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Methodology in the Afterglow

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Abstract

My dissertation study seeks to understand how artist-teacher renewal may be nurtured through aesthetic experiential play in a Masters of Art Education degree program, and beyond, as my former students/participants and myself experience finding ourselves in its afterglow. *Aesthetic experiential play* could be described as a playful, curious, questioning, artful engagement with the world; an engagement that sparks an *aesthetic swell*, which moves us in surprising, unanticipated ways from play to its *afterglow*. In this sense, *afterglow* may be the unfolding answer to an open question, and the open question may be a place to play (Schwandt, 2007). Barone and Eisner (2012) posed such an open question, asking: How may we employ “the arts methodologically to reveal what the arts make possible in various situations?” (p. xii). This paper engages with their provocative question by exploring the spaces between my research interest and the methodology constructed to pursue it. Further, I consider the expansion that blooms out of the multiplicity of engagement that arts based research inspires and commands- an expansion that illuminates my research process as *an unfolding methodology in the afterglow*.

Beginning

Playing around with a camera in the sun and in the low red glow of a high school darkroom at the age of 17 set me free. Free to imagine myself becoming so many things. For a long time now, I have wanted to bestow this gift upon others. And I have been a dutiful and inspired teacher. And I would be lying if I said that I didn't sometimes miss that awakened place of art making, especially when I am too exhausted from teaching to make any work of my own. This longing has led me back once more to join a circle of learners- to ask new questions, to seek different answers, to understand more deeply the work of the artist-teacher¹. As Vagle (2011a) stated, "(t)he continuous work we do on ourselves is a gift to those we teach" (p. 424).

For seven years, I worked as a K-12 art educator before leaving to become a teacher educator. It was bittersweet to leave, for I had come to see the art classroom as a space where time can be lost and attention to the present can be found through play and exploration. Busy things could be slowed down: by the sweeping motion of a paintbrush where blue meets green and becomes ocean; where the fusion of two pieces of clay between fingertips becomes vessel. Years later, as I now commit to my dissertation research, the intersection of play and aesthetic experience is my beginning.

Overview

My dissertation study seeks to understand how artist-teacher renewal may be nurtured through aesthetic experiential play in a Masters of Art Education degree program, and beyond. Barone and Eisner (2012) posed the question: How may we employ "the arts methodologically to reveal what the arts make possible in various situations?" (p. xii). In this paper, I will engage with their provocative question by exploring the spaces between my research interest and the methodology constructed to pursue it. Further, I will consider the expansion that blooms out of the multiplicity of engagement that arts based research inspires and commands (see Barone and Eisner, 2012; Bresler, 2006; Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Rolling, 2010; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008; Sullivan, 2005).

The design of this study is qualitatively constructed with three overlapping layers, each intended to explore aesthetic experiential play in the professional development of artist-

¹ According to Hausman (1967), the artist-teacher is one who balances "the teacher as an artist and the artist as a teacher" (p. 17).

teachers from different vantage points. To begin this paper, I will discuss my theoretical framework and research questions in the context of the first layer of this inquiry—the pilot study. Then, I will consider how these inquiries and ideas inform my methodological commitments—commitments that draw ardently from autobiographical, hermeneutic, phenomenological and post-structural conversations. Concluding with where this intersection leaves me standing in “an always open world” (Greene, 1988, p. xi) of inquiry, where I release my open questions into *an unfolding methodology in the afterglow*.

Braiding, Tracing, Situating

In this paper and in my dissertation study, I will draw upon the philosophies of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975/2004, 1986), John Dewey (1916, 1934, 1938), and Maxine Greene (1978, 1988, 1995, 2001); interweaving their theories of play and aesthetic experience as potentially educative, transformative, and generative (see Gallagher, 1992; Henry, 2010; Shusterman & Tomlin, 2008; Vilhauer, 2010; White, 2009). While Gadamer, Dewey and Greene share this commonality; each brings a distinct and powerful thread to bear. As such, my theoretical framework braids Dewey’s (1916, 1934) theories of play as artful, active, imaginative and educative, Gadamer’s (1975/2004, 1986) theories of play as an ontological engagement and freedom, and Maxine Greene’s (1978, 1988, 1995, 2001) theories of transformation within the lived landscape of individuals through artistic-aesthetic experience.

I will first explain how the terms *aesthetic experiential play*, *aesthetic swell*, and *in afterglow* have developed in my work. As Greene (2001) expressed: “Meaning refers to connections made in experience as well as to the definition of certain terms” (p. 67). Post-structurally, this becomes “a question of method: *the tracings should always be put back on the map*” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 13, emphasis in original). And so, throughout the paper, I will provide tangible examples of places where these lived experiences encounter and entwine with “the eternal return” of scholarship that informs my evolving understandings (Hafeli, 2009, p. 369). These experiences are drawn from the first layer of my inquiry, the pilot study, which was conducted during a course I designed and taught as part of a Master’s of Art Education degree program. Nine artist-teachers and myself spent a semester engaging playfully in a variety of aesthetic experiences including: keeping visual verbal journals, reading novels and philosophy, exploring materials and processes of art, and visiting art museums. In-between our 5 monthly meetings, my students and I exchanged letters reflecting on our experiences prompted by open questions.

Situating Aesthetic Experiential Play (AEP²)

The first term I will trace is *aesthetic experiential play* (which I refer to henceforth as AEP), working to articulate my understanding of AEP as an ontological commitment situated in the in-between and beyond. The suffix *al* at its most basic root means *beyond*. This suffix also connotes relating, action, and process (The American Heritage College Dictionary, 2002). Aesthetic experience and play are always, already in a relationship of connection; Further, in their belonging to one another in a reciprocal and generative engagement, these terms create an *in-between* (Gadamer, 1975/2004). I see this liminal space as holding threads of intentionality (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005; Vagle, 2010, 2011b) in a productive, sustained tension; which in turn, keeps us forever on the way, going beyond, becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Greene, 1978, 1988, 1995, 2001).

I am positioning AEP as an ontological engagement by situating it in hermeneutic, phenomenological and pragmatic traditions (Dewey, 1916, 1934, 1938; Greene, 1978, 1988, 1995, 2001; Gadamer, 1975/2004, 1986; Latta, 2001; Schwandt, 2004). In this sense, I see it as a living commitment; something to be chosen as a way to engage rather than simply exist, pass the days, get through until the 3 o'clock school bell. And, by expanding these traditions into post-structural conversations, I also position AEP as liminally and unpredictably unfolding in disruptive and generative ways (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Lyotard, 1979/1984; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008; St. Pierre, 1997; Vagle, 2010, 2011b). This alchemy of traditions and conversations enables me to express AEP as a renewing, restorative engagement that seeks to heal the splitting wound of Cartesian binaries and its splintering implications for teaching and learning.

Commitments and qualities of AEP: Playful, aesthetic, curious.

Art, aesthetics, aesthetic experience and play are terms that often become interwoven in powerful and evocative ways. Placemarkers of our humanity, the lineage of their connectedness is well beyond the scope of this paper (see Bruner, 1996; Dissanayake, 1974, 1992; Efland, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Gilmour, 1986; Gude, 2010; Hetland, Winner, Veneema, & Sheridan, 2007; Huizinga, 1955; Kant, 1790/1952; Latta, 2001; Nachmanovitch, 1990; Piaget, 1951/1962; Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 1999; Schiller, 1795; Szekely, 1991; Vgotsky, 1978; Winnicott, 1982). Instead, I will choose to focus on AEP as an ontological commitment with playful, aesthetic, curious qualities.

² *Aesthetic Experiential Play* will appear in the abbreviated form of AEP from this point forward.

These three dynamic qualities perform endless entanglements and permutations, as they are lived, experienced, and undergone- bleeding and blossoming into my conceptions of *aesthetic swell* and *in afterglow*. Therefore, it becomes difficult (and potentially dangerous) to parse out these qualities as distinct or operating in isolation, to do that would flatten and arrest any potential offerings. Rather than pinning them down to the page, I will attempt to trace these qualities with fluidity, embracing their overlapping nature as “a gnarliness that gives radical punch” (Vagle, 2011b, p. 3).

Aesthetic experience “educates us about our world and existence in it” (Vilhauer, 2010, p. 11). Like play and art, it tenders generous potential to provoke, stimulate and inspire (Greene, 1978, 1988, 1995, 2001; Dewey, 1934; Gadamer, 1975/2004, 1986). Artist-teachers have the opportunity to work with art and aesthetics in playful, experiential ways every day in their classrooms, and therefore are beautifully poised to experience these connections. As Gallagher (1992) stated: “play opens the world to question” (p. 162). While I see AEP as an engagement, a way of being-in-the-world (Gadamer, 1975/2004, 1986; Vilhauer, 2010), I also see it as inevitably bound to curiosity, wonder, and opening worlds with the questions we ask (Greene, 1978, 1988, 1995, 2001).

Beyond great expectations.

Costantino (2010) reawakened a conversation about wonder in relationship to aesthetic education in the contemporary art classroom. Her work inspired me to ask: What would a curious, wondering engagement bring to bear in the lives of artist-teachers? Baldacchino (2009) offered a possible answer, drawing from Greene’s (1973) writings on teachers as strangers looking “inquiring and wonderingly” on their everyday worlds in order to move beyond (as cited in Baldacchino, 2009, p. 146). In this excerpt from her course meta-reflection, my student and participant, Virginia, looked in such a way at her experience during the pilot study, touching on many of the commitments and qualities of AEP I have been attempting to trace theoretically:

My visual verbal journal is filled from cover to cover, as I’ve created in a way like never before – habitually, playfully, deeply. For the first time in my life I feel freely bound to my creativity in a loving embrace. Free to explore whatever comes to mind. Free to experiment. Free of obligation and expectation. Free to swim safely on the surface or dive deep into personal waters. Free to choose. Free to discover me as an artist... as a teacher... as me. This was a beginning for me and as Maxine Greene writes, beginnings have so much to do with freedom.

I am in awe of how liberating the act of creatively playing has been. It opens you up to the endless possibility of the world of ideas and materials around and within you.

For me, it became a flow of action and reaction to the world around and within me – past, present, and future, each informing the other. Words and pictures danced gracefully across many pages as I faced your proposed question of *what are my great expectations?* Reading the novel *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, intertwined with my new creative experiences, I’ve come to realize that so often our expectations are skewed by our circumstances, experiences, and allowed misleadings, but most often by our limited perspective. When we challenge ourselves to live wide-awake and open to possibility, it is then that we allow ourselves to live beyond expectation. Therefore, my great expectation is to live *beyond expectation*. Beyond the expectations of artist training, beyond the expectations of institutional education, beyond the expectations of everyday life, beyond my own limited expectations. (all emphases in original)

Virginia’s words resonate with Gadamer’s (1986) view of play as holding a sacred seriousness and freedom:

Insistence on the opposition between life and art is tied to the experience of an alienated world... play is capable of penetrating all the dimensions of our social life, through all classes, races, and levels of cultural attainment. For these our forms of play are forms of our freedom. (p. 130)

Moreover, she used phrases like “free to choose” and “when we challenge ourselves.” These phrases point to the ontological engagement and commitment of AEP as a living expression of freedom. Virginia turned herself over to living out AEP as a commitment: “habitually, playfully, deeply.”

Additionally, her reflection blurred the same boundaries and binaries between art, play and aesthetic experience that I have been exploring. She did not separate “creatively playing” from discovering herself as an artist or feeling awakened by aesthetic experiences. Nor, did she separate the act of reading novels from the act of creating, playing, exploring, nor from her reading philosophy for her thesis project. She spoke of them in fluid connection, building towards a reflective commitment to “live beyond expectation” in a “world around and within” her, rather than an alienated world.

Moreover, Virginia used language like “flow of action and reaction” and “freely bound... in a loving embrace” to express the movement of AEP towards a space beyond. These phrases resonate with my vision of AEP as holding productive, generative, restorative tension that moves us towards becoming. Perhaps what is most profound for me though, is the awareness Virginia revealed of a liminal space situated between her “own limited expectations” and her

commitments to moving beyond them. As Gallagher (1992) explained: “An essential aspect of all educational experience, including play, involves venturing into the unknown, going beyond ourselves and experiencing the unfamiliar” (p. 49-50). When we play, we move to “unaccustomed earth” (Lahiri, 2008).

All of this helps sustain my desire to more fully understand and articulate how AEP is lived, experienced and known in the lives of artist-teachers, like Virginia. And so, these tracings and experiences reveal how I am coming to understand AEP as a playful, aesthetic, curious engagement with the world: an engagement that potentially sparks an *aesthetic swell*.

Situating Aesthetic Swell

What happens when we choose to live, engage, dwell in these playful, aesthetic, curious ways? My hope is twofold: that we may embrace the surprising, unanticipated outcomes of experience and that we may break open binaries, the either/ors created by educational systems (Baldacchino, 2009; Britzman, 2003; Dewey, 1934, 1938; Greene, 1978, 1988, 1995, 2001). I might have said *current* educational systems, but then Dewey (1938) observed: “Mankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of Either/Ors, between which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities” (p. 17); going on to say that such situations “compel us to compromise” (p. 17). And while I would change his language to make space for humankind, I believe his observation holds.

More recently, Palmer (2011) echoed this sentiment, when he said: “we must teach our hearts a new way to understand the tension we feel when we are torn between two poles” (p. 85). This gives me pause to consider what this new understanding might be. Perhaps, something like Virginia’s understanding of being “freely bound... in a loving embrace” between competing forces.

Lineage of resistance.

Earlier, I asserted that because aesthetic experience and play are always, already in a relationship of connection, a reciprocal, generative, restorative engagement is created: an engagement that holds threads of intentionality in a productive, sustained tension necessary for reaching, going beyond (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005; Vagle, 2010, 2011b). When Gadamer (1975/2004, 1986) freed play from the subject/object binary, he put this engagement on the move: Play became a process. When the play was no longer bounded to the player, it was free to engage more fluidly; as in “the play of light” or “the play of waves” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 104). And so, play became an ontological movement towards freedom; a generative process that “renews itself in constant repetition” (p. 104). The process of play became *bildung*,

becoming, transformation; a way of being-in-the-world (Gadamer, 1975/2004, 1986; Gallagher, 1992; Vilhauer, 2010).

I find parallels here to Dewey (1934), who stated: “Experiencing like breathing is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings” (p. 58). The play of breath repeats and renews. If we attend to productive, sustained tension created by the rhythm of our breath, to the flow rather than the inhale-exhale binary, we may deepen our engagement. If we breathe freely; our breath becomes generative and restorative. In the same way, we may see the *either/or* as an opportunity to move fluidly, rather than choosing sides. The *and/both* move cuts free what anchors our becoming. Imagine; artist-teachers who feel free to move fluidly between both those big things.

Greene (1978, 1988) continued this lineage of resistance against binaries with her position that when educators practice attending, noticing and reflecting upon aesthetic experience *either/ors* disappear and those we teach may rebel. One may ask, what is there to rebel against? How about the binaries that stifle us and choke us out of the field- asking us to choose teacher or artist, beginner or expert, practical or visionary? How about the fact that “(h)alf of all people who begin their careers thinking they will love being a teacher decide that they just can’t do it. Half. (Reynolds, 2011, p. 3, emphasis in original)? AEP seeks fluidity, rather than unsatisfying compromises.

Inspired by Gadamer, Dewey, and Greene I have begun to envision an *aesthetic swell*- a wave-like movement that unmoors us and sets us adrift towards unanticipated, surprising possibilities. But, what stirs us to begin? Our relationship to the world is dialogical and curious and full of wonder (Freeman, 2008; Gadamer, 1975/2004; Greene, 2001; Grondin, 1994). Gadamer (1975/2004) bared the heart of this relationship when he said open questions come from a desire to be led somewhere new in our quest for understanding. The question we ask is our first move. Therefore, we could say an open question acts as friction, it is the ripple of wind that releases a wave to swell and to crest.

We open surprising, unanticipated worlds as we embrace our curious and wondering qualities- when we become what Greene (2001) called

a philosopher-person---someone whose life is absorbed in teaching, trying to move others to wide-awakeness and reflectiveness, to learning to learn on their own initiatives; someone who has spent and continues to spend time trying to confront the questions that arise. (p. 50-51)

And now, I wonder where an aesthetic swell might take Malik, one of my students and participants, as he becomes such a person.

The birthday pages.

Modern, terracotta tiles laid cool and smooth against the backs of our legs and ankles as we sat, a cluster of bodies holding pencils and hardbound journals, on the balcony of the contemporary art museum. Our presence complemented by the long shadows of two bronze sculptures and the slightest brush of Saturday morning traffic below. I had made my first pedagogical move of the day. The balcony was accessed from a small gallery that, at the time, housed pages of a birthday book made for art dynast, Hans Bechtler. The works, intended as presents, were quite small and made on paper with materials common to any artist or public school art classroom: crayons, watercolor, cut paper collage. They shared a spontaneous and improvisatory quality that I thought resonated with our course focus: aesthetic experiential play in art making and art teaching. As my students discussed the birthday pages, I tended loosely to the circle, holding only as tightly as needed to keep the conversation flowing and pushing, like blood into the heart of this body of learners.

The discussion turned itself over to a connection between the loose, spontaneous feeling of these works and our shared practice of visual verbal journaling³. This journaling was another of my pedagogical moves, a move towards crafting a space for AEP to be played out on a daily basis. After a long silence, Malik spoke up. He expressed sadness, regret even. He spoke about feeling left out. He confessed that he was uncomfortable with journaling, with a practice that was (maybe) art and (definitely) not Art. As an artist-teacher in a public, urban high school, his days were busy; his time was precious, and playing, exploring openly didn't feel much like a priority. He proclaimed his perfectionism was getting in the way. Judy had already confessed to ripping pages from her journal, because they were ugly. And, now she explained her efforts to stop tearing pages from her book, as a result of some of the letters she and I had exchanged. In hearing others speak intensely, cathartically about their relationships with their visual verbal journals (our VVJ's, as we affectionately called them), had left Malik feeling as if he was missing out.

Greene (1988) helped me understand this even more deeply: "With situations opening, students may become empowered to engage in some sort of *praxis*, engaged enough to name the obstacle in the way of their shared becoming" (p. 133). Malik had named the obstacle

³ I offer my sincere gratitude to Tracie Costantino for expanding my pedagogical vision of journaling into the visual *and* verbal.

when he asked the questions: What am I missing out on here due to my attachments to finished products, to perfection? He became a philosopher-person; he released an aesthetic swell.

Anne took care of the cohort. You know her type of kindness, the kind that coordinates flowers, onesies, and cakes for all the special occasions. And so, I was not surprised when she took action. Her plan involved someone from our class sending Malik a text message with a prompt to play out in his VVJ every day until our next class meeting. She passed around a sign-up sheet; a friendly sort of contract, I suppose. And so, Malik played in his VVJ. He played in pursuit of these questions and constraints until he broke through. As Caputo (1988) wrote:

There are certain breaking points, let us say, in the habits and practices, the works and days, of our mundane existence... where the whole trembles and the play irrupts. Then we know we are in trouble. The abyss, the play, the uncanny- in short, all hell- breaks loose, and the card castles of everydayness come tumbling down. Something breaks through because the constraints we impose on things break down. (p. 269-270)

Malik challenged his assumptions of what artists do, produce, achieve, and began asking questions about how artists live. How is it to be artful, active, playful, curious, and wondering as we move in and through the world? For his final project, he wrote a reflective list of ways he was standing in his own way. Malik chose key ideas and words from the list and stitched them onto fabric bricks. Inspired by the brick wall metaphor in his chosen novel, *The Women of Brewster Place* by Gloria Naylor (1982), he built a structure to hold the bricks and then knocked each free, as he read aloud to us from his journal. He literally broke through; allowing everything to collapse, be torn down, in order to start anew.

Malik's experience reflects the type of aesthetic swell I am theorizing in my work. It is a movement, a reaching, a breaking away (Greene, 2001). It is finding a bit more fluidity in our way of being in the world. Where could an aesthetic swell take us if we let go? Dewey (1934) offered:

Like the ocean in a storm, there is a series of waves; suggestions reaching out and being broken in a clash, or being carried onwards by a cooperative wave. If a conclusion is reached, it is that of a movement of anticipation and cumulation, one that finally comes to completion. A "conclusion" is no separate and independent thing; it is the consummation of a movement. (p. 39)

Each swell moves us to the next breaking point, if we let go and turn ourselves over to the unfolding; every ending carries us to new beginnings (Gadamer, 1974/2004). And so, perhaps an aesthetic swell moves us in surprising, unanticipated ways from AEP to *finding ourselves in afterglow*.

Situating Afterglow

What would it take for you “to live with all your burners lit” (Richards, 1996, p. 32)? For me, it involves being in an expressive commitment with the many, many ways I work the world—as a papermaker, book artist, writer, journal keeper, teacher, scholar, and lover of philosophy, poetry, and literature. Poet Laureate Billy Collins (2001) wrote: “I see us reading ourselves away from ourselves, straining in circles of light to find more light” (p. 12). As we choose to engage in AEP, as we unmoor ourselves and move with an aesthetic swell, we may experience this struggle to seek more undiscovered light within ourselves; we may experience the Deweyan storm. Or perhaps, we might experience something like Rene Magritte’s painting, *The Empire of Light (1953-4)*. In this work, the streetlamp is not all that illuminates. It is day *and* it is night. There is a glow emanating from somewhere beyond; from a place we cannot see or name or ever hold between our humble, human hands.

Throwing light.

Afterglow is a word that holds two ideas in tension. The first idea, is the *after*; the meaning made after experience (Dewey, 1934; Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 1999). The second is the *glow*. Together, these concepts create an illuminated space that unfolds with our commitments to openness and inquiry allowing us to continue “throwing light” upon our understandings of self and world (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 301).

After.

Dewey (1916) emphasized that what makes play educative is the meaning that is made afterward through the experience. Later, he stated that as we play, our “experience matures” and “purpose becomes a thread” that allows us to make meaning from our playful actions (Dewey, 1934, p. 290). I see AEP as engaging threads of purpose connecting artist-teachers to their creative and teaching practices. Where reflective practice (Schön, 1987) might indeed illuminate these threads; afterglow may instead play them in a productive tension. We could make a move here towards hermeneutic circularity to help us to see the practice of reflecting in a new light. To see reflection as the ongoing tracing of a circle- cycling towards “reflexive enlightenment” rather than “perfect enlightenment” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 559). For we are never finished, and reflection will never yield perfection, only more light. Think of Malik, who allowed his reflections to swell and burst forth (Sartre, 1939/2002); who tore down and started anew.

And yes, threads of purpose or intentionality may not be so neat and tidy in this postmodern world (see Slattery, 2006; Vagle, 2010, 2011b); as we Race to the Top (RTTT) across the weakened, anesthetized terrain of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Yet, we can learn, as artists do, to speak through the many languages of thread (Camhi, 2011). We can learn to stitch, wrap, braid, and weave our sense of purpose as the years pass and everything swerves and shifts around us. We can ask: What tugs at these purposeful threads in teachers' lives? How might AEP help us mend them when they snap, or make our threads more elastic and flexible in the first place?

Glow.

I share Greene's (2001) concern for educational systems that ignore the simple premise that "we cannot *learn* anyone" (p. 136; see Duckworth, 1987; Eisner, 2002). I believe this holds in classrooms, as well as in professional development for teachers. Vilhaeur (2010) explained from a Gadamerian perspective that

a human being will not, and cannot, simply change his old conceptions by being handed new ones- or by being handed a set of new premises and conclusions- as if some kind of instantaneous conversion were possible. Instead, learning happens through a slow and thorough process of engagement with new meaning, in which the prejudices with which we begin slowly come to light, and are revised until we reach a transformed sense of things. (p. xv)

I find this idea of slowly learning to be critical for both artist-teachers and their students. If AEP pursues renewal and transformation, it must allow for learning to steep: slowly, patiently, openly.

My understanding of *afterglow* is, perhaps, the most tenuous of the three concepts I am situating. At this point, I tentatively understand finding oneself in afterglow as playing a sustained chord of tension that productively balances a commitment to reflective practice with disruptive generativity. It begins with an open question. It is a space we choose to occupy as playful, aesthetic, curious teachers who long to throw a bit more light on our life-worlds.

Opening to Questions

Thus far, I have braided, traced and situated my emerging understandings of the conceptual aspects of this study with experiences from my pilot study. To sum up, perhaps *aesthetic experiential play* could be described as a playful, curious, questioning, artful engagement with the world. Perhaps this engagement sparks *aesthetic swell*, which moves us in surprising,

unanticipated ways from play to its *afterglow*. Perhaps *afterglow* is the unfolding answer to an open question. And perhaps, the open question is a place to play (Schwandt, 2007).

And so, I ask:

- What is the potential of aesthetic experiential play to spark an aesthetic swell, moving us towards a space of possibility or afterglow?
- And, what might this afterglow illuminate for the holistic growth and renewal of artist-teachers? What change could it inspire? How far, how long- could it shimmer?

An Unfolding Methodology in the Afterglow

My dissertation study seeks to understand more deeply what it means to *find oneself in the afterglow of AEP* through engaging with open questions with my participants for the 12 months that follow the pilot study, which leads me to discuss the second and third layers of this inquiry.

Our research questions influence our methods and methodologies, as does the place we position ourselves within our work. Interpretative phenomenologist, van Manen (1990), went deeper with Gadamer's concept of the open question by placing it at "the heart of our existence" so that we live the question; we become the question we are asking (p. 43). At the heart of my existence is the multiplicity of engagement I experience as an artist, a teacher, and a scholar. I *become* the question through what Schwandt (2004) considered a "poetics of inquiry" rather than a "methodology of research" (p. 31). And so, my study draws upon an expansive, entangled view of arts-based, practice-based research (see Barone and Eisner, 2012; Bresler, 2006; Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund, 2008; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009; Rolling, 2010; Scheurich, 1997; Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2008; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008; St. Pierre, 1997; Sullivan, 2005); a "living practice" as Carson and Sumara (1997) envisioned (p. xiii).

My methods of data collection include: reflective writing, journals, artwork, observations, interviews, postcards and letters. My participants and myself actively construct these methods as we live through this process of inquiry (see Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; St. Pierre, 1997), and as we attempt to engage with these open questions within our "lifeworlds" (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nystrom, 2008; van Manen, 1990).

The second layer of this study involves engaging with aesthetic experiential play within my own art practice. As a papermaker and book artist, I decided to stretch myself into a new, yet complementary, discipline. Therefore, I have become a letterpress apprentice, hopeful that I can use my new skills to present my dissertation findings. Perhaps even creating large

broadside posters amplifying the voices of teachers too long dampened. Broadside posters that aim to do what Anne Waldman asks of her poems, to “dwell in the interstices of imagination and action” (<http://www.poetspath.com/waldman.html>). Who knows? Anything is possible when we choose to begin anew (Greene, 1994).

The third layer of my dissertation study will explore the afterglow of aesthetic experiential play for one year from the time my pilot study ended. It was in the letterpress studio that I began to envision this final layer. Moreover, it was by being with my art making, being with my students, being with theory—all at once—that allowed for methodological possibilities to blossom and expand. It is here that I began to see and to live within the multiplicity that arts based research inspires and commands; Where I began to see how I might integrate these layers of inquiry through my emerging letterpress practice.

And so, I created letterpress stationary sets with 12 letters and 12 envelopes for each participant. These papers were blind debossed with the words of William James - “we learn to skate in summer after having commenced in winter” (Dewey, 1934, p. 24). Blind debossing is a process of making an impression into paper without ink. Imagine the way your feet sink slightly into damp sand as you walk the shoreline, leaving behind a delicate, but crisp impression.

Each month since our course ended, I have mailed a postcard to my former students/participants, encouraging them to write to me on the stationary sets they received. The front of the postcards feature a new letterpress process or technique I have learned, and on the back I write an open, reflective question that my former students can attend to in their response with words, drawings, collage, and so on. These open questions come from the analysis of my pilot study.

When I envisioned this layer, I was fairly unsure whether I could actually complete such a project with my fledgling letterpress skills. And, I sensed an even deeper risk—I had only faith that my former students might engage in these continued letters back and forth with me, long after any pedagogical authority I might have once held disappeared, as grades were finalized and they walked tall in their graduation regalia. I held only hope that my open questions on the backs of these postcards might provoke continued aesthetic swells in the lives of these nine artist-teachers—however tiny, however timid. I held only hope in the words of Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund (2008) who offered:

Thus arts-based research might aspire to engaging social change. However, the methods of change are different from traditional research, which applies change top-

down through the intellectual authority of the researcher. Arts-based research seeks change from the bottom-up through grassroots circles of conversation. (p. 236).

Yes, I envisioned these letters as just that. 108 postcards mailed, 108 potential letters to be received, many grassroots circles of conversations waiting to be had.

I will be honest that my hands quivered as I handed those bundles of letters wrapped in twine and envelopes adorned with stamps to each of my students. Yet, I let the packages pass from my hands to theirs, knowing it was time to let go. I let the open question slip away, because I know that we learn through what we lose (Gadamer, 1975/2004). With the loss of stubborn misconceptions, by loosening our hold on deep-rooted ideas, we become open to the generous offerings of dialogue, to what we learn by listening to others. In other words, our losses put us in a dialectical relationship with each other and the world. In thinking differently about the world, we open ourselves to experiencing the world differently. We swell with dialogic possibility. What greater ends could we desire of arts based research?

In that moment, there was nothing much to do. No prints to run, no class days to plan, nothing to do but wait for unfolding answers. Or, more accurately, unfolding letters that will lead me to ask new open questions. So, I breathed deeply and saw myself becoming the woman who eagerly anticipates a new ritual - a low grumble of acknowledgement from the dogs, one, two, then three footsteps on the brick stairs, and then—maybe—the sweet sound of letters dropped in a tin box at half past four each afternoon. A woman poised to risk, to lose, in order to deepen her understanding. A woman left wondering if the afterglow could ever be bright enough to wash out these binaries in its blinding light? Will it be enough to break free?

Postscript

Perhaps, on that last day of class, my hands trembled because I knew that for the next twelve months, the days that passed with no letters would feel, somehow, a little less alive; that in living the open questions, I would find myself slipping in (and out of) afterglow, as the world too slips in and out of days and nights, light and darkness. On those days, I hold on here:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, that cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. (Rilke, 2011, p. 35)

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