ARTICULATIONS: EXPRESSIVE ARTS-BASED CURRICULUM IN THE
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A Dissertation
by
PEACHES HASH

Submitted to the Graduate School
Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2020
Reich College of Education

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ABSTRACT

ARTICULATIONS: EXPRESSIVE ARTS-BASED CURRICULUM IN THE
COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

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The following dissertation used practitioner action research as a method for exploring what students in collegiate rhetoric and composition courses experience when expressive arts-based curriculum is utilized throughout a semester. Qualitative data was collected from voluntary student participants in the forms of reflective journals, visual data of their art projects, and four interviews conducted throughout the semester. Once the data was analyzed through coding and mapping of thematic recurrence, it revealed that expressive arts activities fostered active learning, mindset shifts, and intrinsic motivation within students. The study also supported that expressive arts activities can serve as a method for students to engage in a *currere*, and, further, that *currere* can be used as a methodological framework for understanding students' exploration of identity. Lastly, the study exhibited how expressive arts activities have therapeutic elements for students even when they are connected to course content.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To begin, I would like to sincerely thank my committee members for their significant support, thoughtful feedback, and dedication to my process. Damiana Gibbon Pyles, my chair, was the first faculty member to believe in my ideas and enthusiastically support my practitioner action research. She has been ever-present, understanding, and helpful in all stages of my doctoral experience, and I would have never considered this form of dissertation without her. Leslie Cook has known me in some capacity for almost ten years, and when I returned to ASU from teaching high school, she was not surprised. She encouraged my growth as an instructor as well as student, while providing the challenge and critique necessary to consider my audience while writing. Finally, Brooke Hofsess, who agreed to be on my committee during our first face-to-face meeting, has served not only as a mentor, confidant, and empathetic nurturer, but also as a role model for who I aspire to be like in arts-based educational research. I will likely experience the afterglow of learning from her throughout my life. As a woman beginning her journey within academia, it is difficult to put into words how impactful my all-female dissertation committee has been for me, but I hope my dissertation showcases what they have instilled.

Secondly, I must thank my former student research participants. They devoted some of their coveted free time to this study, including roughly two and a half hours of interview time throughout the semester outside of their class meetings. I literally could not have done this without them not only because they produced the data, but also because their experiences led me to findings I did not anticipate. They made this study an absolute joy by producing thoughtful art, deep reflection, and genuine interest in my research.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the research participants, my students, whose experiences shaped my own ways of knowing. I hope you keep creating.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Eventually, you will have to pick which camp you belong to," the former director of my doctoral program said to me.

I sat back in my chair, contemplating her advice. I had heard a version of this statement all of my life when faced with choices: art or English teacher, Master's in Education or Master's in English, Ph.D. or Ed.D.? To be honest, the decisions I have made, especially when it comes to education, have always been bittersweet. When I open a door, why should I have to close it all the way? What if my journey is nonlinear? What if I want to move into multiple rooms?

I spent two years of doctoral coursework with the bound dissertations of cohorts before me lined up evenly on shelves. Though ranging in size, most uniformly had a gold title on the spine that encompassed the entire study, five chapters within black binding, and so on. I knew what was expected of me, but does a study that truly reflects multifaceted educational leadership completely "fit" in this standard format? I had so many research interests within education that spanned different methodologies, theories, and writing styles. Can someone with so many educational interests really pick a "camp" and never look back? Eisner (2008) profoundly stated that "universities ought to be places in which doctoral students could explore imaginatively new methods and concepts, and if universities could not provide such a setting, there were few places that could" (p. 18). I needed to utilize my knowledge within the doctoral program to manifest this setting for my dissertation study, one that allowed for my research to work within multiple "camps." Once I finished my

coursework and no longer had to stare at those homogenous dissertations, I decided, "Perhaps, I will eventually have to pick which camp I belong to. But, not yet."

This dissertation spans multiple "camps" that reflect my interests and experiences within Educational Leadership: Curriculum Studies, Composition Studies, Arts-Based Educational Research, and Expressive Arts. Without incorporating all of them, I could not have explored a solution to my problem: Art-making is rarely utilized in composition curriculum throughout a semester and, when it is, it is traditionally to aid students in a stage of the writing process (brainstorming, selecting a topic, etc.). Many compositionists in higher education (Dunnigan, 2019; Fleckenstein, 2003; LeCourt, 2004; Palmeri, 2012) consider art-making to be effective in composition courses. They recognize that the process of creating visual products is another form of the composition process, but it allows for more openness in composition than the limits of written words alone. Allowing for alternate methods of composition prepares students for the increasingly visually communicative world they inhabit, opens opportunities for expression, and helps students articulate what might be difficult in academic language; consequently, current trends in composition include students exploring different modalities within the arts. Albers (2007), Dunn (2001), Dunnigan (2019), Hanzalik and Virgintino (2019), Palmeri (2012), and Shipka (2011) have all experimented with using arts-based methods in their courses in some capacity to facilitate the composition process and create more "intellectual pathways" (Dunn, 2001, p.1) for constructing knowledge; however, though they articulate the benefits of using alternative forms of discourse (Shipka, 2011), there is less research on how the art-making can enhance other aspects of students' experiences. I designed my study to contribute to this gap by exploring how art-making can influence students' engagement, personal connection to curriculum, and

even therapeutic processes with my own students as research participants. Studying the influences of expressive arts in the collegiate writing classroom could "open up conversations and relationships instead of informing others about what has been learned" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxx). I desired to contribute to the growing understanding of composition, including processes other than "generating words" (Sharples, 1999, p. 90).

Eisner (2008) poses the question, "Could there be [. . .] an approach to educational research that would rely upon the imaginative and expressive crafting of a form in ways that enlarge our understanding of what goes on, say, in teaching?" (p. 18). My dissertation research attempts to answer this question by infusing visual art-making in the collegiate Rhetoric and Composition courses I teach. When designing the study, I considered the following research questions:

- How does art-making influence a collegiate Rhetoric and Composition course?

- What kinds of processes do students go through when creating these activities?

- What is unsettled, disturbed, or disrupted when students engage in art-making within a collegiate Rhetoric and Composition course?

These questions deliberately contained an openness to possible outcomes that is reflective in both arts-based educational research (ABER) and the interpretive or constructivist paradigm, which "examines [how people engage in processes of constructing and reconstructing meanings through daily interactions" (Leavy, 2017, p. 129) as well as the meaning people assign to their experiences. Because I was interested in studying students' experiences, processes, and reflections, my research questions fell under a constructivist framework. My research questions "[prioritized students'] subjective understandings and multiple meanings in the research process" (p. 129). Throughout the study, the research questions shaped

interview questions and journal prompts that elicited a range of responses as students explored the possible meanings involved in their art-making.

Practitioner Action Research

The idea for my dissertation began when I saw that the curriculum I created was influencing my own students, which caused me to want to explore further in my own classroom through a qualitative study. My study's methodology was *practitioner action research*, a form of action research that encourages teachers to conduct investigative inquiry in their own classrooms with their students. Originally, educators often turned to professionally-trained outside researchers for answers (McKernan, 1991), but practitioner action research (and action research in general) is an inclusive methodology. McNiff (2017) envisions action research being useful for all people who want to take action within their worlds, speak for themselves, and "provide explanations for what they are doing" (p. 2), which is what I was seeking. I knew that students enjoyed the expressive arts activities, but I did not understand why, to what extent, or even if, enjoyment mattered in writing. I had a vague understanding of the curriculum's effectiveness, but did not deeply investigate why. The dissertation, then, was an opportunity to explore and provide explanations for why arts-based curriculum is effective in a collegiate composition class.

While I desired to provide research-based reasons for why I implemented this curriculum, I also sought to contribute to the fields of Curriculum Studies, Composition Studies, and Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER). This study showcases how arts-based curriculum, focusing on the process of art-making, can enhance students' experiences in a classroom space; therefore, practitioner action research is not only a methodology for research, but also a process of inquiry. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) explain that common

characteristics of practitioner inquiry include "[b]lurred boundaries between inquiry and practice" (p. 39). I implemented my curriculum as the classroom teacher, but also positioned myself as a researcher, investigating what meaning-making occurred that was not necessarily a writing skill they were expected to develop within my course. Originally, I was interested in how arts-based methods can facilitate writing development, but I noticed while working with the data that there were other effects from the process. Because this methodology is both open-ended and developmental, I followed the study when it went in other directions than what I expected (McNiff, 2017).

Though critics of this methodology may argue that the multiple roles of the researcher and teacher lead to subjectivity that negatively influences a study, practitioner action research views subjectivity as an opening for new meaning. Instead of being skeptical of how a researcher can function as the classroom teacher, practitioner action research encourages researchers to explore what is possible when it happens. The researcher may hold multiple roles simultaneously, or position differently in roles with participants as needed. This positionality, however, requires high sensitivity in the study. I chose to be conscious of how collecting data could influence the classroom space. Ultimately, I elected to interview students around their schedules outside of class. The interviews took place via ASU's online conferencing platform, Zoom, so students could select a space that was comfortable and private for them. During class time, I was instructing both participants and non-participants in the same space, requiring me to almost entirely position as the teacher. Though I was aware of the study during class time, discussions about the study with participants occurred outside of class and the only data collected during class time was through work that all students turned in before or at the end of class (photographs of their artwork, journals, etc.).

Methods

Curriculum

During the course, my students completed three major paper assignments with multiple drafts that aligned with the RC 2001 course objectives. Their first paper assignment was a literacy narrative followed by a rhetorical analysis of a self-selected text. Lastly, students completed a research paper that required collecting multiple forms of data, then combining data to create a commentary of communication/writing. While writing these assignments, students were asked to create an artistic product to accompany them. They could choose to make the art before, during, or after writing, but they were asked to create the art outside of class and bring it in on the day their papers were due. Though my students created art during class as well, I was interested in studying their process outside of class when they selected their own materials and had more time to make art than out class time. As students might need more time to complete art assignments to go with their papers, I was conscious that "[t]he pace of the activity needs to accommodate the richness of the encounter" (Bresler, 2018, p. 657). Students had around two weeks to complete their out-of-class art, leaving time for them to ask questions, change their ideas, or revise. They also had more time to consider, obtain, and work with materials of their choice.

Visual Artifacts

The photographs students turned in of their artwork served as visual artifacts that enhance their interviews. During interviews, students would refer to specific details of their art as they looked at what they created. The images of their art enhanced verbal responses. But the visual artifacts were not only a form of data collection, but also a way to "represent research" (Holm, Sahlstrom, & Zilliacus, 2018, p. 312). I was not present during their actual

processes of making since they completed activities at home; therefore, the products showcase the completion of process. In expressive arts, the process is valued over the product, but visual images of products are used to represent what participants went through.

The visual artifacts also contribute to my positioning within practitioner action research. I am writing these articles for readers to consider how art-making can fit within their curriculums, but discussing art without providing examples for readers would be less effective. Holm, Sahlstrom, and Zilliacus (2018) explain that "[b]ecause images are memorable, they are [. . .] likely to influence the ways we think and act, and can help us disseminate our research findings to a much larger audience" (p. 313). The visual artifacts add a richness to the data that words could not provide alone. Moreover, journals that accept practitioner research often advise writers to include visual evidence of their curriculum for readers.

Reflective Journals

My students completed multiple journals throughout the semester on various topics that were graded for participation as a way to promote reflection and the act of writing in general. Palmeri (2012) states that "the teacher's aim should be to help students reflect critically about the strengths and limitations of various alphabetic, auditory, and visual methods of invention" and that "teachers should engage students in regular reflective writing and discussion about multimodal strategies for invention" (p. 150). Since I teach writing courses, it felt necessary that participants engaged in some reflection by writing about their experiences. Like the visual data, the journals would provide insight into the individual experiences students had with art-making. Three journals throughout the semester served as debriefing/reflection on students' experiences with art-making. All journals throughout the

semester were participation-only, low-stakes assignments within the course; consequently, I have found students to be open with their opinions, even if negative. Feedback from participants were saved in a private Google drive and coded/analyzed after the course ended.

Participant Interviews

Participant interviews proved to be the richest source of data throughout the semester. Though students did express themselves in their journals, I was not there when they wrote them to ask further questions. Providing an at-home assignment for reflection may have limited students' willingness to express their thoughts due to time-management, comfortability expressing their thoughts in writing, feelings towards homework in general, etc., which is why I desired to interview as well as use reflective journal responses. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that "depending on the topic, interviewing is sometimes the only way to get data" (p. 109), but I would add that depending on the interviewee, this statement holds true as well. For undergraduate students taking a required writing course, expecting them to expand on their thoughts in writing is not always welcome; thus, I sought to "uncover and interpret [. . .] meanings" (p. 25) further through interview. Because I was interested in a specific topic (art-making) related to their experiences, my questions formed a topical interview that focused more on "process than on people's lives" (Glesne, 2016, p. 97) in general. Since the art-making activities spanned the semester, participants were interviewed four times: once after each major assignment, then lastly at the end of the semester when time has passed. Multiple interviews per participant contributed to more of a "living inquiry" (Gouzouasis, 2008, p. 228), where reflections and feelings on the assignments could transform over time and be recorded in the study.

Interview questions were largely predetermined to elicit useful data. This study's topic required an interview where specific data was needed to answer my research questions); consequently, a list of questions that all related to the central research questions were needed. The questions included subtopics involving process, cognition, and connection to other assignments. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) attest that pilot interviews are "crucial" (p. 117) for trying out questions, which made me conduct a few small interviews during previous semesters with students on the topic of their arts assignments, which greatly contributed to formulating my questions. The interview questions were highly structured in that the wording and order of questions was largely predetermined, but I also left room for conversation and ambiguity based on student responses. Bresler (2018) reminds readers that "[d]ialogue needs to have an open-ended interaction. It can also have more structured aspects to support the open-ended interaction" (p. 660); hence, the questions were a mix of structured and less structured, allowing for flexibility with participants, especially when it came to probing.

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data collected at multiple points during the semester were necessary to promote participants' and the researcher's ongoing interpretations. After each assignment, new thoughts, discoveries, and interpretations could be made by participants and myself. These forms not only provided several windows into individual experiences, but also created pathways where individual student experiences could possibly connect to each other. In selecting my ways to collect data, I considered what I was interested in discovering as well as how I could contribute to understandings of artistic expression/the effects that art-making can have in the classroom (McNiff, 2018, p. 34). Data consisted of written reflective

journals, visual artifacts, and participant interviews that all came from the arts-based curriculum I created.

Dissertation Format

This research showcases how practitioner action research and arts-based educational research methods can work within a college composition course, contribute to the field of curriculum research, and shed light on the significance of art-making in educational settings for students' wellbeings. As I began to analyze my data, I found that there were threads of meaning that contributed to different fields of research. Forcing these findings into a standard dissertation format with a "results" section would require me to make overarching connections between findings that are not as specific, useful, or valid for myself as a practitioner learning from her research or an audience; therefore, the following dissertation sections are articles that focus specifically on unique findings and how they connect to Composition Studies, Curriculum Studies, and Arts-Based Educational Research. I intend to submit these articles to three different types of journals (A description of each journal is included before each chapter for reference). Each article reflects an aspect of my (current) three major educational interests as well as my past, present, and future roles within educational research: I have been a practitioner for some time, I have recently been involved in curriculum studies, and I intend to move further into arts-based educational research.

Along with seeing different threads of meaning across my research, I also noticed nuanced, individual experiences within my research participants. It would have been simpler to force their data into a standard analysis format by making general connections; however, when I attempted to generalize in the analysis sections, I realized that I could not. If I generalized their data based on themes, I would lose participants' unique voices that reveal

the extent art-making influenced them. This study is impactful because it explores how art-making can influence students' experiences on individual levels of mindset, motivation, personal connections, and therapeutic effects. In order for me to showcase what art-making can do for individual students, I elected to use narrative analysis. This method for analysis enabled me to maintain individual research participants' voices and experiences.

Essentially, these articles are "multiple ways of seeing" (Fleckenstein, 2003, p. 99) the effects art-making had on individual participants within my composition courses. As stated earlier, most research on art-making within composition courses focuses on how art-making assists students with the writing process. But there are other ways that art-making can enhance students' experiences. In my three articles, I examine other ways of seeing what art-making could do within my classroom. The first article addresses an issue I had within my Rhetoric and Composition courses and how I attempted to solve it with arts-based methods. The second article views students' composition processes through the curricular framework of *currere*, an autobiographical method of connecting personal experience with course curriculum through four stages: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical (Pinar, 2004). The third article explores how expressive arts practices (art-making that emphasizes the process of creation over product for stimulating ways of knowing, reflection, and growth) can function within curricular structure and enhance students' experiences. Because an "educational practice consists of a range of transactions between teachers and learners" (Pring, 2015, p. 143), I chose to create articles that reflected that range. The articles blend practitioner action research, arts-based educational research, and my personal voice to create a picture of which camps I am interested in but am not willing to be exclusive to: composition theory, curriculum studies, and arts-based educational research. Dunn (2001)

once explained that she was "still working" on her philosophy of teaching because she was still "working through" (p. 9) her philosophy of life, and so am I. Currently, my life, as with research in education, is filled with constructed knowledge, multiple meanings, and opportunities for surprise; hence, the following articles reflect it.

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CHAPTER 2: "WOW, I FEEL MOTIVATED": ACTIVE LEARNING, MINDSET SHIFTS,

AND MOTIVATION IN COMPOSITION COURSES THROUGH EXPRESSIVE ARTS

How does art-making influence a collegiate Rhetoric and Composition course?

My first article examines the initial practitioner action research within my study:

Curricular design, my research questions, and so on. I originally created this study to see if

my students' outlooks on writing would develop when expressive art-making was added.

Before I added arts-based curriculum, my students often seemed apathetic and unmotivated

to put effort into my assignments. Some also seemed to have fixed mindsets, assuming that

their writing skills would not improve during the course. I hypothesized that these behaviors

in students were due to the lack of connection to their assignments; they did not feel like

what they were doing meant anything. The qualitative research involved collecting multiple

forms of data (reflective journals, visual data, and multiple interviews over a semester) and

analyzing it through mapping of students' experiences. I was looking for shifts in their

outlooks towards the curriculum, but also in their perceptions of their own abilities. Through

analysis, I found that students' perceptions of the curriculum and their writing abilities were

enhanced through art-making. The data supports that art-making can contribute to

motivation, growth mindset, and active learning.

This article was written with a specific journal in mind. *College English*, an NCTE

publication, serves as a forum for professionals who teach courses within English

departments. It seeks articles on histories, theories, and practices within subfields of English

while focusing on representing emerging, innovative teaching practices within the field.

Ultimately, *College English* wishes to contribute to new knowledge or challenge old

assumptions within the field of teaching English. With this article, I intend to contribute

knowledge to the topic of teaching Rhetoric and Composition by exploring the effects of integrating art-making into my curriculum.

College English's newest posted feature is titled "And Gladly Teach." This call specifically asks for innovative practices that can blend theory into curricular practices. Submissions must engage with recent research in the field, but also showcase curricular practices and primary classroom documents (assignment prompts, student work, etc.) that translate methods into instructional techniques. The goal of this call is to show how practitioners solve problems within their own courses through curriculum and assess their success with student data. In 2019, a practitioner piece I wrote based on the curriculum I used while teaching high school was published in another journal of NCTE, *English Journal*; consequently, my past experience working with NCTE editors and writing a practitioner piece on instructional methods served as the framework for the following article.

Introduction

When I found out I had been accepted to teach within a university English department as an adjunct, I was ecstatic. After seven collective years of teaching high school, I was exhausted from the curricular restrictions, testing requirements, and, most of all, student apathy. My days of students smiling blissfully with a shrug when I asked for their homework would be a distant memory, or so I thought. Little did I know that an increase in age did not automatically correlate to student engagement.

During the fall of 2017, I taught my first courses of Rhetoric and Composition 2001, the (traditionally) second-year writing course with a theme of Writing Across the Curriculum. "Sophomores! Even better," I thought to myself as I planned the syllabus with required readings, essay prompts, and in-class activities that I thought would be enjoyable:

analyzing advertisements on Youtube, rhetorical debates, etc. My fantasized semester of second-year writing was filled with mature, engaged learners who pushed themselves to write. I could not wait to begin.

Fast forward to the end of the semester, and all I could think was, "What went wrong?" The apathy within my high school students was, to some degree, still present in many of my current university ones. Many had fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2006), thinking their writing skills could not increase significantly with practice, so why bother? Even the ones who acknowledged that they could improve were often unmotivated due to demands from other courses. Each class took so much effort for me to get them engaged enough to do much more than passively listen or write for a few minutes without attempting to text under their desks.

It was easy to believe that external factors were causing my classroom issues. My course was a General Education requirement, meaning students had to take it to graduate; consequently, many of them came in with poor attitudes on the first day that sometimes never dissipated. Or, perhaps it was the time of day. I taught morning classes where some of them were yawning throughout the activities. But in my heart, I understood that the curriculum I had painstakingly planned before the semester was not effective. Sullivan (2014) states that an essential question teachers of writing must ask themselves is "[h]ow can composition instructors create classroom conditions within which students will motivate themselves?" (p. 126). When reflecting on that question, I determined that if the curriculum had elements of active, individualized learning, students would become more engaged, or self-motivated. But for this type of learning to occur, I needed to create a more learner-centered curriculum

where students could construct their own knowledge instead of just listening to mine (Schiro, 2013).

My quest for this type of curriculum led to practitioner action research with arts-based methods. As I assigned art activities that paired with each paper sequence of drafts, students began to put forth more effort. After one semester using this curriculum with freshman composition, many of them signed up for one of my second-year sections because they wanted to create more art. Though I knew students liked making art in my composition courses, I did not understand why on a deeper level. The following article explores my findings during a semester of practitioner action research where students engaged in art-making within a second-year rhetoric and composition course. When students enjoy the curriculum within a course, they are more likely to put forth effort and personally connect to the material, which is what I sought to explore new methods within my courses to engage students. Ultimately, expressive arts-based methods in composition fostered active, individualized learning, growth mindsets, and enjoyment in student participants over a semester.

Why Don't They Want to Write?!

Though I recognized that I needed to do something for my own students, the issue of student engagement within collegiate writing classes was not an isolated occurrence in my own classroom. Throughout education, many students do not enjoy writing, which leads to lack of engagement. When people enjoy activities, they are more likely to put forth time and effort into completing them (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). When I first began teaching at the college level, I assumed that students would find more enjoyment in writing because they had chosen to attend higher education, but I was mistaken.

Compositionists identify several contributing factors to students' lack of enjoyment. Writing in academia is often "a laborious and many times unrewarding process" (Fleckenstein, 2003, p. 39). The process can require a significant amount of time for an outcome that may be lower than a student expected. Assignments typically included in writing courses are cognitively demanding of students, requiring more than sentence construction and organizing paragraphs. Additionally, students are expected to showcase high levels of what Carroll (2002) calls critical literacy, requiring "researching, reading complex texts, understanding of key disciplinary concepts, and strategies for synthesizing, analyzing, and responding critically to new information, usually within a limited time frame" (p. 9). All of these expectations students must meet can make the composition process seem futile: Why put so much effort in when it is not enjoyable to do? Why try when there is no guarantee the efforts will be rewarded? As Fleckenstein (2003) expresses, "Writing hurts. Failure hurts" (p. 40). If students do not feel that they can avoid failure, they can at least attempt to avoid the added pain of a lengthy process.

Other curricular methods within composition classrooms contribute to students' lack of effort. Professors in higher education commonly ascribe to a Scholar Academic ideology: Students must learn the knowledge accumulated from the instructor's academic culture (Schiro, 2013). The curriculum is constructed, influenced, and molded by the instructor's personal or professional interests, creating a "hierarchical community" (Schiro, 2013, p. 4) where the instructor holds the truth and the students are recipients of it. In her research, Carroll (2002) noticed that students are constantly involved in a process of figuring out what the professor wants, attempting to force their writing into these expectations. As a result of this structure, binaries (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016) develop between learner/instructor,

skilled/unskilled students, and "good writers"/ "bad writers." Binaries cause students to feel divorced from their writing if they struggle, preventing them from seeing themselves as writers at all even though they are expected to produce writing (Nolan, 2019). When instructors reply on solely teaching the rules of academic writing, the result is both indoctrinating and disempowering, making students ascribe to this rigid system of "good" writing, but also revealing to them how difficult it is to achieve, especially as undergraduates (Sirc, 2002). Even if students see ways to achieve these academic standards, they may not think themselves capable. When course structures narrow individual expression and constructed knowledge, student writers feel as if their writing should be standard rather than individualized (Nolan, 2019). Additional aspects of the scholar academic ideology that contribute to student aversion in writing are evaluation and traditional assignments that narrow student creativity (Sullivan, 2014). If students do not feel that they can succeed under this model, they will not enjoy writing.

Art-Making to Enhance Composition: Imagination, Constructed Knowledge, and Unsettled Curriculum

Art-making is a curricular method that many compositionists in higher education (Dunnigan, 2019; Fleckenstein, 2003; LeCourt, 2004; Palmeri, 2012) consider as an effective way to engage students. They recognize that the process of creating visual products is another form of the composition process, but it allows for more openness in composition than the limits of written words alone. Allowing for alternate methods of composition prepares students for the increasingly visually communicative world they inhabit, opens opportunities for expression, and helps students articulate what might be difficult in academic language; consequently, current trends in composition include students exploring different modalities

within the arts. Albers (2007), Dunn (2001), Dunnigan (2019), Hanzalik and Virgintino (2019), Palmeri (2012), and Shipka (2011) have all experimented with using arts-based methods in their courses in some capacity to facilitate the composition process and create more "intellectual pathways" (Dunn, 2001, p.1) for constructing knowledge; however, though they articulate the benefits of using alternative forms of discourse (Shipka, 2011), there is less research on how the art-making can enhance student engagement, motivation, and enjoyment over the entire course. I designed my study to contribute to this gap.

Before designing my study, I found in my research that the arts are theorized to have unique benefits for learners that can enhance their experiences with writing, especially for sparking imagination. When interacting with visual arts in disciplinary experiences, Freedman (2003) states that imagination develops. According to Greene (1988) imagination is "fundamental" (p. 48) for engagement. But the term "imagination" lacks a clear definition. It seems to be an ideal aspect of curriculum and learning, yet elusive in how practitioners can achieve it in their classrooms. Egan (1988) explains that imagination is a desirable outcome of an educational experience, but that many practitioners are unsure what causes it, which is partially due to imagination being less synonymous with academic learning and more with unstructured thought. Curriculum theorists throughout history (Dewey 1934/2005; Eisner, 1972; Greene & Lincoln Center Institute, 2001; hooks, 1994) have recognized the power art-making has for sparking imagination, but they have fewer suggestions for curricular activities and more theoretical ideas of how imagination and art can function in education.

Imagination is an essential aspect of composition as well as art-making. Both practices require imagination to begin a process of creation. In terms of the writing process, imagination is often connected to brainstorming. After a lightbulb effect of an idea

(imagination), the student is able to articulate it through writing. As with imagination in composition theory and education, the arts are traditionally used before composition begins, if at all. But Sharples (1999) explains that "there is no single starting point" (p. 6) to begin writing; it is up to the writer to determine where to begin. Likewise, art-making has multiple pathways for beginning. In art-making, there is often a flow of ideas as one experiments with materials. Idea flowing can also occur in writing, but it requires writers to be "fully engaged with the task" (p. 49). Writers from a range of skills and reception to written composition may have difficulty inducing this type of deep engagement, but art-making is a nontraditional method that can activate this engagement. Art-making can then transfer to written composition based on the curricular models in place. Imagination, or exploring possibilities, is essential for students to write, but it is not limited to a brainstorming, pre-writing process, which is when the arts typically occur in writing courses.

Along with sparking imagination, I found that art-making can facilitate the construction of knowledge based on experience. Art-making contributes to the construction of reality for those interacting with them. Efland (2002) explains that throughout history, the function of the arts has been to construct reality. Visual arts are representations of worlds, whether they be realistic or interpretive. Dewey (1934/2005) explains that art-making can deepen the construction of reality because "to perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience" (p. 56). While externally creating, the brain is internally creating as well. In terms of what is occurring within the brain, Malchiodi (2018) asserts that the arts are able to evoke different responses than what language and logic are able to do, as well as "expand the logic of the thinking brain to other possibilities and perceptions" (p. 72); thus, art-making can deepen and enhance previously constructed knowledge as well as provoke the formation of

new knowledge. With these theories in mind, I began to consider how curriculum could be used to facilitate knowledge construction.

Researching before my study also revealed links to art-making and written composition that I had not considered. When creating visual arts, one's process involves generating and selecting ideas to represent. Written language as well as art-making function to both stabilize and represent ideas (Berthoff, 1984). Though ideas may be in a state of continuous construction, art-making, as well as writing, records a moment of construction for students to return to. The selection of ideas can both frame one's view and "captures the moment" (Eisner, 1972, p. 12). Once ideas are selected, they are constructed with art-making. Makers reflect, interpret, and consider how to put what is in their heads into a visual form. According to Eisner (2002), an artistic product is a "[r]epresentation [that] stabilizes the idea or image in a material and makes possible a dialogue with it" (Eisner, 2002, p. 6). Essentially, the dialogue is constructed knowledge, knowledge that is learned or unlearned, occurring before, during, or after a process of art-making. But the entire process of art-making is not just creating a product; it is also a form of meaning-making. Meanings form, develop, and restructure continuously during a period of art-making. With both writing and art-making, meanings are "created, found, formed, and reformed" (Berthoff, 1981, p. 71). Each meaning that is made, then, is constructed knowledge that may stabilize or reconstruct with new experiences.

Though enjoyable for some, art-making in a subject area that is not an art course is unsettling for other students; it is not what they seem accustomed to. Students are typically prepared for what Sharples (1999) describes as external constraints: the paper prompt, pencil or other writing device, and paper. Students have relayed as much to me in all of the

semesters I have used arts-based methods, curious as to why they are not writing daily in a writing class. But this unsettling of what is expected is also beneficial. Art-making creates imaginative contexts for learning that may mean "unsetting routines" (Egan & Judson, 2016, p. 111). Creating curriculum that is more inclusive makes spaces available for student meaning-making that might otherwise not exist. This type of curriculum calls for the unsettling of spaces that emphasize competition and traditional classroom dynamics. Asking students to begin a process of composition without having to write words disrupts the norms of the composition environment, where students assume they will be writing continuously as their form of communication. Sharples (1999) views this type of disruption as a liberating activity where students can explore the process of design more fully, seeing that it can occur outside of the external constraints they have come to view as comfortable: "Activities such as sketching and doodling are not distractions from the task of writing, but an integral part of it" (p. 10). Through art-making, students' ideas of composition and communication are challenged to develop further than they might not otherwise.

Unsettling routines within curriculum can also bring about pleasure in the classroom, resulting in excitement for learning. hooks (1994) understands that many students come to college used to learning through a banking system where memorization and absorption of facts are rewarded over critical thinking. Her solution is that educators "disrupt the atmosphere" (p. 7) by attempting to bring pleasure in the classroom. Art-making lacks the enforced seriousness that students often relate to written composition, allowing them to play. As students share their art with their peers, they also come to know one another, which is another way hooks (1994) sees excitement being generated within the classroom, "hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence" (p. 8). In order to execute this

type of environment, there needs to be flexible agendas and "spontaneous [shifts] in direction" (p. 7), which aligns with aspects of arts-based educational research (ABER): flexibility, willingness to follow exploratory threads of meaning, and participant self-expression.

Aspects of Expressive Arts in Education

Though other compositionists and educational theorists have explored the connections between art-making and composition, there is less research on how expressive arts can enhance students' experiences. I had a feeling that art-making would enhance my courses because I experienced it firsthand as a student when I had the opportunity to work within the framework of expressive arts (EXA). While completing my doctorate degree in Educational Leadership, I was also taking classes in expressive arts to complete the graduate certificate. During my courses, I began to notice how much EXA aligned with what I wished to create in my courses. Though EXA is more common in therapeutic professions, it can also be utilized by educators. What makes EXA different from art-making in a traditional studio setting is that it places importance on the process of art-making rather than a final product (Knill, 2005; Knill & Knill, 2017). Neither teachers nor students have to have any artistic skill as long as they engage fully in a process of making, putting forth effort and focusing on how their thoughts construct meaning. A curriculum based on expressive arts, then, allows for low skill/ high sensitivity (Knill, 2005; Knill & Knill, 2017). It is based on the ancient Greek word *poiesis*, "the act of bringing something new into the world" (Levine, 2017b, p. 10), with the "something new" being knowledge/understanding instead of a highly skilled artistic product. Through this construction, or composition process, art becomes a way of knowing (Allen, 1995).

Individual ways of knowing for learners contribute to the exploration of multiplicity in their creative processes. Knowledge/information is continuously being constructed or reconstructed as new experiences continue, making learning active/ongoing rather than passive and positivist, or what hooks (1994) would describe as banked knowledge. Though content knowledge is taught, it is not an ultimate, irrefutable truth, and students are encouraged to take what they have always known and push further into the unknown (Levine, 2017a). This type of exploration for knowledge is "decentering," requiring students to move away from positivism, of "'dead-end' situations" to follow the circular "logic of imagination" (Knill, 2005, p. 83). Within EXA, art-making is a way of knowing that is individualized and respected by peers and the instructor. Though these concepts may seem radical or daunting, hooks (1994) sees individualized learning as something that students crave: "Students are eager to break through the barriers of knowing. They are willing to surrender to the wonder of re-learning and learning ways of knowing that go against the grain" (p. 44). Expressive arts, then, seemed like an appropriate curricular method for giving students what they desire.

Designing the Curriculum

The first step of bringing expressive arts activities into my courses required me to revise my curriculum. Research conducted by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) explains that the amount of writing assignments within a course is not as important as the types of writing assignments instructors give their students (Bean, 2011). Engagement and deep thinking are not automatic; the assignments must promote them. In their "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing," the Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council

of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project (2011) outlined habits of mind to approach learning that would challenge and help students develop their skills:

- Curiosity: The desire to learn

- Openness: The willingness to alternative ways of thinking and being

- Engagement: Investment and involvement in one's learning

- Creativity: Novel methods for exploring and constructing knowledge

- Persistence: Sustaining effort and attention

- Responsibility: Taking ownership for one's learning

- Flexibility: Adapting to change

- Metacognition: Reflecting on one's process and constructed knowledge.

With these aspects in mind, I sought to create a curriculum under Schiro's (2013) Learner Centered ideology, with students constructing meaning, engaging in activities, and actively participating in creation over the semester. When designing the curriculum, I desired it to facilitate the following aspects that would align with the aforementioned habits of mind:

Individualized Active Learning

Simmons and Hicks (2006) explain that creative art-making can "enable people to trust their inner intelligence and imagination and enhance opportunities for learning" (p. 80). I wanted students to gain confidence in their own composition abilities instead of worrying how I would assess them. The curriculum emphasized process creativity rather than product creativity, looking at how their art-making problem-solved, explored, or questioned within their environments instead of their final art products being original, useful, or valuable to the outside world (Kellogg, 1994).

Oxtoby (2018) identifies an aspect of active learning as an activity that allows students to work with metaphors to help understand course concepts. Expressive arts asks participants to explore metaphors through art-making; thus, including them could stimulate an active environment.

Growth/Innovator Mindset

A simple, but effective way to view students' beliefs in their composition abilities is through Dweck's (2006) conception of fixed versus growth mindsets. A fixed mindset stems from the one's belief that their knowledge and skills will not develop regardless of the amount of time they put into learning. If students feel that they are just not writers or will never write well, they have a fixed mindset towards the subject. In contrast, if they believe that their skills can develop with resources and practice, they have a growth mindset. Dweck (2006) attests that skills are not innately present; they must be developed, but a fixed mindset prevents students from doing so. Sieben (2018) states that mindset theory should be an important consideration in curriculum development for writing courses. In her own research, she found that growth mindsets significantly correlated with what she called writing hope, or the positive belief that they have agency in achieving their writing goals in a course.

Expanding on Dweck's (2006) mindset theory, Couros (2015) explains the need for growth mindsets to extend to innovation in this ever-changing world students inhabit where they prepare for jobs that may not exist yet. He defines the innovator's mindset as "the belief that the abilities, intelligence, and talents are developed so that they lead to the creation of new and better ideas" (Couros, 2015, p. 31). To foster an innovator's mindset, educators must create a curriculum that allows students to recognize that failure is part of the process of learning, which will then enhance their resilience and grit. Curriculum should also tap into

students' passions while also promoting risk-taking, problem-solving, creating, reflecting, and construction of knowledge (Couros, 2015). All of these aspects put students within an educational culture of "yes," where they feel that their ideas matter and they feel empowered to pursue them.

Intrinsic Motivation

My students seemed motivated to write because of external factors, such as the grade, my perception of them, etc. The result was that there seemed to be a disconnect between themselves and their writing: They only wanted to do it to get it done, not engage with the process based on their topic. Sullivan (2014) suggests creating assignments that motivate students intrinsically. Through surveying students on what they enjoyed, valued, and learned in writing courses, Sullivan (2014) found that students are more intrinsically motivated to complete creative assignments and different mediums for composition.

My department's course structure for Rhetoric and Composition classes typically allowed for three major writing assignments with several drafts throughout a semester. Though we have choice in the types of assignments, I followed a standard narrative, analysis, and research-intensive structure within the semester. The new component was to assign an expressive art project to accompany each paper sequence. Though students would not be graded on the artistic product, they would earn credit for the thought and reflection they put into the making. The art would be due with their first draft for peer workshop, allowing for students to share their art as well as the writing with their peers. Table 1 reflects the prompt for the art/writing.

Table 1. Course Assignments

Paper Assignment	Art/Writing Prompt	Reflective Activities After Completion of Art/Draft
Literacy Narrative	Create a hierarchical form that reflects how you achieved literacy in a topic of your choice and write an accompanying narrative that helps your audience understand your art.	• Class gallery walks on the due date of the art/draft. • Peer writing groups sharing of art processes/products. • Peer workshop of written component. • Journal reflection on their art-making/writing processes.
Rhetorical Aesthetic Response	Create a multimodal form that reflects how a text rhetorically persuades you in different ways and write an accompanying narrative that helps readers understand your art.	
Discourse in the Major Research Assignment	Create an artistic form that takes your audience through your journey of research, and write an accompanying document that helps your audience understand your research process.	

Assessing the Curriculum

The reflective journals provided a gateway into how students felt about the artistic aspects of the curriculum, but I sought more feedback into what students were experiencing than their short responses provided; consequently, I decided to engage in practitioner action research to explore the effects of the curriculum. This research involved interviewing student participants in my courses four times a semester: Once after each art project, and the final time at the end of the semester. The interviews were semi-structured, asking students open-ended questions such as how they felt about the assignment, then questions on how they thought the art-making related to their writing process. Table 2 includes the research questions used for the study.

Table 2. Interview Questions

After each individual project	At the end of the semester
- Can you explain your art to me? - How did the art-making connect to your writing? - How have your feelings about art/writing changed or remained the same? - What thoughts or discoveries emerged during this process? - Do you think the art-making was beneficial for this assignment? - What aspects of the art-making did you like or dislike?	- What art-making assignments that have stood out to you this semester? - What moments stood out this semester during the art-making? - What thoughts, ideas, or discoveries did you have while making any of the art this year? (About self, topics, etc.) - Do you think the art contributed to your development as a student? - How has the art influenced your writing process this semester? - How have your opinions of art-making and writing changed or remained the same this semester? - Some students might state that the art assignments have no relation to the skills we cover in a writing class. How would you respond? - What would you recommend or warn a friend about the art-making? - Some students might say that these assignments are a lot of mental effort. How would you respond to that? - What, if any, connection exists between the art you created and your writing development?

Once the data within student participants' journals and interviews was collected, I began to analyze it. Because I was utilizing arts-based curricular methods, this practitioner action research also fell into arts-based educational research, which does not require structured coding. Instead, I selected a less structured, open-ended method of mapping data by frequency of themes throughout the semester (McKernan, 1991). For each participant, I

recorded all of their statements regarding their mindsets, perceptions, and feelings after each assignment, then reviewed if their statements changed over the course of the semester.

Throughout this process, I found the aspects of active/individualized learning, growth/innovator mindset, and intrinsic motivation that I considered when making the curriculum connected to participants' responses. The following sections are descriptions of participants' responses blended with my observations as their course instructor and their own statements from interviews/journals. For this article, I worked with data of students who exhibited fixed mindsets and less enthusiasm towards the course/college in general at the beginning of the semester. By the time I selected participants, I had read multiple homework assignments that asked students to reflect on themselves as writers, which helped with participant selection. Students selected their own pseudonyms, and visual data of their art projects is included to showcase ranges of student ability levels and choices of materials. Though I could have grouped data by themes, I elected to leave it divided by each participant to showcase their individual narratives throughout the semester. Separating and grouping would have taken away from their voices and experiences, as I would have tried to make them fit into a formulaic structure.

Students' Experiences with Expressive Arts

Figuring Out the Puzzle: From Concern to Growth

I have seen many students in my courses like Pippin, who come into my courses comfortable with the writing abilities they already have. Often, these students have poor attitudes and wish to put forth minimal effort. Pippin's mindset and attitude did not change after the first assignment; it was a gradual process throughout the semester where he began to explore different artistic methods, forms of composition, and, consequently, ways of finding

what he referred to as "balance." To be successful in the course, he had to challenge his understanding of writing and find new methods for representing his ideas.

Pippin was initially interested in the arts-based elements of the course because he thought it meant he would have "less papers to write." As he considered what arts-based elements would entail, however, he began to feel anxiety at the thought of having to draw. Still, he elected to remain in the course after discovering that it was arts-based. "I trust in my ability to write and to tell a story," he said confidently at the beginning of the semester, reflecting his fixed mindset that his writing would not develop further. In the past, he had succeeded in writing classes with minimal effort, understanding how to write a "standard essay." The apprehension, he explained, was due to his perceived lack of "ability to adjust" to the new method, or his ability to grow.
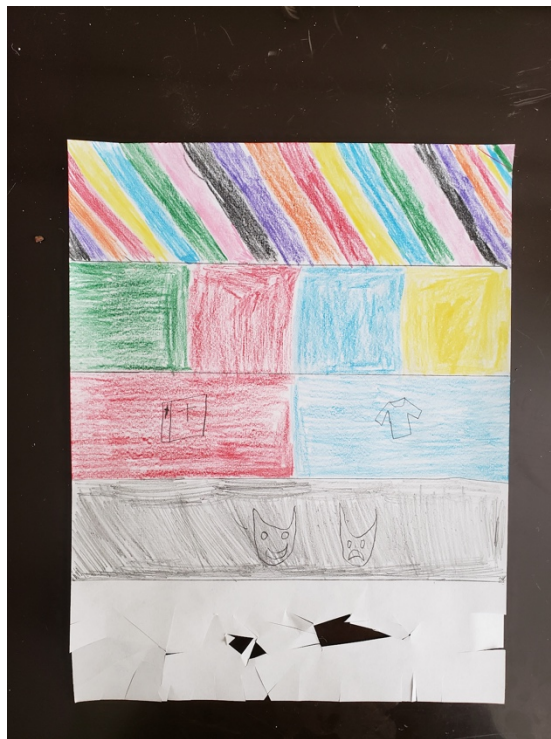
Figure 1. Pippin's first art project

Pippin struggled with these concepts of adaptability and growth throughout the semester. He felt "shackled" by the expectations to create unique pieces that actually connected to his life. "I struggle really heavily with trying to find that balance," he explained. To him, the assignments were calling for a balance of creativity and logic, which were "opposite sides" of his brain. He wrestled with what he described as an "overpowering" urge to compose in the standard academic way he was used to versus complete creativity while disregarding the prompt. But through his struggles, he was actively learning as he composed, playing in tangible ways with ideas and methods to discover what worked. Though he was not yet intrinsically motivated, he was actively learning through individual ways of meaning-making.

He did become more intrinsically motivated with each assignment, eventually spending over three hours composing his final project. He told me that by the end of the semester, he was no longer thinking of my feedback, but was instead considering his own "high sense of critique." "I'm a super harsh critic on myself [. . .], so that also translates to art," Pippin remarked when reflecting on the work he put into his third project. His third project was the most developed in terms of his process and final product. It was his only 3D piece throughout the semester, and he noted that he spent far more time on the construction/composition processes than he had for the others.

Figure 2. Pippin's second art project

Pippin also ended the semester with a change in mindset. At the beginning of the semester, he thought he could identify all of his strengths and weaknesses as a writer. He did not perceive the course as necessary to his education, nor something that would enhance his writing skills. His interviews and journal reflections were filled with "I can do this. I can do that. I can't do that." When I brought this pattern up to him in his final interview, he replied, "I suppose, in the same way that a puzzle isn't challenging as much as it is something you have to figure out." He saw that what he was being asked to do all semester, which initially gave him so much frustration and struggle, was not actually difficult. Instead, Pippin just needed to shift his mindset: Once he saw the assignments as something he could figure out, or grow in, he could "solve" them.

A "Big Risk": From Lack of Enjoyment to Excitement and Hours of Effort

I have also had many students like Charlie in my courses: Students who are willing to complete assignments to receive a grade, but wish to put forth as little effort as possible. Charlie's transformation began so early in the semester that I was surprised when he told me that he typically was not motivated in his other classes. The expressive arts activities were different for him; they allowed him to pursue his interests, which, in turn, motivated him to spend hours on the assignments and become excited in the composition processes.

Charlie began the semester feeling relatively neutral to writing. He was willing to do it for a grade, but he did not "look forward" to it. Though he did not mind terribly writing for school, he did not enjoy it because he rarely got the opportunity to write "genuinely." Charlie did not view his writing as something that could develop significantly, moreover, he did not care to develop it. His first project of art and writing caused him stress because the results were unknown. He described picking an idea and going for it as "a big risk," but he decided to "go for it." He admitted that he did not spend much time in the composition of the assignment, but did spend more time exploring and selecting an idea than he did for his other courses.

Figure 3. Charlie's first art project

By his second project, something was changing in Charlie. Surprisingly to both myself and him, he spent around seven hours generating ideas, creating the art, and composing the writing. Though he admitted to taking little breaks, he said that he was "energized" to keep going. He said that the writing aspect took around two hours, longer than the time he would normally devote to writing, but the project caused a shift in his process. "It was like a two-hour period where I was just completely into it and I was just like, 'Okay, I'm doing this.' And I didn't think I'd be able do that," he told me excitedly. Charlie's reflections were aligning with aspects of active learning, individualized learning, growth mindset, and intrinsic motivation. When asked what facilitated the difference, Charlie explained that he typically "had a mindset of fake school work," where he looked at assignments as tasks he needed to complete to get a good grade, but he never felt "honest" when he did them. In contrast, the second project made him "[give] that up" and decide "to just be honest with it," exploring his individual interests and connections during his composition process.

Figure 4. Charlie's second art project

Charlie's increased effort continued throughout the semester. His third project took around four or five hours. When I remarked on the length of time, he explained, "I put all my effort into it 'cause I like it." In our final interview, Charlie identified ways the projects facilitated growth within the semester, including creativity, maturity, and what he described as "honesty" in his work. Honesty, he reflected, was something he had never had the opportunity to showcase before in his courses. He was willing and motivated to engage in active learning and connect with the assignments. When faced with a challenge in composing that made him frustrated, Charlie saw it as a learning experience and an opportunity for growth, whereas he would be annoyed if he had to put forth more effort if this scenario occurred in another course. His perception of his abilities also developed. Charlie noticed that each project made him think, "Wow I can actually do this kind of stuff and it comes kinda naturally," seeing that he had the ability to grow all along, but he did not realize it. The projects also improved his "creative abilities" and problem-solving, enhancing his innovator's mindset. His creative abilities improved and he "knew what more to expect" in terms of the process of composition: generating ideas, problem-solving, constructing

meaning, etc. Overall, each project made him think, "Wow, I feel motivated" in a way that had not happened before.
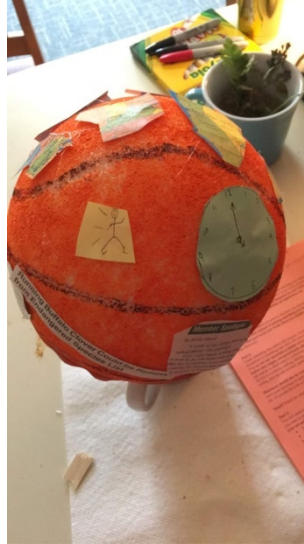
Figure 5. Charlie's third art project

By the end of the semester, Charlie admitted that he did not enjoy writing before the course, but the art-making made him "excited" to do the work. He was able to see his growth in abilities and was curious what he would learn with each new assignment: "I saw how I was learning throughout the semester and was excited to see what was gonna happen next 'cause I knew it was gonna be unexpected, and it was." He also told me that he did not enjoy college and typically put forth minimal effort into everything he could, but the course was a welcome change. "It's better to think about our assignments than mindlessly read a book and answer a question," he stated. The types of active and individualized learning provided within the arts-based curriculum facilitated growth/innovator's mindsets and intrinsic motivation within Charlie.

A Student Who "Tries More": From Considering Dropping the Course to Advocating for Challenging Assignments

Alex and I were both surprised by her inclusion in my research study. I was surprised she desired to be a part of it since she openly did not enjoy writing, and she was surprised that I selected her for the same reasoning. But using students for this study who already liked writing and art would not do what I wanted: I sought to showcase how expressive arts assignments could enrich experiences for students who typically did not put forth as much effort. Alex had multiple periods over the semester where she became frustrated, telling me that my work made her "brain hurt" and explaining that she just was not creative. But by the end of the semester, Alex was advocating for arts-based curriculum. She saw that she was capable of producing interesting, entertaining texts if she believed that she could; moreover, Alex began to view the assignments as fun and no longer wished for traditional standard assignments that would restrict her creativity.

Alex considered dropping my course when she learned it was arts-based. "I was a little worried 'cause I kind of liked to try to be artsy, but I'm not [. . .] I looked to see if other classes would fit my schedule and they didn't," she disclosed. Alex described herself at the beginning of the semester uncreative with a dislike for writing. "I have never liked writing. Writing is not on my thing," she explained. With her fixed mindset of being a nonwriter and uncreative, one would think Alex would dislike the course throughout the semester, but after the first project, she admitted that she enjoyed it a mild amount. The art-making, to her surprise, added "something else" that made the writing "not as bad." She appreciated that she could actively create with her hands in a different way than writing, and also thought that the

art-making made the composition process more individualized because the prompts were so "open."

Figure 6. Alex's first art project

Alex did not enjoy the second project due to frustration with coming up with an idea. To her, the prompt was challenging her fixed notions of rhetorical analysis, calling it to be individualized and personal. Interestingly, her writing portion of the second project was the strongest writing skill-wise. She also noticed that once she began, it was easier for her to think creatively.
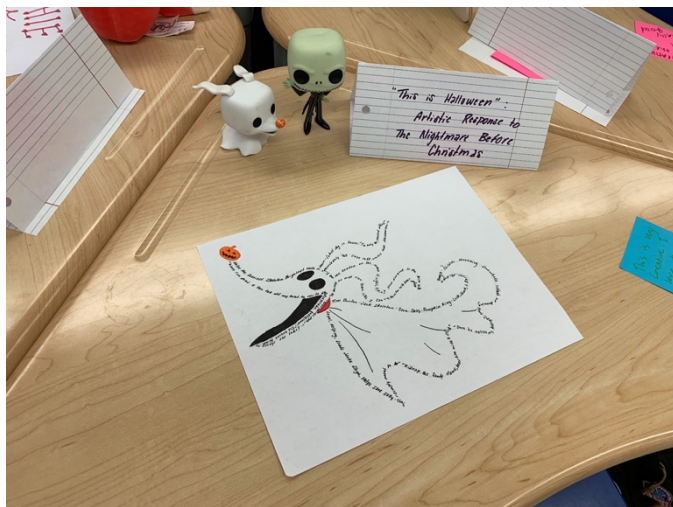
Figure 7. Alex's second art project

By her last project, Alex saw that the assignments made her "brain hurt" because they shifted her mindset. "Yes, you made my brain hurt," she stated in our final interview:

I would have to be like, 'I don't... I... I... No…' [. . .] I'd be like, 'I don't know how to write this paper because I have to be creative, and I'm not creative' [. . .] So, I definitely...I have had to think more about different assignments in your class.

These statements indicate that though challenging, Alex was actively thinking about the assignments: how to creatively problem-solve, how to compose, etc. This reflection also alludes to how her motivation shifted to intrinsic. In this course, she said that she "felt like a student that tries more." In other classes, she would "get through" the work, but never put forth "maximum effort." In this class, the art "required" that self-directed effort within her, making her willing to rise to the challenge. The third project, which required art-making and engagement with research, was one of the more complex assignments, but Alex appreciated the challenge. "I mean, it might have made my brain hurt, and I didn't enjoy that part of it, but it was like after I got done with it, I was like, 'Alright this is kind of fun to do a research paper in a different format because I've done so many normal research papers,'" she said,

recalling that it was "fun" to "change it up" with the composition process. She even compared the assignment to her "easier" freshman level writing course. It's more fun, she exclaimed after her third project was completed, "In my RC class last year, I didn't have to think about it as much, but I hated it." Though it required more effort, Alex preferred active, individualized learning.

Alex identified a shift towards growth mindset by the end of the semester as well. When comparing the arts-based creative methods to the ease of writing a familiar, standard essay, Alex reflected, "I can write out a five-paragraph essay in a good 45 minutes. Like, I've gotten that down pat [. . .] So, when you said no, I was like, 'Crap. I'm actually gonna have to think about this, and word things differently.' So, I was a little nervous, but then I was also kind of like, 'Alright, let's see what happens. Maybe I'll like this writing style better.' And I do like it better, because I feel like it's not as boring and nonchalant and just 'bleh.'" Alex was describing an activity that would take far less time and effort for her as boring, whereas the creative activities that made her "brain hurt" were intriguing to her, opening her up to new ways of composing that she may never have explored due to her initial dislike of writing. She referred to her change in mindset to a "journey" that led her to realize, "This wasn't as hard as I thought." Interestingly, Alex became an advocate for arts-based curriculum in collegiate writing courses by the end of the semester. She noted that the art-making facilitated construction of knowledge, the use of rhetorical concepts, and *deeper* understanding: "We actually develop our concepts through the art. It's not like we're just playing around [. . .] We're using our concepts and we're developing them through the art. And it's allowing us to add a new level to what we're doing." Once she became open to the process, Alex was able to understand why it had a place within the curriculum. She was both

surprised and pleased with the shift in mindset from the beginning of the semester. "During the process, it really wasn't that hard," she realized, "It just takes the process of thinking creatively. And as long as you start to get into that mindset, you're good. It's that initial step of stepping into the creative aspect and really starting that journey." That initial step that she describes is her openness to growth, innovation, and active/individualized learning that would lead to intrinsic motivation; she was learning for the benefits the art-making provided for *herself*.

Thinking Outside the Box: From Comfortable and Proficient to Embracing Creativity

Students who took AP courses in high school often have trouble adapting to my arts-based curriculum. They are used to a certain style of writing that can be produced within a certain time frame almost automatically, regardless of topic. Fletcher was one of these students, which caused her to have anxiety when she heard about my course structure. My assignments asked her to step out of her comfort zone and she was not sure if she wanted to. Her transformation during the semester involved letting go of the restrictions she placed on herself and embracing the unknown. As the semester progressed, Fletcher became more excited to explore and play with ideas, realizing that she was capable of growth.

Fletcher too considered dropping my course when she found out it was arts-based. She said she was nervous and intimidated, but wanted to push herself out of her comfort zone. As a student who had taken AP English courses in high school, she felt both "comfortable" and "proficient" with her writing skills as they were, not expecting them to develop much further in a general education writing course. Though she did not have a fixed mindset towards writing in general, she was fixed in her belief that she was only proficient in one type of writing: a standard academic essay like the ones she wrote for AP classes. For the

first project, Fletcher noted that her process was different. It made her "think outside of the box" and unsettled her from her typical format of getting an assignment, "crunching it out," and "calling it a day." "I had to really kind of think about this one and force the creative part of my brain to light up and get used," she explained. This project required active learning within her that she noted had gone unused for some time. When I asked her to expand more on the word "force," which typically has negative connotations, she elaborated, comparing the process to a "challenging exercise" that might be difficult in the moment, but then be enjoyable. "Wow, this is dope. I did this, and I feel great," Fletcher stated when describing how she felt by the end of the process, recognizing that she had experienced a shift in mindset, seeing that she was capable of growth and innovation that she originally did not think possible.

Figure 8. Fletcher's first art project

The second project took her around four hours and evoked nervousness once again. Fletcher was still influenced by her fixed mindset of not being creative, which led to difficulty in selecting an idea. Fletcher did not expect this type of confusion because she had always felt "comfortable" with rhetoric from her AP training, but this curriculum asked her to actively learn it. "In an artistic sense I was like, 'I have no idea how I'm gonna convey

rhetoric in a physical manifestation.' I was like, 'I really have no idea,'" she explained. Still though, like her first project, she was engaged in the composition, describing the process as getting in "the zone" and surprisingly enjoying it. She was also learning to trust this process of knowledge construction through art due to the appreciation of how her creativity was developing. To my shock, by the second project, this student who originally wanted to drop my course because of the curriculum was beginning to advocate for it: "I think if kids are just allowed to do art in an environment where they're not pressured and terrified of not producing some high-quality product, if they're just given the reins, I think they can actually produce some pretty cool stuff. You just have to not be so scared that it's not gonna turn out the way you want." By the end of the semester, Fletcher would take her own advice.

Figure 9. Fletcher's second art project

The projects' active learning and individual learning components began to transfer into Fletcher's daily life. Instead of sitting down to work on the projects, as she would for other classes, Fletcher would look around the places she was and wonder, "Could I use that? Well maybe that? Look at this." She was getting excited to construct and "play" with her ideas. Unlike her former fixed mindset of her writing process, she began to approach

composition as exploratory. "And I just plugged in my music and I was like, 'I'm just gonna get it all out and then see where it goes,'" she expressed while reflecting on her third project, which took her four to five days to complete. Each time, her process was increasing because she was intrinsically motivated. Instead of thinking about the grade I would give her, Fletcher was composing to please herself. For the third project, her thoughts included, "I need to switch it up and... It might look kinda goofy but...I was like, 'I just wanna kinda do something kinda crazy.'" Her art was not the only area of the project that transformed, however. For her third project, Fletcher wrote a poem, something that she had never tried before. When I asked what changed, she stated that she was "so sick of writing essays" that were in "MLA English," her term for structured academic writing. She was "scared" to write it, but felt "relief" when she finished. Rather than writing something that was "so long," "repetitive," and "boring," she created something where she saw "more room for error," but also more ways of expressing herself through active, individualized learning. She was thinking in metaphors, using them to connect her thoughts and explore them deeper.
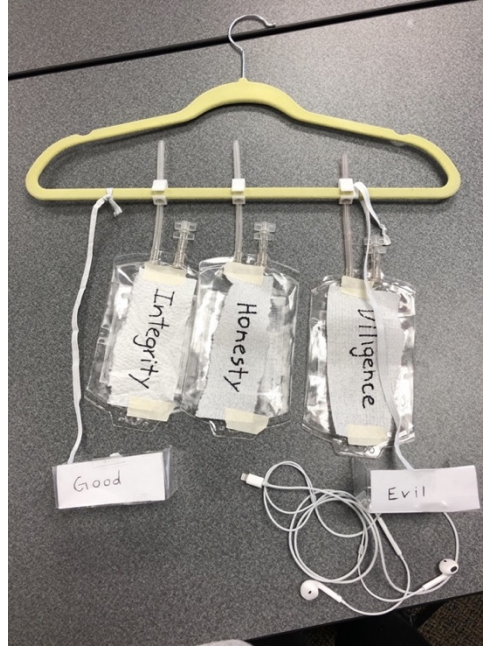
Figure 10. Fletcher's third art project

By the end of the semester, Fletcher understood that the curriculum called for a different type of student than she was typically successful in being: passive and less motivated. "Even last year's RC1000, high school English, middle school... I didn't do shit. I posted, it was a breeze, I gave them the little 'la-di-da' five paragraph, bingo, got 100. No sweat. With your class, you were like, 'I'm not taking that.' And I was like, 'Now I actually have to put in some work,'" she explained during our final interview. Though she experienced frustration during her composition processes at times, she also saw that the projects were "more rewarding." "There's parts of me in it. It's personal, I care about it. It's not some carbon copy that I've been doing for 100 years," she expressed, connecting to the individualized learning she experienced. She saw the curriculum as a method for creating exploratory, comfortable spaces for students who, in turn, became more motivated to compose.

Fletcher's mindset definitely shifted from fixed to growth/innovator's by the end of the semester. When considering her growth, Fletcher explained, "A demon's on your shoulder saying, 'There's no way you can do it, it's gonna be trash.' And it was like, 'You know what? I'm gonna try to prove it wrong, I'm gonna try to go out on a limb and not be some weenie and try,' and I'm really proud of what I did." The demon was her own fixed mindset, or perceptions of her abilities. After completing three arts-based composition projects, Fletcher recognized, "I like it a lot. It's definitely more challenging, but I think anyone can do it, regardless of artistic background or not." Once she moved past the restrictions and expectations she constructed within her own mind, she saw that she was fully capable of both art-making and interesting, personal writing. At the beginning of the semester, she saw herself as close-minded, but the projects made her both "less intimidated" and "more open to playing" with ideas. Ultimately, she saw that the art projects made her desire to "just try new stuff" in both writing and art, embracing discomfort and newness. "If you fail, so what? Who cares?" Fletcher confidently stated in her last interview, which we both agreed was not coming from the same mindset of a passive, less engaged learner she had initially been.

Afterward

When I first began teaching collegiate composition courses, I felt like a failure due to their apathy and lack of engagement. "Perhaps, I am not meant for this," I thought to myself, searching for reasons to leave instead of confronting my issue: My curriculum simply was not engaging, which meant my students, as well as myself, were not enjoying it. But once I shifted my mindset from the fixed outlook that I could never improve, I discovered the

thematic element of expressive arts that could facilitate growth in myself as well as my students.

The result of my pedagogical growth/innovator's mindset is this curriculum that uses arts-based methods to foster growth/innovator's mindset, individual/active learning, and intrinsic motivation within students. Through the individual participants, it was clear that those who thought their writing skills would not develop, in fact, did so because the art-making helped their mindsets shift. Students who typically put forth minimal effort in their work were spending hours not only completing assignments, but enjoying the processes of making. The assignments sparked imagination, construction of knowledge about composition, and enthusiasm that was previously lacking in my courses. Students were pursuing individualized interests through active learning, motivating themselves to put forth effort, and finding that they were capable of growth.

There were, however, limitations to my findings. I used voluntary participants from my courses, which means some student voices were not included. By holding dual roles as researcher and teacher, students could have been influenced to respond in certain ways. Additionally, though I included participant data from multiple courses, this study spanned one semester. Practitioner action research is a continuous cycle of testing curriculum's effectiveness, revising it based on data, and trying it again in the future. I have yet to see if these findings continue as I teach new sections of my courses, but by writing this article, I hope other instructors will consider utilizing some of these approaches in their own courses. If so, this study of practitioner action research will keep cycling out into other classrooms, with other students becoming more engaged through art-making.

Now, I cannot imagine teaching composition without this expressive arts theme. I cannot envision coming to a sterile room with twenty-three blank faces awaiting me to dump knowledge into them, instead of twenty-three (give or take; this is not a perfect solution) students excitedly carrying their projects into class, already admiring their group members' and asking questions. Knowing that this is the fifth semester using this curriculum in some capacity, I cannot fathom how many students would have never gotten to where I hoped they would be in composition processes without this curriculum. Now, I gladly teach because art-making has transformed my curriculum and students.

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CHAPTER 3: ARTICULATING *CURRERE*: ARTS-BASED METHODS AND
METHODOLOGY TO FACILITATE AND UNDERSTAND BIOGRAPHIC SITUATIONS

What kinds of processes do students go through when creating these activities?

While analyzing participants' data, it became clear that students were going through an autobiographical process during their art-making. They were reflecting on past experiences, considering future opportunities, analyzing how their personal experiences fit within the assignments, and synthesizing their constructed knowledge into their final products. Essentially, the art activities were facilitating *currere*, a curricular method comprising four stages (regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical) that enables learners to personally connect with course content through autobiographical exploration (Pinar, 2004).

Currere was not a major thread I thought I would explore when I began this study. But Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) explain that practitioner action research is not only about documenting student learning; it also involves how practitioners' questions, frameworks, and views change over time (p. 44). The original intent of my dissertation study definitely developed after working with the data and considering my increasing knowledge of curriculum studies. By the time I finished collecting data, my first solo article was published in the *Currere Exchange Journal* and I had presented at the Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice. Drawing from *currere*, which I learned about during my doctoral courses, I went through the data again, exploring how art-making can serve as a method for students to experience *currere* as well as methodology for researchers to understand students' experiences with art-making. This time, my analyzed data

contributed to curriculum studies and how *currere* can function with a new method of art-making rather than traditional biographic written composition.

I began writing this article for the *Currere Exchange Journal*, but their word count was too restrictive to fully explain my research; therefore, I plan to submit this article to the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, which sponsors the Bergamo Conference each year. Previously presenting at the conference informed my understanding of the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing's* values, which include reconceptualizing curriculum for innovative practices, informing classroom practices, and presenting compelling ideas. The *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* showcases many curriculum scholars' explorations with *currere*, which is still a relatively new method in the field. This journal is open to forms of research that challenge traditional presentations of ideas and make connections between disciplines. Because I am interested in art-making and *currere*, which is not explored in theory, as well as narrative forms of recording participants' results, this journal seems ideal for my article.

Introduction

When I began teaching university courses in 2017, my students were not very motivated and I did not understand what I was doing wrong. I allowed them to pick topics for each writing assignment, held in-class discussions, and thought I was creating a curriculum that enabled them to personally connect with the material. Yet there was a disconnect: They did not seem to feel that the assignments personally meant anything to them, and according to curriculum theorists, this divide is common in education.

During this time in my life, I was actually very engaged in my own doctoral education, which was partially due to my former director introducing me to *currere*. *Currere* is a form of autobiographical inquiry with four stages that learners experience: regressive,

progressive, analytical, and synthetical (Pinar, 2004). It necessitates self-reflection for understanding. Through *currere*, I felt personally connected to the material and felt encouraged to do so. The simple thought would be to place *currere* writing assignments into my students' curriculum. But so many of them disliked writing already that I did not think it would be effective. I was, however, interested in implementing an arts-based curriculum, which surprisingly connected to *currere*, the process I originally felt my students would not enjoy or do well with.

Once I began my arts-based educational curriculum, I noticed that students were far more interested in the writing for my course because I paired it with art activities. But I did not understand why. It was not until I began a study of practitioner action research, collecting multiple forms of data from voluntary student participants over the course of the semester, that I began to understand: The art assignments were a curricular method that enabled my students to engage with the *currere* process; moreover, my knowledge of currere made it possible for me to understand the depth of their educational experiences with the curriculum. The following article explores the connections between currere and art-making. Additionally, it showcases how art-making can serve as a curricular method for students engaging in currere as well as a methodology for practitioners to understand how students experience currere.

Currere: An Answer to "Split" Curriculum

Pinar (2011) explains that there is a damaging divide between students and their learning. The human subject is often "split" (p. xi) from curriculum, which limits student engagement and understanding of course content. Curriculum theory requires expression of subjective individual experiences within history and society, strengthening "inextricable

interrelationships" (p. 25) that structure educational experience; therefore, the split that Pinar (2011) refers to is not only between student identity and learning, but also within educational theory and practice. In the field of curriculum studies, theorists have been calling for a restructure of curriculum where human subjects' experiences are no longer separated from course content but instead recognized as an integral part of constructed meaning (Pinar, 2011). When students personally connect with material, they are more likely to construct meaning from it; however, it "requires a holistic engagement and attention that is especially fostered by the student finding himself or herself in the material" (Barbezat & Bush, 2014, p. 4). When I considered the type of curriculum necessary for students to personally connect with it, I realized that my curriculum was enforcing more of a split; students were not provided with the opportunities to personally connect with my curriculum because my assignments were restrictive.

Currere is a way to foster the connection between personal experience and curriculum. Positioned within curriculum theory, *currere* is both autobiographical and theoretical "truth-telling" (Pinar, 2004, p. 25) that transforms educational experiences of teachers and students into lived experiences. It was developed as an answer to the splits between human subject and education, "[privileging] the concept of the individual in curriculum studies" and "[cultivating] distinctiveness" in individuals' learning (Pinar, 2011, p. 2). *Currere* is relatively recent, developed by Pinar (2011) in 1975 to "underline the significance of the individual's experience of the school curriculum, whatever the course content or its alignment with society or the economy" (p. xii). It is the Latin infinitive form of curriculum, which translates to "run the course" or "the running of the course" (Pinar, 2004, p. 35). Who is running? The self (teacher, student, etc.), or anyone who finds

themselves with an urge to regress into personal histories while interacting with curriculum (Doll, 2017). Running the course of those personal histories, tugging at the threads of connection with one's past, places learners within a biographic situation (Pinar, 2004) that can lead to *currere.*

A biographic situation is not limited to the past; it encompasses a course of exploration that moves from the past to the future, then to one's current positionings. Though the term "biographic" is synonymous with the past, a biographic situation is a "structure of lived meaning that follows from past situations, but which contains [. . .] contradictions of past and present as well as anticipation of possible futures" (Pinar, 2004, p. 36); therefore, though *currere* requires the subject to run a course, the course can actually run backwards and forwards, examining everyday experiences, while reconstructing meaning through dialogue with oneself (Pinar, 2011). It is neither linear nor progressive (McNulty, 2018), but it will ultimately take a learner through four stages of experience: the regressive (reflecting on past events), the progressive (exploring future outcomes), the analytical (considering the data that the regressive and progressive have brought), and the synthetical (how the individual takes the constructed knowledge into the present).

For *currere* to exist in an educational setting, the curriculum must promote it. Activities should be set in place to prompt these four stages. Pinar (2004) sees that educational experiences have the ability to create biographic situations that could result in *currere* but seems to leave it up to instructors to find ways to do so. Doll (2017) provides examples of how *currere* can pair with works of fiction about the hero's journey, which reflects current trends of the method. Most often, *currere* is described as a process of autobiographical written composition. For instance, *Blood's Will: Speculative Fiction,*

Existence, and Inquiry of Currere is both what McNulty (2018) has described as a vampire fiction, but also *currere*, her process of running a course of meaning. But there are other ways the steps of *currere* can function within the curriculum. Art-making can serve as a method for taking students through the steps of *currere,* resulting in deep interaction with course content and reconceptualized constructed meanings. During different stages of art-making, students may be called to move into regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical stages. As they work, internal conversations and decisions will occur that facilitate meaning-making and construct knowledge. Ultimately, if the curriculum calls for students to create something that is both personal and in alignment with course content, there is an opportunity for *currere*.

Aesthetic Education and *Currere*

Curriculum theorists, such as Dewey (1934/2005), Greene (2001), Eisner (2008), and even Pinar (2011) himself, understand the impact that the arts can have on curriculum, but they have not yet been connected to *currere* in a way that practitioners can implement; there are few examples of curriculum that practitioners can use. Dewey (1934/2005) recognized that the purpose of education is to provide students with experiences that facilitate construction of knowledge; thus, he advocated for aesthetic education: Education that comes from hands-on inquiry, questioning, and making with materials. Eisner (2008) poses the question to readers, "Could there be [. . .] an approach to educational research that would rely upon the imaginative and expressive crafting of a form in ways that enlarge our understanding of what goes on, say, in teaching?" (p. 18). In his book, he answers by connecting art to educational research to curriculum. The arts enlighten in acts of research as well as student learning. Like Eisner (2008), Greene (2001) asks her readers a question:

"How do we invent the kinds of situations that release people for moments like these?" (p. 23). She also answers for readers, explaining that aesthetic education with the arts holds this power within the curriculum. This type of power that connects students to learning is also the goal of *currere*. The arts within curriculum can facilitate the "foundation for creating expressive forms that enlighten" (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 9), accessing imagination that has the power to "mold experience into something new, to create fictive situations" (Greene, 2001, p. 30), which is also what *currere* can facilitate. Like writing, art-making enables subjects to express in metaphorical ways, resulting in new ways of thinking about and relating to educational concepts (Doll, 2017).

There is little connection between art-making and *currere*, yet educational theorists do note connections between art and curriculum. Noteworthy curriculum theorists agree that art does have the ability to "engage our agency" and "[solicit] passion" (Pinar, 2011), but there is little connection between art-making and the specific form of *currere*. Dewey (1934/2005) recognizes that the arts "[celebrate] with particular intensity the moments in which the past [reinforces] the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is" (1934/2005), mirroring the steps of Pinar's (2004) *currere*: Running a course of past, future, and present experiences to gain insight. Greene (2001) urges educators to consider how the arts can help learners "recover those moments when imagination released through certain encounters with the art, opened worlds for [them]" (p. 179), which is synonymous with *currere's* regressive step, but is yet again not directly connected. In her arts-based autobiographical research, McDermott (2008) even attests, "I believe that life events past, present, and future produce a kaleidoscopic lens through which we construct, disrupt, define, and embody notions of 'self,' 'reality,' and 'truth'" (p. 137), an articulation of *currere* as a

whole without mentioning the term; however, though the connection between student art-making and *currere* is under-theorized, art-making has the ability to facilitate movement through *currere's* stages.

While curriculum is often viewed as text-based, there have been explorations into alternative forms of *currere*. Pinar (2004) originally identifies *currere* as a process of interacting with a text, but Irwin (2006) explains that *currere* "is active and contextual" (p. 77). In fact, she argues that because *currere* is the active form of curriculum (running), it is characterized by acts of inquiry within a course of action more than an individual reading or writing. Her *currere* research involved the connection between physical movement and *currere*, exploring how sensory stimuli outside of a written text could spark the stages. Irwin's (2006) physical movement sparked a biographic situation as she engaged in a recursive process that helped shape who she was. The opening in meaning that Irwin's research creates results in the consideration of what else is possible for *currere* to occur with students. Though not directly identifying *currere*, McDermott (2008) theorizes that art-making facilitates autobiographical inquiry, exploring "the ways that thinking and being collide, explode, and emerge, like the birth of a star" (p. 136), resulting in reconceptualization. Both studies involve researchers receiving what Greene (2001) would call aesthetic education, learning through sensory methods, but this learning is the same process of exploring aspects of the self that *currere* calls for. Regardless of the method one takes to run the course, *currere* "[allows] us to see anew and understand anew" (Pinar, 1991, p. 246).

Neither arts-based inquiry nor *currere* are linear progressions to knowledge (McNulty, 2018), which is another aspect they have in common. With this in mind,

practitioners can consider how curriculum can promote these types of nonlinear progressions. McDermott (2008) explains that arts-informed inquiry mirrors lived experience in that they are both circular, moving from end to beginning, then moving again through stages. *Currere's* running of the course from past to speculative futures, then back to the present for meaning, is a continuous cycle that can be sparked by engaging with curriculum in multiple ways. After all, if "consciousness is shaped by different forms of understanding which transform and make more intelligible one's view of the world" (Pring, 2015, p. 28), it makes sense that knowing can result from multiple methods. Additionally, those who have theorized on *currere* methods and the arts see that art-making can enhance the experience. Though the term *currere* was not in existence while Dewey (1934/2005) lived, he recognized that the arts enhance experiences, uniting processes of "doing and undergoing," with "outgoing and incoming energy" (p. 50), that are present within *currere's* stages. Moreover, he understood that in order to perceive, learners must create their own experiences. Reading and even writing can be a passive, more automated activity, while art-making calls for more engagement. Arts-making in *currere*, then, could enhance the experience in ways writing may not. Irwin (2006) agrees, explaining that sensory experiences can move individuals from being "passive receivers" of information to "humans are capable of receiving the world with fresh perceptions and acute awareness through both felt and imagined understandings" (p. 78) if their curriculum calls for it; therefore, students who may not engage in a process of *currere* in writing may be jolted into it through the more active approach of art-making.

Designing the Study

The aforementioned connections between art-making and curriculum studies sparked this practitioner action research exploring whether art-making could be used in a collegiate

classroom to facilitate *currere*, Pinar's (2011) way to integrate the human subject of the student with course material. As Eisner (2008) points out, arts-based methods can "shed light on educational situations we care about" (p. 22). If a great issue in education is that the human subject and curriculum are split, as Pinar (2011) believes, could art as *currere* bring them together again? Siegesmund and Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) attest that arts-based methods "not only [shift] the focus to how we inquire, but also [model] a new version of curriculum," demonstrating strategies that "might inform our thinking about how we allow students to exhibit their coming to know" (p. 244). Essentially, I assert that art-making could create visible reflections of students running the course, moving through stages of *currere* and making meaning.

Curricular Design: Prompts for *Currere*

In my Writing Across the Curriculum courses at a public university, students completed three major paper assignments: a literacy narrative, a rhetorical analysis, and a research paper involving communication in their majors. It was evident from previous semesters of practitioner action research that when I assigned art-making with the paper sequences, students enjoyed the assignments more, but it was unclear as to why; however, after researching voluntary participants' experiences within my course through interviews, reflective journals, and their artistic products, it became clear that art-making was not only pleasurable, but also creating biographic situations (Pinar, 2004) that positioned students to move through stages of *currere*.

The art-making was a curricular method that prompted students to run the course (Pinar, 2004) of *currere* because it called for students to reflect on their lived experiences (Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008). Each art assignment was designed to place

students into biographic situations that would help them see that "there is curriculum within each of our lives" (McNulty, 2018, p. 1). For their first project, students were asked to create art that reflected their journey of literacy, prompting them to explore past situations that have contributed to their knowledge on a topic. Their second project paired with our rhetoric unit, asking students to create an artistic response to any text that has persuaded them, again prompting a move to a regressive stage and explore past experiences. Their final art assignment was one involving revision: Students were asked to create art that reflected their experiences that contributed to declaring a major, then after collecting research for their papers, they would be allowed to edit, revise, or transform their art based on their new knowledge if needed.

After running the course of regressive (past) and progressive (future) stages of their choice, I hoped that they would move into the analytical and synthetical stages, but that required my examination of student reflections by the end of the semester. In order to facilitate the *currere* process, the curriculum must help "'frame' the complex process of conscious self-actualization" through revealing "interconnected moments" of lived experience (McNulty, 2018, p. 2). Art-making in research as well as education "offers ways to tap into what would otherwise be inaccessible, makes connections and interconnections that are otherwise out of reach" (Leavy, 2018, p. 9), possibly helping students and researchers to see and think differently; thus, the art-making served as a method to facilitate participants' running of the *currere* course.

Collecting Data

Art-making served not only as a curricular method but also a method of data collection. Students were asked to have their art nearby when they participated in interviews

and wrote their journals to assist with reflection. If students looked at what they created, they could be more likely to recall specific moments within their experiences of art-making. Weber (2008) describes numerous benefits for using images with participants, explaining that they can "be used to capture the ineffable, the hard-to-put-into-words," "make us pay attention to things in new ways," "be used to communicate more holistically, incorporating multiple layers, and evoking stories or questions," and "encourage embodied knowledge" (pp. 44-6). Images would help participants articulate their experiences, explore nuances of them, and begin to see themselves as a rich source of autobiographical data. By creating images, participants could stabilize their ideas (Berthoff, 1984), which would enhance the reflective process by making their experiences easier to access.

Data Analysis

The course of *currere* is autobiographical, running into past experiences, moving to present reflections, and considering future realities that will result in reconceptualization. Due to the necessity that knowledge is constructed through autobiographical experience, only the participants could describe and explain the reasons behind their art-making; therefore, the analysis of their data was partially narrative, as their movements within *currere* were individualized and, at times, different from one another. Once participants shared their knowledge, I could examine their data through Pinar's (2004) stages of *currere*. After student data was collected, it was coded with a deductive method of thematic analysis, using the stages of *currere* as a methodology. Each of the four stages of currere served as a theme for coding. Below are the four stages with detailed definitions of their aspects.

Regressive

The first regressive step is backward, allowing a subject to "uncover what has been covered over by the demands to bury what is not socially acceptable" (Doll, 2017). Subjects reflect on their past experiences, exploring with a present point of view how these experiences have constructed meaning. It is a "recalling" (McNulty, 2018, p. 1) of autobiographical experiences that contributed to education. Doll's (2017) exploration of *currere* within the hero's journey sheds light on why this regression into the past is so necessary for development: It must be visited again "so as to see anew what has been forgotten or repressed" (p. xv). Additionally, Pinar (2004) explains that the regressive step enables individuals to utilize past experiences as a "data source" (p. 36). When individuals free associate into the past, they may gather data that can "enlarge--and transform--one's memory" (p. 36), thus constructing knowledge.

Progressive

Like the regressive step, the progressive is also a practice of free association, but with one's future. An individual "looks toward what is not yet the case what is not yet present" (Pinar, 2004, p. 36), seeking "the revelation of one's fantasies of what one might be" (p. 55). McNulty (2018) likens this step to a "gesture" towards "what is not yet present" (p. 1). This step is an imaginative play of fictitious possibilities, asking subjects to consider future versions of themselves and worlds they may inhabit, which can be especially useful when positioned within "the obscurity of the present" (Pinar, 2004, p. 55).

Analytical

After these steps of regressing into past selves and considering future ones, the last two steps call for reentry into the present. In the analytical step, individuals move into a

"subjective space of freedom" (Pinar, 2004, p. 36), where they can examine both past and present from a distance within the present. Through *currere*, they will come to see that each present moment is, in fact, historical in that it contributes to their constructed knowledge.

Synthetical

Then, subjects may enter the synthetical stage, where they consider how past and future factor into their present lived experiences and understandings of the world "with more complexity and subtlety" (Pinar, 2004, p. 4). It is this step that causes what Pinar (2004) describes as a "shattering" or "evaporation" of a former self, resulting in an individual who is "mobilized for pedagogical engagement" (p. 10) within the curriculum. It is also a re-entry into one's present as a different person because of the newfound constructed knowledge (McNulty, 2018). This reconceptualization occurs because currere is a process that makes learning deeper and more reflective, all four steps are "temporal and cognitive modes of relation between knower and known that might characterize the ontological structure of educational experience" (Pinar, 2004, p. 35).

The definitions of the stages above served as the method for thematic coding. Moments where participants' experiences coincided with one of the four stages of *currere* were grouped by the "theme" or stage. Additionally, *currere* was utilized as a methodology for analysis. With the aspects of these stages as a methodology, I collected participant data through a semester, waiting to see if the art-making did, in fact, spark *currere*. After viewing the data through a narrative analysis of personal experience, each data set was conceptualized, or grouped by the four steps in the *currere* process. Understanding the stages of *currere* enabled me to analyze what students were experiencing with the art-making. McNulty (2018) refers to the process of participants reflecting on their *currere* journey as

well as the incorporation of others' perceptions as a re-assemblage of "the 'I' through multiple 'eyes'" (p. 5). The new "eyes" or lens that the subject views themselves through constructs new knowledge. When a participant recalls an experience from the past, there is always a new perception based on the students' present self looking back upon it. The researcher is also one of the multiple eyes, taking what the participant has already constructed from the past, then constructing it further based on their own experiences and understanding.

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Participant *Currere* Results

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The research revealed that though all participants engaged in moments of regressive and progressive stages while art-making, some participants' data reflected a full running of a *currere* course. Participants' stages all began with regressive and progressive stages that lasted for different lengths within the semester, but towards the end of the semester (by the third art project), the participants began to move into analytical and synthetical stages, as evidenced in their data. Ultimately, the participants moved from stages of *currere* at different paces, at times while completing one assignment, but other times over the course of the semester, depending on their constructed knowledge. This individualized movement was anticipated due to the nonlinear nature of *currere* (McNulty, 2018). Their experiences are all unique to their personal lived experiences, but they each went through *currere's* four stages. Their results are divided by their pseudonyms.

Reflection, Exploration, and Shattering

Charlie's first art project symbolized his experience working at a summer camp the previous summer. The project consisted of brightly-colored popsicle sticks that formed a house with open windows and doors. Charlie explained that he was able to learn to build

alongside the campers at this camp, and he was "really excited to be able to apply that practice in a school assignment." Though his enthusiasm for what he learned during this past experience was evident every time he spoke about it, he stated that Art Project 1 was the first opportunity to reflect on that past experience. It facilitated a regressive stage where he could revisit and connect with a past event. This statement is reminiscent of Pinar's (2011) criticism of the current curriculum: splitting the student from their lived experience within the curriculum. After the first project, Charlie was appreciative of the biographic situation the curriculum enabled him to explore. He felt it was the first opportunity to reflect on how his experience taught him something useful.

Figure 11. Charlie's first project

The second project also prompted Charlie to engage in a regressive stage: When considering how to rhetorically analyze a text in an artistic way, he was initially at a loss. He stated that he did not find any motivation when he considered what to do. Again, the prompt called for Charlie to reflect, deciding, "Well I like the NBA, so I'll look at past NBA stuff to see maybe something I've seen, like a Hall of Fame speech or a commercial or something."

Through this searching, he came across a commercial from his past, remembering how it persuaded him when he was fifteen. His art included a rose blooming from a box that represented his memories of the commercial, which symbolized new understanding emerging from the past. The curriculum allowed him to "see anew and understand anew" (Pinar, 1991, p. 246). Charlie's process was one of "free association" (Pinar, 2004) that is necessary for regression: One must sift through autobiographical data before selecting a memory. By the second project, Charlie was running the course further into his past experiences, finding poignant moments of learning that excited him and being open to how they could construct new knowledge for him.

Figure 12. Charlie's second art project

The third art project required a progressive movement into the future, asking Charlie to consider "fictitious possibilities" (Pinar, 2004) of himself that he may become, as well as roles he may hold within society. He decided to paint a Styrofoam sphere, adding images that ran through his head when he considered his major. Though this process was all hypothetical

at this point, all participants being at least four semesters shy of graduation, Charlie found this futuring valuable, explaining, "[I]t was about stuff that I actually need to know that affects me in the near future that I should have already known. So, it was very helpful in forcing that. So I was just grateful for that, and I was more happy to do it because it was helping me directly, which I guess is kinda selfish." His word choice here is interesting, with the word "forcing" to describe a "helpful" influence the art-making had on his thought process. Interestingly, he saw it as possibly selfish to use a curricular activity for personal exploration, which is what *currere* advocates for. For Charlie, *currere* was a welcomed opportunity to answer, what if? (McNulty, 2018).
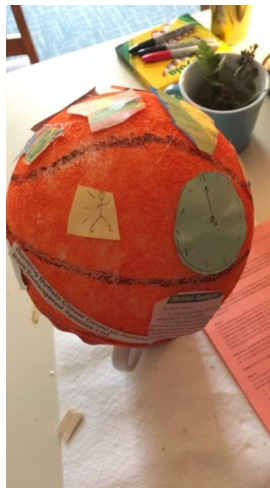
Figure 13. Charlie's third art project

Aware of the subjective space of freedom (Pinar, 2004) Charlie entered after regressive and progressive stages, he articulated that the art projects enabled him to be "more honest" in his self-expression. With the distance he now had in the present, he explained that he could now think with a new perspective, "Okay, well this is all the stuff that happened." Art-making helped Charlie revisit knowledge he learned in his past, but also explore what could occur in the future. Pinar (2004) likens the synthetic stage to a "shattering" (p. 10) of a

former self, which was visually evident when Charlie revised his final art project. After learning more about his major, Charlie desired to do something to his art that would symbolize his transformation, so he beat his third art project with a hammer, making deep crevices in the Styrofoam ball. Though this violent act could be perceived negatively, Charlie explained that he wanted to do something to radically change the art, or former self-knowledge, in a radical, irreparable way. Charlie was willing to "[cut] and [tear] identities and 'truths' to reveal other interpretations" (McNulty, 2018, p. 2). Art-making provided Charlie with an educational experience (Pinar, 2004) that not only facilitated reflection, but also a more nuanced, complex understanding of what it means to be authentic in his life. When explaining what the art projects did for him, Charlie stated, "[They're] an opportunity to grow with... And know yourself more because you're gonna learn a lot about yourself if you really try and do it. So it's not just for a grade, it's worth something in your life." It is this type of experience that can occur in an educational setting, but transfer to something far greater in a student's life that curriculum scholars are advocating for within education: Curriculum that sheds light on meaning within students' lived experiences.

Figure 14. Charlie's revised third art project

Going Deep, Reassembling, and Mobilization

Krista took my arts-based my freshman level writing course the year prior, but entered my sophomore level class with a different energy. She disclosed multiple times that she enjoyed my class because it brought so much out in her group members, but she wasn't willing to go as deeply. In my second class, she decided to challenge herself to, in her words, "go deep," or push herself to regress into moments in her past that were tied to learning, but also complex emotions. Krista told me that her first art project was a "pain in the ass," but also "fun to make." Her project was on her experience in theater, an extra-curricular that she left behind when she came to college. She selected a stage of regression that went back to early childhood. Because she typically enjoyed art, I was at first struck that she said making her project was a pain, but she clarified by explaining, "It was hard to pick which shows I wanted to do at first to represent 'cause I've been in some many [. . .] but once I started doing the writing, I think that this was the easiest writing thing I've ever had to do for any class because it literally just like flowed out." This sifting of data from her free association allowed for "(re) assemblage between self and inquiry" (McNulty, 2018, p. 2). Her different colored

masks represented acts of a play as different stages within her regression. Krista's running of

the course into the regressive stage was overwhelming for her, filled with data overload from

her past experiences, but she was able to navigate through and filter through her experiences,

selecting the ones that were most meaningful to her. She also decided to write small

monologues of why the plays mattered to her. With her present lens to view her past, Krista

was already beginning to move into an analytic stage (Pinar, 2004).
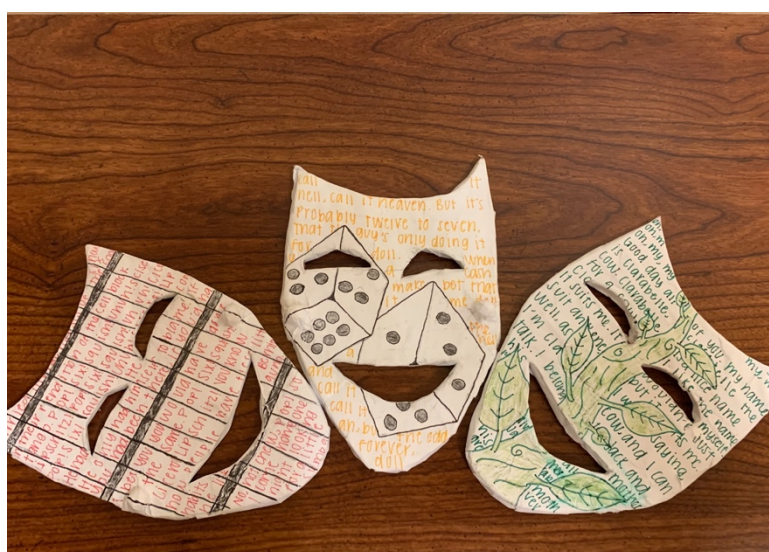
Figure 15. Krista's first art project

Krista pushed her reflective skills further in the second project. In her rhetorical

analysis art, she moved from working with masks to a more realistic image of a face on one

side and lyrics of a song that meant something to her on the other. Her descriptions of this

art-making again reflected *currere's* regressive stage, where she moved into her past to find

moments of meaning. While her first art project ran from early childhood to adolescence, this

project began at adolescence and moved to the present, with Krista re-visiting her high

school self that was concerned with outward appearances and using the lyrics within her art

as a way to speak to "her" from the present. She ended her written response with, "I know

that girl was me. So, don't wear make-up on Thursday 'cause who you are is enough," a combination of her own advice in the present and a part of the song she selected for the project. Krista's regressive stage for the second art project reflected Doll's (2017) understanding that a regressive stage of *currere* has the ability to revisit what one may have hidden in the past due to a fear of it being socially unacceptable. Her reflections on her art indicated that she was re-assembling her "I" (identity) through "multiple eyes" (McNulty, 2018, p. 5) of her current experience. Krista's first art project dealt with an outward role she played, but her second moved into exploring inward motivations and desires.

Figure 16. Krista's second art project

Krista's third art project interacted with her future self. But before she could look towards the future, she regressed into the past again. As *currere* is non-linear, multiple regressions may occur during the process (McNulty, 2018). During this project, Krista stated that she reflected on all the reasons for why she decided to major in Criminal Justice, beginning when she was a child. The curriculum urged her to regress into past exploration again (Doll, 2017). Then, she decided to write a letter to her future self, structuring each

paragraph as a different time in her life, then concluding with "I hope you figured this out, but I hope you figured out more questions that I have now." Again, Krista stated that the ideas flowed out once she decided on the topic for the art. The art was very different visually from the first two projects, leaving images of faces and multiple colors and stabilizing in a black box with bars with the word "justice" behind them in a glittery, brightly-colored cursive.

Figure 17. Krista's third art project

It was evident that the third art project was an entire *currere* process for Krista. Though all of her art projects required her to take the regression step, the third art project completed *currere* stages of realizing that she was continuously facing moments where her present could negatively define her. When explaining the pink lettering in her third art project, she exclaimed, "And then I did the justice in pink because every single freaking time I tell someone I'm a Criminal Justice major they're like, 'But you're a girl. You should be a nursing major.' Do you know how many times people have told me I look like a nursing

major?!" By being analytical in her present, she was actively trying to work against constructed knowledge that she did not support. Though she chose not to change her third art project as drastically as Charlie, the force behind her reflection in interviews highlights the successful synthesis of her knowledge: She was mobilized to actively work against the knowledge she felt was being constructed around her. Her entire semester journey, however, was also one of *currere* as she worked towards "shattering" (Pinar, 2004, p. 10) her former identities of being a "theater kid" or a girl who always felt she needed make-up to a Criminal Justice major who is "mobilized for pedagogical engagement" (Pinar, 2004, p. 10) with her future courses and career.

Growth, Multiple Eyes, and Futuring

Flora was one of my most self-aware students, already declared as a Studio Art major with a high GPA and a great deal of confidence in my class even though she had not taken my freshman level course. Unlike the others who engaged in the *currere* process during this study, Flora did not seem to be someone who would necessarily need to revisit her past "so as to see anew what has been forgotten or repressed" (Doll, 2017, p. xv). But a "(re)construction of meaning" (McNulty, 2018) could still be beneficial. After her first project, Flora stated multiple times in her reflections how fun it was for her even though her regressive stage made her revisit negative emotions. Her art took the audience through her literacy with drawing from high school as an elective to her current positioning in college. "I hated art so much. I thought I was terrible, but now it's my major. I hated art so much. So, this was really fun [. . .] It was really awesome to see how much I've grown," she stated. Like other participants, Flora was re-assembling her "I" through "multiple eyes" (McNulty, 2018, p. 5) of the present. Though she likely could have begun a *currere* process without the

art, she explained that getting to work with materials was equally enjoyable because she chose a medium from her past that she also does not use/revisit often. The art provided Flora an opportunity for regression that she may not have come to on her own.
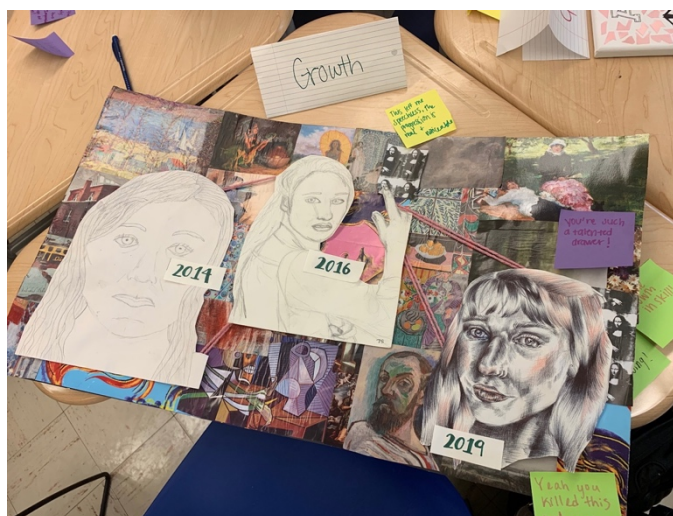
Figure 18. Flora's first art project

In her second art project, Flora admitted that the project was more challenging, admitting that it was difficult to select a text that had rhetorical aspects, but also connected to her personally. Flora was accustomed to Pinar's (2011) outlook on the current educational system, with a split between students' experiences and the curriculum. To decide on a topic, Flora again went through a regressive stage, moving back to adolescence: "I thought of something that really impacted me growing up. Not necessarily growing up, but as I was in my more, I don't know... I feel like teenage years can be more of an influencer of the things that you enjoy, they influence how you grow up sort of." The art-making facilitated a regressive recalling (McNulty, 2018) of biographic situations. Recalling her wonder and appreciation for the film *Amelie*, she decided to create art that reflected what she would like to communicate to the movie, the directors, but also to her past self because she was aware of how influential the film was to her. The autobiographical data she was collecting was

essentially enlarging and transforming her memory (Pinar, 2004). Flora also considered the extent that *Amelie* contributed to her education even in the present, explaining that, in some ways, she was still very much like Amelie, sometimes putting other people's lives before her own, even if it was detrimental to her own happiness. "I think there's a lot of knowledge in that," she reflects. Aware of how her present lens influenced her memories, Flora stated, "I definitely revisited a past self of mine and kind of evaluated from there, if that makes sense." Through her reflections, it was clear that she saw herself positioned in a biographic situation, where meaning had been constructed, but would continue to do so in her present (Pinar, 2004).

Figure 19. Flora's second art project

Because Flora had already declared her major before the semester began, one might assume that the third art project would be superfluous. But Flora used the project as an opportunity to push through her typical progressive stage musings of majoring in Studio Art

to "But what is next?", echoing the progressive "What if?" of *currere* (McNulty, 2018). In her last reflections, Flora shared a more vulnerable side than her typical confident demeanor, explaining that majoring in Studio Art is taking a significant risk for her future. She imagined futures in which she "made it," sustaining as an artist, or others where she worked in a museum to provide for herself. Though she was a participant who was most settled in her choice of major, Flora explored more futuristic possibilities (Pinar, 2004) than many of her peers. Unlike other degree programs, Flora's career path was less defined, requiring a futuring that not only asked what is next, but if anything would come next. As her art moved from literal to abstract, so did the running of Flora's course from the individual she knew herself to be, to what she might become.
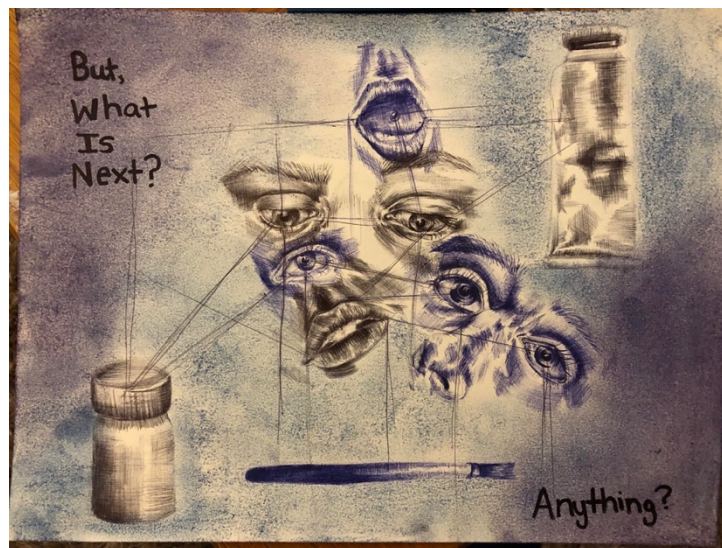
Figure 20. Flora's third art project

Free Association, Revelation, and Shattering

Miles's art-making also sparked a more recent regressive stage, running down a course to revisit a break-up that still evoked strong emotions. At first, he was unsure of what topic to select, but then thought, "Art reflects how we feel, and I actually just went through a

really bad break-up." Miles free-associated with his feelings, allowing any memories to arise within his regressive stage (Pinar, 2004). After reflecting on painful moments in his past, he decided to create a sunflower. With his art, Miles desired to make "something eye-catching and beautiful" to reflect his current feelings on how he was feeling about relationships: hopeful for the opportunities to grow. The words he wrote on the leaves that build up to the bloom are "lovable," "intelligent," "mature," "confident," "respectable," and "compassion," all aspects of himself that facilitated healing from his experience. Each leaf, too, was an opportunity to reflect on moments of strength and growth. At the top on the sunflower petals, Miles included the last four lines from "Nothing Gold Can Stay," by Robert Frost because, as he told me, "[his] relationship [was] over, but it's still golden, it's still golden in in [his] mind and in [his] memories." Though his regressive stage was emotionally difficult, he, like others, was drawn to a repressed moment (Doll, 2017) that was educative in his understanding of love. To emphasize this sentiment further, he placed a little gold heart at the bottom. Through his complex, detailed art, Miles was able to view his painful experience with his lens of the present, allowing him to see what the relationship taught him about himself. His art-making allowed him "to see anew and understand anew" (Pinar, 1991, p. 246).
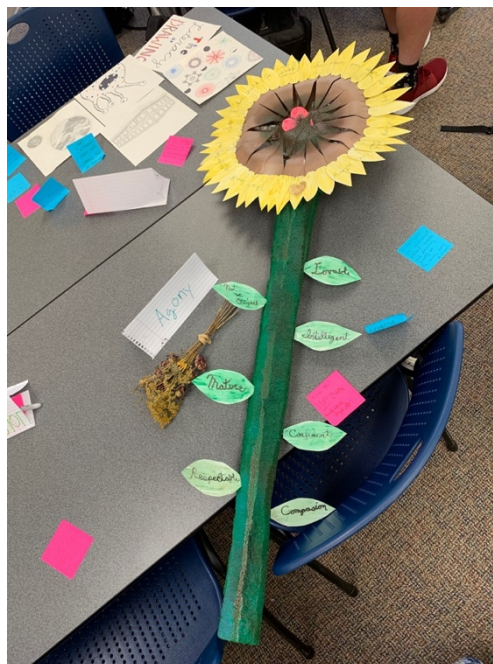
Figure 21. Miles's first art project

Miles's third art project was also emotionally-charged, but it sparked a progression into the future. As an Environmental Science major, Miles reflected on his future "duty to the planet," feeling that his talents "could be put towards not only protecting, but educating people and bringing information" to them. He decided to again create yellow flowers, representing his past and current fascination with the environment. The flowers were made from old books Miles found discarded in his environmental science building to which he repurposed for the project; a small act of sustainable practice within the art-making and a "gesturing" (McNulty, 2018, p.1) into his future. In the middle, he placed a live succulent, which he described as a "hefty" plant with little spines that viewed as representative of "new environmental ideas and movements growing and really trying to get their start and keep huffing and puffing by using the shade and the protection from older movements." Miles was experiencing what Pinar (2004) would call a "revelation" (p. 55) of possibilities for his role in the future.

Figure 22. Miles's third art project

Like Charlie, Miles stated that he enjoyed the art-making because it felt "genuine."

He repeated the word multiple times in our final interview to describe his art-making;

however, Miles's *currere* also ended in critical feelings about both his art and his journey.

His final project elicited feelings of frustration for what people are doing daily to the

environment. When revising his third art project, Miles desired to push his message further,

tossing the carefully-crafted flowers into a campus dumpster and taking photographs to show

our class. "But you spent so much time on those!" I exclaimed with wide eyes. He proceeded

to tell me that that was the point: Everything will be wasted in the future if people with

knowledge do not take action after their education. Like Charlie, Miles had decided to

physically shatter (Pinar, 2004) his art as a metaphor for knowledge. He envisioned a future

that he desired in the progressive stage, analyzed the data he collected in the regressive and

progressive stages, and shattered or tore (McNulty, 2018) his former self/knowledge by

throwing his art in the trash. But despite these feelings, Miles enjoyed the process because he

thought it was authentic to his experience: "Yes, I like it. Because I think it is effective in the

context of me." Interestingly, though he produced well-crafted art pieces, he was more

concerned with whether they reflected the "context" of his identity. The context that Miles refers to here is part of his *currere*. After regressing into his past breakup and progressing into future career options, Miles could view them through the analytical lens of the present, then synthesize the information. The result was an understanding that he was actively positioned to make sustainable changes, even if they were small, in the present, which he was able to do through his art: "I felt [they were] very, very accurate in my message," he said during our final interview. He was now "mobilized for [further] pedagogical engagement" (Pinar, 2004, p. 35) within his major.

Figure 23. Miles's revised third art project

Further Findings

The art-making brought some participants to analytical and progressive stages where they recognized that their current present lives were historical in defining them and

contributing to their constructions of knowledge, then were mobilized for action. Across many of them, these stages connected to knowledge about majors. Though Krista had already declared her major, her artistic *currere* process helped her realize that she is interested in certain aspects of her major over others. She understood that the art helped her decide, "Okay, this is what I wanna specify in. I want to do this part." Through her art-making, Krista was able to see nuances and deeper meaning that *currere* prompts (Pinar, 2004). Reflecting on her past and future possibilities was pleasing to Flora as well, strengthening her decision to keep running the course of Studio Art into the future. Like Krista, she did not dramatically alter her art, but instead worked on adding more details. She too had already declared her major, but the exploration into her past and future selves made her happy, especially since she was using the medium of her major. She realized, "I'm glad I'm a studio art major 'cause this actually makes me very happy to do this." Flora and Krista ended the semester with the same major they had declared, but acknowledged that artistically exploring their interests built excitement for new knowledge. Like Miles, they seemed "mobilized" (Pinar, 2004, p. 10) to learn more.

Conclusion

By the time I analyzed participants' data, I was struck by the depth of their *currere* courses. Never before had I witnessed students put so much effort and thought into personally connecting with my curriculum and find pleasurable moments in it as well. Other students engaged in the *currere* process for individual projects, or over the course of the semester like the aforementioned examples, but it was never required of them. Though I provided assignments that gave opportunities for *currere*, the open-ended nature was an

invitation more than a restriction; they could choose where they wanted to go, how deep they wanted to explore, and what it meant to them when they did so.

Critical of curriculum studies, Pring (2015) tells readers, "Research too often fails to address the practical question 'What works?'" (p. 10). Yet, when it comes to actual curriculum that can be utilized within the classroom that facilitates the *currere* process, educators are left with few examples. From the four selected participants' data that spanned a semester, it is clear that art-making can serve as a curricular method to facilitate *currere*; however, *currere*, as well as arts-based educational research, are not "limited to definitive proofs" (McNulty, 2018, p. 243). It will not work for every participant in the same way under the same timeframe; however, though all of the participants had different experiences running their courses of *currere*, they were clearly, authentically "reaching out to become different" (Greene, 2001, p. 70). Art-making as a method for *currere* made the subjects within this study feel connected to the material, then encouraged them to reach further, as evidenced in their detailed art pieces. Ultimately, the success of the curriculum and the data analysis within the study creates a "décollage" (McNulty, 2018, p. 2) that reassembles participants' lived experiences with inquiry. Art-making can move participants through the regressive, progressive, synthetical, and analytical stages in enjoyable ways.

The study also explains how *currere* can be used as an analysis methodology for practitioners to delve into a deeper understanding of how their curriculum influences their students. Through the stages of *currere*, I was able to identify key moments in students' experiences that constructed meaning. But the art-making was a crucial component as well. Eisner (2008) explains that artistic metaphors have a place within research, calling attention to relationships that may otherwise go unnoticed. Although students were unaware of the

theory of *currere*, their experiences in art-making provided rich qualitative data to explore how art-making can facilitate a running of the course. I was able to understand their metaphors more fully through *currere* methodology.

What will happen to these students after their *curreres*? Ultimately, *currere* has no end, as it is neither linear nor progressive (McNulty, 2018). Knowledge will be constructed, but as experiences continue to add to the past while future possibilities continue to emerge, the constructed knowledge will reassemble under, as McNulty (2018) explains, multiple eyes. In her research, Irwin (2006) goes further with etymology, learning that excursion means *excurrere*, or "to run outward" (p. 77). Perhaps, these students will seek "understanding beyond the original course of action" (p. 77), running out into new pathways and onto different *currere* courses based on their experiences during this study. Only time and experience can answer, "What if?" (McNulty, 2018).

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CHAPTER 3: "A TREASURE BOX AT THE BOTTOM OF THE OCEAN": EXPRESSIVE
ARTS CURRICULUM IN COMPOSITION COURSES

**What is unsettled, disturbed, or disrupted when students engage in art-making within a
collegiate rhetoric and composition course?**

It could not finalize my dissertation until I coded and analyzed for another topic: The
therapeutic effects that expressive arts have for students in a composition course. Though I
did not intend to examine this topic before the study began, I could not ignore the repeated
data from participants that pointed me in that direction. Leavy (2018) expresses that arts-
based educational research offers ways to "tap into" (p. 9) what might otherwise be
inaccessible. Arts-based educational research jars people into seeing or thinking differently,
and that is what happened to me. My participants were not the only ones unsettled by this
research study; my perceptions were as well. I did not think that the therapeutic elements of
expressive arts would be significant enough to include in my study, but I was wrong. When
engaging in arts-based educational research, researchers must ask themselves, "Does it ring
true? Is it believable? Does it feel authentic? Does the work resonate?" (Leavy, 2017, p.
213). After I finished the third chapter, it did. By the end of the third process of analysis, I
also found that my curriculum was therapeutic for participants.

There are several journals I had in mind when I began writing this article, but most of
them limit the word count to 5,000, and what I had to say/the feedback from my committee
to keep expanding make this article well over 10,000. As a result of this process, I will likely
have to cut parts of it for any journal submission, but I plan to submit to the *Journal of
Creativity in Mental Health* first. This journal seeks to promote dialogue around effective
practitioner techniques and has a specific section for creative teaching methods. Aside from

the openness of the word count, I also selected this journal because it has recently published multiple articles on expressive arts techniques in education.

Introduction

Before a class period in the fall of 2019, Claire began drawing sad-faced cartoons on the whiteboard beside my head. She emailed me her third art project the previous day: A song that was so powerful I had already listened to it several times. It was produced with full instrumentals and harmonizing vocals, but what stuck out to me were the lyrics she composed.

"Hey," I said as she continued to draw, "Are you really thinking of dropping out?"

"How did you know I was thinking of quitting?" She asked, turning her head to face me.

"Well, you sang about it," I explained.

"I didn't directly sing about it. You picked up on the deeper meaning," she retorted while smiling. "Anyway, I already know what I'm doing for the next project, so no worries. If classes keep letting me do things like this project, I might just finish the degree!"

I did not intend to explore the therapeutic effects my students experienced when I brought art-making into the composition courses I taught at a public university, but I am surprised I did not foresee the data coming. When I began this study identifying what students experience when they engage in art-making as a form of composition, I was also working on a Graduate Certificate in Expressive Arts practices. Though the courses were offered for educators as well as people within therapy programs, they were largely geared toward therapeutic skills. "I am not my students' therapist, and I don't want to be," I exclaimed multiple times throughout these courses, thinking that while art-making is closely tied to emotions, my students' improvement in writing skills would far outweigh the

therapeutic benefits. Yes, art is "inherently therapeutic and empowering" with the possibility to "give life meaning" (Shore, 2009), but I was not optimistic enough to consider those aspects when I prepared the study. I knew that art-making was the type of active learning necessary to generate excitement in students and motivate them to remain in the course (Davis & Shadle, 2007); hence, I thought I knew what I was going to research. My ideas originally took a shape involving straight lines that moved outwards in clear patterns. I created the following figure by pasting my entire research prospectus into a word art program. Figure 24 reflects my initial thoughts about how my research would take shape.

Figure 24. Word art composed from the research prospectus

Though I thought I knew the directions I was going, my research had different ideas and began shifting shape. Over the course of a semester, I conducted four interviews with each participant, once after each art project, then once at the end of the semester, as well as

collected data via reflective journals and students' completed art projects. Though not all participants identified therapeutic benefits in their art-making, the ones who did referenced them repeatedly throughout the semester without my ever asking about them. I began this study thinking that in order for the curriculum to be therapeutic, I had to create it with that intent; however, the term "therapeutic" is synonymous with healing or restoration, which my participants were experiencing without my original intent.

I was not surprised with this finding. My study worked within arts-based educational research, which is poststructural in the sense that outcomes cannot be predicted; the researcher must be open to how the data unfolds, ready to separate entangled threads of meaning and follow those strands as far as they go (Hofsess, 2016). Before analyzing data, I thought that my threads were already untangled, ready for me to follow meaning in clear forms, but my data spattered instead, clumping in ways that I did not anticipate and creating patterns that I could not ignore. With this in mind, I put my prospectus in a word art program again, but shifted the shape to reflect what actually happened. Figure 25 is the revised shape.

Figure 25. Word art of research prospectus revised after data analysis

There are still areas branching out from a unified idea, but the branches are not uniform.

Additionally, there are also smaller splatters of meaning veered from the original intent,

which is what arts-based educational research requires: the ability to expand, contract, or

move away from what is planned. There are two circular splatters that are not connected to

the larger form. The largest words in one of the splatters are "data" and "knowledge," while

the other splatter holds the words "active" and "method" as the largest. I find this depiction

appropriate, as my data began to create new knowledge of how my curriculum. I also had to

take a more active method of analyzing my data because arts-based educational research calls

for a "messier" process of following themes that may result from an unsettling, or "spill" of

the original design. The following article outlines what happened when I allowed my study to

"splatter" and decided to explore the therapeutic elements of healing and restoration that art-

making generated within students in my courses.

Mental Health and a Holistic Approach in Colleges

College students are a high-risk population within the U.S. for mental health symptoms; yet, they are also unlikely to seek treatment (Bravo, Villarosa-Hurlocker, & Pearson, 2018). Common mental health symptoms include depression, anxiety, and stress (Pace, Silk, Nazione, Fournier, & Collins-Eaglin, 2018). But because stress is often synonymous with the college experience, students are less likely to find coping mechanisms and self-care practices to relieve it (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Gullust, 2007), resulting in a collective mindset that mental health symptoms should be tolerated or accepted as a normal state instead of something that can be relieved. As Burwell (2018) explains, though it is supposed to be the "time of their lives," with studies, such as the 2016-17 Healthy Minds Study reporting that 39 percent of students indicated they were experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety, the current generation of college students could be dubbed "Generation Stress" (p. 150). Though professors are not licensed counselors and should direct students to the appropriate collegiate personnel for treatment, studies indicate that campus initiatives that emphasize a culture of care (Nguyen, 2019), or a holistic approach to education, can enhance student wellbeing.

Art-making is a holistic curricular approach for enhancing collegiate students' wellbeing. Palmer, Zajonc, and Scribner (2010) suggest that educators within higher education should adopt an "epistemology of imagination" that "rejects objectification and distancing" in learning, instead embracing "subjectification and intimacy" (p. 94), which is what art-making facilitates. Students must actually connect to materials, touching them, considering what to do with them, and creating something that did not exist before. The process of making art is a type of "[c]reative, synthetic thinking" that "requires a holistic

engagement and attention that is especially fostered by the student finding himself or herself in the material" (Barbezat & Bush, 2014, p. 4). Curriculum theorists who advocate for the arts within education understand that they can enhance performance by engaging students (Eisner, 2002), as well as facilitate deeper understanding of material (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). But they can also restore vitality (Dewey, 1934/2005), promote personal growth (Greene & Lincoln Center Institute, 2001), and make learning pleasurable by disrupting the standard passive atmosphere traditional courses have, with the instructor "banking" knowledge (hooks, 1994, p. 5) into student recipients. Essentially, unlike other curricular methods, art-making "constitutes one of the rare locations where acts of transcendence can take place and have a wide-ranging transformative impact" (hooks, 1995, p. 8). Art-making has the ability to excite students in a classroom, holistically blending students' experiences with content, enhancing their wellbeing. Expressive arts, a field of art-making traditionally found in therapeutic settings, especially aligns with the holistic aims of art in education.

Expressive Arts in Education

Expressive arts is based on *poiesis*, "the act of bringing something new into the world" (Levine, 2017b, p. 10). Expressive arts practices involve participants engaging in multimodal forms of art-making based on choice and situation, such as collage, music, painting, etc., but the "something new" (Levine, 2017b) is not actually the art; instead, it is the constructed knowledge participants gain from a process of art-making. Arts-based research has an overlap with expressive arts' worldview that falls under constructivism of reality. Humans are constantly constructing and reconstructing meanings through art-making (Leavy, 2017). Through this construction, art becomes a way of knowing (Allen, 1995). This knowing is not reliant on artistic skill. Expressive arts emphasize the concept of low

skill/high sensitivity (Knill, 2005; Knill & Knill, 2017), never requiring participants to have artistic skill or create a developed artistic product, as long as they are engaged/sensitive to the process of making. Through engaging in expressive arts, participants are able to explore thoughts, feelings, and information they receive from both inside of themselves as well as their outside environments.

Expressive arts are less common in educational settings than in therapy settings. Studies involving expressive arts in education typically examine how students or educators experience art-making outside of a course meeting; hence, the field does not have significant representation of Expressive arts within course curriculums. But expressive arts do have elements of effective learner-centered curriculum for educators to use in class. In expressive arts, knowledge or information is continuously constructed rather than positivist. Instead of valuing the knowledge that is banked (hooks, 1994) into students from course content, expressive arts emphasizes the constructed knowledge that occurs through an artistic process, rather than holding a perspective that "presupposes *theoria* as the basis of all knowledge" (Levine, 2017b, p. 11). Through this type of curriculum students are actively involved in meaning-making and encouraged to connect their personal experiences with content to create a new understanding of constructed knowledge. In place of theory/content without a personal connection, aesthetic education, or "[l]earning through the arts" (Levine, 2017a, p. 177) is highlighted. When expressive arts practices are utilized to connect with a course theme or objective, students "are encouraged to engage in art-making not as an illustration of a theoretical framework, but as a way of discovering what had been previously unknown" (Levine, 2017a, p. 178). This learning is a type of "decentering," asking students to move away from narrow, often more logical, that can lead to "'dead-end' situations" and move

with "the logic of imagination," with open-endedness and a "circularity" (Knill, 2005, p. 83) of learned experiences as knowledge continues to be constructed. Additionally, the process of art-making is valued instead of a product, aligning with low skill/ high sensitivity (Knill, 2005; Knill & Knill, 2017). Expressive arts recognizes that everyone is an artist, and that only the creator can articulate the meaning of the product; therefore, an educator cannot "grade" or assess the value of the product (Shore, 2009).

Though content must be included within a course's curriculum, expressive arts recognizes that educators' first priority should be to take care of the souls within their classrooms (Hösli & Wanzenried, 2017, p. 189); consequently, they must find ways to let the soul speak within their students. Rather than teach students how to create an artistic product, educators/practitioners have an "aesthetic responsibility" (Levine, 2017b, p. 13) to facilitate aesthetic responses in others, guiding them to reflect on their experiences, but never emphasizing artistic skill (Knill & Knill, 2017, p. 182). Expressive arts recognizes that unsympathetic and threatening environments cause individuals to bury creative sides of themselves (Naumburg, 1950/1973); consequently, part of educators'/practitioners' aesthetic responsibility is to "help others become able to respond to their difficulties in ways that are creative and life-affirming?" (Levine, 2017b, p. 12). Imagination within expressive arts is "the most important faculty" (Allen, 1995, p. 3) because it enables students to explore possibilities and options of ideas and how to voice them. For this process to occur, the curriculum must allow for "[s]pontaneity and originality of expression" (Naumburg, 1950/1973, p. 49), or free expression, so that students have choices. Though this type of learning environment may be difficult for an educator to embrace due to the lack of structure in student responses, parameters may still be set to facilitate development, so long as they

allow for student voice and choice. McNiff (2017) views this type of curriculum within education as an indication of a mature educator "who realizes that the most profound results are based upon creating an environment in which others can realize their creative potential" (p. 29). Within expressive arts, students are trusted to co-construct their curriculum, and educators are asked to trust the process.

The Arts in Composition Courses

Historically, when visual arts are included in collegiate composition curriculums, they regularly involve visual art products created by others rather than students engaging in visual art-making. For instance, after noticing that students seemed to find their writing courses ineffective, Hevener (1966) adopted a self-made curriculum that exposed students to "fine arts": mainly well-known works of literature and visual arts. When surveying his student, it was clear they enjoyed this method, but there was no student creation of artistic products. Gomez (2005), too, desired to create an "arts-centric" composition classroom, but the curriculum did not include visual art-making. Though students did write creatively, they compared the writing process to works of art that were created by *others*, including music and visual arts. This curriculum was also only implemented with Gomez's advanced-level students. In her introductory freshman-level course, Golden (1986) recognized that visual arts can definitely teach students about writing essays, as both art-making and writing include a revision process that moves towards "harmonious connections" (p. 59) between elements. But even with this recognition of composition in both art-making and writing, her curriculum called for students to compare sketches of artists she produced for them, not sketch themselves. Moreover, her activity was documented as one exercise with students. These arts-infused curriculums call into question why students were not provided with opportunities

to create their own art when the instructors clearly saw the benefits of including visual arts in a writing course.

Though expressive arts does not arise as a term associated with composition studies, writing and art have been linked with educational trends in composition. In 1996, the National Council of Teachers of English recognized that "viewing and visually representing our world has a form of literacy" (NCTE, 1997, p. 99). It is surprising that it took until 1996 for this decision to occur, as "[w]riting is a visual medium" (Kress, 1997, p. 120), containing elements of spatial design, and both writing and the arts share similar approaches to composition/delivering messages to an audience (Hobson, 1998). After NCTE's decision, it became clear that many educators within colleges and secondary schools already paired visual elements with writing, understanding the importance of visual literacy within increasingly the increasingly visual culture, but still considering how to approach teaching "the intersections between the visual and the verbal" (Childers, Hobson, & Mullin, 1998, p. ix).

Many compositionists in higher education advocate for the inclusion of arts within the curriculum as a way to enhance understanding of the process. Palmeri (2012) attests that educators repeatedly hear that "alphabetic literacy is our past; multimodal composing is our future" (p. 5) due to the increasing ease and access of visual methods. To teach multimodal composing, Fleckenstein (2003) explains that a "pictorial turn" is needed that facilitates a revised definition of literacy that is no longer "dominantly and aggressively linguistic" (p. 2). Aspects of the pictorial turn would involve alternate forms of imagery that enhances ways students could communicate their ideas. LeCourt (2004) also highlights the necessity for students to have multiple pathways for communication, as written language can prevent

students from including their personal identities because they are confined by a singular form of expression. Dunnigan (2019) goes so far to say that there is no simplistic distinction between drawing and writing in terms of process, as they "are both actions directed at communicating ideas, emotions, and things on surfaces" (p. 57). The only difference, according to Dunnigan (2019), is that "drawing uses a repertoire of marks or lines whereas writing uses a specific set of symbols" (p. 57). With these arguments for why artistic composition should be included as a form of expression in composition courses evident, it is surprising that some compositionists restrict students from actually creating art.

Mullin (1998) is critical how art-making can function in curriculum, stating that when the arts are brought into a composition classroom space, they are often resources for therapeutic "relief from the day-to-day" (p. 116); however, many compositionists (Albers, 2007; Dunn, 2001; Dunnigan, 2019; Hanzalik & Virgintino, 2019; Palmeri, 2012; Shipka, 2011) ask students to create artistic products as a means of enhancing their composition skills. Specific goals of their curriculums include creating "multiple intellectual pathways to generate knowledge" (Dunn, 2001, p. 1) so less voices are excluded and creating methods that shy away from freezing writing (Shipka, 2011), where students are left to feel that their written products cannot be enhanced further. Shipka (2011) expounds on other benefits such as student experimentation with "alternative, hybrid, or diverse forms of discourse" (p. 1), but although she is able to see more of her students' processes and take them into consideration, she is still largely focused on the final product's relationship with the composition process (Shipka, 2011, p. 3). Though some compositionists are moving towards art-making in their curriculum, expressive arts is still underutilized or not used at all.

Expressive Arts Elements in Composition Studies

Still, there are compositionists who seem to align with expressive arts values in their perception of composition. When using art-making with their students, Hanzalik and Virgintino (2019) emphasize the importance of play, not simply as an in-class activity, but "an open-ended way of being" (p. 187). Similar to expressive arts helping students discover what was previously unknown (Levine, 2017a) as well as moving students away from "'dead-end' situations" (Knill, 2005, p. 83) and linear pathways. Playing with artistic methods in the composition classroom "artistically subverts common sense ways of thinking, writing, and communicating" (Hanzalik & Virgintino, 2019, p. 189). Additionally, Berthoff's (1981) comparison of teaching composition to meaning-making, helping students get in touch with their own minds and give them back their language, aligns with expressive arts' guidelines for educators to create situations where students can construct individualized meaning (McNiff, 2017, p. 29). Because "[m]eanings don't just happen: we make them; we find and form them" (Berthoff, 1981, p. 69), it is up to educators of composition to design curriculum where students can do so.

Another connection between expressive arts and composition deals with the process of constructing knowledge. *Poiesis*, or "the act of bringing something new into the world" (Levine, 2017b, p. 10), aligns with Sirc's (2002) metaphor of composition as a Happening, an experience that privileges what occurs within the present, valuing spontaneous and innovative thoughts that cannot be replicated or constructed the same way when the moment has passed. Expressive arts emphasizes the process of art-making over the product, which, according to Rubino (2019) connects to current trends within composition theory and pedagogy: "the privileging of process" as well as "freedom of expression" and

"compositional flexibility" (p. 125). Like expressive arts practices, process-oriented pedagogies are maternal/nurturing (Stenberg, 2015). Process-orientated pedagogies appreciate that written products may not always be finished by due dates because it has not reached its potential. Furthermore, they acknowledge that writing should not be bound by an assignment (Graban, Charlton, & Charlton, 2013, p. 260), encouraging writers to extend further into their ideas rather than constrict it with rules. Like art-making, process-oriented pedagogies nurture the nonlinear, nontraditional ways that writing can construct meaning (Berthoff, 1981; Graban, Charlton, & Charlton, 2013). Whereas product creativity is used for the quality and quantity of products to be judged by others, therefore preventing less skilled people from engaging in this act, process creativity in writing "refers to the ability to apply relevant knowledge inventively to problems at hand. It is as normal to human functioning as is remembering" (Kellogg, 1994, p. 24). Under process creativity, all learners are creative and capable of composition, just as everyone is an artist under the expressive arts framework.

Methodology

Arts-Based Educational Research

Arts-based educational research (ABER) is exploratory, creative research involving the relationships between participants and researchers. It "involves adapting the tenets of the creative arts into a social research project" (Leavy, 2017, p. 9). Both myself and my students explored the ways art can facilitate constructed meaning-making. Their exploration involved creating art, while mine involved collecting and analyzing their multiple forms of data. I was not looking for *whether* expressive arts could function within a composition course, but *how* art-making influenced student experiences; therefore, this study utilized ABER methodology,

looking at complex and, at times, subtle interactions between curriculum/methods, participants/students, and teacher/researcher (Barone & Eisner, 2011). Within the constructivist paradigm, ABER encourages researchers to construct meaning that is formed through their positioning, knowledge, and relationships in the study.

Constructivism is an epistemology that can determine knowledge through participants' meaning-making. The term *constructivism* should be used for "epistemological considerations" (Crotty, 1998/2015, p. 58) that focus on meaning-making that occurs in an individual's mind. With arts-based educational research (ABER) methods, knowledge is constructed through artistic inquiry. When a participant or researcher creates art or witnesses a process of creation, meaning can be created within the interpretations. The results will not be one uniform, positivist answer/solution. I did not select the arts as a way to "prove" a hypothesis, but is more interested in the many ways of understanding a topic that the arts have the power to reveal. As each individual participant's experience is unique, a "certain relativism is in order" when working under a constructivist paradigm where there is a "need to recognize that different people may well inhabit quite different worlds. Their different worlds constitute for them diverse ways of knowing, indistinguishable sets of meanings, separate realities" (Crotty, 1998/2015, p. 64). ABER also emphasizes the constructivist view that "each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other" (Crotty, 1998/2015, p. 58). The art created from ABER methods is not assessed for skill, but appreciated for what each individual's process can contribute to meaning-making. Despite participants' different backgrounds/possible skills in art-making, their constructed knowledge is all equally rich data. There is an "individualizing method" over a "generalising method" (Crotty, 1998/2015, p. 68) when viewing data, where each piece of data from a

participant is reflective of an individualized experience. Meaning cannot be separated from individual participants' interpretations of experiences.

Though meaning can be created by participants and researchers, ABER allows for poststructural ambiguity within research practice. In fact, Springgay (2008) states that ABER methods can "[penetrate] meaning," creating "an interstitial space, hesitant and vulnerable, where meanings and understandings are interrogated and ruptured" (p. 37). Instead of categorizable meaning-making from participants, new ideas may emerge from the process that contradict the researcher's original predictions. As stated before, I did not intend to explore the therapeutic effects that art-making had on my students. But in a process involving art, everything cannot be explained, assessed, and categorized based on a study's design. As I explored my data, there were ruptures of meaning that resulted in alternative ways of seeing my curriculum's effects. Leavy (2017) explains that studies involving ABER are useful when "[one's] purpose is to explore, describe, or evoke, provoke, or unsettle" (pp. 9-10). The unsettling comes from challenging what might seem fixed or stable in participants' and researchers' minds. Ultimately, my original purpose for this study was unsettled, and participants' views on art-making were as well.

Practitioner Action Research

As a type of practitioner action research, the researcher can hold multiple roles such as the instructor of a course. The multiplicity of roles has the ability to construct new knowledge in the field. Moreover, holding multiple roles is essential for new meaning to be constructed. Leavy (2015) notes, "[I]n order to cultivate new ways of getting at social research questions and bringing the resulting knowledge to broad communities, we need to be able to see and think differently" (p. 2). With ABER methods, traditional assumptions

about the role a researcher should hold within a study are less important than how the researcher could construct knowledge.

Because this study was practitioner action research, requiring me to hold dual roles of classroom teacher and researcher, I was concerned that students would be less candid in their interviews. Stenberg (2015) explains that students within rhetoric and composition courses can be taught that any kind of negative emotions are "urges in need of control rather than social responses to oppression and exploitation" (p. 47). If they were unhappy, dissatisfied, etc., would they feel free to express it with their teacher/researcher? Would my activities create the "[o]peness, freedom, and safety" required to empower "each person's discovery of his/her unique potential and his/her own answers"? (Shore, 2009, p. 4). McNiff (2017) explains that the energies produced within expressive arts activities have the ability to "cross over from one realm of activity to another" (p. 28); therefore, if the art-making did, in fact, elicit a transformative experience, encouraging deeper ways of knowing or constructing new knowledge, the experience could continue into further interactions with myself, such as the interviews. Essentially, the reflective aspects of the study, such as journals and interviews, could extend meaning. As Allen (1995) attests, "*[i]mages need a witness*" and image work is about "bearing witness to our stories and the stories of others without whitewash or turning away" (p. 198). As a teacher/researcher, I could be a witness to participants' images, and they would know I would not turn away.

ABER methods facilitate self-expression and connection; consequently, there can be an intimacy between researcher and participants that is highly beneficial. While researchers often assume they must hide their relationships to their work, ABER "[allows] researchers to share this relationship with the audiences who consume their works" (Leavy, 2015, p. 3);

therefore, researchers in this role can more effectively establish rapport with participants, collect data, and understand artistic process because they have meaningful connections with their participants. I was the students' teacher as well as the researcher, which meant I was able to get to know their stories deeply throughout the semester. Subjectivity could not be avoided in this, but it could beneficially contribute to meaning. I would be someone familiar who students saw multiple times a week in capacities of instructor as well as researcher. My multiple roles could help them feel more comfortable with me as well as enable me to understand their data on a deeper level than if I only saw them for data collection.

Expressive Arts as Method

I did not begin this research to explore the therapeutic effects expressive art-making had on my students, but "[d]iscovery frequently occurs during periods when the linear thinking of a particular experiment is suspended, and this allows the various aspects of a problem to take on a different relationship with one another" (McNiff, 2017, p. 22). Originally, I desired to create a curriculum where I did not have to lecture in front of students for eternity while they sat passively. Instead, I could make a curriculum that was learner-centered (Schiro, 2013) with activities that enabled students to explore their own interests and bring in their experiences for reference. Working within an English department that emphasized process-oriented composition pedagogy, I began to see how expressive arts and composition studies could fuse within the curriculum. I did not have to "impose knowledge" on my students, but could instead create activities that would help them "to be able to shape their own way of understanding" (Levine, 2017b, p. 15). Ultimately, I assigned three art projects for students that aligned with their major papers for the course: a literacy narrative, a rhetorical analysis, and a research paper involving discourse within their majors. Instead of

using art to illustrate theoretical aspects of composition, students were asked to create art that connected their personal experiences to the three major paper assignments: literacy narrative, rhetorical analysis, and research paper on their intended college major. In this way, the curriculum was moving students to discoveries of "what had been previously unknown" (Levine, 2017a, p. 178) instead of reflecting passive learning of course content.

Drawing from expressive arts' emphasis on process over product and low skill/high sensitivity, I did not assess their artistic products for skill, nor did I provide a framework for how they would create them. When designing curriculum, educators often worry if their curriculum is achievable for students when it involves rigor. In expressive arts, educators may ask, "How can we avoid forcing the artwork to a specific educational purpose? How can we stick to the arts and go beyond pedagogical creativity exercises? How can we set the challenge of an aesthetic learning frame quite right: not too low or too high?" (Knill & Knill, 2017, p. 182). For this study, the answer was to provide a connection to course topics that was open enough for students to set their own expectations within their learning. The courses I taught were General Education requirements for all students; thus, they came in with a range of feelings towards writing as well as skills. Adding an expectation for their artistic products could have made them more anxious or created unnecessary binaries within the classroom based on ability. I desired for the art assignments to be "a way of breaking boundaries, loosening outwork ideas, and making way for the new" (Allen, 1995, p. x). The art was simply a "carrier of images into the world" (Shore, 2009, p. 5), or an alternative to writing for students to compose their knowledge. Everyone can be an artist within expressive arts, just as in composition studies everyone can be a writer. Though I did have guidelines for their eventual writing pieces, I was not required to have any for their artistic pieces, so I

chose to give students full credit if their processes reflected time and effort. There was no right or wrong so long as they were willing to explore possibility (Allen, 1995).

In regards to arts-based educational research, researchers must consider how the arts can contribute to a researcher's topic as well as general understanding of the topic (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008). Students' art-making shed light on their lived experiences, allowing them to refocus attention "on the interplay between nonsymbolic and symbolic meaning to form understanding" (Siegesmund & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008, p. 244). When students wrote their reflective journals after each art assignment or participated in the four interviews during the semester (once after each art assignment and a final at the end of the semester), they were asked to have their art nearby. Interacting with their artistic products to recall their processes would help with the de-centering (Levine, 2017b) necessary to step in to an alternative world of imaginative reflection, separating from other aspects of the present. Images can shed light into what is going on inwardly (Allen, 1995). They can also aid participants in articulating shifting perspectives and express thoughts with more fluidity (Sharples, 1999; Weber, 2008). Seeing their creations helped them imagine, see more deeply, and entertain possibilities they may have not considered otherwise (Romano, 2013). The artistic products were a method of data collection because they were creating expressive forms that enlightened/constructed knowledge within student participants (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 9).

Data Collection and Analysis

Due to the curriculum's expressive arts' framework, students' artistic products were not analyzed. As the process is the focus of expressive arts is the focus over the product (Knill, 2005; Knill & Knill, 2017), students' final products were not significant in

comparison to the ways of knowing that occurred from the process of art-making. Still, collecting multiple types of data for triangulation and authenticity was necessary, especially since I was researching student experiences, and therefore feelings, within the study. Pearson and Wilson (2009) articulate that feelings are often experienced as a type of layering, with original or primary emotions and overlaying secondary emotions; thus, within research, collecting different forms of data at different times would help peel back the layers of participants' feelings.

In ABER, decisions on coding before a study are not required. Instead, I elected to make decisions on coding after the semester of data collection concluded and participants' interviews were transcribed. Waiting until I had collected all data would ensure that I was not looking for presupposed outcomes or analyzing the data before construction of knowledge of peeling back of emotional layers had occurred fully. Though coding is not required for ABER, I selected a less structured method of mapping data by frequency of issues and themes (McKernan, 1991). After reviewing all interviews, I made separate charts for each theme that emerged within some participants, such as *currere*, growth mindset, and enjoyment with art-making. Participants' responses were divided by each individual project so I could see how their constructed knowledge and emotions remained consistent or developed over time. But "even research can be reconceived from an expressive arts perspective. Research is always an act of *poiesis*, it discovers the new" (Levine, 2017b, p. 15). As I mapped, it became clear that one theme was reaching out to me across multiple participants, emphasized and reiterated by their voices until I could not ignore it further: The participants recognized that art-making truly had therapeutic effects, even though I did not intend for this to happen when I had created the curriculum originally.

Participants' Experiences with Expressive Arts

Once data was collected, I searched within their interviews and reflections for anything that connected to principles within expressive arts and found that participants experienced moments of stress-relief/catharsis of emotions, de-centering towards imaginative exploration, art as a way of knowing, and moments where their souls seemed to speak through art-making. To some degree, each participant identified therapeutic benefits of expressive art-making within our course: relaxation/stress relief, expressing emotions, reflecting on emotions, and utilizing creative parts of themselves that were typically not accessed in their courses. Divided by their pseudonyms, the following sections are participant responses blended with my view of their experiences as their teacher/researcher. To reflect my process of mapping data by frequency, I have included word art from each of the participants' journal responses and interview transcriptions. I selected a different shape that connected to my understanding of their data. Samples of their artistic products are also inserted to showcase the range of artistic abilities and methods participants utilized to construct knowledge.

Blowing off Steam and Introspection

Summary

Griffin was a student who self-identified in his interviews as not artistic or particularly skilled in writing; however, the course's arts-based curriculum provided opportunities for what he described as "breaks" from other school work as well as moments for introspection that he typically did not experience. The word art created from his data takes the form of a simple oval, which represents the clarity of his therapeutic moments;

when reflecting on his experiences, he was able to see that the expressive arts activities

relieved stress as well as created pathways for understanding his emotions.

Figure 26. Griffin's word art representation of data

Griffin's EXA Experiences

Griffin told me that he was anxious when he found out he had enrolled in an arts-

based rhetoric and composition course. He explained that he had little artistic ability and was

unsure how it would go for him. But he was always willing to try due to the emphasis on

process over product (Knill, 2005; Knill & Knill, 2017). Though he never felt very proud of

his final products, he enjoyed the therapeutic processes of making, stating that they were "a

good way to [. . .] blow off some steam." Even though he recognized that the art was tied to

"high stakes" writing assignments in the class, he described art-making as "a nice little break

that you don't usually get" in college. While art-making, Griffin was able to relax and de-

center (Knill, 2005) from the rigidity that his other courses enforced, which he saw as

therapeutic as well as a welcome change from his typical course assignments. Though he was still creating something for a course, he did not see it as work because it was not "staring at a computer for 10 hours wracking [his] brain" for ideas. By the end of the semester, Griffin also noticed that he had been engaging in a different aspect of de-centering: Looking inward to reflect on his emotions, which surprised him. "It made me look more inward," he said, "which is very hard for me cause I'm a very big macho man. I don't have feelings!" For Griffin, his aesthetic education (Levine, 2017a) was coming to understand aspects of himself that had not been examined as in-depth before. Though the therapeutic elements began with relieving stress, he recognized by the end of the semester that the art-making also helped him understand his feelings.

Figure 27. Griffin's first art project

Relaxation and De-Centering

Summary

Fletcher first viewed the expressive arts projects as relaxing, but began to see that they influenced her ways of knowing. As the semester progressed, she noticed that she was focusing on things in atypical ways. She attributed her new ways of seeing to the expressive

arts activities. The word art created from her data is in the shape of a brain, reflecting her discovery that art-making can influence how the brain processes information.

Figure 28. Fletcher's word art representation of data

Fletcher's EXA Experiences

Fletcher was also less than thrilled to be in an arts-based rhetoric and composition course, telling me that she went so far as to look at other classes she could take instead when I sent the information out. After the first project, however, she began to see that the process of making art was beneficial. Surprised, she admitted that "[t]he process of creating actually was not bad." Once she began to, in her words, "force" herself to "crank it out," "time really flew by." She chose to collage, and the process that she described as both repetitive and rhythmic while she searched, cut, and pasted was "almost relaxing," or therapeutic. She was not frustrated, as she imagined she would be, but instead appreciated the *poiesis* (Levine, 2017b) of creating something new.

Figure 29. Fletcher's first art project

After two more projects, Fletcher moved from "almost" enjoying the art-making

process to stating that it was significantly therapeutic for her. Though the art activities

connected to a paper, Fletcher found them a welcome way to shift focus in her composition

process when needed. Whenever she was "too overloaded," she could switch to the art, or

vice versa, giving herself breaks from working on the same part. Fletcher saw this ability to

shift between methods as beneficially therapeutic because it was restorative. "I was always

productive, but I wasn't drained," she elaborated. Fletcher also noticed that the art-making

was de-centering. Typically, she was constantly focused on so many parts of her life that she

did not examine them in depth. The art-making, in contrast, de-centered her into a space

where she could focus on one task specifically. The de-centering process allowed her to

"focus on the details and the fine lines," noticing small details and patterns that she typically

would not while losing track of time. "It's insane that I'm saying this," she exclaimed,

"because I'm the least... I'm a big picture kind of [person]. I don't really do a lot of detail

stuff, but it's funny with this, I kinda like it in a way." Levine (2017b) points out that

imagination in art-making involves envisioning other possibilities, which can lead

participants to "new understandings, new ways of acting and being that bring freedom to a restrictive situation" (p. 15). Fletcher's new understanding was an opening from a restrictive way of seeing. She was experiencing art as a way of knowing, beginning to see aspects of her world that she did not think possible based on what she knew. Though she first saw the art-making as stress relief, she saw other therapeutic effects through de-centering and meaning-making by the end of the semester.

Enjoyment and Freedom

Summary

Raven also saw the expressive arts activities as opportunities to relieve stress. Though this view of them continued, she also noted by the end of the semester that the expressive arts elements of the course helped her become more "carefree" and less focused on others' perceptions of her work. Raven's word art is in the shape of a fist raised to the sky, a common symbol of solidarity and support, which is what the art-making provided her with.

Figure 30. Raven's word art representation of data

Raven's EXA Experiences

Raven found the art-making a relief from her stressful semester as well. As the semester progressed, she began to describe it as a safe, welcoming environment, telling me, "I knew if I went to your class, I wouldn't be stressed out." She took my course during a semester where she had a great deal of homework and appreciated the art-making because it allowed her to "put [the other work] aside and just make art." The expressive arts assignments were a therapeutic way to complete work for a course. Because the art was for a class, she could still feel productive, but she was not stressed due to it being process over product (Knill, 2005; Knill & Knill, 2017). "I think I just stopped caring so much about if it was perfect or not, and I kind of just did it 'cause I enjoyed it," she explained, mirroring the value of process in expressive arts.
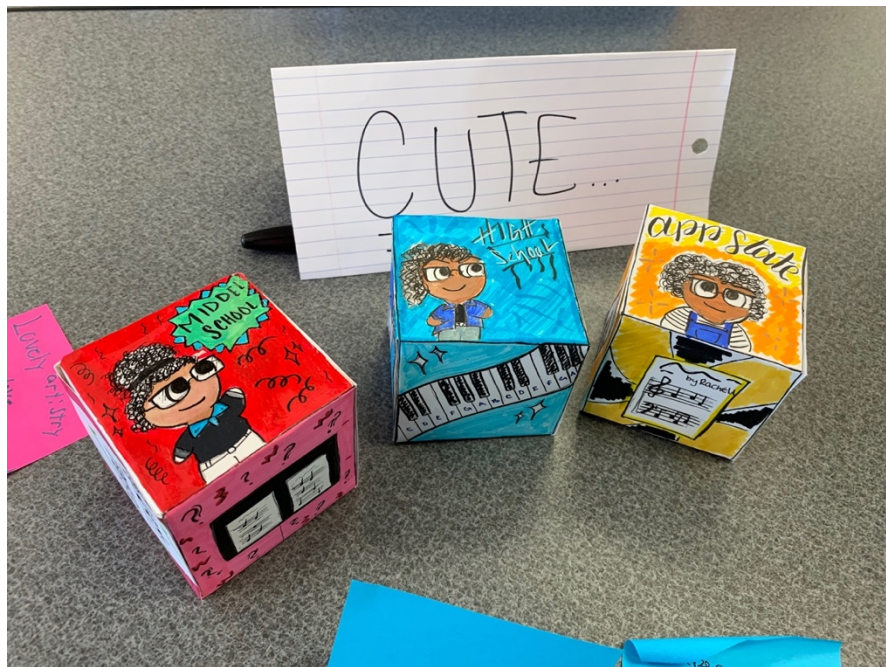
Figure 31. Raven's first art project

Raven noticed that this feeling began to transfer outside of the assignments, explaining that she began to become more "care-free" as the semester progressed. Barone (2008) attributes an "emancipatory" (p. 36) effect with art-making, which is similar to Raven's shift in perspective. This shift is especially important because Raven's writing was highly criticized before my course, contributing to a great deal of anxiety for writing assignments. But the multiform nature of my course allowed her to see that creating was a way of knowing (Allen, 1995). Through art-making and writing, Raven could find answers to internal and external questions. "When I did the art then I wrote it, I felt like that chapter was finished[. . .] 'Cause then I'd make the art and then the story would go with the art, so then it felt like that's a complete set. So I guess that could be answers," she reflected during her final interview. Her anxiety was alleviated through the therapeutic process of art-making, which provided her with room to explore ideas without criticism. Raven also told me that she recommended my course to a friend and gave the advice, "As long as you are creative, and then you are confident in your art, nobody's gonna tell you your art is bad. As long as you take pride in it then you should be perfectly fine." Without taking a course that taught her about expressive arts, she had learned the values by doing and was now informing future students who would explore art as a way of knowing. Her advice was also a noticeable shift from her former anxious feelings as a student. The therapeutic elements of the activities enabled her to be more "care-free," or relaxed in her assignments. She was able to find relaxation through the process of making.
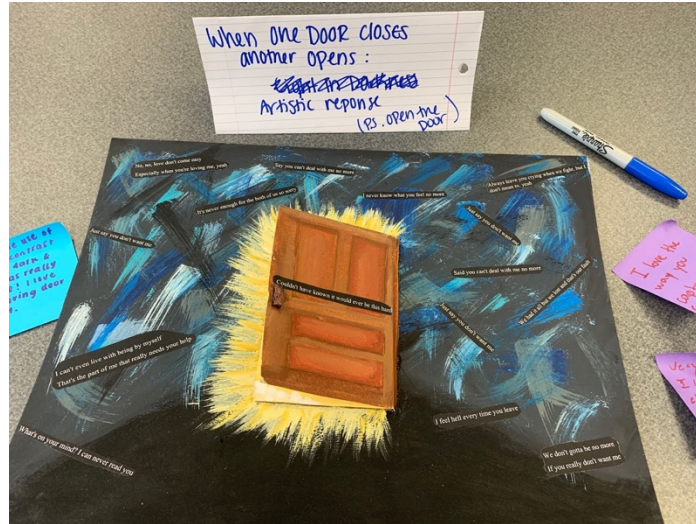
Figure 32. Raven's second art project
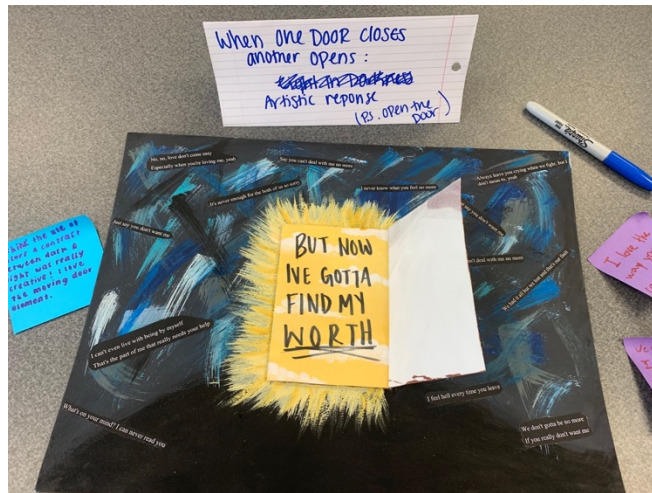
Figure 33. Raven's second art project (continued)

Exploring Emotions and Transformation

Summary

Miles had negative emotions during the beginning of the semester that he elected to explore through the expressive arts activities. After recognizing that his art could reflect his feelings, he spent the semester representing ways that his emotions developed and changed. Miles's word art is in the shape of a flower not only because he reflected his feelings in his

own artistic products, but also because it symbolizes the growth, or blossoming he experiences with self-expression.

Figure 34. Miles's word art representation of data

Miles's EXA Experiences

Miles was forthcoming of a personal issue he had during the semester that was causing negative emotions. For his first project, he was unsure of what topic to pick, but finally came to the realization that "[a]rt reflects how we feel," leading him to create a literacy project on a recent breakup. Through his project, he began a process of de-centering (Knill, 2005), moving from focusing solely on his negative feelings of the breakup and more on his literacy within all of his relationships, highlighting positive attributes that blossom within himself. By the time he was finished with the process, he saw that his focus had changed; he was now focused on the positive attributes within himself and his potential to

grow in the future. But he still has lingering feelings that transferred to the second project. In

his second project, he chose to make a video with himself going different places on campus.

The project was a rhetorical analysis of a text, and he selected a song that again connected to

his recent breakup. Although he kept the same topic within his life to connect to, Miles

reflected that making this project was not difficult for him like the first. "It wasn't actually

bad," he explained, "[I]t was just encompassing something that made me feel very bad, and

was very hard for me to express and convey. So putting it in that form made it inherently bad,

but it was kind of me taking that bad out of me and putting it into that work." He continued

to describe his process, comparing it to a therapeutic extraction of negative feelings because

he recognized that what happened was in the past. Levine (2017b) sheds light on this

extraction, explaining that "[a]s we shape our world, we shape ourselves. Suffering comes

from when we are unable to create" (p. 15). Once Miles created, the emotions began to

change because the assignments allowed for a therapeutic process.
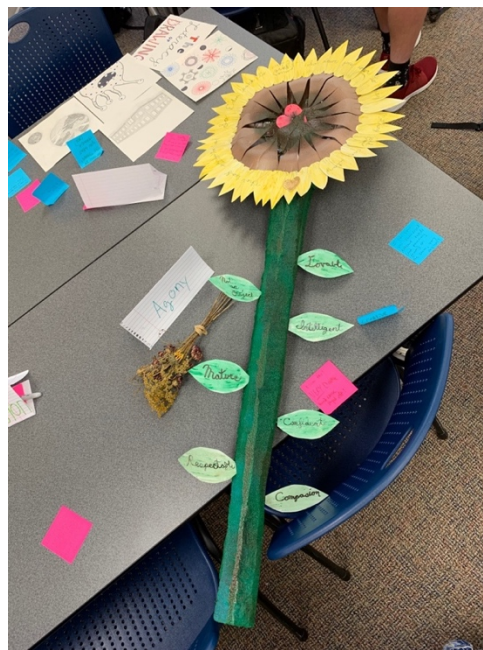
Figure 35. Miles's first art project

Throughout the semester, Miles noticed that he kept with a "theme of sadness," but one he was "very happy with." He described what he created as "genuine" and "honest," reflective of what he was actually feeling and going through. He took time during his last interview to thank me for the assignments because he felt that they "genuinely helped [him] get through [his] problem and the things [he] was feeling." They were therapeutic for him despite it not being my intention when I created the curriculum. Though I did not serve as a counselor to Miles, assigning expressive arts activities provided him with a framework for exploring and expressing his own emotions, coming to new ways of knowing and allowing his soul to speak on what was inside. Allen (1995) notes that paying attention through creation is transformative, which is what occurred in Miles that semester. Miles identified these assignments as especially therapeutic for college students, who "have so many more deep conflicting crazy thoughts and feelings" and go through "basically a masochist tormentation" of themselves, causing strong emotions to be evoked. "And no matter who you are, if you're gonna make art it's gonna be at least partially reflective of that," he said as he reflected on the benefits for those in college. To Miles, the art in class made students feel "that nothing you do is bad or wrong. If it is accurate and very vocal about you, then it's right. And it's easy," which helped him open up so much. Had the assignments been different, this type of experience may not have happened: "If students receive the spoken or unspoken message that their way of knowing is less than adequate, they may not have the heart to continue their education" (Dunn, 2001, p. 52). After such an intense semester, I asked him if he thought he would miss the art, and he expressed, "I'm gonna go look and find some art to do 'cause I'm gonna be dying with my three labs next semester, I'm gonna need something that's actually fun." After all the negative emotions he expressed while art-

making, he still found the process enjoyable/therapeutic and knew he would seek it out again.

Figure 36. Miles's third art project

Discoveries and "Therapy Sessions"

Summary

The art-making provided opportunities for Krista to explore her emotions centered around personal experiences more deeply. By the end of the semester, she likened the projects to personal "therapy sessions" where she could explore and process her emotions. The word art with Krista's data is in the form of an eye because she continuously connected her projects to ways of seeing her experiences.

Figure 36. Krista's word art representation of data

Krista's EXA Experiences

Krista, who also took my freshman level composition course, set a challenge for herself during sophomore year: To step out of her comfort zone. In our previous class, she enjoyed how much people opened up through the art activities, but did not do so herself as much as she thought she could have. In regards to the projects as a whole, Krista described them as activities that provide "the freedom to create what you want and you can show so much or show so little." People could open up if they desired, but they had to want to; it could not be forced. Her first art project was what she described as an introspective experience. The topic she selected was theatre literacy, and as she began reflecting on her past shows, she noticed that she grew as a person through them. "[The art] helped me realize

certain things," she explained, "'Once I went back and thought about each show and what was actually going on in my life at that point, it really... I was able to connect the pieces." Allen (1995) identifies a benefit of expressive art-making as revealing that "we are holographic creatures, living multiple stories" (p. 10). Without this understanding, people may "get stuck in one view of self and lose the richness of [their] multiplicity" (p. 10). The de-centering (Knill, 2005) aspect of the art-making called for Krista to explore other meanings from her past that eventually led to new connections between experience and herself. Her art projects exploring her emotions and experiences continued with layered depth. It was a therapeutic process of re-examining her past, considering her present, and exploring future possibilities through art-making.

Figure 37. Krista's first art project

By the end of the semester, Krista realized that she had opened up far more than she thought possible: "I talked about things that I wasn't comfortable about originally 'cause I talked about my mom and how she was a single mom for a while, and she got pregnant with

me at 18. And so, I talked about that in my paper 'cause I've never talked about that before."
Students were never required to select topics that were emotionally-charged, but Krista
decided to do so, pushing herself to "[discover] what had been previously unknown" (Levine,
2017a, p. 178). She identified her own emotional needs and engaged in self-directed
therapeutic processes of art-making. The art provided her a way to express aspects within her
soul. Even her family was surprised. During the semester, Krista chose to share her projects
with them. She told me during an interview after one project, "It was a thing I didn't even
realize affected me and I was like [. . .] 'Wow, okay.' And I would talk to my family about it
and be like... I'd sent my mom a screenshot [. . .] and she was like, 'Wow.' 'Cause she knows
that I don't open up to people about stuff like that too. So then when I had done it, she was
like, 'Whoa.'" Like Miles, Krista was expressing sometimes difficult emotions, but also
enjoyed the experience of reflecting on them through art. In fact, she identified them as
beneficial during what she described as a rough semester. "I'm very always bubbly and
everything, but there's things I just don't talk about," she explained, "And so I think this year
was... This semester has been rough with everything that's gone on. And so I think having
these art assignments [. . .] was like a little therapy session." While she was not given these
assignments by a therapist and did not engage in therapy during the semester, Krista was able
to benefit from some of expressive arts' therapeutic effects.

Figure 38. Krista's second art project

Relieving Pressure and Processing Emotions

Summary

Theo was the participant who expressed his dislike for school the most, but he viewed the expressive arts activities differently. After the first project, he saw that the activities could help him relieve the stress he was feeling in multiple areas of his life. By the end of the semester, he also recognized that the activities promoted identifying and processing emotions that he typically tried to keep locked away. Theo's word art is in the shape of a drop of water. Water was a common metaphor he used throughout the semester. He first described the art-making as a release of a pressure valve with water, then later described his emotions locked away at the bottom of the ocean.

Figure 39. Theo's word art representation of data

Theo's EXA Experiences

Theo enjoyed art and previously won awards in high school for it, but when he came to college, he no longer had time. He was unhappy with his first art project because it did not meet his expectations for skill. When I suggested he could find more time to make the next one, he unhappily responded by saying, "Well, it doesn't matter how much time I have, 'cause every day I have an insane amount of homework [. . .] Honestly, it doesn't matter how much time I'm given for this class, 'cause I'll end up doing it probably the day before. I'm being honest." I reminded him that the process was what mattered in my class, but he was still dissatisfied, explaining that if he did not have such a heavy workload, he would love to be creative because he liked art. He was bound within a structure of higher education that primarily valued theory/content over aesthetic education (Levine, 2017a). At the beginning

of the semester, Theo seemed searching for therapeutic outlets to release his unhappiness, but did not see any ways to do so.
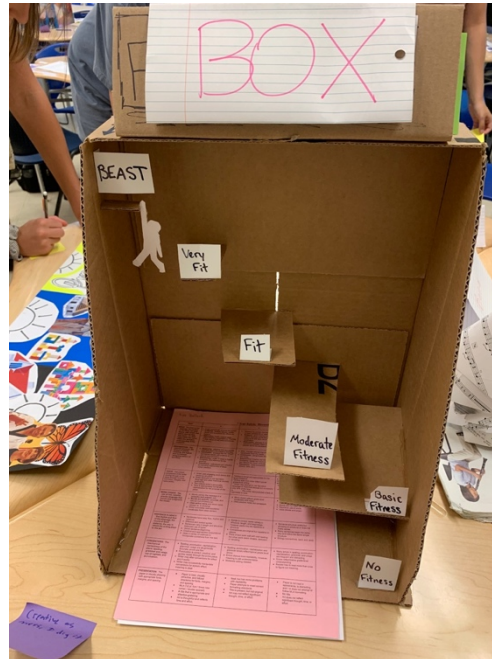
Figure 40. Theo's first art project

By his second project, though, there was a shift in the amount of time he spent on his art as well as his outlook on the assignments. Theo noted that somehow, he had more time for his art, even though he acknowledged that he was "scrapping around for midterms." In fact, though he had three midterms to prepare for, he said that he did find more time for his art. McNiff (2017) described imagination as "the conductor of creative action, a force that operates by making fresh links between previously separate entities, always open and receptive to new possibilities while forever seeking opportunities" (McNiff, 2017, p. 23). Somehow, Theo had found an opportunity for his imagination despite his demanding schedule because he desired to do so. Though he never thought his products reflected his actual artistic skill throughout the semester, he began to spend more time on the process of creation. His process of making during his second project included ripping and intensely

scribbling on paper to showcase the intensity of his thoughts. After this project, Theo's unhappiness seemed to shift. When explaining his process of art-making, Theo stated, "It felt really refreshing for a short amount of time. It was like opening a pressure valve for a really short amount of time. Just... Like that. So it was relieving, but the pressure built up again." The art-making had been therapeutic even though he was not pleased with the final product. Though he could not avoid the pressure in his daily life completely, the art provided a de-centering (Knill, 2005) release from those restrictions, at least for a brief time. As the semester progressed, Theo continued to describe my class as a type of stress relief, eventually describing the class as a "[b]right shining light in the middle of a dark ocean" due to the creative therapeutic aspects.

During a semester where Theo was constantly, in his words, "hammered by school work." His "fried" brain still desired to produce what he called "brain juice" and "eke out something." He consistently described himself as overworked, causing me to wonder if he would end up resenting the additional art assignments that coincided with the papers in my course. Yet, he still found enjoyment because of the therapeutic elements, especially reflection. Theo liked thinking back on what affected him in his past. He noticed that the "creative part" of his brain was stimulated, which was different from his typical experience in school. He went as far as to state that he abhorred school because he felt forced to do what others said and no one seemed to care how he desired to learn. Instead of the typical repetitive lecture format of his college classes where he felt "indoctrinated to become a good student," the expressive arts elements of our class emphasizing process over product made him feel that he "[did not] have to be necessarily correct" as long as he put in effort. It was a therapeutic release of the typical external conditions he had to work under. Theo expanded

on the contrast in our class and his others, articulating, "In general, as a whole prospect, I hate school [. . .] I hate the process of it, I hate the way a lot of people will try and teach me. But your class is really different 'cause you actually provide enjoyment and entertainment along with us actually learning useful skills. And I have a good time in your class, so I don't hate your class, I hate school in general." The expressive arts elements that allowed for inquiry and self-directed learning through aesthetic education (Levine, 2017a), were an enjoyable change for Theo. In this course, he could release the creativity and emotions that were typically stored inside of himself with no room for expression.

Along with the aforementioned effects art-making had for Theo, he also noticed that the activities helped him express himself; he had to explore emotions that he typically tried to ignore. When he had tried to explore his emotions before, he closed himself off from going deep. Albers (2007) points out that "[a]long with new learning comes fears and joys" (Albers, 2007, p. 14), even if it is connected to the self. In our final interview, he identified this process as a benefit within the class: "I guess [. . .] getting more in touch with my emotional side [. . .] I have a tendency of every time I tap into that and getting to know myself emotionally, I just sort of lock it back up. And chuck it back in the ocean, which is like, 'Nope, go away, don't like you.' 'Cause I mean, even though I did that, I know that it's always gonna make me end up getting hurt anyway, so I usually just lock it back up." In contrast to his past experiences, the expressive arts activities helped him open, what he described as a treasure box at the bottom of the ocean. He elaborated by saying, "[I]nside that treasure box is all of my internalized emotions from the past. And then getting to think about this sort of stuff, I got to take a peek inside that box. A lot of the stuff that I saw I don't like, just 'cause, like you saw from my art and my writing, that there's a lot of bad stuff in there."

Theo was speaking of his knowledge as a treasure box, and the way of knowing he experienced through art-making was what had the power to open it. The process was therapeutic, allowing him to not only discover, but also explore his emotions. Allen (1995) theorizes that there is an "inner critic" that is universal within everyone, and it arises in creative activities because they "wake us up and lead to knowing" (p. 48). The inner critic urges us to stop searching for knowledge within ourselves because we "might find out something awful" about ourselves and "drown," but, in actuality, "knowing is dangerous because it leads to change" (Allen, 1995, p. 48). The expressive arts process required Theo to face his inner critic and explore what it had to say. Again, Theo recognized this type of learning as different from traditional curriculum, which he saw as an issue. "Most people today aren't really acclimated to expressing themselves, and art is definitely a mode of doing that, and allowing them to do that just opens up a bunch of different pathways to being mentally healthy and also to just learning how to express yourself in general, to other people and to yourself, and letting you know who you are and what you're thinking, what's going on with you," Theo explained. Though he never expressed needing any of these aspects he listed or ways to promote them, Theo understood what expressive arts had done for him, and how it could enhance students' experiences in other courses.

Motivation and Positive Reinforcement

Summary

Claire described herself as unhappy multiple times during the semester. She did not enjoy school and felt lost in her negative thoughts. The art-making motivated her to put effort into assignments, which connected to her self-worth. She used the assignments to express her interests and feelings, but also as ways to get positive feedback from her peers and myself.

Her word art takes the form of two hands reaching for each other, which reflects the aspects of connectedness to emotions as well as others that Claire sought to make with her art.

Figure 41. Claire's word art representation of data

Claire's EXA Experiences

Claire was also unhappy because of her coursework, but she described the art-making as enjoyable after the first project. She appreciated that she could connect her project to her favorite band, which she saw as uncommon in higher education: "It wasn't like my history course where it's like, 'Write about this revolution and use all these dates,' and I'm just like, 'Okay, I don't care though.' I don't know, I enjoyed it; it was just like... It was easier, but not baby easy, just it didn't stress me because I was engaged in the topic." The first art project, in contrast, was therapeutic because it allowed for expression and personal interests, as well as stress-relief. Claire experienced stress-relief and enjoyment early on, but she also began to explore her emotions as the assignments progressed.

Figure 42. Claire's first art project

By the end of the semester, Claire was able to explain the differences between an expressive arts-based course and a typical one in higher education. Along with it being less serious and regimented, she said that the expressive arts elements "let [her] brain just run wild." "It was nice to just do something," she said. The expressive arts activities allowed her to create and construct knowledge rather than sit and passively listen. It was therapeutic because she was being told "yes" to the type of learning she enjoyed instead of "no." Though she originally felt anxious about the art, she embraced it when she realized she would be graded only on effort. When I asked her what advice she would give to future students, she, like other participants, emphasized expressive arts' process over product (Knill, 2005) value: "I would probably tell them it's not that stressful because they don't need to make a masterpiece. They need to just express themselves." Claire also saw how expressive arts elements were beneficial in a writing course, explaining that they made writing seem less "daunting" and "more casual." Ultimately, though, the greatest benefit for her connected to

school was that art-making encouraged her to try because she could be expressive. "I feel like it's not a 100% guarantee," she noted, "but the art gives a chance for people to actually care."

Claire's journey throughout the semester was definitely one of self-expression. In comparison to her other classes, she noticed that her personality "worked" in this class. "I've tried to be like this in all my classes, and it usually goes very poorly," she explained, referring to her outcoming nature and need to express herself. Claire, who often would draw cartoons on the board before or after class, sought to express her emotions. Like other participants, her semester was difficult. She felt trapped in a major she was not enjoying and was also questioning whether she should remain in college at all. In her third art project, she decided to explore those feelings, creating a song with powerful instrumentals and introspective lyrics:

> *Disconnect.*
>
> *I'm upset.*
>
> *I took the wrong way home again.*
>
> *Now I'm alone,*
>
> *can't see the road.*
>
> *I'll take a path,*
>
> *see where it goes.*
>
> *I don't know what you want me to say.*
>
> *But I don't know how to make these feelings go away.*
>
> *But it's quite alarming I don't think I,*
>
> *wanna be another starving artist,*
>
> *so I guess,*

I'll settle for this.

Rotten wood.

Leaky sink.

I'm discontent,

with everything.

Don't wanna be

53

with my regrets

on top of me.

I don't know how to make you see,

but I don't want to fake complacency.

'Cause the clock is ticking,

I feel sick and

there's so many people who want great things from me.

But I don't know how to make you see.

What's it take to find another role,

to run away from the stakes of growing old?

What's it take to start anew,

to break apart the home in front of

youuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu?

She spent longer on that project that she had for any of her classes, and was also the proudest of it than anything she had done musically before. It was an act of *poiesis*, bringing something new into the world (Levine, 2017b) that she did not expect. But her process was

even more complex because it was therapeutic. She explained that she had been in a creative rut of being unable to finish work, but the assignment pushed her through a process of creation. Allen (1995) sees pleasurable activities as ways to open people up as well as prompt them to take action. "This kind of forced me to be more creative, and so I feel I was like, 'Okay, I'm doing this, so I might as well go all in,'" she explained; however, going all in also meant delving into her emotions. In our interview after she submitted the song, she opened up more, saying, "I feel miserable all the time. And I feel like I'm wasting my time here, but I don't have any other place I wanna go because I have no ambitions in life. Or my ambitions I have in life are not achievable to where I can drop everything and do them. I should definitely set up a safety net, but I don't want to because I'm just unhappy." Behind her gregarious demeanor, her soul was expressing layers of emotion that she typically did not have to peel back in school work. The expressive art-making enabled her to do so, and the results were therapeutic. Similar to other students, though, she enjoyed the process: "I enjoyed it. I enjoy recording things. It was weird actually doing something with it." The activities helped her respond to her difficulties in what Levine (2017b) would describe as both creative and "life-affirming" (p. 12).

Another meaningful aspect of the art-making to Claire was what she described as validation, which was something she did not feel like she was getting in other areas. She referred to our course as an opportunity for an audience, people that would desire to see her art and, in turn, learn more about her. "This semester, no validation was being received from any other avenue in my life," she stated, "So I was like, 'Okay, I might as well... I have an audience, so I might as well roll with it.'" Rolling with it included being especially creative, which she attributed to the class's structure, or lack thereof, for art-making: "This class kinda

made me be creative again, 'cause I just wasn't, not by choice, but I just wasn't really doing many creative efforts this semester. 'Cause last semester, none of them... My last year of school, none of them really took off, but I was doing things." Ultimately, Claire's descriptions indicated that she felt part of a community that would receive her art and care to hear about her process. Levine (1997) sees the power of expressive arts as multi-faceted, explaining that the arts can shape inner as well as our worlds, or one's environment, simultaneously. Claire's art-making was creating new connections with herself as well as her "audience."

Experiences Combined

Though each individual participant benefited in different ways from the expressive arts activities, they noted therapeutic elements that contributed to their wellbeing during the semester: relieving stress' exploring, expressing, and transforming emotions; connecting with others, etc. Each participant's data reflects different aspects of how expressive arts can influence students' experiences, but their data can also combine to shed light on how art-making can enhance curriculum as a whole. Figure 43 represents this wholeness. I put all of the participants' interview transcriptions and journal responses into the word art program to create this circular form. There are individual colored pieces, but they create a whole shape that incorporates the positive/negative emotions as well as internal/external factors that contribute to students' experiences with expressive arts in their Rhetoric and Composition course.

Figure 43. Participants' combined data

Conclusion

During the first conference presentation of my practitioner action research in 2018, I only presented my arts-based curriculum ideas and what I was noticing. When it was time for questions, a professor asked me something along the lines of, "Don't you see this as dangerous, pushing them to open up in this way when you aren't counseling them?" Two years ago, my response was that my students were adults, and if they had something they desired to express, they deserved that opportunity (coupled with listing university resources I could refer them to as needed). I did, and still do, believe in what I said. But now my viewpoint is more layered. I now see that this curriculum can be therapeutic in ways I did not see at the time. I knew my curriculum was doing something for my students beyond enhancing their content knowledge; I just did not understand how. Through this study, I

discovered that arts-based curriculum can enable students to explore meaning in their lives and process emotions.

Siegesmund and Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) explain that arts-based education "not only shifts the focus to how we inquire, but also models a new version of curriculum" (p. 244). Through this research process, I came to find that what I thought was a curriculum that would help students enjoy writing more was actually providing them with ways to "exhibit their coming to know" (p. 244). Students were exploring aspects of themselves and using the art activities for therapeutic gains that I never intended. But "[a]rts-based visual research reminds us that data is not found; it is constructed" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008, p. 101). The students identified therapeutic benefits of art-making, but it was then up to me as teacher/researcher to construct what they initially constructed. Though I will never claim to be a therapist for my students, their experiences exhibit how expressive arts can function within higher education so that students can discover ways of knowing within themselves if they have a facilitator. Expressive arts enable construction of knowledge, exploratory learner-centered activities, reflection, and process-oriented pedagogy in composition courses. But they also have therapeutic effects that these participants expressed repeatedly in their data. My students understood that expressive arts helped them in areas other than writing skills. They engaged in creative thinking that allowed them to personally connect to the material. They could relieve stress and de-center from other areas of their lives. They could not only identify emotions they were feeling, but could also process them in beneficial ways for their wellbeing.

Now that these students are no longer in class, I wonder what will become of their constructed knowledge. It is not uncommon for previous students to ask to come sit in on a

class for an art activity because they say they need it or miss it, but it is clear from their stories that they are also often stressed, busy, and overloaded with other responsibilities. When each semester ends, my course is no longer a mandatory "excuse" to engage in creative art-making. When reflecting on endings, Shipka (2019) notices that "[w]e often frame and talk about them (or perhaps we frame them *so we that can* talk about them) in manageable ways--in ways suggesting that there's a fairly clear and identifiable (or knowable) beginning and end point" (p. 18). Though the semester and study's end seems like an appropriate endpoint, the students' knowledge constructed during the study's semester will either continue to construct or reconstruct as they experience more. Hopefully, they will take with them some of the therapeutic aspects of expressive arts and remember that "[e]verything can be re-formed" (Levine, 2017b, p. 12).

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CHAPTER 5: CODA

I began this study to explore how art-making could enhance my students' experiences within Rhetoric and Composition courses. Originally, I thought that this study would be a standard dissertation format: Practitioner action research with an identified problem, a tested curricular method, data collection/analysis, and a conclusion on if it was effective. The article "'Wow, I feel motivated': Active Learning, Mindset Shifts, and Motivation in Composition Courses Through Expressive Arts" was written based on my first cycle of research analysis. Within the article, I explored how the expressive arts activities led to increased engagement within my courses. This article answered my first research question, "How does art-making influence a collegiate Rhetoric and Composition course?" I used my own arts-based curriculum based on expressive arts practices: process over product, low skill/high sensitivity, and art as a way of knowing. This curriculum lasted throughout the semester, and I found that the activities promoted active learning, movements from fixed to growth mindset in students' approaches to their composition processes, and motivation from students who admitted they typically put as little effort into coursework as possible.

My research journey had ended, or so I thought. I saw benefits to using expressive arts in composition courses that I could show to other instructors. But I still had so much data that supported something *more*. I originally thought that practitioner action research meant one cycle of research, then repeating after a cycle had completed (McNiff, 2017), but now I see that there can be multiple cycles of data analysis within one research cycle. I still had so much data that was speaking to me from the one semester of data collection, so why not open another door and walk into another research subtopic? What about the art-making was actually causing these shifts?

The pull towards looking at the data again led to the second article in my dissertation, "ARTiculating *Currere*: Arts-Based Methods and Methodology to Facilitate and Understand Biographic Situations." This article answered my second research question, "What kinds of processes do students go through when creating these activities?" One of the most impactful experiences I had as a doctoral student was when I was exposed to *currere*, which makes it fitting that I kept seeing the stages of *currere* in my data. Though *currere* is traditionally used through writing, my students' art-making was sparking biographic situations, where the curriculum created personal connections.

For my second article, I created my own coding system and method of analysis using the stages of *currere*. When I read research on *currere*, it was mostly an individual analyzing their own writing through the stages. As the practitioner and instructor, I used the stages to understand students' experiences. By the end of the semester, I found that the art-making moved many students through a full cycle of regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. And they appreciated it, welcoming chances to highlight significant moments of their past, inquisitive of their futures in ways they were typically not asked to do, and passionate in how they displayed their newly-constructed knowledge from reflection. I knew they were motivated and engaged from my first article, but it was not until I went through this round of analysis that I saw it was at least partially because the art-making allowed connections between personal, and therefore meaningful, experiences and curriculum.

Again, my journey could be over. Through my second article, I'd explored why students were engaged on a more individual level, but it was not yet as true to arts-based educational research as I desired. I'd used arts-based methods for creating data and designing curriculum around expressive arts, but arts-based educational research calls for researchers'

willingness to explore what was originally not anticipated. When I began my study, I thought the research would be clean, clear, and, in a way, easy to articulate. But in arts-based educational research, you have to be prepared for the way data can actually splatter, calling on you to examine the difficult-to-interpret shapes and consider what new meaning is waiting. I could have wiped away the splatters, "cleaned" up my dissertation, and presented it as it, but I chose to create meaning with the splatters instead.

My last article was unexpected. During earlier cycles of data analysis, I kept seeing words such as "therapeutic," "relaxing," and "break." My data was telling me something that I did not intend to examine when I designed my study, but I should not have been surprised. Arts-based educational research is about uncovering the unknown. Practitioner action researchers using arts-based methods may discover threads of meaning that they did not anticipate, and it is their job to pull on them until they find connections that can contribute to the field. The last article within my dissertation is called "A treasure box at the bottom of the ocean'": Expressive Arts Curriculum in Composition Courses." This article answered my last research question, "What is unsettled, disturbed, or disrupted when students engage in art-making within a collegiate Rhetoric and Composition course?" From my previous article, I knew that art-making allowed personal connection with curriculum, but as I analyzed, I kept seeing something else in the data: The therapeutic effects of restoration and healing that expressive art-making can bring into a course. During this cycle of analysis, I found that expressive art-making had the following effects on individual research participants:

- The art helped students de-stress, relax, and take breaks from the demands within their daily routines.

- Some saw cognitive changes, noting by the end of the semester that the art had made them notice different things or think about things in alternate ways.

- Some felt supported by their peers and instructor that led to feeling empowered and confident in their composition skills.

- Some used the art as a way to express and move through experiences that held a great deal of trauma during the semester.

- Some felt encouraged to identify and express emotions when they typically tried to repress them.

- For some, the expressive arts activities created connections to community that they did not find in any other area of their lives that semester.

To return to my final research question, "What is unsettled, disturbed, or disrupted when students engage in art-making within a collegiate Rhetoric and Composition course?" Participants' perceptions of themselves, their abilities, and what it means to compose something, for starters. Additionally, the assumptions of what is possible in a composition course. I in no way sought to bring this type of therapeutic experience to my students because, as I state in the article, I am not a therapist, but these activities provided methods for students to self-select topics that they desired to explore, finding ways to relax, enjoy, move through, express, and grow. You don't have to be a therapist to allow students to express feelings that need to be expressed. Perhaps my knowledge was what was unsettled, disturbed, and disrupted most of all.

As I opened my last door towards the effects expressive arts had on students other than connections to curriculum, I saw that this unexpected finding was possibly the most important. Current university populations of students are dealing with stress, depression, and

other problematic mental states that influence their learning. I did not anticipate anything I created to have an effect on their well beings to an extent worthy of documentation, but there was a rupturing, or overflow, of data from how I was attempting to categorize it: Students found my curriculum therapeutic. It offered them ways to relieve stress, identify/work through problems that I was not aware of, and find self-worth through the process of composing their art. If I was asked to answer "why" this study is meaningful, this article would be the most significant answer: Because the curriculum allows students to be human, bringing their flaws, problems, and fears into an academic space that typically does not allow for it. The article's narrative analysis includes students' expressions of a range of emotions from stress to unhappiness, but it also showcases how the expressive art-making provided ways for them to seek healing and restoration as a self-directed practice.

This dissertation reveals multiple ways that expressive art-making can enhance students' experiences in composition courses that are unrelated to writing skills. Most research on art-making and composition relates to students' writing skills, but there are so many other factors that influence their experiences. Though my courses are General Education requirements intended for students to enhance their writing skills, students may come into collegiate courses battling issues of engagement, inability to connect with course material, and negative emotions that can distract and even prevent them from learning content. Art-making can improve students' experiences by allowing students to express their emotions, use their imaginations, and stabilize their ideas for reflection. If instructors understand ways that art-making can enhance students' *experiences* in the classroom, not just their skills, they may be more open to using this type of curriculum in their courses.

My study definitely has limitations. As researcher and teacher, students could have been influenced by my positioning in their responses. Though I triangulated data, there was still a power dynamic in place because of my roles. Participants volunteered outside of class, which means some students were not represented due to availability or unwillingness to devote free time to the study. I used participants from multiple courses that I taught, but they were all within the same semester, so it is unclear if the study would have the same results if it was conducted during different times of the year.

Now that I have completed three cycles of data analysis from my research study, where do I go from here? The simple answer would be that I am going to complete more cycles of the same study with revisions, as practitioner action research calls for. But as I state in my introduction, I do not want to pick one camp to belong to; I want to continue opening new doors. Appalachian State University is a predominantly white campus; thus, most of my students are also white and, consequently, so were my participants. Considering the power dynamics at play of a white practitioner action researcher (myself) asking for nonwhite participants to work with her outside of class brings into question to what extent my participants' data is representative of diverse student experiences. I understood these issues when designing my study and did secure multiple nonwhite students, but once I analyzed the data, I still saw an issue: My nonwhite students within the study did not speak on their racial experiences or create art that reflected them without prompting or encouragement from myself.

Towards the end of the semester, I asked Raven, a Black student participant who I had taught for two courses, whether she thought the art-making enhanced her experience in the course. In a moment I will likely never forget, she said carefully, "I always felt very, very

safe in your classroom and very willing to speak up. You know what I mean? I have classes at App where I don't feel that way." How had I not known this about a student who I had spent a year teaching? How had I not uncovered something this significant until the end of my research study? Because I had not thought to ask. I have only recently been exposed to Critical Race Theory and poststructural analysis, which is what prompted me to ask Raven about her experience as a black woman engaging with art-making in a largely white classroom. Going forward, this is the first topic I want to explore: Do expressive arts have the ability to enhance nonwhite students' experiences in predominantly white composition courses, and, if so, how? It seems I have found another door to open, and I am interested to see where it will lead.

Completing this dissertation has been a whirlwind of research, writing, thinking I understand something, then realizing I have a lot to learn; however, my dissertation reflects who I am as an educational leader. Though education often asks students to write to show proficiency in knowledge, I do not think anything is worth writing if the writer does not encourage readers to think differently. Content-wise, this dissertation shows readers that art-making not only enhances the classroom as a whole, but offers depth in learning to students. It can help them personally connect to content. Most importantly, in my opinion and especially in light of current events, art-making provides ways for students to have therapeutic experiences with learning that can help them reflect, cope, and heal.

But this dissertation also showcases what I believe as an educational researcher. To a certain degree, it is easy to identify a problem, find a solution, and state that it worked. What is more difficult is when you find a solution, not being complacent in what you found, but pushing further, re-examining the data for nuanced meaning and meaning that you may have

never anticipated. Though a dissertation is a "result" of research, it really showcases one journey, and if executed effectively, foreshadows the promise of future journeys to come. I look forward to seeing how my research will splatter, transform, re-shape, and transform as I continue to explore arts-based curriculum as a practitioner action researcher.

References

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VITA

Peaches Hash was born in Atlanta, Georgia and raised in Kingsport, TN by Debbie

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Ms. Hash taught high school English for seven years in Virginia and Tennessee. She

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During her time as a doctoral student, Ms. Hash was a Research Assistant for faculty

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Ms. Hash is currently a member of the American Educational Research Association, the National Council of Teaching English, the National Art Education Association, and Kappa Delta Pi International Honors Society in Education. She resides in Boone, North Carolina with her fiancé and two pugs.