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On Becoming ‘Wide-Awake’: Artful Re-search and Co-creative Process as Teacher Development

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Abstract

In this essay we reference a co-creative art installation entitled *Box-ing In/Out* (Di Rezze & Mantas, 2006; Mantas, 2004). Through this collaborative project we describe how artful re-search and the co-creative process can help teachers access and reframe tacit understandings of teaching and learning. We argue that the personal meaning making, which results from such a re-search process can be understood as embodied learning. We propose that when teachers identify, reclaim and continually reframe their subjective understandings of teaching as social practice, they can embody a more response-able (Di Rezze, 2000; Surrey, 1991) disposition toward students; that is, be able to respond to them more thoughtfully, mindfully and with care. As agents in their own learning, teachers can then begin to create more nurturing teaching and learning spaces for both self and the students entrusted to them.

Introduction

Alienated teachers, out of touch with their own existential reality, may contribute to the distancing and even to the manipulating that presumably takes place in many schools. This is because, estranged from themselves as they are, they may well treat whatever they imagine to be selfhood as a kind of commodity, a possession they carry within, impervious to organisational demand and impervious to control. Such people are not personally present to others or in the situations of their lives. They can, even without intending to, treat others as objects or things. (Greene, 1978a, p. 29)

We are teachers and artist re-searchers who have worked in public school systems, at the elementary and secondary levels respectively. Gianna has taught in elementary schools for twenty-five years. She spent the first decade of her teaching life in mainstream classrooms teaching children from grades 1 to 8. The last fifteen years, however, were spent in a variety of special education contexts working with students who struggled with learning. In many schools in which she taught, both she and her special education students were relegated to a stand alone portable building - the box - positioned on the fringes of the schoolyard. During this time the number of children who needed additional support through special services had grown to the point where she was forced to begin the practice that Freedman (1990) refers to as “educational triage”. Freedman (1990) defines this practice as “the process - and principle - of separating the casualties and concentrating efforts on those who are most likely to survive” (p. 114). Gianna felt less and less able to make a significant difference in the lives of the children entrusted to her and decided to return to graduate school. Several years after the completion of her doctoral work, she decided to leave the board altogether and is presently teaching students with special needs in alternative settings, collaborating with colleagues, making art and re-searching.

Kathy has taught students in a variety of contexts for over twenty years. She has worked in rehabilitation centers as well as in alternative and mainstream classrooms. For most of her teaching life she was a middle and high school teacher with specializations in second language learning and visual arts. Despite these credentials, she was also asked to teach outside of her areas of expertise. For the most part, she found herself teaching students who were learning in the margins - outside the box - of the educational system, such as special needs students, newcomers to the country, as well as students drawn to the arts. Over the years, she witnessed the impact that cutbacks had on students, support staff, teachers and select programs in the arts and second language learning. But what disheartened her the most was the realization that many “of today’s students find the learning of discrete, unconnected subjects difficult, boring, and irrelevant to their lives” (Noddings, 2005, p. xxiv). Over time,

she found herself questioning her own complicity in sustaining the status quo. To re-engage her students more thoughtfully in their learning processes, she began turning to the arts and arts-based teaching approaches. She also began to get more involved with new teachers through various mentoring and new teacher induction programs both at the school and board levels. In an attempt to better understand her own transition of becoming a teacher and the complex contexts in which teaching and learning happen she too decided to return to graduate school. Kathy is currently a pre-service teacher educator in art education.

We both began our doctoral work several years into our teaching careers. Much of our individual and collaborative work as well as our re-search relationship began during this intense period of study. In our work together, we specifically use the hyphenated form of re-search to emphasize the “inescapably personal nature” of learning that includes that which “takes place in families, among friends... intimates, at work, and generally going on about living” (Salmon, 1980 p. 60).

Our discussion for this paper focuses on a prior collaboration, which resulted in an art installation entitled, *Box-ing In/Out* (Mantas, 2004; Di Rezze & Mantas, 2006). It is drawn in part from a larger inquiry entitled, *becoming AIR-BORNe: women co-creating, ex-pressing, and in-forming our lives* (Mantas, 2004). Using the box as both form and metaphor, we co-created an installation using boxes that then became visual prompts for examining our lived experience as women, teachers and artist re-searchers. The individual boxes in this installation acted as containers to hold the fragments of our lived experience. The process of box-ing in/out allowed us to identify central themes and tensions in our teaching practice and to better understand the nature of our work with students. This co-constructed knowledge led to different and more thoughtful ways of thinking about, and being with, self and students. It became a starting point for further reflection and action in both personal and professional contexts.

We continue to resonate with Greene’s (1978b) notion of ‘wide-awakeness’ to describe this new state of attentiveness to the forces which influence and constrain teachers’ work. When teachers are ‘wide-awake’ they cannot play out their daily teaching life unconsciously in a mechanical fashion. This new insight gives rise to some of the ethical questions embedded in their work with students. The transformation of perspective is a way of characterizing learning and this characterization presumes that “self knowledge yields critical consciousness” (Diamond 1991, p. 17). When teachers are in touch with this critical subjectivity they begin to ponder, as does Clark (1990), some of the following questions:

By what authority do I push for change in the lives of these children? At what costs to their freedom and autonomy? Where does my responsibility for these young lives begin and end? How should I deal with true moral dilemmas in which it is simply not possible to realise two goods or avoid two evils? How much pain and discomfort am I willing to endure on behalf of my students? How are my character flaws affecting the lives of others? (p. 264)

Greene (1995) also connects this new clarity to existential concerns and reminds us that teaching is a social practice that is connected to our notion of the good:

We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share. It is simply not enough to reproduce the way things are (p. 1).

Our own experience has demonstrated that when teachers become more aware of the forces that impact their work with students, they are better able to connect with their critical subjectivity, thereby creating more caring learning spaces. By caring we mean “a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors” (Noddings, 2005, p. 17). Relational knowing (Hollingsworth et al., 1993), empathy (Surrey, 1991), response-ability (Surrey, 1991), reciprocity (Lather, 1991) and connectedness (Surrey, 1991) emerge as important considerations for our personal/professional knowledge. To know relationally is not peripheral but central to teaching life; therefore, it becomes important to consider “the quality of those relationships...to ensure that they are caring...rather than harmful, oppressive” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 246) and keep students and teachers from being boxed-in.

Through our artful re-search process we identify and describe how this form of teacher development based in the arts helped us access personal ways of knowing. It allowed us to better describe our state of alienation and disembodiment, and how this way of being manifested in our relationship with students. In addition, it compelled us to examine our own complicity in the reproduction of limiting teaching and learning experiences that allow for few opportunities to box-out. In this paper we describe how knowledge made through participation in arts processes yields new understandings of the self in the classroom and in the world. Artistic processes also allow us to define and represent ourselves and our experiences in the re-search literature. In this inquiry we use both the form and metaphor of the box “to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed” (Greene, 1995, p. 123).

On the Nature of Teacher Knowledge and Identity

The autobiographical nature of teaching means it is impossible to understand teaching without understanding the teacher; that it is impossible to understand the practice apart from the practitioner; that it is impossible to understand the knowledge apart from the knower. We challenge any positions that support the objectification, disembodiment, and decontextualization of teacher knowledge. (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 9)

Constructivist notions of identity suggest that the formation of a teacher self is rooted in personal autobiography and continues to be shaped by personal and professional contexts. Aspiring teachers enter formal teacher training having served an “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975, p. 62) in their own lives as students through which they have formed both implicit and explicit ideas about the nature of teaching and learning. Left unexamined, this primary experience of education may only facilitate teachers’ replication of regressive practices (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991).

But becoming a teacher is more than just the transition from pre-service practice to the actual classroom. Becoming a teacher is an ongoing process; “a continuing story of selfhood, undertaken through making and sharing texts about it” (Diamond & Mullen, 1999, p. 67). It is shaped by our personal histories and by educative and miseducative experiences (Dewey, 1938). This knowledge is “intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytical” (Dewey, 1938, p. 62). Naming and identifying the conditions that shape teacher knowledge is a step toward rectification.

In our experience, the seeds of teacher alienation are planted when teachers are relegated to the position of being consumers of prepackaged knowledge funneled through the school system conduit into their classrooms (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). Subjective and relational ways of knowing are undermined or “neutralized” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). This narrow definition of the complex social matrix of the classroom, which sees teaching as transmission and learning as acquisition of facts, demands proof of learning that can be measured by test marks and report cards. The more emotional, relational and embodied aspects of teaching and learning which cannot be articulated as easily are not given their due importance in large part because this kind of knowing cannot be measured in traditional ways. These implicit misunderstandings, once revealed and made explicit, can be questioned and then critically evaluated.

Fenstermacher (1990) characterizes the private world of the classroom as being an oral culture requiring the proximity of mouth to ear in order that dialogue and relationships can be built. The more public world of the educational system (school, board, ministry), on the other hand, is a more public space reflective of a written culture requiring the proximity of pen to paper (accountability). Teachers live out their professional lives in both worlds and experience this duality as a tension in their practice. Teachers who do not understand the institutional and power structures that shape and distort their work begin to experience a “spilt existence” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 5) or fragmentation of self as they move about these different spaces in educational settings. Teachers who have little insight into these dilemmas of teaching (Lampert, 1985) are the most vulnerable to becoming a functionary for the system while treating students as cogs in the machinery. “Lacking wide-awakeness... individuals are likely to drift, to act on impulses of expediency. They are unlikely to identify situations as moral ones” (Greene, 1978b, p. 43).

These understandings of teacher knowledge and development suggest that a merely cognitive or managerial approach to teaching and teacher education cannot deal effectively with the range of social and academic concerns reflected in schools. Decisions about students as whole persons (J. Miller, 1988, 1993; R. Miller, 1990) require that teachers build frameworks of meaning around the moral and social purposes of teaching. We believe that teaching and learning co-exist and are inextricably linked. “When teachers redefine their own relationships to knowledge about teaching and learning, they reconstruct their own relationships to knowledge about teaching and learning, they reconstruct their classrooms and begin to offer different invitations to their students to learn and know” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 101). These new and emerging understandings make a teacher more aware of her/his practice.

On Artful Re-search and Co-creative Process

We concur with Dewey (1938) who construed inquiry as a process of reconstruction by which open and doubtful situations become understood in new ways. We use the prefix “re” in many of our terms to indicate the dynamic and tentative quality of constructing new understandings only to revise them once again as new information comes to light. Our artful inquiry is a process of re-visiting, re-telling and re-framing of experience in the light of new understanding. It also seeks to re-position the teacher as learner and agent in her/his own development. Our inquiry also acknowledges the teacher as a curriculum maker (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) and teaching as a reflective practice (Miller, 1994).

In addition, our understanding of learning is also rooted in feminist understandings of praxis that see knowledge production as “a process rather than a product, an experience rather than work, and lived rather than done” (Melamed, cited in Reinharz, 1992, p. 218). We agree that learning is “a journey of the self” (Huebner, 1993, p. 405). Our re-search, therefore, begins

with our experiences and is “situated in places we know, and in which we participate” (Neilson, 1998 p. 198). It is connected to our life. Knowledge that results from engagement in such re-search is personal, nuanced, embodied, and integrated into one’s life as opposed to knowledge that is objective, static, linear, factual and absolute.

In our paper, we choose to use the term artful inquiry to describe our Box-ing In/Out (Di Rezze & Mantas, 2006; Mantas, 2004) collaboration because making art was our re-search process; art processes were used to collect and represent the data as well as inform the actual box form of our final installation. Also, we attempted to re-create an aesthetic experience of being in a/our box for the viewer/reader. Our co-creative process (Di Rezze & Mantas, 2006; Mantas, 2004, 2007; Mantas & Mieзитis, 2008), both artful and relational in nature, can be defined as “learning and experience being rediscovered in community” (Christ, cited in Christ & Plaskow, 1979/92, p. 231). When we co-create, we come together “to create something that would have been impossible to make alone” (Paley, 1995, p. 55). It “does not imply a making something out of nothing but has to do with reshaping, renewing the materials at hand, very often the materials of our own lives, our experiences, our memories” (Greene, 2001, p. 96). Our inquiry also presupposes innovative forms of representation “which give texture to an individual life” (Deri, cited in Firestone, 1997, p. 27) and can include the invention of new language (Daly, 1978) – a “language of familiarity, reverence, and affection by which things of value ultimately are protected” (Berry, 2000, p. 41).

This process was documented by Kathy, the re-searcher and one of the co-creators, through journal entries, e-mail correspondence, photography and taped conversations (Di Rezze & Mantas, 2006; Mantas, 2004, 2007; Mantas & Mieзитis, 2008). We “played” (Nachmanovitch, 1990), side-by-side and together, with acrylic paint, oil and chalk pastel, paper and brushes. Soon after we became interested in the box as a form for our work, we began to collect various sized boxes, personal artifacts, co-created images, and text pulled from our re-search transcripts. The artifacts were later sorted, grouped thematically and collaged into the various sized boxes. Afterwards, we examined the boxes, regrouped the finished boxes thematically and glued these themed boxes on several large boards. In the beginning the process was somewhat tentative, but our commitment to the inquiry, desire to reconnect with art, and our trusting re-search relationship that developed through the process of co-creating for close to eighty hours carried this artful re-search process. Since then we have been using various artful forms to elaborate further on the various themes that emerged from this work.

On Box-ing In/Out

Our use of the box as form was inspired in part by artists Joseph Cornell and Susan Hiller. In an art exhibit entitled *After the Freud Museum* (2000), Hiller used artifacts and found objects, photographs, shards of rock, and various texts to create her series of archaeological boxes in which “she does not materially alter the objects but creatively and skillfully contextualizes them” (<http://www.susanhillier.org/Info/bio.html>) through her art making process. Cornell too, used pictures, diagrams and trinkets that another might have discarded to create his now famous Cornell boxes. Over the years he also kept dossiers which document aspects of his personal process of art making (Blair, 1998). Cornell’s boxes can be said to be a dialogue with fragments of the self, understood as “an elusive construct that we assemble and construct through making and sharing texts about it” (Diamond & Mullen, 1999, p 67). His dossiers and his box constructions literally encapsulate his “urge towards self revelation” (Blair, 1998, p. 22) which to some degree parallels our own artistic process of coming to know other facets of our teacher selves (Diamond, 1991).

This process revealed to us some of the paradoxes of being women who teach (Mantas, 2004) – being both knowledgeable and not knowing, powerful and powerless, and having authority while lacking authority (Walkerdine, cited in Munro, 1998). We identified the erosion of teachers’ response-ability and the centrality of relational knowing and resistance as central motifs in our teaching life (DiRezze, 2000). Using both the metaphor and actual form of the box, we also began describing the nature of the fragmentation and alienation of the teacher self in overly bureaucratic school systems. Below we share with you a glimpse into our co-creative re-search process through selected box text fragments and photographs. These words emerged and were recorded while we were in process; that is, while we were co-creating our boxes. These fragments are shared below through our merged voice named *Pyxa* from the Greek “pyxos” for box. This voice was named and shaped by Kathy from the re-search data. These boxes represent our unique collective voice and encourage us to consider the following questions: What does (box-ing in/out) art bring to re-search? What does (box-ing in/out) art bring to wide-awakeness? What does (box-ing in/out) art bring to teacher development with respect to creating more caring and thoughtful learning environments?

Box Fragment 1: Pyxa, our merged voice, speaks on “What does (box-ing in/out) art bring to re-search?”

Introspection through the box and with others brings us back to ourselves because it invites us to reflect upon and then reframe our experience. It is not navel-gazing. It’s about reshaping the box for ourselves and those in our care and finding a different box in which to be. The box we were in two years ago will not be the box we construct for ourselves and others down the road. This form is not an accident.

Box Fragment 2: Pyxa, our merged voice, speaks on “What does (box-ing in/out) art bring to wide-awakeness?”

Artists see the world in a certain way. I believe that the eye of the artist sees the beauty even in the sorrow. I remember F. M., one of my favorite teachers, saying that for the artist and “their artistic eye” everything is grist for the mill. It doesn’t matter whether you’re sitting in your living-room or whether you’re in a museum or a classroom.

My real problem is the systemic undermining of people’s ways of knowing. I often ask myself what part am I playing in this system? How am I complicit in this? Am I doing good by being here? How do we create spaces for people to learn in and to help them keep their love-of-self? How are we complicit in keeping our students from tapping into their own creative energies?

I believe that stifling someone’s potential to create is a...form of violence. It is dismissed, silenced, belittled and laughed at because there are no marks left on someone’s body. This kind of violence doesn’t make the papers. Imagine the frustration at not being able to be who you are, not being able to become who you want to be.

Box Fragment 3: Pyxa, our merged voice, speaks on “What does (box-ing in/out) art bring to teacher development?”

Over time the teacher begins to ignore her/his intuitive and subjective understanding of students and may eventually become a functionary for the system. Pressures put on teachers to be accountable for delivering a centralised curriculum at an inhumane pace facilitates objectification of others. Sstudents are put into boxes.

What makes me most angry is when I see kids who can't advocate for themselves being unjustly punished. I don't believe in power-over someone but I do believe in discipline; discipline comes from within. Real discipline is dialogue. As a teacher, I found that the more I talked, the less I needed to discipline in an authoritarian way. When I talk about myself as learner, I always think of the children I teach as learners. Some kids work better in groups; others, prefer to work on their own. People do learn differently.

There is a dialectic there. Good teaching, like good facilitating of a creative process, is not didactic or pedantic; it's more about teaching kids the love of something. It's also about teacher education. If the teacher is creative, s/he's going to be creative in the classroom. School shouldn't be punishment. In school you have a captive audience because students don't really have an option of getting out of school.

I know that children still have the spark for learning. Now, what happens on the other end? I'm talking about the child who sees the world in a different way. Is this all there is? Is this what life, living, teaching and learning are all about?



Image 1.

Co-creators Gianna & Kathy (Wednesday, January 3, 2001). Voice Boxes: Choosing/Sorting Themes & Artifacts (boxes in various sizes and shapes). Photograph by Kathy Mantas.



Image 2.

Co-creators Gianna & Kathy (Thursday, February 1, 2001). *Untitled* (mixing and creating colours). Photograph by Kathy Mantas.



Image 3.

Co-creators Gianna & Kathy
(Monday, February 26, 2001).
Untitled (finished boxes sorted and
mounted on board by theme).
Photograph by Kathy Mantas



Image 4.

Co-creators Gianna & Kathy
(Monday, June 4, 2001). *Untitled*
(boxes and text mounted on board).
3' X 4'. Photograph by Kathy
Mantas.

On Personal Knowing

Teachers who come to teaching to make a difference by being response-able (Di Rezze, 2000; Surrey, 1991) and trying to enact an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1992) soon must confront obstacles that require choices between obedience to the system or being responsive to the situation at hand. The first indication of this dissonance is an embodied one. We felt an increasing sense of powerlessness, unease, tension, restlessness, and even anger as we undermined our best teacher self. Feeling and thought always seem at odds in this dialectic construction of teacher self in the classroom. This way of being, over time, may result in frustration and insensitivity toward self and students. These embodied signals “are distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values” (Jagger,

1989, p. 160) and “provide the first indications that something is wrong” (Jagger, 1989, p. 161). But, when we examine and reframe this dissonance, we are able to reconstruct it as “the voice of self-respect” (Donelson, 1999, p. 636). We could also see how our indignation might act as a catalyst and allow us to live and learn outside the box. This ongoing struggle for authenticity to bring one’s best teacher-self into the class each day requires self-knowledge and constant monitoring.

Self-aware teachers who continue to examine and clarify for themselves the nature of their work can turn their energies toward what is more important and better fend off the distractions and box-ing in experiences that interfere and interrupt the real work with students. This questioning disposition, which we continue to nurture in our collaborative work together, can birth and sustain wide-awakeness (Greene, 1978b). But self-awareness is not a fixed state; it requires a constant reflection, questioning, and seeing in/out/back/ahead. It can be cultivated by continually asking ourselves: Who am I serving? Why? What and whom am I protecting? Decisions about students as whole persons require that teachers build frameworks of meaning around the moral and social purposes of teaching. Huebner (1991) reminds us that, all too often, important moral issues are obfuscated by the technical language of education. Teachers need to reclaim their moral agency, constantly undermined by the conditions of the workplace, by talking “about moral values and responsibility since they are often discouraged from exercising either” (Huebner, 1991, p. 268).

A language of practice is “not only a means for speaking about or representing one’s practice to oneself” (Yinger, 1987, p. 295) but is also “a set of integrated patterns of thought and action [which] constitute a kind of syntax and semantics for action” (Yinger, 1987, p. 295). Learning a language of practice suggests deliberation and a conscious choice between alternatives. Teachers who have developed a more nuanced language of practice feel that they are more empowered to humanize classrooms and schools one interaction at a time by choosing pedagogical and personal approaches that honor both teachers and learners.

Artistic processes broaden the language of practice. Forms that emerge from making art and “playful learning” (Melamed, 1985) allow access to more in-depth understandings about the nature of teaching, learning and re-search. The ways in which artistic and co-creative processes invite us to identify, acknowledge and engage the paradoxes and tensions inherent in our personal and professional lives allow us access to difficult knowledge about self in the world. The arts refine our senses so that our ability “to experience the world is made more complex and subtle;...they provide models through which we can experience the world in new ways” (Eisner, 2002, p. 19).

On Co-creating Knowledge

Art is a way of knowing what it is we actually believe. ...Knowing what our beliefs are requires confronting ourselves, our fears, and our resistance to change.... Art making is a way to explore our imagination and begin to allow it to be more flexible, to learn how to see more options. (Allen, 1995 pp. 3 - 4)

Art is “a living process” (Kumar, cited in Gablik, 1995, p. 137). Art invites us to partake in co-creating knowledge in the world and “acknowledge the positions from which we see, the particular embodiment of our own eyes, and then be both critical of our vision and accountable for it” (Meskimmon, 1996, p. 9). When we co-create, we witness and validate each other’s experience, but in order to do so we must become vulnerable, receptive and trusting of each other and the creative process (McNiff, 1998). This process “involves a negotiated...practice of give and take, connection and disconnection, while striving to be mutually honoring and supportive” (Bickel, cited in Irwin et al., 2008, p. 86). Through co-creation we enter into dialogue and meaning making. We become aware of power relations and we feed “one’s capacity to feel one’s way into another’s vantage point” (Greene, 1995, p. 37). This process enables understanding and empathy for others’ points of view and moves us away from disconnected and depersonalized ways of seeing, knowing and being-in-relationship (Mantas, 2004). Ultimately, co-creating “helps us develop a concern for other selves and improve the art of life” (Damasio, 1999, p. 5) which for us includes our teaching practice.

We have begun to link the language and processes of art to qualities of perception that value nuance and complexity in discussions of teaching and learning. Along with content and pedagogical knowledge, teaching has a strong artful, ethical and relational dimension that needs to be foregrounded. Artful co-creative processes that emphasize learning in relationship allow embodied knowledge to surface. This knowledge, which is not static or objective, can best be characterized as fluid and continuously open to new interpretations. It is by nature subjective, paradoxical, multilayered, ambiguous, open-ended, impressionistic and at times, ineffable. Our re-search and co-creative process is a way of tapping this kind of knowing. Through this personal and self-directed form of teacher development we begin to make important connections between the language of teaching and artistry and to interrupt the dominant discourse borrowed from cognitive science, hard psychology and business models. Furthermore, we identify artful re-search and co-creative processes as ways of tapping into our implicit assumptions and examining our complicity in the reproduction of limiting practices that box both teachers and students in.

Teaching consists of a constant negotiation between top down hierarchical demands versus responding to the needs that arise from the complex social matrix that is the classroom. We

agree with and emphasize Kozol's (1981) definition of the hidden curriculum as "teacher's own integrity and lived conviction" (p. 20) because along with teaching a prescribed curriculum, teachers also teach who they are. Our beliefs and assumptions locate us. "They define the stances we take" (Salmon, 1988, p. 37) and point the direction to future actions. Classroom teaching requires that we, as teachers, become aware of our own lived convictions so we can help shape, with thoughtfulness and care, the learning experiences of others.

Concluding Thoughts

The box, a space of containment, confinement and a cautionary metaphor "about the dangers of curiosity" (Brunner, 1998, p. 14) could also be read as a refuge, an enclosure with a way out/exit (Casey, 1991), a space for co-creation (Mantas, 2004), "a female symbol of the unconscious and the maternal" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, p. 116), and also as a physical space of inwardness and amplification (McNiff, 1998).

The art of Box-ing In/Out (Di Rezze & Mantas, 2006; Mantas, 2004) helped us realize that we as teachers are simultaneously boxing students in as well as allowing them to box out -- in other words, we became more aware of the tensions and paradoxes in which we teach and learn. Lampert (1985) characterizes teaching life as the managing of dilemmas. She explains that, despite not being able to solve the tensions inherent in teaching life, "the teacher has the potential to act with integrity while maintaining contradictory concerns" (p. 184).

The examination of personal experience through various forms of reflection, including our process, allows for tacit assumptions about teaching, learning and schooling to be made explicit. Once brought to awareness they can be more closely examined and transformed in relationship and through the collaborative artful process. Our ongoing experiences of making art together taught us that "the multiple...perspectives provided by arts- based/informed ...inquiries can promote space for empowerment, construction of knowledge" (Mello, 2007, p. 219). We have come to know that the eye of the artist-teacher begins to "make perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, said and heard in everyday life" (Marcuse, cited in Reitz, 2000, p. 213).

Teacher learning is personal, complex, idiosyncratic and "an active process whereby we learn to make more conscious the meaning that we make out of a lifetime of teaching" (Diamond & Mullen, 1999, p. 68). Our re-search seeks to reposition the teacher as knower and agent in their own development. We therefore see the re-searching "of teaching...as a purview and responsibility of teachers.... They continue to learn to teach and teach to learn" (Cole and Knowles, 2000, p. 2). Finally, co-creative processes help us to better understand what is

important to us in our teaching life. They help move us and our students from being contained to living more authentically outside the box.

Box Fragment 4: Pyxa, our merged voice, speaks....

The art of Box-ing In/Out
is a question
of identity
it's about defining ourselves
and not allowing
the box
to tell us who we are.
The art of teaching
is about moving with conscious intent.
In the classroom too,
If you're sensitive to kids' needs and interests,
don't you co-create a learning environment with them?

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