because this approach relies on the educator to trust the process and “be in the flow or moment” with the students.

Even though I felt frustrated by some of the sessions I have described, I think in retrospect, it was very fortuitous that they occurred, because I inadvertently set up a comparison between a student driven or “discovery” approach and a teacher-led or “product oriented” approach to learning. This comparison is critical because it makes it
clear that the curriculum and the way it was presented did make a difference. Otherwise, it would be tempting to think that the teens had the same level of enthusiasm and engagement regardless of curriculum and approach. The comparison between the two approaches also contributed to my understanding of what motivates students with diverse needs and abilities to want to learn and what curriculum engages and excites them. I wish to make clear that I am not implying that the "discovery method" is a new approach to teaching art. However, in the context of this community of learners, this approach is not usual, especially in resource room settings. What is central to this study is my faith in the participants' abilities and faith in the whole functioning of their imagination and expression of meaning.

One of the most effective motivators seems to be giving the teens autonomy within a structured activity. The staff and I noticed a considerable increase in the level of engagement and concentration when the teens were given the freedom independently to explore and investigate ideas and materials. Giving the students the opportunity to look for, select and collect materials also proved to play a key role in “hooking” the teens into the various activities. I noticed this especially when Michael was at the beach collecting materials for his sculpture, but it was evident with all of the teens. Having a structured activity such as the texture rubbing exploration with built in freedom, clearly motivated the teens move in their own creative directions. This was illustrated in how the students moved from making 2-dimensional “random acts of art” to sculptural pieces, “painting with found objects” and “painting on photos”.

Over the course of the study, it became apparent that the sessions that engaged the students the most were the ones that began with explorations that offered the students ways to connect to their imaginations and bodies. This may be because
students with intellectual disabilities are less likely to “jump” into creative activities and need ways to initially tap into their imaginative flow. I observed that once students were engaged in this “flow” their ability to sustain concentration continued into the art activities in which they later participated. All of this seems to suggest that once they are “hooked” into their creative flow, it continues on to other activities. It could also be that students with intellectual challenges do not have as much experience “jumping” into creative activities, so it may be something that would change over time. It would be interesting to focus on this in future research.

Participating in this research has also made me aware that there are certain conditions that make it easier for the teacher to take this approach. I am aware that it can be somewhat challenging to create an open, creative space for imaginative art making in the middle of the hustle bustle of the school day, but I believe the rewards for doing so are rich and numerous. Perhaps one of the strongest ways to support this way of working is to create certain “habits” especially with introducing concepts through the body and imagination. Therefore, I would suggest to teachers wishing to work this way, who have time and space constraints, that even simple relaxation exercises that focus on breathing and guided visualization (with or without music or simply sitting quietly and listening to music) can be effective. As some students may initially be reticent about participating in movement activities, I have found it is useful to begin in a very gentle way. Some of the teens in this study were very self-conscious and shy, but because the movement activities began with either lying down on a mat or sitting comfortably in a chair and began with breathing, gentle stretching and visualization work, the teens were more inclined to join in when we moved freely in the space.
Another element that strengthens the experience is when the staff model the concentration required and adopt a respectful approach to the material. As this approach is very playful it often generates humour and laughter, and consequently there were a few times when the staff and volunteers did not take the activities seriously. This may be because in our culture we tend to think if something is important, it has to be difficult and if something is really pleasurable and joyful, it cannot be serious. For many people serious and fun are two ends of the spectrum. However, I think the open-ended and joyful approach contributed to students responding so well to the activities. While students were involved in the activities, (especially the movement and exploratory ones) they made comments such as “I love this!” and later they wrote in their sketchbooks that they hoped to do it again soon. The few times the staff went “off track” (e.g. making fun of the activity while they were doing it) I took it as an indication that I needed to include them more in my philosophy.

It was noted by both parents and the staff that the concentration that the teens exhibited while exploring and creating art was noticeably stronger compared to the concentration they usually exhibited when engaged in their regular activities. The staff also pointed out that the students stayed with the art activities for much longer periods of time than they did with other activities. There were a number of times when parents came to pick their children up and the teens did not want to stop making art. At those times the parents told the teens that they “could make art at home”. Some of the parents told me that as a result of the interest the teens were showing in the art activities, they had bought sketchbooks and other art materials so that their teens could make art outside of Teen Club. For this community of learners, immersion appears to be a significant component. Immersion is important because it provides a social component
as well as an opportunity for more in depth exploration. In addition, the opportunity to experience this immersion is needed both in school and in the larger community because it can offer spaces not only for more in depth exploration of art activities, but also provide spaces for social interaction.

Overall, I observed that having choices was a very strong motivator for the teens. Conversely, when I taught in a more traditional manner (having them sit down, listen to and watch my demo before the activity) it was met with resistance. As discussed earlier, this was especially clear in the “text and art” activity. Before this activity I wrote in my journal, “I am interested to see if this approach might be a useful way to engage the teens in written literacy” and in that way the sessions were useful because I was able to compare the activity with how the teens engaged with the writing during and after the art activities in the summer. I believe this observation is useful with respect to exploring the connection between aesthetic and written literacy because it would seem that the direct experience of art making inspired or motivated some of the teens to write, whereas when I specifically set up an opportunity for them to explore text and art together they resisted. There could be a number of reasons for this; it might be that the text I presented them with was difficult for them to comprehend, whereas the writing they did in the garden emerged from their own vocabulary. It could also be that they felt pressured to conform to a predetermined outcome. By contrast, the writing that emerged from the experiences in the garden was by choice, more open-ended, and consequently prompted some of the students to write more than usual. The key seems to be offering experiences that relate to personal experience and interest and inviting, rather than requiring, students to reflect and write on them.
An additional goal of the project was to explore ways in which art can be used to both form and express meaning and to investigate if and how students with intellectual challenges would be able to learn the “language of art”. For me, one of the most significant outcomes from this project is that not only did Geoff and Michael, (the two students who the staff initially said would not be able to participate in the study), engage with the art making, but they both made significant progress. As I have documented, not only did the two teens participate well in the art-making activities; they also went off in their own creative directions. At different points in the project they were both making choices and selecting how they wished to create art, which strongly implies that they were “thinking in art”. Their active participation and progress strongly suggests that even students who seem to have extremely low comprehension and expressive skills can learn the language of art.

Over the course of the study it became clear to the staff and myself that the teens were not only capable of learning basic art skills, but were very excited and motivated to do so. The staff reported that the teens often drew and wrote in their sketchbooks outside of the ‘art class’ time; more than half of the students voluntarily began to draw on a daily basis during their ‘free time’. Staff also noted that some of the teens requested art-making activities when they had free time. It is worth noting that the teens’ regular choices include playing video games, board games and Foosball. Some of the teens like Rae, did not draw in their sketchbooks that much during our time together, but chose to draw and write quite a bit outside of the sessions.

It is great that the staff are giving students the option to draw in their sketchbooks on a daily basis. Rae drew in her sketchbook a lot when I wasn’t there. She seems to have created a series of drawings similar to a comic strip—which is interesting because she did not participate that
much [in the sessions] but I guess she enjoys the freedom of being able to draw whenever she likes in the sketchbook. (August 26, 2006)

There were indications that for some of the teens even when they weren’t physically engaged in the process of art making, they were thinking about art making. This was illustrated with an excerpt from Kelly’s sketchbook: “Today I thought about paintings and pictures a lot” (July 14, 2006). It is worth noting that Kelly wrote this at the end of a day when I wasn’t there and she had made no artwork. Trish also wrote in her sketchbook how she was “going to do art on her own” (July 31, 2006). These examples suggest that some of the teens were beginning to “think in the arts” as well as adding the identity of artist to their existing identity.

As much as possible I tried to include parents in the project. I would often stay after our afternoon sessions so that I could chat with the parents and show them what their teen had done that day. This proved to be a very opportune time for the teens, staff, parents and I to have informal interactions and discuss the teen’s participation in the project.

At the holiday dinner in December, we held an informal showing of photos taken and artwork done by the teens. The teens were very proud to present their artwork and photos. At first, many of the parents thought that I had taken the photos and were very surprised to find out that they were all taken by the teens. As part of the study I interviewed parents. Overall, the parents were very supportive and enthusiastic about the project and all of the parents expressed that they thought art should be offered in the resource room on a regular basis. The following is an excerpt from an interview I held with a parent who is also a Speech Therapist:
I have found that artistic creativity is often a strength with my students, be it music, painting, drawing on the computer, drama or dance. I think the arts are one area that, with a bit of imagination (oops, forgot I was talking about the school system!) students could be included—not plonked in the back with a SEA doing a beautiful something and sending it home as the students' “work” but by looking at the students strengths and then modifying the project so they can genuinely produce something (yes, Jan I am on a roll now!)...There are always ways—it just takes a little thinking outside the box. (Liz, May 23, 2007)

### Inside the Classroom

One of my original intentions for conducting the research was the hope that what was learned from this study could act as a resource for teachers to assist them in finding additional ways to motivate students with diverse needs and abilities. Even though *The Story Project* took place outside of the classroom it is my belief that aspects of the study can be drawn upon and applied to work that is being done inside our schools, especially in secondary settings. One of the key implications of the study is that students with cognitive challenges can learn the language of art. The principles and elements of art may need to be introduced and explored in a non-traditional manner, but from working closely with the students over an extended period of time, it is clear to me that students with restricted language skills are capable of forming and expressing meaning through the arts. It is important to point out that the kinds of activities I have described are not meant to replace regular art classes but are intended to act as a reinforcement and/or extension to them.

Clearly, it is vital that students with disabilities are integrated into mainstream art classes but, as mentioned in Chapter 1, I have observed that far too often—students with disabilities hold the status of ‘visitor’, interacting primarily with their Educational Assistant. Realistically, I know it is not easy to find ways to build positive relationships
between non-disabled students and students with special needs in secondary settings. A simple approach that might improve this situation would be to invite students in regular art classes to act as mentors and partner with students with disabilities. This could occur on a rotating basis so that eventually the students with disabilities will have partnered with all of the students in the class. This approach would benefit the student with a disability because it would provide additional opportunities for social interaction with their non-disabled peers, thus encouraging a stronger sense of belonging in the classroom. As well, I have observed from my own experience, that these kinds of partnerships tend to bring forth a kinder, more patient side in students without disabilities.

Another possibility would be to invite non-disabled students into the resource room in order to participate in art activities along side students with disabilities. This approach could act as a reversal of sorts—instead of thinking only of how to integrate students with special needs into mainstream classes it would offer a space for non-disabled students to experience different ways of learning and knowing. The idea would not be for students to ‘help’ the student with a disability, but rather for them both to experience a different way of learning and creating art, thus laying groundwork for relationships to form and evolve. An additional benefit of this approach would be that because the students with disabilities would be welcoming the non-disabled student into their class, they could experience what it means to be the host instead of the visitor. For example, the students based in the resource room could participate in planning and organizing art activities in preparation for the visits.

What would be the advantages for the non-disabled student? This arrangement could provide an opportunity for students to form different kinds of relationships from the ones they typically have with their peers. It would also suit students who are in need of a
gentler, less judgmental atmosphere. One of the keys to successful inclusion is encouraging acceptance of students with disabilities for who they are, and realizing that we all have different strengths and abilities. Surely, this same kind of acceptance could benefit all students.

The suggestions I am making are based on my own experience as a secondary art teacher, teaching in resource rooms, as well as conversations I have had with resource room teachers and educational aids. I have observed in resource rooms that there is a fair amount of ‘down time’ in the day when students do not have work to do and often they are given the choice between free time on the computer, playing cards or board games. There is nothing inherently wrong with these choices, but I feel there are clear advantages to making art one of the choices. Simple activities such as ‘daily drawing’ could be incorporated into the everyday schedule and students could have sketchbooks that they use on a regular basis. The possibilities are many and it wouldn’t be necessary for these activities to be lead by ‘art teachers’; if needed, resource room teachers and Educational Assistants could be offered professional development training by art educators.

As well, I believe the kinds of activities described in The Story Project would not be difficult to incorporate into elementary classes. The model of ‘daily art’ in the form of silent drawing or collaborative art projects could easily be integrated into the daily curriculum. I have had the opportunity to teach some of the “movement, imagination, and drawing” activities to elementary classes and the response from teachers and students alike has been very positive and enthusiastic. I have also led professional development workshops on this approach and the feedback I have received from teachers who tried it with their students, is that they found the activities to be worthwhile and engaging.
Whether it takes place in an elementary school setting or the resource room, I believe that engaging in art making on a regular basis, much in the same way students now practice reading and numeric literacy, could lead to a developed sense of aesthetic and the ability to ‘think in the arts’. Just as we see numerical, written and oral literacy as something that ought to be offered to all students, we should consider aesthetic literacy as one of the mainstays of education, especially for students who are struggling with the aforementioned forms of literacy.

**Concluding Thoughts**

I agree with Charles Taylor (1989) that in order to become fully functioning human beings, we need two things: The first is to understand our lives in story and the second is to have a personal relationship to the good. Taylor states “Orientation to the good and seeing our lives in story are inescapable structural requirements of human agency” (1989, p. 52). In this chapter, I have discussed some of the reasons why I consider it critical that each student be given the opportunity to be co-author of their story. In the next chapter I will look at the role the arts can play in offering our students the means to form personal relationships to the good.
Chapter 4.
Perceiving the Good Through Art

The sky is a deep shade of blue
The perfect backdrop
For the yellows, oranges and reds of September

The school board act has been amended and children will no longer be bussed to special classes in schools far from their home. Each child is now entitled to go to their neighbourhood school.

After two years of being in a segregated classroom in a school across town, Danny is enrolled to go to the school two blocks from our house. He will be in Grade 3 and he is ready and excited.

There is only one problem.

The principal has phoned to say that, yes, she knows that it is his neighbourhood school but the school has no place for him. We check with the school board and they tell the principal that they have no choice; they have to take him whether they want to or not because this is his school. They are told that they cannot say “no”.

It is against this unwelcome that we proceed.

The first crack appears when the teacher calls us in October and leaves a message
“Please don’t bring Danny to school tomorrow”

There is no explanation.
Thinking it must be a professional development day I don’t question it.

The following day I take him to school to discover that the reason the teacher told us to stay home is because the class went to the pumpkin patch.

When asked why he wasn’t included in the field trip, the teacher says she didn’t think he belonged on the trip—she was afraid that he would run away.

“Even if I went with him?”
“Oh well, too late now” the teacher responds.

That day the students carve their pumpkins. The teacher hadn’t brought a pumpkin back for Danny, so he watched.
The next crack appeared when it was brought to our attention that there was a problem at lunch time. Older students would form a circle around Danny and tease and taunt him about his speech. The older children would ask him questions which Danny would answer with garbled speech and then they would repeat what he said and laugh and push him.

We requested a meeting with the principal, teacher and resource room teacher.
I asked “How can we create a safe environment for Danny at lunch time?”—“Find a buddy for him?”—“Let him stay in the library at lunch?”

After some discussion the resource room teacher said that ultimately none of the suggestions would work.
She looked over at us and said, “Really he should just learn to get used to it because that’s the way his life is going to be.”

My husband and I exchanged looks.
I slowly shook my head and said, “No, I don’t think so.”

We contacted the school board and told them about the situation. They promised to send all the support we would need in order to turn the situation around.

The school board was as good as their word. They sent a team of people who specialized in “bullying”. The liaison person said, “This is not a problem that is specific to your son—it is a school-wide concern.”

To this end, the specialists interviewed teachers and students and held presentations for all the classes. It was a very positive move on the part of the school board but it was clear that it was going to take time to turn the unwelcoming atmosphere of the school around.

On the surface it seemed like we were fighting the good fight, but underneath I felt like I was falling and it was becoming increasingly difficult to hold my position.
My back started to seize up with pain. I made my living teaching dance and I could barely walk.

One day I couldn’t get off the floor. I lay there with my thoughts sinking into my body. I felt like I was being pulled under water. I knew the situation had to change but I didn’t know how.

I ran into Danny’s resource teacher from his old school. She was very sympathetic, but also very practical.
She said “if you can move to another district you should leave. Things are improving here but it isn’t going to improve in time for Danny.”

When I heard this I knew she was right.
As it happened, I was part of a group that was leading art programs in the schools called “Integration Using the Arts”. We designed and taught activities that promoted acceptance and inclusion through the arts. I was seeing first hand how positive inclusion could be.

I thought “this is what I want for my son”
Within three months we moved to that school district.

Danny was placed in a regular class with a Special Education Assistant and things seemed to be going really well. We were very grateful to the school board for providing so much support and Danny’s teacher couldn’t have been more positive.

One day I was with my son at the local corner store. We saw a group of girls from Danny’s class in the store—they said “hi” to him, finished paying for their purchases, and left.

We were paying for our groceries when we heard their voices outside the store “Dannyyyy! Oh Dannyyyyyy! Come out here we have something for you!!!!”
“Oh no”, I thought “Now it is starting here—they are going to give him a hard time.”
Their voices grew louder and more insistent “Dannyyyyyy. Come out—we have something for youuuuu!”
We had no choice but to leave the store. With my stomach tied in knots, we stepped outside.

There were five little girls standing there waiting for us. They crowded around my son, forming a circle. They held out their hands, “Look Danny—look at what we got—this is for you.”

In their hands were candies.

I learned some very important things from this experience. I learned that we are a very fortunate family because we had the resources to move from one school district to another. However this experience made me wonder about the students whose families don’t have the time, energy or financial resources to move or advocate on behalf of their child. This experience also made me wonder about parents who are new to Canada and might not speak or comprehend English very well.
The most important thing I learned from this experience though is how influential teachers and other professionals working in education can be. In addition, I came to understand that the teacher is not separate from her values and beliefs, because how we think, feel, and act can deeply affect the quality and direction of our students’ lives.

Now I am going to tell a story from another perspective and that is the perspective of being the teacher in a very difficult situation.

A few years ago I was an art teacher at a small alternate program designed for adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19. The staff consisted of four teachers, a full-time counsellor and anywhere from between 15 and 25 students. Students generally attend this program because they have emotional and behavioural problems that may include violent behaviour, alcohol abuse and drug addiction. Many of the students have been out of the school system for quite some time. There are various reasons for this; some of these reasons could be they have been living on the street, in jail or they have simply refused to go to school.

All of the students are enrolled in the program because they have been kicked out of regular school settings, or sent to alternate programs and have now been asked to leave these programs as well. For many of the students this program is the “last resort”. As part of our job we hold ‘intake’ interviews with the student and members of their families as they are referred to us.

I was part of an intake interview that involved a 16-year-old boy and his mother. The interview began by us asking the young man about his situation and what had brought him here.

We asked the usual questions; including “how do you find school?” The answer was, “boring”.
We continued, “And how do you get along with your mom and dad?” “Fine, no problems”.

After a few more routine questions, we asked, “So, if everything is fine how did you end up here?”
The boy hesitated and then said, “Because they found some things in my locker at school”.

“What kind of things?”
“Oh” the boy answered “a knife, which is no big deal because if I wanted to hurt someone I could use almost anything, a pen even”.
“Anything else?”
“Yeah, some marijuana.”
“Okay, anything else?”
At this point there was a long pause and then the boy said quietly, “Oh, yeah, some heroin”.

With the word “heroin” a blush rose up the mother’s skin. It was I thought, a “blush of shame”. The mother remained silent, but she looked at us and at that moment I realized that she truly did not know what to do. I also realized that she was hoping that we would be the ones that did know what to do and that we could “turn her son around”.

It struck me in a way that it never has before, what a complex and important role teachers can play in the moral development of their students. I thought to myself, “I am an art teacher, what can I possibly do that could make a difference to this young man?”

In the previous chapter, I argued the importance of offering students with intellectual disabilities the means and opportunity to be co-creators of their identities through engagement with the arts. In this chapter, I will be focussing on a different group of students with particular learning needs: adolescents who are labelled as being emotionally and behaviourally “at-risk”. As mentioned in the Introduction, the link between students with intellectual disabilities and students “at-risk” may not be immediately clear. However, I believe the commonality these two groups share, is that students given these labels are typically placed outside the lines of mainstream education. Consequently, this means students with these designations are often educated in a less enriched manner than students without these labels. I am basing this point of view on my own experiences working with “at-risk” students. These experiences include teaching art in alternate programs for youth, as well as teaching art to young offenders in the Provincial Resource Program, and facilitating after school arts programming for students identified as being “at-risk”.
In this chapter, I will ask the question: “What role can the arts play in encouraging our students to develop a more ethical sense of the world and themselves?” I believe this question is relevant for a number of reasons. The primary reason being that in our society today there is growing concern over our ‘youth culture’. It seems almost daily there is a new story in the media about youth violence, whether it is in the form of swarming, bullying, curbing or even murders. The amount of reported incidents is in itself disturbing, but what I find particularly distressing is that so many of these incidents seem to be senseless. Recently in White Rock, an elderly man was accosted by a teenage male who asked him if he wanted to die and then pushed him into oncoming traffic. There are many other local incidents such as the girl who was walking home in Burnaby at nine o’clock at night and was assailed by a group of teenage males she didn’t know. They harassed her for over 2 hours before they let her go. Two of the most disturbing incidences that occurred recently involve helpless animals. In one incident, three youths broke into a home and killed the family’s cat by frying it in the microwave. In the second incident, the youth stole a car and dragged the pet dog behind the car killing it in the process. There are countless other cases where people and animals have been hurt or killed by teens just because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

What is perhaps even more troubling than the actual events themselves is that there seems to be a decided lack of remorse on the part of the young person who has caused such grievous harm to another human being. It would be easy to think that these young people don’t really feel this way, and to chalk it up to bravado, but having worked closely with “young offenders” and youth who are identified as being “at-risk” I know that this is usually not the case. Many of the teens really don’t seem to care about their damaging actions. What is going on? How is it possible that we have such a large
number of young people so lacking in empathy that they can cause extreme pain to another human being or animal and feel no remorse.

At this point, it is easy to say, “Well that is just those particular individuals, obviously they come from an impoverished background, and if we address social issues such as poverty we can get rid of it”. This may well have some truth in it, but in my experience, I have noticed that this ‘lack of remorse’ or conscience, is far from limited to a select group of teenagers. The forms of violence, both subtle and overt are not restricted to a handful of students.

As a society, we seem more aware than ever, that we need to do something. And there are many concerned and well-intentioned people in education, law enforcement, and other related agencies doing a lot. There are a number of worthwhile “anti-violence”, “anti-bullying”, “anti-racism” and “anti-drug” programs in the school. Educators are going to great lengths to reach students, as speakers ranging from police officers to convicted murderers are brought in to speak to students. Large amounts of money are being put into programs to educate students against the negative effects of these behaviours. We are trying everything from preventive education in elementary schools, to scare tactics in secondary settings, and nothing seems to be working. If it were information that was needed, the problem would have been solved a long time ago. Instead, it seems to be getting worse. We see evidence of this with the recent spate of gang murders in the Lower Mainland.

Clearly, there is no “quick fix”. The problem appears to run much deeper than that. What seems to be missing is something more internal and elusive. When we look at our teens more closely, many of them seem to be disengaged and disenchanted. What
seems to be lacking is a strong sense of self and empathetic connection to other members of their community and culture.

As educators, what can we offer our students that will help them to form a stronger, more ethical sense of self; a self that is connected on a deep level to others in their community and their culture? Taylor (1989) writes that in order to "make even minimal sense of our lives we need an identity and an orientation to the good" (p. 16). I strongly agree with Taylor and I believe that the concept of the good is needed in our postmodern time and specifically it is needed in our education system.

In order to discuss the relevance of the good in relationship to our education system and culture it is important to understand what Plato meant by the term. It is essential that the concept of 'the good' is not confused with our personal opinion of what we think of as 'good' or 'bad'. Generally, when we say that something “is good”; we mean that we personally approve of and receive pleasure from it. This is very different from 'the good' that is referred to by Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle and Plato bring us closer to an understanding of what the good is, but even they acknowledge that it is essentially indefinable. Plato believed that the good is the highest of human goals; he defines it in the following passage, “it is that which every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does all that it does, with some intuition in its nature, and yet also baffled” (360BC/1955, p. 505). Aristotle argues that all humans have an innate desire towards good; he states, “The good is that which all things seek” (350BC, 1985, p. 95).

Plato believed that the good is the highest of human goals. According to Plato, there is an aspect of reality beyond this one, which we cannot see. This facet of reality is more real than the 'visible' world. This invisible reality, also known as the intelligible
realm, is composed of unchanging, eternal, absolute entities, which are called The Forms. These absolute entities or truths, such as Goodness, Beauty, Blueness, etc. are the cause of all the objects we see around us in the visible realm. Among the forms, the form that stands out the most is "The form of the Good" (360BC/1955, p.228). Plato is unable to tell us exactly what 'The form of the Good' is, but he does tell us that it is the source of intelligibility and our capacity to know. The Form of the Good is also responsible for bringing all the Forms into existence; its function is comparable to the role of the sun in the visible world. Plato tells us "The form of the Good is the ultimate object of knowledge, as it is the source of reality and truth" (p.31).

Perhaps the closest we can come to understanding what the good is in modern day terms is to think of it as being aligned to the concepts of 'divinity', 'infinity' or 'pure awareness'. Murdoch (1971) states, “Good is the magnetic center towards which love naturally moves” (p. 100). Taylor (1989) encourages us to think of the good as being a fluid state that we can enter into. He writes, “It is good to think of the good as a living flow like 'li' not as a static thing. Something we can ‘enter into’ or ‘mesh’ with” (p. 421). Personally, I find Taylor’s description of the good very helpful, especially as it relates to the flow one can experience though the imaginative experience of art making (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

In my view, arts education could play a crucial role in encouraging our students to recognize, attend to, and form a relationship with the good. At a time when our society is faced with increasing violence and apparent apathy on the parts of many young people, I believe the arts could form part of the antidote. Despite the elusiveness of the good, through my experiences as an educator, I have found there is a need for the good. Even though it is an extremely difficult concept to conceptualize many of us recognize
the need for it, especially in connection to the personal and universal qualities of the good.

Perceiving the Good in Education

Young people are not alone in their disillusionment with our culture. As a society we share what Charles Taylor describes as a “disenchantment of the world” (1991, p. 4). Taylor tells us that the modern freedoms we enjoy have come about through the discrediting of the old hierarchies and moral orders. As much as those orders limited us, they also gave meaning to our world and social life. We knew our place in the “Great Chain of Being” (p. 4). Ordinary life for the individual was set against the backdrop of a shared background of meanings. Today we have lost the sense of a moral framework and this loss has resulted in superficial relativism. The loss of our connection to something higher than ourselves has undermined our sense of ourselves as fully functioning human beings. Taylor points out that we have become a culture that cares little about anything beyond making our ordinary day-to-day lives as comfortable and pleasant as possible. The focus on our individual needs and desires has resulted in a flattening and narrowing of our lives. In some ways, we have become a culture that lacks passion and engagement.

As discussed earlier, in order to become a functional human agent it is essential that we have a relationship to the good and we can only form an authentic self by forming values that extend beyond our everyday desires. Along with the loss of a shared background of meanings, our culture has come to embrace instrumental reason. This preference is reflected in our education system, which values efficient, measurable knowledge over subjects such as art that focus on the intrinsic nature of learning.
For Plato the good was the highest goal in education. Plato (360BC/1955) created the “Simile of the Cave” (p. 240) in order to illustrate the effects of education on the human soul. Plato’s concept of education is not that we are feeding knowledge to our students, but rather we are attempting to turn our students toward the light of ultimate truth or reality. In my view, this allegory is still relevant to educators today. Viewing this story in present-day terms, we can interpret ‘life in the cave’ as ways in which our culture is fascinated and mesmerized by media and technology. As a society, we are becoming further removed from the direct experience of life, and increasingly, we are relying on the media to interpret it for us. In contemporary terms, the 'shadows on the cave wall' are our everyday lives that are reflected back at us through the filter of the media.

Plato’s metaphor of the cave can be applied not only to our external culture, but also to the state of our consciousness. The allegory of the cave could be symbolic of the kinds of consciousnesses that Collingwood describes *The Principles of Art* (1953). The light of ultimate truth or reality may be interpreted as the ‘truthful’ or generous consciousness, and the shadows of the cave could symbolize the ‘false’ or self-absorbed consciousness that Collingwood speaks of. Seeing the cave as a metaphor for both our individual consciousness and our external culture can work together, because as a society it is our collective consciousness that is reflected back to us through the media. Our journey out of the cave towards the light can be interpreted as our personal struggle between the shadows of a self-absorbed consciousness and the light of a compassionate consciousness.

Albert Einstein alludes to this in the following passage:

A human being is a part of a whole, called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as
something separated from the rest...a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affections for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security. (quoted in Myss, 2004, p. 103)

Murdoch (1971) argues that the states of our consciousness not only differ in quality, but they also affect our ability to judge, choose and act. She states:

Our states of consciousness differ in quality, our fantasies and reveries are not trivial and unimportant, they are profoundly connected with our energies and our ability to choose and act. And if quality of consciousness matters, then anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and realism is to be connected with virtue. (p. 83)

Murdoch describes the reorientation of the prisoners as a metaphor for how we can turn our minds away from our shadowy ‘fantasy selves’ toward the clear, honest light of reality. She writes, “The self, the place where we live, is a place of illusion. Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness” (p. 91). Murdoch’s notion of attending to something outside of our selves is critical. This is because loving something for its beauty, not for what it can do for us, makes us recognize the independent existence of another. And it is this recognition of an “independent other” that enables us to become compassionate and ethical beings. Murdoch offers an example of this in the following passage:

I am looking out the window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious of my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage done on my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel [small hawk]. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but kestrel. And when I return thinking of the other matter it seems less important. And of course this is
something we may also do deliberately: give attention to nature in order to clear our minds of selfish care. (p. 82)

**Turning Our Attention**

Even though we know it would be more advantageous to turn our attention towards a more truthful light, it is not an easy thing to do. How do we move our attention away from the shadows of the cave toward the light of the good? Using the metaphor of the prisoners transfixed by the shadows on the cave wall, it is obvious that it is ineffectual to tell the prisoners to 'stop being transfixed'. As humans, our minds do not work that way. When we are absorbed in a strong emotion or compulsion, we cannot stop simply by telling ourselves to stop. What we need is to turn our attention towards something that is equally or more compelling than what we are presently transfixed by. Murdoch makes the point that what is needed is a “reorientation, which will provide energy of a different kind, from a different source” (1971, p. 54). This makes sense, as all the willpower in the world will not release us from our strong attachments, nor will it release us for long. Murdoch states, “human beings are naturally attached and when an attachment seems painful or bad it is most readily displaced by another attachment” (1971, p. 55). It follows then that what is needed are new objects of attention and the new energy that comes about through refocusing.

Murdoch tells us that ‘art offers a clue’ as a way to refocus our attention, but how does focusing on art actually help us to form a more truthful consciousness? The “clue” seems to be that by focusing on a more truthful reality, we are better able to see “our world, and not another one, with a clarity that startles and delights us simply because we are not used to looking at the real world at all” (1971, p. 63). In other words, we are
experiencing, even for the briefest of moments the world in a less selfish way. Murdoch writes:

The appreciation of beauty in art or nature is not only (for all its difficulties) the easiest available spiritual exercise; it is also a completely adequate entry into (and not analogy of) the good life, since it is the checking of selfishness in the interest of seeing the real. (1971, p. 63)

I agree with Murdoch that ‘checking our selfishness’ is key, as it is the powerful pull of the ego that causes us to focus on the shadows or fantasies that are being played out on the cave wall. One of the consistent features of these fantasies or projections is that the ‘self’ is placed front and center in a starring role that serves to further reinforce our self-absorbed perception of life. However, by focusing on art or nature it allows the opposite to take place, for “when clear vision has been achieved, self is a correspondingly smaller and less interesting object” (Murdoch, 1971, p. 66).

The kind of attention Murdoch is speaking of is more than a passing glance at something; it is a deeper, more contemplative kind of awareness. Murdoch uses the term ‘attention’, which she has borrowed from Simone Weil to “express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality” (p. 33). Murdoch goes on to say that she believes this characteristic to be “the characteristic and proper mark of a moral agent” (p. 33). These two ideas: “the just and loving gaze” cast upon our individual reality and the concept of becoming “an active moral agent” are critical.

I can offer an example of what Murdoch is speaking of from my own life. Last summer I volunteered to teach art in Oppenheimer Park, in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. Even though I wanted to be part of offering free art programs to children and adults in the Downtown Eastside area, I was fairly apprehensive about actually spending
time there. Up until this point, my main experience of the neighbourhood had been
driving through the area with my doors locked, or on the rare occasions I attended
cultural events in the area, making sure I walked quickly, avoiding eye contact with
anyone I passed. To be honest, when I looked at the residents relaxing in the park, all I
saw was depression and hopelessness.

However, as I spent time teaching art there, it became clear to me that this
negative perception was not necessarily shared by the residents themselves. I noticed
that for the most part, the residents seemed to genuinely care for one another. I also
observed that unless someone was actually threatening physical harm to another,
individuals were welcomed and encouraged to join in with whatever activity was taking
place. Many of the residents know each other and participate in art and music making
together both in Oppenheimer Park and nearby Carnegie Centre. Consequently, I found
that the area has a very strong sense of community and, in some ways, it has a much
stronger “neighbourhood” feeling than my own neighbourhood in North Vancouver.

As the weeks went by, I found myself forming relationships with the residents
based on looking for beauty, not only in the art we were creating, but also in the
surrounding environment and the people who lived there. In turn, I felt my view of the
area and its’ residents shifting. Eventually, I came to see that even though the
Downtown Eastside is a community struggling with some very serious issues; it is also a
community with a certain amount of beauty and goodness. The area had not changed,
but through forming relationships based on perceiving the good, my perception of the
area was transformed.
Forming the Good Through Art

In Plato’s (360BC/1955) time, morality and social structure were intimately linked. In our postmodern era, ideas of morality are constantly shifting and being negotiated. Traditionally culture has been communicated via parents and other respected members of the older generation. In our more peer-oriented society, culture is largely transmitted through the media. This leaves all of us, but especially young people, in the tenuous position of being able to acquire and discard morals based on what is convenient and immediately gratifying. A key concept that has travelled forward from Plato’s time is the expectation that the teacher should be a kind of moral guide or caretaker of his or her students. This idea is based on Plato’s belief that educators should have a deep care for the well being and future of the students with whom they work. Plato proposed that educating is a moral enterprise and it is the duty of educators to search for truth and virtue, and in so doing, guide those they have a responsibility to teach. Today we still see teachers in this role. Currently we see examples of this in that teachers are now expected to teach ‘social responsibility’ as part of the ongoing curriculum.

I believe that the concept of the good has a place in our current educational system. However, contrary to what Plato (360BC/1955) proposes in The Republic, I believe that the arts could be the ideal vehicle for discovering and articulating the good. And I would argue that instead of trying to teach morals as a subject separate from the rest of the curriculum, the arts could provide a more effective means to explore and acquire values.

In many ways, our current system reflects Plato’s (360BC/1955) views on the curriculum. For Plato, curriculum was central to awakening in the student a desire to
know the truth. Subjects were meant to gradually awaken in students a desire for knowledge and the clear form of reality. Plato believed that geometry was one of the most perfect forms for recognizing reality. Like Plato, we value Math and Science over the arts. This is clear in the way that we label the fine and performing arts as ‘electives’. The idea that the arts are not central to education is rooted in Plato’s proposition that the poets should be banished from the Republic. Plato believed that the Poets were using the seductive power of art to corrupt society and consequently teach falsehoods about the true nature of life. Plato’s point of view is still with us today, as we see the arts as enjoyable but not necessary subjects. Unlike Plato though, I would argue that “art is a necessity not a luxury” (Audre Lourde as cited in Majozo, 1995, p. 89), and that instead of relegating the arts to the category of electives, arts education should be central in our curriculum. It is important to note here that Plato was against the poets because he saw them as using their art to seduce people away from what is truthful. Plato urges us to be sceptical of our beliefs, and I would argue that art offers a way to deconstruct myths and other cultural untruths as students can use art to examine and critique the media.

It is our nature as humans to want to make sense of the world and to express what we have come to believe. By giving our students the opportunity to engage in the total imaginative activity of art making, we are offering them the means to know themselves and their world in a more authentic way, and consequently form a more truthful consciousness. The idea of “knowing” oneself is vital because it is through knowledge of ourselves that we can come to know the world. I believe that the arts are best suited for exploring, defining and articulating an ethical sense of self because art offers a means to truly know oneself and it is only through knowing ourselves that we are able to become ethical beings.
In my view this is why the total imaginative experience of art making is so important, for it allows us the opportunity to express the inexpressible through the unique language of art. Expression is an important part of articulating our experience, because often we do not know what it is we are trying to say until we engage in the process of articulating it (Taylor, 1991). Eisner (2002) points out that one of the most important roles teachers play is to help students articulate their responses and feelings about what they have experienced. However, ‘this something to say’ may not be able to be expressed in everyday conversation.

Taylor tells us that the arts offer us subtler languages. In the Malaise of Modernity, Taylor states, “The poem is finding the words for us. In this ‘subtler language’—the term is borrowed from Shelley- something is defined and created as well as manifested” (1991, p. 85). Taylor offers the example of a poem finding the words for us, but it could be a painting, a song or a dance, or any other form of artistic expression. What is important is that through the process of creating art, we are able to express something previously hidden from us and make it visible.

In terms of education, it matters that we take the time to identify what is good in an art form, because it helps us place it in the context of learning. I would argue that it is particularly advantageous to have students take the time to reflect on both process and product in relationship to their own artwork and others. The arts are one of the few subject areas where a student can ask the question “what is true for me?” This illustrates how art is closely aligned with ethics, because both simultaneously inform and create who we are in relation to our selves and others.
Eisner (2002) makes the important point that the opposite of aesthetic is the ‘anaesthetic’, which suppresses feeling, dulls the senses and renders one numb to feeling. By contrast, what is aesthetic heightens feelings. This point is significant in terms of the students that I am speaking of, for we are able to act without conscience when we are less connected to our own feelings and the feelings of others. Involvement with art cultivates a richer emotional life, which can in turn nurture a more empathetic view towards others and a stronger sense of agency in the world. Aesthetic practice is key, because it is through attaching our consciousness to something that lifts us outside of ourselves that we are able to experience the “unselfing” that is essential to forming a moral centre.

Murdoch points out that our ‘moral life’ is not something that can be switched on and off, but rather it is something that goes on continually, so that when we have to make real life ethical decisions we are already in the habit of attending to the good. This point is particularly relevant to “at-risk” students, because it shows how art can provide constructive ways to deal with the very real challenges of life.

I would emphasize again that this is why the total imaginative experience of art making is so key for our students; because when we recognize and explore our emotions more deeply we can choose how we will direct them. Hence, we can begin to reflect on and contemplate our emotions and impressions, which can lead to forming ideas and ideologies. Collingwood tells us that this is not yet morality, but it can point the way to it. In a sense, we are laying the seeds to forming a moral imagination.
Perceiving the Good

How can we become persons who perceive and nurture the good in others, or as Murdoch asks, “How can we make ourselves morally better?” (1971, p. 51). Perhaps we can begin by first recognizing the good in ourselves. For me, this is what Plato’s (360BC/1955) allegory of the cave is referring to. It is a metaphor for the struggle all humans have in freeing our minds from the shadows of a deluded or self-obsessed consciousness, and turning toward the light of a more authentic consciousness. It is important to point out that there is no one who possesses a consciousness without shadows. All of us are involved to some extent, in the struggle between the shadows of a self-absorbed consciousness and the light of a more generous consciousness. One of the key ways that we are able to form a more compassionate consciousness is by encouraging ourselves to focus on the good in ourselves and others. Aristotle (350BC/2002) tells us that we can become who we aspire to be through practice. It would follow then, if we develop the practice of recognizing and nurturing the good in ourselves, it will eventually transfer to how we view ourselves and others. For if we see ourselves as being capable of having worthwhile insights and making valuable contributions, we are that much more able to participate in a community setting where ideas are shared.

It is possible that some social problems can never be ‘fixed’. Rather the solution to problems such as violence and addiction may be to transform the shadowy consciousness to a more authentic consciousness. The danger in focusing on the shadow part of the consciousness is that it can reinforce the darker parts of our consciousness. For our belief that we are a person with problems places us deeper into the shadowy parts of ourselves.
When we actually ‘see’ someone as a human being, we are recognizing and acknowledging the good in them. The notion of focusing on what is infinite or divine in someone, rather than focusing on what is “wrong” with them, is critical in relation to students who are behaviourally and emotionally “at-risk”. For when we focus on the drug addiction or the violent behaviour, we are reinforcing the problem. Even though counsellors, parents, and educators mean well when they deal directly with these challenges, there exists the danger that the young person’s identity will be formed around the core notion that they are a ‘problem’. I would argue that it would be more useful if we could see the ‘infinite possibility’ of the person and see that ‘the problem’ is only one small aspect of who they are. This is especially important in terms of mentoring our students, for it is very powerful to have an adult you respect see you and acknowledge you.

By choosing to develop the practice of seeing the good in others, and ourselves we are subtly, yet surely, transforming the way that we think about our feelings and the language that we use to express them. This change is evident not only in how we interact with others, but how we interact with ourselves. By practicing this, we are ultimately creating a consciousness that is more compassionate, and a more compassionate consciousness is one that is expansive enough to include multiple ways of being human.

Attending to the Good

Taylor (1989) touches on this area when he says that to see something as good is to make it good. Taylor tells us that by choosing to perceive something in the light of the good we are bringing about a reversal, which he calls a “transfiguration” (1989, p.
450) of how we usually see the world. Outwardly, nothing changes, but because of our internal shift in perception, everything changes. Perceiving the good is what makes it good. Our world is transformed by our perception of it.

This seemingly simple idea has profound implications, for it means that transformation of our selves and the world can come about through a subtle shift in our perception. But how can we bring about this change? I would suggest that engagement in the arts is one way to change our perception because it increases our aesthetic awareness. Aesthetic attention is critical because it is a ‘disinterested attention’; we love beauty for its own sake, not for its instrumental value. This is a departure from seeing the world in terms of what it can do for us.

I would venture further and propose that increased aesthetic awareness could lead us to see life itself as an artwork with its own unique configurations and relationships. For by developing our sense of aesthetic we are more able to perceive a kind of disinterested beauty in our own lives and relationships. The benefit of this is that it could lend perspective and wisdom to our everyday way of seeing and consequently acting. In a sense, we are “thinking in the arts”. Perhaps this is what Shakespeare meant when he said, “All the world’s a stage” (As You Like It, 1963, p. 71). I would suggest that life is also a painting, a dance, a poem or a piece of music; for example, seeing a life situation as a painting with its own focal point, contrasting colours, tone, broad and detailed brush strokes, tension, balance and overall composition and feel. Or if we are more inclined, we might view a circumstance or relationship as music or dance composition. Once we really begin to see these elements in art, we are more able to perceive these elements in our every day lives.
I would like to share the following story as a way of illustrating what I mean by “thinking in the arts”. The past few years have been a particularly challenging time for me as my daughter has had a very serious illness. She has been in and out of the hospital a number of times. For the most part, I have managed to stay strong and positive but the summer my daughter was admitted to the hospital for the third time, I felt myself slipping into a very dark place. This happened for a few reasons; one was that we had waited a full year for this placement, and if this hospital stay didn’t help then there really wasn’t much else out there for her. The other reason was that I was experiencing some conflict in my professional life. This made me realize how much I had come to depend on my professional life to bring me solace when my personal life felt out of control. In a healthier time, I would have known what to do. In fact, I did know what to do: exercise, see friends, eat well, read books, go for walks, meditate and so on. I did all these things but I still seemed unable to find relief from the overwhelming fear that our daughter was slipping away and there was nothing I could do. My days were consumed with dealing with stressful situations at work, driving to the hospital and spending my evenings with my daughter.

Strangely enough, the solace I sought came to me while I was driving. As I drove, my mind wandered and I found myself “resting in art”. Unbidden, incredibly vibrant images of the emotions I was feeling would come to me in the form of paintings. Consequently, I was able to gain a perspective on the feelings I was experiencing by experiencing my emotional state in the form of visual art pieces. I started to imagine a whole series of paintings, simple yet vibrant images in deep cool blues and warm vivid reds, oranges and yellows. The images became a barometer of the energy and emotions I was experiencing that day. I had neither the time nor the energy to produce
the images, but they brought me a clarity and comfort as if I were creating them (maybe more so because I didn’t have to experience the frustration we often feel when our work doesn’t match up to what we see in our “mind’s eye”). As well, I found these images especially comforting, because once I had created them in my imagination my mind would revisit them many times throughout the day; it was like I had my own personal art gallery that I could tour at will.

What strikes me the most about this experience and the reason I have chosen to include it in this thesis, is that my training as an artist had obviously gone much deeper than acquiring specific skills and developing a stronger sense of aesthetic. It seems the accumulation of years of creating and thinking about art had pervaded my consciousness and subconscious to the point that when my “everyday self” was unable to function as usual, my mind went to a kind of default setting. I was “thinking in the arts” but perhaps more importantly, the imaginary paintings were giving me a way to articulate emotions that I couldn’t bear to talk about even to myself. And by being able to visit the images as many times as I wished, I was also able to integrate these unsettling emotions into my conscious mind. This is one of the many reasons why I believe it is important to make art an integral part of our lives, because the arts can take root in our consciousness and inform not only how we see ourselves and the world, but also how we experience our own sense of aliveness.

**Teaching with an Open Heart**

It is important to keep in mind that the arts educator is not an art therapist. As much as we may want to “save” our students, we have to be mindful of what our professional role is as arts educators. Having said that, I believe the possibility of using
the arts as a means to turn students’ minds towards the good does depend to some extent on who is teaching the art. According to Aristotle (350BC/2002), we can choose good or bad character, but once we have made that choice, we cannot hide who we are. This is because, who we are, will ultimately become known through our actions. Our actions include every aspect of ourselves such as our thoughts, how we choose to articulate and express these thoughts, as well as our interactions with others. This is why if the educator is “searching for the good” it will ultimately inform every aspect of his or her being, including what they choose to teach and how they choose to teach it.

As educators, it is important to ask the question, “What really matters to our students?” Certainly curriculum and information matter, but I would argue that what matters the most is who we are and how we relate to our students. We have all had teachers who have the ability to make even the most exciting subject matter dull. At the opposite end of the spectrum, most of us have had teachers who have inspired and uplifted us, regardless of the subject matter. When we reflect on what makes a teacher excellent, we are not able to easily define what it is about them that made us want to be in their presence. This is because as educators, we set an emotional tone within our classrooms, which we create both consciously and unconsciously. On an unconscious level, our character or disposition serves to create either a sense of ease or discomfort in our students. It follows then, that one of the natural outcomes of nurturing the good in ourselves is that we begin to “attend” to the good in our students.

One of the reasons I became an educator was because of the profound effect a teacher had on me when I was a teenager. This teacher saw that I was struggling with personal problems and unasked, came to my aid. What struck me about this teacher was that she didn’t help me because she felt a special affinity towards me. Rather she
went to the lengths that she did, because she saw it as her responsibility; it reflected who she was. She illustrates for me what an excellent teacher is, because she made it her practice to respond in a compassionate way to her students, regardless of her personal feelings towards them. This point is critical, because it easy to be kind and of service to people we feel an affinity for, but at times it can be extremely difficult to reach out to students who we find rude, apathetic, or otherwise difficult to reach. This is a struggle that most educators who are working with challenging adolescents face on a regular basis. In my experience, I have found that this is usually the case when interacting with students with behavioural challenges, because these students frequently have a history of being rejected and so often they reject you first. The question becomes then “how do we keep our hearts open to students who are the hardest to include?”

Certainly, the answer is not to accept disrespectful behaviour without question, for that only perpetuates the bully/victim paradigm. I know from experience, how truly difficult it can be not to put a challenging student into a category of “other” when they are acting out towards us in a negative way. The hardest thing to do is not to reject them, for this is exactly what they are expecting and it only perpetuates the student’s belief that they are unlovable and “unteachable”.

I would like to share a dream I had, which helped to give me insight into this challenge. In the dream, a social worker from the Ministry of Families and Children is trying to give me a particular child as a foster child. In the dream I am shouting emphatically that “No! Under no circumstances will I allow this child into my home!”

I am in a rage because I am so afraid that the Ministry will place this child with me against my will. I am using all the energy I have to keep this child out of my home.
Finally, I go home and sit down cross-legged in my living room. I am sitting there meditating when I sense a presence in the room. I look up and there is a child walking into the room. The child is completely naked, so naked in fact, that he or she has no outer skin. The outer skin has been entirely burned off and all that remains is black and blistered under skin. It is impossible to tell if the child is a boy or a girl because it does not have any sexual organs. Without asking, the child comes and sits beside me and places his or her head on my lap. As the child lies with their head on my stomach, I can feel them relax with the inhalation and exhalation of my breath. In the dream, I feel ashamed that I have put so much energy into rejecting this child when they wanted so little from me.

This dream served to give me insight into why it matters so much who we are as educators. If we are individuals on our own path to find the good and make it matter, we literally begin to see ourselves in the light of which Plato speaks. As we begin to identify more strongly with the good, we have a less narrow view of ourselves. As we attach who we think we are to the idea of the good or infinite awareness, we begin to develop a deeper sense of compassion and empathy for others and ourselves. This is what Murdoch is speaking of when she says that human beings are naturally attached and we can attach our attention and consciousness to the good. Murdoch offers “the image of the Good as a transcendent magnetic center” (1971, p. 73). This image rings true for me, as the more we turn our attention to the good the more we are drawn to do so. The idea of seeing the good in some people but not others becomes absurd. It comes down to “who do we think we are?” and who we think we are, is literally based on the light in which we see ourselves. In this way we are awakening from the dreamlike quality of the shadows to the clarity of a truer reality.
My dream also serves as a metaphor to illustrate the tremendous amount of energy we use to keep unwanted impressions or feelings out of our consciousness. It is interesting that it is only when I am meditating, or in a state of contemplation in the dream, that the unwanted child or impression comes unbidden and is allowed to stay. For it is when I have finally stopped fighting so hard to keep the unwanted visitor out, that my mind can relax and expand enough to let them in.

If we see ourselves in Plato’s (360BC/1955) light we see that we are infinite awareness, there is no limit to our minds or our spirits. When our consciousness begins to approach this vastness, we cannot help but feel compassion for others and ourselves. For me this is true inclusion, because our consciousness is so expansive we are incapable of exclusion. This is why Aristotle (350BC/2002) tells us that contemplation is the highest form of happiness, because it is the closest to the good. It is only through contemplation that we are able to integrate and absorb fearful feelings and thoughts into a truthful consciousness. If when we look at someone, no matter how difficult they may appear to us, and see the good in them, we are actually acknowledging that they too, are infinite awareness. It becomes a question of what do we attend to in another person. This is a radical departure from focusing on what is wrong with a person. In the most real sense of “the good”, there is no duality. What matters is the recognition that that person is “pure awareness” as are you. This thinking melts the division between “us” and “them”, and “me” and “you”. For if you are “infinite awareness” looking at “infinite awareness”, who else is there? Perhaps this is what Plato means when he says “the purpose in fostering this attitude [a relationship to the good] is not enough to please himself, but to make each man a link in the unity of the whole” (360BC/1995, p. 247).
I am now moving to an area in education that has become somewhat taboo; and that is the discussion of love in connection to our students. In many ways we are more comfortable discussing sex than love in our culture. But as many educators know intuitively, any relationship with a student that is based on finding the good in that student is a relationship based on love.

As educators, especially when working with students that have in many ways been ‘written off’, it may be helpful to keep in mind that the any attempt at compassion or love for our students is not wasted. It is our intention that matters. As Murdoch tells us “when we try perfectly to love what is imperfect our love goes to its object, via the Good to be thus purified and made unselfish” (1971, p. 100). This speaks of a kind of intimacy that is based on uniting with someone on an emotional, intellectual and even a spiritual level. This uniting is essentially attaching our selves to the good in each other. And it is through this ‘uniting’ that we come to see that we are not completely separate from each other. It is through this ‘joining’ or unity we are able to walk with our students away from the shadows of the cave towards the light of the good.

**Concluding Thoughts**

At the beginning of this chapter, I posed the question, “As an art teacher, what can I do to make a difference?” Throughout this chapter, I have argued that there are ways to make a difference. It is my belief that the arts can play a vital role in encouraging our students to identify and articulate the good. By giving our students the opportunity to engage in the total imaginative activity of art making, we are providing them the means to know themselves in a more authentic way, and consequently form a more empathetic perception of themselves and others. And by offering our students the means to develop
a stronger sense of aesthetic, we are encouraging them to search for and recognize the good in themselves, others, and the world at large.

I believe that art offers us possibilities. Art can serve to remind us that in the most real sense, we are larger than any challenge we may encounter. We are not our problems. We are pure awareness that can expand into the light of the good or shrink into the shadows of the cave. We can choose to perceive the good and make it matter.
Discussion and Conclusion

Twenty years later.

My cell phone rings.

“Hi honey, how did it go?”

“Great, Mom. Guess What? I got elected!”

“Fantastic! How did your speech go?”

“Oh I ended up not reading it after all—I just said what I wanted to say. I’ve gotta go now Mom—Cheryl’s here and karaoke is about to start.”

“Okay Honey—have fun—I’m really, really proud of you."

Danny has just been elected to be a member of Caucus to represent North and West Vancouver for BCACL, a provincial body made up of self-advocates with physical and intellectual disabilities.

Danny still needs support with his day-to-day activities, but he is also a person who contributes to, and enriches the lives of many others. He works part-time at Safeway, volunteers at the Harvest Project (the food bank in North Vancouver), sings in a choir, and performs in the Fringe Festival. He has many friends, including a girlfriend. His speech is not perfect; within a minute or two of talking to Danny, one knows that there is something “different” about how he thinks and puts his thoughts into words, but he is very confident socially, and loves engaging in conversation with whomever he meets. Danny reads at a Grade 5 level and, every morning at breakfast, he reads the sports section of the newspaper. He also plays sports, loves hockey and believes in God. Danny’s IQ is 52.
If we had not challenged what many experts told us our son was capable of achieving it is unlikely Danny would have become the person that he is today. It is difficult to know for certain how much his early years of prolific drawing contributed to his later development of written and oral literacy, but I suspect the “drawing years” contributed a great deal. Throughout his childhood and teen years, Danny has been, and continues to be, very involved in the arts. The main thing, though, is that Danny is a happy individual and a very active member of his community. He is aware that the world sometimes thinks he has a disability but, to his mind, being “a person with a disability” is just a small part of who he is. When asked to describe himself, Danny does not even put “disability” on the list. He is who he is—a complete human being with many identities.

I began this thesis by asking the question, “What does inclusion mean in our postmodern time?” Inclusion means many different things to different people. There is no one “right” way to include; there are many “right” ways. Inclusion might take the form of students working on a project side by side, excitedly chatting, or it might be students working alongside each other in absorbed contemplative silence. Inclusion might mean learning skills and exploring ideas in segregated settings. It could also take forms we cannot possibly predict.

Not long ago, I was walking through the hall of a secondary school and witnessed an example of this. There was a young man with no legs in a wheelchair, and he was surrounded by two aboriginal young women. The girls were leaning into his chair and talking animatedly to the young man and he was shrieking with delight. Curious, I paused to listen to their conversation. Were they telling him jokes I wondered? What I heard was the opposite of what I expected. The girls were saying:
and if you think that’s bad, what we are going to do next is slap you so silly you won’t be able to smile for a week, and then we might find a hill and push you off just for fun! (Journal, May, 2007)

The girls were laughing as they were speaking, and it was clear that the three of them had an amicable, and in their own way, affectionate relationship. I realized I was witnessing their specifically unique way of being friends, and it was true inclusion, because it was authentic. They weren’t censoring their sense of humour in order to relate to the young man, and certainly they weren’t being “politically correct”. Most notably though, they weren’t relating to the young man in the wheelchair because they had to, they were including him because they wanted to. The key is that each of them was being who they authentically were in that moment. There was an acceptance of each one’s distinctive individuality, coupled with a certain amount of good heartedness.

In my view this interaction also serves as an example of what relationships might look like if we prescribe to the notion that disability is natural—the girls talking with the young man in the wheelchair were not treating him as being “special” or in need of being fixed. This experience made me realize that even though it is easy to criticize schools for not doing enough, it is clear that, to a large extent, schools have been, and continue to be, doing a very good job of including students with diverse needs and abilities. The words spoken by one of the young women who volunteered for The Story Project illustrates this point well. This volunteer is in her early 20s and was educated alongside students with a wide range of disabilities. This excerpt, from a questionnaire I gave to staff and parents, is in response to the question “What does inclusion mean to you?”

Inclusion is getting over whatever it is in your brain that is telling you that someone else is a threat. It’s accepting them, realizing that they
won't hurt you. Inclusion is acknowledging differences, and then deciding that they don't matter. Deciding that there is nothing to be afraid of, or that whatever discomfort there might be is worthwhile, because this other person deserves kindness and acceptance just as much as you do. Inclusion is a little effort on behalf of compassion. (Justine, June 10, 2007)

I give immense credit to the hard work and dedication exhibited by educators in our school system. However, I believe we can go further. Over a 100 years have passed since Seguin put forth the notion that students with intellectual disabilities could be trained to be useful in our society. Perhaps it is time to think of expanding this model to include a more complex and nuanced form of education, one that offers the means for students with intellectual disabilities to form and express meaning in order to become fully functioning human agents, capable of authoring their own identity.

I believe that one of the primary aims of education should be to enlarge who we are as human beings and this goes beyond training to be a useful member of society. Clearly, it is worthwhile to encourage students to be productive members of our society, and I do not mean to imply that the training model needs to be replaced, but rather I am suggesting that we add another dimension to this predominantly practical model. Along with offering students the model of training, I believe we should also be offering them the kind education that is aimed at self-development and self-understanding.

On many levels, the task of having to integrate and accommodate students with diverse needs and abilities into our classrooms may seem like one more problem for teachers to take on. However, I would like to offer the perspective that instead of viewing inclusion of students with diverse needs as a problem, we might perceive it as an opportunity for positive change within our schools. This might mean that instead of thinking that students with learning and behavioural challenges should adapt as much as
possible to our existing system, we could be looking at ways that our system can change and expand in order to include new approaches to learning.

In my view, it is worth finding new ways to include, for by expanding our notion of how students with diverse needs and abilities can be educated, the possibility exists that our present structure of education can be transformed in a small, but meaningful way. These transformations could lead to fresh ways of knowing and perceiving that could ultimately extend beyond our classrooms to our larger culture. One of the most positive outcomes that could emerge is that we begin to see ‘thinking in the arts’ as a valid means to build cognition.

These two ideas; thinking in the arts can build cognition and giving our students the cognitive tools to make sense of and express meaning are key. For by becoming human beings capable of expressing their own unique voice, individuals with intellectual disabilities will be better able to engage in our culture; thereby inhabiting a more equitable place in our society. Clearly, there are distinct differences in how we learn, but these differences should not mean that one is placed on the edges of learning.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that aesthetic literacy should be offered to students with intellectual disabilities in the same way that they are offered numeric, written, and oral literacy. True inclusion for students with diverse needs and abilities is contingent on them acquiring a language that will allow them to make sense of themselves and their world. Language is crucial, because as Taylor (1991) points out, we do not become fully formed selves in isolation; we become who we are in relationship and engagement with others. Without a language to articulate and express the deepest aspects of themselves, individuals with cognitive challenges are destined to remain on
the margins of our culture. However, it is possible that through the language of art, these individuals will be more able to function as fully formed human beings and inhabit a more central place in our society.

I believe that increased emphasis on aesthetic literacy and engagement with the imaginative arts would benefit not only students with diverse needs and abilities, but also be of benefit to students without disabilities. A curriculum that emphasizes the imaginative arts is one where the transcendent side of students would be nurtured. I am not naive enough to suggest that an arts based curriculum would automatically solve all our problems in education and in our culture, but I do believe it would be a move in the right direction. This shift would also be freeing for teachers, as teaching would be viewed more as an “art form” than a job they constantly have to justify in terms of student’s test results.

I am advocating for more art in our curriculum, but I believe we need to careful that we do not over mandate and over structure our art curriculum. To my mind, it is important to leave spaces for dreaming and contemplation. The kind of art I am advocating is art that focuses on the experience of creating, which to my mind is the “art of possibilities”, rather than art that is prescriptive and aimed primarily at creating a product. I am encouraging the kind of art making that opens spaces for imagining new selves and ways of being. As mentioned in my discussion of The Story Project, a "student lead" approach to teaching and learning can be challenging, but the rewards for taking a more open ended approach are rich and numerous.

What is particularly effective with the arts in teaching is that they offer a venue for the imagination to take root and flourish. I believe it is vital that we nurture the
imaginative lives of all of our students because the imagination provides the space required to experience the ineffable or sublime parts of ourselves; the parts of us that cannot be expressed in words. The arts also offer a powerful means for students to come to know themselves and to engage in the process of re-creating themselves. Few academic subjects afford this opportunity. The ability to re-imagine oneself is particularly relevant in relationship to students with intellectual disabilities, because even though there may be cognitive impairment, the imagination can still be a productive and functioning ability.

Participation in the imaginative process of art is capable of transforming how we perceive ourselves and others. By allowing individual difference to be seen as natural and not something that needs to be absorbed or fixed by the norm, we are permitting multiple ways of being human to exist in our consciousnesses and our culture. Furthermore, by expanding our idea of what it means to be human, we are re-defining what community and culture means to each of us. Thus, we are able to open spaces for small but meaningful transformations to take place in order to actualize and express our own unique sense of aliveness.

The kind of transformations I am speaking of are subtle and occur in the “quiet” moments when we are engaged in the flow of an activity such as art making. These moments occur in many forms and, almost always, have a seemingly random quality to them. They happen in relationship with others; shared humour, an “aha” moment when we see something afresh, or a conversation. These transformative moments are subtle and fleeting, but cumulatively add up to tangible differences in how we think, feel, and act. These moments may be as understated as a softening of our attitude or mistrust toward someone we are in conflict with, or an awareness of the language in which we
think and speak. This is why I believe we need welcoming and accessible spaces for people to create art alongside and in collaboration with each other. When I imagine “inclusive communities”, I see accessible art centres where any member of the community can join and make art on a daily basis, in much the same way we can now join a gym and drop in as often as we like.

Since completing *The Story Project*, I have been imagining an art centre that would be called *Open Arts*. The centre would be designed first for people with physical and intellectual disabilities. The key would be that the centre would be especially welcoming for people with disabilities, but it would be also be open to members of the non-disabled community. The idea being that members of the disabled community would play host and invite the rest of the community to come and join them; it would be a reversal of how disabled people are usually positioned in our communities.

When I envision this centre, I see it as having a number of studios offering visual art, dance, music, theatre and so on. Ideally, artists would be encouraged to work on projects there, essentially being “artists in residence”; free space in exchange for being on hand for conversation and occasional guidance to emerging artists (both disabled and non disabled). However, a centre such as this would only be supported by the community if our children and youth are educated to believe that art is an integral and ongoing part of life. This is why curriculum matters, for if our students are encouraged to value the arts in our schools they will come to expect and actualize more artistically enriched communities and culture.

The process of writing this thesis has been a valuable experience for me; I have become more aware of my own experience in the research and I have developed as an
artist and teacher. As mentioned in the introduction, this process has been a journey for me with unfolding realizations along the way and it has made me aware of my own evolution and process as an artist, researcher and teacher. In the future, I would like to explore this self-awareness in more depth.

Throughout this thesis, I have also argued that it is not only students with intellectual disabilities who need a connection to their more transcendent selves; all students, but especially “at-risk” students require this connection in order to become fully realized human beings. As discussed in Chapter 4, I believe that engaging in the imaginative experience of art making can have profound implications for these students. Art offers our students new ways of seeing and being seen. Art gives a way to attend to the existence of a reality that exists outside ourselves as “we cease to be in order to attend to something else” (Murdoch, 1971, p. 58). This “attending” to something else such as art, provides a means for our students to develop a more empathetic view of themselves and others.

I believe that in many ways we are educating young people to be good employees but not necessarily ethical human beings. For this reason I have argued that we need the concept of the good in education, and that I believe the arts are the ideal domain with which to explore, discover and articulate an ethical sense of self. One of the reasons the concept of the good may seem out of place in our present time is because the concept as illustrated by Plato (360BC/1955) is seen in a hierarchal way. In our postmodern era we are sceptical of any thinking that presents the notion of a ‘universal truth’. In our culture, we are more comfortable with the idea of multiple forms of knowledge, lateral in their relationship.
A community based on the notion of whole inclusion is essentially a community formed around the core notion of ‘the good’. I believe an inclusive society is one that accepts and encourages each individual to become a fully formed human being. In order for this to happen, we need to be able to form meaning, express that meaning and have a relationship to the good (Taylor, 1989). An education that includes the concept of the good is one that encourages our students to look beyond their immediate everyday selves. By having an ideal larger than ourselves, we are more likely to become fully realized human beings capable of making ethical choices.

Throughout this thesis, I have put forth the notion that the arts could play a vital role in encouraging our students to identify and articulate what the good is. It is important to make the initial connection to the good through subjects such as the arts, because the arts provide a basis for students to form and build relationships to the good in other areas of their lives. This point is at the heart of why participation in the arts is key, for through a simple shift in our perception, we are able to perceive the good and as a result make it good (Taylor, 1989). On one level, nothing changes but, on a deeper level, everything changes. In this seemingly simple, yet profound way, engagement with the imaginative arts could encourage our students to become active agents in their lives and in their culture.

Participation in the arts affords our students the opportunity to both discover meaning and create shared meaning with others. As we come to know our authentic selves, we are more able to form relationships that are based on deeper ways of knowing, thereby creating communities that are expansive enough to include multiple ways of being human. The role that art would play is that it can act as a type of connective tissue or “ongoing dialogue”; it is about being able to participate in the
conversation of life—listening in a meaningful way and contributing your own voice when you have something you need to say. For some of us, engagement with the imaginative arts is our way to discover how we think, feel and respond to others, our environment and ourselves. For me, this is the essence of inclusion because it means that one has the ability to co-construct their own identity and engage in dialogical relationships with others (Taylor, 1991).

It may be useful to imagine the good as a fluid and shifting state (Taylor, 1989), something that we can not only enter into, but an actual state that we can rest our minds in. If we imagine the good as a fluid state, it is easier to go a step further, and envision an inclusive culture as one that has softened and re-drawn the lines that we place between “us” and “them”. As Taylor points out “As humans we see some objects and people meriting our compassion and others not—what causes us to make this distinction—is it us or is it them?” (1989, p. 7). I would have to answer that it is "us", as I believe that each one of us has the capacity to enter into the flow of the good and to perceive and join with the "other". In the most fundamental sense, each one of us is “one of our own”.

Though my years of creating and teaching art I have come to see that each of us has something to offer just by our presence. In *Phaedrus*, Plato (360BC/2002) tells us that as souls we choose who we want to be in this life and it might be that the oldest souls are the ones who choose the most challenging lives, minds, and bodies. This may or may not be true, but I do believe that each of us has something valuable to offer because of who we are. It is a case of being open and accepting, and not deciding ahead of time what we need to learn from someone, but patiently listening and waiting
for it to emerge. Over time, I have come to see that acceptance is key. Acceptance is very powerful—it can transform us because it provides the space to be who we truly are.

The human heart can never be put aside; it forms and informs our rational self. In terms of education, I believe we need to find fresh ways to engage the human heart because it is both the engine and the compass that guides our thoughts, judgments and behaviours. Our passions and emotions can be a powerful motivation to learn. For me personally, exploring ways that the arts can be part of encouraging a more inclusive society is my passion, and has been a driving force in my professional, artistic, and personal journey. As a parent of a son with a disability, I would have done anything in my power to promote inclusion in our culture and communities. In all honesty, I have to say that if I were a scientist I would most likely have devoted my life to finding ways that science could encourage a more inclusive society. However, I am an artist, so this is what I know to be true.

She takes a deep breath
A good look
This is her home now

Breathe
Blue air
Breathe

Body changes
Mind changes
Life changes

Thank you

Yes
References


