

**USING PERSONAL NARRATIVE AS A STRATEGY TO BRING
CONTEMPORARY MEANING TO PHOTOGRAPHY**

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 1975
Diploma in Education (Secondary Curriculum), University of Victoria, 1978
Diploma in Education (Guidance Studies), University of British Columbia, 1994

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Supervisory Committee

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the use of narrative strategies to assist high school students in creating photography that expresses their personal story and an understanding of universal themes. Review of the current literature indicates that story telling is a viable approach that allows students to explore imagery and connect it to text in a meaningful way. Imagery that emerges from personal stories is an effective way of relating ideas to peers, community, and society. My personal story and experience in photography became the foundation for classroom lessons which move from simple to more complex ideas including metaphor. Photography lessons included problem solving, reflective thinking, and recording ideas in sketchbooks. The use of narrative strategies created ideal learning situations for promoting student independence and a deeper understanding of their work. Further research is required to determine the benefits of using narrative strategies and should involve surveying students for reciprocal transfer of learning.

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TEACHING CREED

This project contains background experiences that support an exploration of using the narrative as a strategy to create meaning in art making.

The Need for Meaning

It should all begin and end with the student. As in the telling of a good story, a lesson should hold their interest, be age appropriate, and leave them discovering a message about their significance or about the world in which they live. The use of the personal story or narrative is a tool that should be more fully explored for its potential to motivate students to create meaning in their work.

It begins in the primary classroom as children draw images that are filled with familiar stories. These drawings clearly lay out the setting of a home, describe the main characters as family, friends, and pets, and record an important event in the children's lives. This record is a celebration of their world and its visual retelling gives it importance and meaning.

In a high school, students may be asked to produce a series of photos that tell about school life. They select friends, place them in familiar settings, and document a familiar theme in their school life. Images are often collected for a yearbook and become a sequence of scenes that reveal a variety of attitudes and unique approaches to being a student in high school. The creation of the simple story about school life is familiar and relevant to students, allowing them to explore school's importance in their lives.

In a senior painting class, students study surrealism and may be asked to gather objects for a still life. For example, students may collect three objects that are symbolic of events in their lives. The objects are arranged and depicted within the confines of a room which represents a metaphor for the containment of thoughts and memories of the event. Students add windows and doors which may reveal scenes that set time, location, and possibly foretell future events. The overall colour palette and tone should reflect the students' feelings about their memories. Each student records the memory fragments of a personal event, considers its emotional impact, and explores its meaning and the important role it may have played in defining their life.

These three examples represent ways in which students may depict story in visual form. While they are visual, they share common elements of communication with the English classroom. What is important in good story writing is also important in narrative art; the student should position themselves in the event. They should become part of the story in order to understand the character's flaws and strengths, the sequence or cause and effects of the events, the role of conflict and resolution, and, most importantly, the relationship of their personal story to more significant life events. Students in writing and in art-making must decide what they will speak of and then must be able to select the text or images to describe their personal narrative.

In this project, I propose that facilitating students in their creation of narratives for art making is important not only to the development of their personal identity but also to their success in other curricular programs. Art should never be taught to the exclusion of other school subjects. While the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2002) states "through visual arts, students make connections between previous and current learning in various subject areas" (p. 2), very little effort is made to work collaboratively. In fact,

in secondary schools with large populations and timetables, courses are often developed and then taught in isolation. Unfortunately, like a puzzle, students experience disconnected pieces. Supportive learning outcomes from other curriculum areas that could facilitate their success are lost opportunities.

A student's involvement in the visual arts needs to be learning based on a variety of ideas and images as well as exploring and experimenting with materials and techniques. It needs to allow each student's personal identity to be explored and communicated. This may be accomplished by using personal narratives to help students to bring personal meaning to their art making.

Art making is a process of creating meaning founded on the artist's personal experiences and knowledge. So too, my experiences of teaching art are structured on my personal experiences in art making as well as my knowledge of how and why artists create. My experiences began in public school where I was able to produce works that were skilled in drawing objects or landscapes in a realistic manner, however the results were not satisfying. Occasionally, there was joy in producing work that illustrated a social condition studied in history or that reflected the imagery of a poignant poem from literature. These were not always technically masterful but they were of some satisfaction. They did not encourage any further pursuit of art making. While studying languages at university, I selected an art history course and my interest in the visual arts was renewed. Enrolling in a university studio course was the beginning of my discovering that the real challenge of art making was to reveal significant personal meaning. I left university for art school, but dropped out because the old feeling remained that while my work was again technically good, it lacked real meaning. This

precipitated a search for my own story and my own voice. This was the hardest lesson to learn and it has become the goal of my teaching. Students should be encouraged to discover their own abilities not only in the skills of producing a visual record of what they see, but in finding imagery that speaks visually to them on a deeply personal level.

Drawing and Creativity

When students enter my class in September, there is a flood of apprehension and the need to calm fears begins by assuring them that their questions can be answered. I strive to assess their needs as a successful first step in art making.

In drawing classes, I begin with distributing paper and then asking all the students to follow my instructions very carefully. They are to follow specific guidelines and not look at their neighbour's drawing for help or ideas. They are asked to draw three lines. Three lines? Which way? What size? The directions are repeated. They are expected to draw three lines; however, the size, direction, style, and thickness are theirs to choose. When the lines are drawn, they are to add three circles; however, these circles must be of three different sizes and may not touch the lines. Again, there are questions but the students are assured they are free to choose placement and size. Finally, they are asked to shade in three of the spaces that they have created. Once again, there are restrictions: the pencil shading must be of three different kinds, but they are again free to choose which spaces to shade. Once they are done, everyone must put their work on display.

While the work is exhibited, the drawings are discussed and positive comments on their many variations are encouraged. Despite the seemingly restrictive rules, students

are able to develop thirty unique and competent drawings. In fact, if the task were to be repeated, the students would be able to create thirty different and equally competent drawings. Thus, it is explained to the students, that they are not to ask what it should look like, not copy the work of others, nor worry that their work will somehow not be correct. They are to concentrate on their exploration of the task within the assigned guidelines. The rules are really guides and, as they discover, there are many creative solutions. The options they choose and the solutions they create should be original and individual. This is the premise on which I teach all my art classes. At every opportunity, students are given a set of guidelines or problems which they are asked to personally explore. They are expected to develop works that are unique, yet fall within a set of class objectives.

Each student comes to class with a personal set of skills. The ability to draw is only one of these but while they often see it as the most important skill set, it is not. Drawing can be improved with practice. If students were asked if they were able to ride a bicycle the first time they tried, they might certainly answer no. No, learning to ride usually takes practice and coaching from family or friends; this is the same for drawing. The other qualities students bring are more important: personality, experiences, and motivation.

Competent Teaching

Although students learn to work within a set of guidelines, they have the potential to develop unique work. For those apprehensive about their skill or creativeness, I am able to support them in valuing their first work. For those that are skilled, this introductory task involves finding opportunities that challenges their creativity. Each

student is expected to work from the strengths they have rather than from expectations of strengths they may not yet have. The first lesson provides an opportunity to observe students as they work through the task and to note their questions. The lesson may reveal who is confident, who is fearful of their mistakes but wants to do well, and who is lacking motivation. Evaluation of the students' ability to draw is less of a concern.

I believe that it is my responsibility to attend to the diverse needs of as many of my students as possible. There are some that are quite capable and they work confidently and independently. Periodically, they check in to reaffirm that their exploration and approach to the problem is valid. Sometimes, they need to be challenged as they push forward with their ideas. They are always encouraged to find and express personal meaning in their work. There are also the very needy and it is my goal to get them from the first small attempts to working confidently and independently. More importantly, they need to acknowledge that their ideas have value. For some, this may take the length of the course. Finally, there is a small group that seems to be plunked into art courses because of timetable needs or the search for an easy credit. It is always my challenge to move them from occupying a space to eagerly working through projects. A member of this last group is often awarded the "red pencil" at the end of the course for their progress from "occupying" to creating personal work. I never mention the award at the beginning of the course and, one year, forgot about it until a student approached me and asked if he could be a candidate. He had gone from scribbles and rude language in his sketchbook to highly developed computer animations, and to fully participating in class. He used his drawings to further his animations which also included personal reflections on his life. He was right; he was not only a candidate but a deserving recipient of the "red pencil". I

learned that what seemed insignificant as a primary printing pencil could be as valuable as the honour of winning the Stanley Cup.

Six Truths Related to Art Making

There are six truths which summarize my beliefs. They are based upon my own experiences in the process of art making and indicate how beliefs apply to the classroom.

1. Art has taught me to explore the social context of my work and to be more attentive to the human condition. Struggling with ideas and generating images reflective of my experiences and beliefs, is a critical part of the discovery of a personal voice. The use of story helps to explain, demystify, illustrate and celebrate events in my life. The use of story has become a creative force in my work. Students need to explore their stories in order to understand more about themselves and the role they might play in their own and other lives.
2. Art has taught me to tackle problems using more than one approach. The first idea may not always be the best solution and, as I play with more possibilities, new ways of examining the problem are generated. Students' explorations are also just as important. Art making should not be a pre-scripted project nor rely on copied processes. Students need to understand that art links to traditional skills and materials as well as contemporary ideas and technologies. The creative process must allow for all possibilities that embrace both.
3. Art has allowed me bring concrete form to my thoughts and feelings. In the search for images, it has helped to clarify meaning and focus my thoughts. The more images and ideas, the more I question exactly what is it I am trying to say.

This progresses from superficial explorations to ones that have a deep personal impact on me. The authentic experience is one that contains the discovery of a profound truth with deep symbolic or universal meaning. Students need to move through this process as well. In the final years of their public education, they need to be able to use personal knowledge and experience as a valid foundation for clarifying their thoughts and personal needs. Students also need to actively engage in creative problem solving and experimentations in order to find meaning in their work.

4. Art has taught me to appreciate the work of others, to look at the great historical bodies of work and the continuing production of work in the modern era. I see my place in a continuum of the history of art. This means voicing my personal history and holding my place in the context of social and cultural history. My place may be small but my struggles parallel the steps taken by many artists before me. While students interact daily in a close and at times chaotic social community, they need to recognize the personal struggles that have historical parallels.
5. Art has taught me to appreciate the cultural diversity of my community and even though my beliefs may be different, we have similarities. Like the artist seeking and finding unique images to express an idea, each culture has unique life stories that are to be valued as they often reveal common ideas. In exploring their own stories, students need to express what is similar and different in their lives or cultural backgrounds. They also need to acknowledge that they are part of a larger

social and cultural community. Furthermore, in a world of cultural diversity and extremes, they need to appreciate difference.

6. Art has expanded and sensitized my vision. I can no longer look at landscapes, objects, or people without sensitivity to a story that may accompany them and the potential for creating images that represent those stories. Students, too, need to look at their environment, whether it is natural or built, and learn to be sensitive to stories. They should also develop a response about their relationship to milieu that varies and be able to communicate their understanding to others.

The writings of Elliot Eisner (1993) in *Why Art in Education and Why Art Education* are closely aligned with my own beliefs. He believes that art teaches us to see, that art develops problem solving skills, that art brings to the visual what has been thought, and that it connects us to the diversity of multi-cultures. He further believes that art is important in the development of self esteem. Eisner states that the arts “engage and develop human intellectual ability” (p.9). This belief he affirms to be the most critical to the future of our culture.

The Use of Photography

When I began teaching, I read Ben Shahn’s, *Shape of Content* (1957). The passage that is memorable is when he is speaking to a painting class.

In the midst of our discussion one of the students walked up to me and said, “Mr. Shahn, I didn’t come here to learn philosophy. I just want to learn how to paint.” I asked him which one of the one hundred and forty styles he wanted to learn, and we began to establish, roughly, a sort of understanding.

... It is not the how of painting but the why. To imitate or to teach style alone would be a little like teaching a tone of voice or a personality. (p. 123)

This has been my mantra as I have taught my lessons. There are no absolutes, only possibilities. The true struggle in the creation of art is to focus on what is being said not necessarily what technique is used.

While I followed this creed in my classroom, I forgot it in my own art making. After graduating from an art history program, my mind was full of images, artists, art movements, styles, and ideas that had been pivotal in the development of Western art. I had wanted to paint, but the voices of history kept interjecting and telling me how Matisse would have done this or perhaps I should consider painting in the more realistic manner of Alex Colville. Images danced before my eyes but my historical critiquing eye suggested that there was already an artist who could do it better. After several years of teaching art, the voice of the teacher would join the historian to critique my composition, my colour choice, and my skilfulness. Why the teacher voice was so strong and so negative, I do not know. It was not the voice used with my students. Students were encouraged and their fledgling ideas nurtured. My students grew to be more creative and free in their exploration than I allowed myself be. I quit painting.

I had a camera and turned to photography. Here, the restrictive voices were quiet. As I prepared to focus, the scenes and objects spoke to me. Elements of colour, line, or simple spaces caught my attention. When in the darkroom, the negative image, often upside down and magnified, became a fresh experience and what had previously dominated in the scene did not always remain important. Enlarging and cropping created new possibilities and new responses to the image. The internal voices now sought to

discuss why various objects and angles of view were selected. Mistakes and imperfections were allowed and, as I learned from my students, often those mistakes pushed my work in new directions and brought new clarity. Much more, emotional meaning was now emerging from my work. My work began to reveal a story. The story was about life's daily struggle but the personal voice was strong.

In review, when students arrive at my classroom, I believe:

1. They have the potential to generate a multitude of ideas for a given task.

However, they need assurance that their ideas have worth and that further nurturing of those ideas will encourage them to develop images with more authentic meaning. Often, their first ideas are cliché and they need to adopt a creative outlook in order to innovate and bring new personal meaning to their work.

2. Traditional skills and techniques, while needed for the visual expression of an idea, should not hold a student back from exploring and responding to ideas with newer media. There are a multitude of media that can be used for expression.

The contemporary use of digital, photocopier, projectors, and photographic media are legitimate forms for developing artistic expression.

3. The principles of composition and elements of design should not be the driving force behind creating the image. Students need to access these design strategies for the purpose of clarifying and enhancing expressive qualities in their work. There is a constant struggle in art between creative chaos and the discipline of structure, but the application of order must not stultify the energy of an idea built on emotions and intuition.

4. Students should be able to critique their own works. They should be able to analyze, interpret and evaluate it. At times, they are harder critics of their work than they need to be. It should not be a question of what is wrong with the work, but what could be done better? The goal should be to illustrate an understanding of their story. It should not be compared too closely to how someone else has done it in the past.
5. Students should be able to appreciate the work of others whether it is a colleague, an artist in the community, or an artist in history. They should look at the work of other artists not necessarily to seek a better solution for how to create the work but to understand the importance of the creative process. As they progress, students should begin to model or emulate the best artists' practices. They should also be generating ideas, analyzing their work, and searching for clarity of a personal voice.
6. Students should draw from their own experiences to create imagery. Students' imagery often represents the telling of a personal story. Their images should bring to concrete form their story. Students should understand that there is value in expressing personal meaning in their art work.
7. Students should be able to link their personal stories to a greater social, cultural, or historical context. In varying degrees, they should mirror the current trends of their age group which Western society has identified as a pop culture. While they may identify with their social group, they should also seek out unique ways of pursuing ideas. They may test and question the expectations society and culture poses and should seek to value their own voice as part of that society and culture.

8. Students should transfer lessons learned in English and Social Studies classes to art classes. The study of the narrative genre in literature or in historical documentation shares common elements of literacy such as a setting, as well as symbolic objects and characters that communicate a message. The process of art making has similar communicative elements. Students should be able to use their knowledge of the structure of the verbal and written narrative to assist them with constructing visual narratives.

This project explores the struggle of finding a personal voice in art making and uses the elements of narrative as a strategy for creating works with meaning. During the creative process, a dialogue between artist and studio work should lead to the refinement and clarification of an idea that has personal meaning or is related to universal themes. The experience of the artist working productively in the studio is valid and needs to be modeled in the classroom. Students can find their personal voice by using narrative as a strategy for their art making. They can then begin to see how they fit into the greater social, cultural, and political context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This project explores the use of personal narratives as a strategy for students to bring meaning to their photography. It is guided and inspired by three sources; the British Columbia Ministry of Education, my experiences in the classroom and studio, and the research and writings of academics. During my years of teaching art, art education has changed from an emphasis on historical traditions, methods, and principles to a personal expression of meaning. Student work has also changed from one that explores formal qualities of design to one that selects ideas and subject matter to express personal meaning. This literature review will consider the use of student narratives in creating meaning, the use of photography as a contemporary art form, and finally, the integration of visual imagery with elements and processes of narrative writing.

For students to create art that is meaningful, their imagery should include a knowledge of art as well as personal experiences. In *Visual Arts 11 and 12*, the BC Ministry of Education (2005) states that:

It is expected that students will:

- create images within a specific visual expression area:
 - that reflect personal contexts
 - that express, defend, or challenge beliefs, values, and traditions
 - that reflect historical and contemporary themes
 - that reflect selected art movements
 - for specific purposes (p.46)

In order to meet the Ministry of Education goals, students must have an understanding of the context in which they live. Howard Gardner (1999) strives “for an education that inculcates in students an understanding of major disciplinary ways of thinking” (p.117).

Gardner perceives *understanding* to be the key goal of learning as it will sustain a student's motivation to seek knowledge and skills long after they have left school. In his description of four approaches to achieve understanding, Gardner (1999) suggests that teachers ask students "to try out their own theories" (p.127), to "confront students with ways their current conceptions are inadequate" (p.127), "be given multiple opportunities to apply their knowledge in new ways" (p.129) and "to engage in ongoing reflection and assessment for ways to improve" (p.131). The use of narrative as a strategy in photography challenges students' beliefs, allows them to produce a number of images and then asks them to assess and select for an image that speaks with clarity to their meaning.

Asking students to use personal stories will assist them in finding meaningful imagery for their work. Their familiar narratives are founded on their beliefs, values, and traditions which will allow them to bring personal meaning to their work. Engaging students in problem solving and critiquing refines their choices and moves them to a deeper understanding. In selecting images for their personal meaning, students have more opportunities to create works that are unique. In exploring their choices they should be encouraged to place their work in social, cultural or political contexts that make their work contemporary yet part of a historical artistic tradition.

Using the Terms Narrative and Story

There are two terms in the readings that are used repeatedly: narrative and story. While there are distinctions between the two, they are both products of the teller's perception of a truth and thus both terms will be used in this project.

Narrative is a personal recounting of a past event. While the event may be a true account of what happened, the organization, selection, and emphasis of the sequence are subject to the narrator's understanding of the incident. Jerome Bruner (1991) in *Self Making and World Making* cites "narrative ... necessarily comprises two features: one of them telling what happened to a cast of human beings with a view to the order in which things happened" (p.71). However, Bruner sees that the details and sequence of events are subjected to the selection by the teller's *belief of truth*. For example, when my son returned to the house with a broken toy, he related that while he had been playing, his brother interfered, and the toy was broken. At first, his narrative seemed a true account of his brother causing the destruction of his toy, but, after hearing accounts from observers; his version did not appear completely accurate. His brother was actually yards away and unaware of the toy being broken. While the toy was truly broken, the selection and organization of information implied an untruth.

However, further examination of the story revealed a personal truth. With more understanding of the dynamics of sibling rivalry and the guilt a child has of breaking a favourite toy, my son's account of the event helped him to reflect on his understanding that his brother had nothing to do with the breakage. But to avoid an admission of guilt, he had narrated the event so that he could use his brother as a scapegoat. This further examination of the story revealed that a narrative may have multiple perceptions of truth; each is dependant on the depth of understanding of the narrator, observers, the innocent victim, and the skeptic mother listening to the story.

Stories, such as a fable or fantasy, while appearing fictional can also have truths. The story teller may describe strange characters in alien landscapes achieving

unbelievable feats but the events reveal what the teller believes true about the dynamics of a cause and effect. Children's stories may be our first encounter with fiction and while they may never encounter a troll or a giant they learn about the rewards of good behaviour and the consequences of errors in judgment. The imaginary plot and outcome of the story is rooted in the experiences and beliefs of the story teller. The story is an analogy for a personal truth that teaches social expectations or cultural morals.

Both narrative and story are viable approaches for students to use to explore personal voice and to achieve an understanding about the role they, as tellers, play in the context of their family, community, or culture. Gardner (1999) calls for narrative as an "entry point", and it should be used in the secondary art program for the development of images, meaning, and understanding in art making. Students should create works based on their personal experiences and understanding in the context of their life. They should produce images that reflect their perceived reality and that access the literary tools of narrative and story to help them create images in their personal voice.

The Use of Narrative to Create Meaning

Narrative helps to create meaning in our lives. Stories may tell about the past but they also help us to understand the present. By reflecting on the story, elements begin to emerge, and from questioning the importance of remembered fragments, the significance helps to define our identity.

Stories are didactic. Dyson and Genishi (1994) in "Conclusion: Fulfilling the need for Story" state:

Stories help us construct ourselves, who used to be one way and are now another: stories help make sense of, evaluate,

and integrate the tensions inherent in experience: the past with the present, the fictional with the “real”, the official with the unofficial, the personal with the professional, the canonical with the different or unexpected. Stories help us transform the present and shape the future for our students and ourselves so that it will be richer and better than the past. (p.242-243)

Stories can explain our existence. They can illustrate good behaviour and warn of the consequences of poor judgment. While they transport us to other times, countries, or worlds, they can educate us to cultures and belief systems that help us to understand our affiliation with our neighbour. They can also reveal the dynamics of intimate relationships which help us to understand our own personal connection to friends, family, and lovers. Finally, they can prepare us for future events by giving us knowledge of fictional experiences that may guide us to seek a better resolution to our own life story.

Thus creating a narrative is the “the task of placing those sequential events in terms of a meaningful context” (Bruner, 1991, p.71). So too, the artist must select and position images to create meaning. “But a narrative must also answer the question “Why,” “Why is this worth telling, what is interesting about it?”(Bruner, 1991, p.71). These are also key questions to ask art students. It helps students to focus not on the generic story but to focus on the unique importance of their story as “It must also contain something that endows it with *exceptionality*” (Bruner, 1991, p.71). There are two aspects of the function of the narrative and Bruner (1991) states:

“...we wish to present ourselves to others (and to ourselves) as typical or characteristic or “culture confirming” in some way..... but if it is all givens, then there is no individuality, no modern Self. We are simply mirrors of our culture. To assure individuality ..., we focus upon what, in the light of some folk psychology, is exceptional (and therefore, worthy of “telling”) in our lives.” (p.71)

A student is part of several cultures: their family, their school, the local community, their country (to which they may have newly immigrated), and as a “teenager” living within a social peer group. Through this maze of traditions and expectations of roles, a student must struggle to develop an understanding of their personal identity. It is important that a student know who they are as they are at the edge of life changes and must make plans for their future. In order to make choices which will affect their future, they are asked to identify what is exceptional about them even though they are immersed in a world where they are expected to conform to so many traditional expectations. Art programs should provide opportunities for students to work through these at times conflicting social and cultural views.

Bruner (1991) declares that “literature comes to invent and exemplify forms of deviation” (p.72). So too, art making can ask students to look for the unique within the context of the many social groups to which they belong. While the process of art making may not resolve the problems of conflict, Gardiner (1999) suggests it may allow students ... “to draw on concepts that bear some relevance to the topics at hand: or will indicate which information or resources are needed in order to elucidate the phenomenon” (p.119). By allowing students to search for discrepancies, personal art making allows students to recognize their life and to give it voice. Bruner (1991) states, “what makes for something “interesting” is invariably a “theory” or “story” that runs counter to expectancy or produces an outcome counter to expectancy....it must be a violation of the folk-psychologically canonical that is itself canonical” (p.71-72).

The object of narrative art, then, is to demystify deviations. Narrative solves no problems. It simply locates them in such a way as to make them comprehensible. (Bruner, 1991, p.72)

In teaching, stories are useful tools. Narratives and journal entries by explorers enliven the facts of social studies. Reading the journal of Mackenzie as he explored a passage to the Pacific, helps a student understand the problems Mackenzie had as he negotiated with the Nuxalk people for assistance in guiding him to the ocean. Jerome Bruner (1991) in *Self Making and World Making* states “that autobiography is not *only* about the past but is busily about the present as well” (p.71). Mackenzie’s journal both records his travels to the coast but also reveals a history of relationships that continues to exist in that area today. Mackenzie’s journal recounts the unwillingness of the Nuxalk to venture into the territorial waters of the Heiltsuk people. When his party encounters a party of Heiltsuk people, his guides become extremely nervous and he decides to turn back. Having taught at the Heiltsuk school in Waglisla, British Columbia, I have encountered incidents where there is still a strong sense of propriety between these two First Nations groups. While the event where Mackenzie made his historical decision to turn back is marked by his inscription on the rock outcropping, there are many other markings, known as pictographs, which existed long before his presence in the area. These ancient paintings on rocks still mark sites and important times in the history of the local people. The simplistic images tell viewers of the territories and riches of the Heiltsuk and the Nuxalk people. Stories, too, are markers, recounted with family or friends, which denote events that reaffirm beliefs of the members that have gathered.

In Waglisla, many of the ideas of Jerome Bruner are best exemplified, for the Heiltsuk people have a great history of story telling and art making filled with meaning. Jerome Bruner (1991) states that

“narrative accounts must have at least two characteristics. They should center upon people and their intentional states: their desires,

beliefs, and so on; and they should focus on how these intentional states led to certain activities. Such an account should also be or appear to be order preserving ...”(p.70).

At a Waglisla potlatch, the mask and dance of *Dzunukwa*, **Tsonoqua**, the wild woman of the woods is performed. The elders tell the children not to go into the woods or they will not come back because *Dzunukwa* would capture them. This story warns the children of the dangers of wandering away from the security of the village. While the older children may not believe in the existence of such a wild creature, they are still cautious about going too far into the woods. Yet these same teens are never fearful out on the ocean in the smallest of boats and in all sorts of weather. During the potlatch, the dance of *Dzunukwa* reaffirms their belief in their history.

Thus, as a viewer of the mask and a listener of the story, I am invited to understand this story as a step into understanding their culture. However, personal beliefs and experiences may lead to another association for this wild woman. Traditionally, when a boy was approaching manhood, he would go alone into the woods. It was during this time away that he would perform cleansing sweat baths and have visions. When he returned to the village, he was a man; the child no longer existed. A new name was given. Had *Dzunukwa* taken the child? Was this another meaning for the story of *Dzunukwa*? Even though this may appear to be another truth of the story, there is no recorded evidence that this second level of meaning exists. (M. Black, personal communication, August 14, 2006).

My attaching a meaning to the story does, however, illustrate that a story once told is subject to the interpretations of the viewer. This too may happen when viewing art. Thus, viewing art like story telling creates a dialogue between the teller and the

recipient. Both bring their experiences and knowledge to the work and create their understanding based on personal context. This possibility of a deviation of meaning must be considered and without sharing similar experience or having a discussion with the teller, the truth will not be similar. Historically, the early writings of explorers and missionaries have provided examples of inaccurate interpretations of foreign cultures. How could they be accurate when they were outside observers using their limited knowledge to describe and explain a culture they had just met. This too happens when art is created. While the artist creates in visual form his experiences and story, the viewer's understanding of the image is also based on personal experiences, knowledge, and cultural perceptions. Viewers may find true empathy for visual images if they share similarities to their own experiences.

As we gain experiences, the stories we tell can reveal different understandings about our life. For the young child, a story may be about the loss of a favourite toy or a cautionary tale about wandering off into the woods. For the adult, the same story may reveal the true feelings of having a sibling or it may mark the rite of passage into adulthood. Thus, the teller moves from the black and white of fear and consequences to a deeper more philosophical level of metaphor and meaning. Stories may include many levels of meaning, and it is the teller's experiences and knowledge that guide and reveal the layers of meaning. So too, the teacher can guide the student viewer, depending on their knowledge and experiences, to see the levels of meaning in art as is done in English literature. In teaching English, these levels of meaning are known as literal and inferential. The literal level encompasses the facts as they appear. The inferential level

requires a higher order of thinking to see implied meaning and greater complexities of understanding. So too, these multiple levels of meaning can be presented in works of art.

Again, looking at the rich, linear designs of the Heiltsuk people, the graphic images describe not only the features of animals but tell of the strength of an ordered society that values the lessons learned from nature and their importance to the community. The depiction of the animal's features focuses on their natural abilities as provider, protector, and leader. Those characteristics are valued and emulated by members of family and community. The image's literal references to the animal's features represent the behaviour of the animal; the inferred references are the analogies to honoured roles that form a basic structure of the community. The connection between the animal's story and a personal story are a result of depicting the evidence whether it be in oral, written, or visual form.

Narrative Turning Points

A closer look at narratives helps the teller to locate themselves in the context of their social, cultural or political environment. In acquiring knowledge and new experiences over time, the teller's understanding of self may lead to a change in their point of view. Students have similar periods of growth and can learn to use these changes as sources of inspiration for their imagery.

Bruner (1999) calls these stories "*turning points*", because they "represent a way in which people free themselves in their self-consciousness from their history, their banal destiny, their conventionality" (p.74). Retelling past stories with renewed understanding allows the teller to see new layers of meaning and "to examine the social norm and

contrast it with provocative ideas that test conventions” (Bruner, 1991, p.74). It becomes a setting where the belief structure can be suspended and the thoughts of the protagonist challenged. Bruner uses the example of high school graduation as a time when students reach such a point in their life and find the freedom to challenge their past beliefs and, subsequently create new interpretations of their story. Thus, the secondary art program should use this opportune time to provide students, who are in their final years of high school, with lessons involving personal stories that may assist them in preparing for the *turning points* which Bruner states they are approaching.

Boyd White (2005) asks art teachers to consider teaching approaches that encourage students to create visual narratives based on their personal social context (p.9). In “What’s the Story?”, he describes using the story of Rumpelstiltskin for an art methods lesson with Inuit teachers. As part of the project, he asked them to see the story as a metaphor to some aspect of life in their community. Many of the Inuit teachers used the image of spinning for gold as a metaphor for their local art production and sale to tourists and collectors. However, Boyd describes one student teacher, who rather than focus on the theme and imagery of creating traditional products for profit, used the imagery of a woman locked in a pill bottle to express a similar feeling to that of the trapped princess. She used the metaphor to describe her life with tuberculosis and how she, like the princess, felt trapped until rescued (White, 2005). White quotes Witherell (1991) where he notes that:

this synthesis provides ...an “integration of value, purpose and meaning, where value represents the valence we attach to the present, purpose entails our sense of future possibility and aspirations, and meaning is our memory and interpretation of the past”. (p.8)

The practice of illustrating a fable with contemporary images may help students to recognize their own story. By asking students to select a story from their past and to create it in terms of contemporary issues, they can apply the analogy to their life history.

Gary Hoff (1982) also considers the use of comic books as a viable narrative approach to art making. Students can select an imaginary figure or location as a metaphor for their personal story. For them it is often easier to use a *stand in* for themselves and their lives. Removed, they are free to observe and explore the conflict and resolution as they work out the events of their story. Stereotypical figures and locations can be substituted to exemplify feelings for real personalities or events. Hoff notes that comics like folk tales share several similar literary elements: the theme of good versus evil, the plot of how the hero overcomes the villain, a setting that is imaginary or of another time, and “that the physical laws governing the planet have somehow become inoperable” (1982, p.21). He uses this primarily visual narrative form as a motivational tool because it taps into “student’s interests to enrich their art experience and hopefully prolong it” (Hoff, 1982, p.23). Comics, from Manga art to super heroes have a current appeal to teenage students. The genre is easily accessible on the internet and bookstores have sections dedicated on how to create heroes, villains, and aliens. However, it is not the ability to copy the style but the ability of the format to access a student’s story that is critical. Students are usually familiar with the use of narrative in literature and using the familiar format of the comic can allow them to transfer their narratives from the verbal to the visual. Further, Hoff (1982) suggests art teachers plan lessons that integrate literary terms and work collaboratively with a literature teacher. The advantages of such cross curricular support will be discussed further in this paper.

The Search for Meaning in Contemporary Art Forms

It is not only folktales and comics that encourage students to apply personal narratives to visual form. Contemporary art that uses the visual narrative and its experimental and non-formulated processes could allow students to be free of pre-conceived expectations of what their work should be.

Dennis Atkinson (2006) in *School Art Education: Mourning the Past and Opening a Future*, “argues for learning through art to be viewed as a productive practice of meaning-making within the life-worlds of students” (p.16). He states that future art education does not need to throw out the traditional skills but needs to look at contemporary art practices, and thus create projects that are open ended as “tightly organized curriculum closes down the space of learning” (p.25). He suggests art projects should be learning based with students searching for image and text, experimenting, and responding in a multiple of manners that “explore personal and social identities often in context of deep social conflict” (p. 25).

Frances Corner (2005) in “Identifying the Core in the subject of Fine Art” calls for curriculum to develop alternative ways of thinking, seeing, and conceptualizing, “that gives graduates a set of abilities that are particularly relevant to our complex society” (p.334). She believes that the curriculum of Fine Arts needs to evolve from teaching skills and aesthetics to developing “critical, contextual and conceptual skills” (2005, p.341). While Corner considers this a key change of approach for his graduate fine art students, the same should be considered for secondary art students. Secondary students also “need to experience a variety of physical and intellectual challenges to enable them

to understand that boundary pushing, problem solving and learning through failure are the cornerstones of a fine art course and what it is to be an artist” (Corner, 2005, p.341).

A caution is advised on the use of the word *failure* and students should be advised to expect mistakes and to use them as opportunities for new ideas. For example, double exposed photo paper may lead to juxtaposition, underexposed paper may be re-exposed for solarization, and overexposed images may be bleached, coloured or drawn on. The focus of the approach must be problem solving in order to allow students to refine their ideas for clarity of meaning.

Before students take steps into the unfamiliar, they need to first work with what is familiar such as personal stories. They should be free to explore their own voice and be encouraged to experiment with approaches that provide them with the best methods of clearly expressing that voice. Then, as Corner (2005) states, “students graduate from their fine art courses understanding what it means to create and contextualize their work, as well as understanding the relevance of their work to other areas of society and economy” (p.341).

Also working with post secondary students, Fiona Blaikie (2006) notes in “Becoming meaning junkies: Art education epistemologies and aesthetics in conflict as students transition from high school to university fine arts programs in Canada” that students applying for art school present unsatisfactory portfolios that are products of high school art programs that are “formulaic”(p.66). Blaikie (2006) agrees with studies done by Dalton (2001) and states that teachers have too long depicted the artist as “the lone genius, isolated and insulated from society and its problems in pursuit of the purely visual aesthetic” (p.70). She also concurs with Gablik’s studies that teachers need to

introduce contemporary artists, as students will be compelled to “expand their visual aesthetic to embrace social, cultural and political consciousness” (Gablik cited by Blaikie, 2006, p.71).

A study of British school art programs which used visits to contemporary galleries has “tentatively drawn conclusions about how the curriculum may be better served by the use of contemporary art, as well as the means by which new learning methods may be facilitated” (Page et al, 2006, p.146). By allowing students to model the contemporary process, it “immediately places the pupil in a questioning situation extending what they understand art to mean” (Page et al, 2006, p.149). The approach of Contemporary Art is useful to present to students as its ideas share with the narrative a search for self in context of social, cultural and political. Surveyed teachers felt “it shows that they (students) could do something like that if they have seen something that represents them in it or they perhaps think that the artist is very similar to them in whatever they are expressing” (Page et al, 2006, p.151).

Contemporary Art also allows the artist to access a great range of materials and techniques which they were free to incorporate into their work. This freedom encourages students to develop attitudes of questioning, slowing the final outcome and asking students to consider the relationship of materials and ideas, and thus, to “see that their identity as a practitioner goes beyond the school context” (Page et al, 2006, p.152). “The indicators of success for many were the transformation in the pupil’s way of seeing the world, especially where the teacher perceived that this gave them a renewed view of their own cultural identity” (Page et al, 2006, p.152).

Photography as a Contemporary Art Form

One medium widely explored by the contemporary artist is the photo image. The photo image provides many opportunities for exploration as it may be digitized, appropriated or altered but it may also include the traditional black and white print. The recognition of photography as an art form has a tenuous history and the debate continues in current readings. However, this medium has allowed artists to approach its use for art making through a wide variety of experimentations to evoke meaning.

Roy Quan (1979) describes photography as an American ritual yet he is concerned that there has been “little educational discussion of still photography’s function as a medium suited to social inquiry and its role in helping students better understand their surroundings and experiences” (p.4). Citing Eisner’s (1976) statement that “art is about seeing and creating meaning”, Quan (1979, p.4) believes that photography also has the ability to create meaning and can “be considered an expressive form worthy of inclusion in the curriculum”. He illustrates the potential for meaning in photography by describing three approaches: anthropological, normative, and intuitive (1979, p.6-9). The anthropological approach is documentary and acts like a “window into the lives of others” (p.6). It has the ability to freeze time.

Where the subject, the setting, and the activity mutually intersect to climax at a single point in time. Here the viewer is asked to ponder the consequences, to infer purpose, to hypothesize a possible outcome, to go beyond the photographic information in order to contemplate the meaning of the image. (Quan, 1979, p.6)

The second approach is the normative that includes the family album which “mirrors the lives of the viewers” (p.8). The photos record family gatherings at special events and contain “hidden meanings that remain known only to family members” (p.8). The third approach is the intuitive which Quan has broken into two sub-forms. The first,

transparent, is the “police photo” which records the reality without intrusion of the photographer; while the second, *opaque*, is staged by the photographer based their beliefs. Quan (1979) concludes that:

“in our need to seek understanding of the world, the photographic medium gives shape to our encounters with life; and by bracketing what we know, it enables us to analyze and re-conceptualize our experiences to better understand the layers of reality that lie between the phenomenon and the idea. In short, photographic inquiry is a means of contemplating the world, of producing harmony and order which is the creation of meaning”. (p.9)

Although Quan wrote about the potential of photography in 1979, there was still a question whether photography was being fully valued when Stanley (2003) in his initial survey of student use of photography found many works were governed by the technical process. In his study, National Diploma photography students “were both resistant to and disorientated when asked to consider issues of social context, to engage in critical practice” (p.136). In contrast to these students, Stanley (2003) looked at community projects in Britain and studied three groups of students using photo images to record their daily lives. While the students were given technical assistance, they “rarely” were “concerned with the technology in itself” (p.140).

“Rather they have treated both photography and digital manipulation as means to an end – producing images that express aspects of themselves in a way they find both pleasing and convincing, and reflective of their engagement with the wider world. (Stanley, 2003, p.140).

Another important study of photography as an art form is by Barbara Savedoff (2006) in “Transforming Images: Photographs of Representations”. She compares how we view photographs and paintings and offers new insights into their differences. She finds that it is the differences that give photographs powerful potential in revealing

meaning. Because photos are perceived as having the ability to be “objective records”, the viewer “cannot simply adopt paintings critical principles” (Sayedoff, 2006, p. 93). She states that “special critical principles for photography are needed” (2006, p. 94). Photographs record both real objects and photos of real objects in the same two dimensions giving them an equality of power. Because colour is removed in black and white photos, the hierarchy of objects is lost and an ambiguity is created that causes the viewer to look at the combination of objects within the photo in new ways (Sayedoff, 2006, p.105). The juxtaposition of real and photos of objects can create powerful messages.

Quan and Sayedoff’s insights into the unique properties of photography have often been exemplified in contemporary art. Contemporary artists use the potential of photography to explore new strategies and to incorporate imagery that conveys the personal meaning of their work.

Contemporary Photographers: Mary Maclean, Maritza Molina, and Jeff Wall.

Examining the works of contemporary photographers, the viewer can find the historical shift from recording the object to creating meaningful imagery that reveals fragments of personal stories. While the starting point may have been personal, the works are clearly connected to more universal themes.

Mary Maclean (2007) explains how her photos move from a record of space to metaphor. She chooses the edges of interior locations. She finds the architectural spaces that “are anonymous, off to the side, unremarkable. But they act as powerful witnesses to a mode of existence and carry the traces of that existence” (p.261). To some of her works

she adds mark making, while others are recorded on aluminum sheets giving her works, she believes, more connection to drawing methods and thus creating new ways of thinking about the images. Maclean (2007) describes the ambiguity of her work,

The work ties itself to a single place, a library, meshed in the particularities of that site. At the same time it resists devotion to this specificity, opening up the image to a wider space that is recognized as culturally systematized (p.264).

Denise Carvalho (2008) in his review of an exhibition by Maritza Molina states her photographs “draw from three main influences: the ambiguous relationship between family traditions, her ritualized connection to nature, and the traumatic experiences suffered during her family’s escape from Cuba” (p.6). She transitions from her personal experiences by using bits of memory to reveal a social and political history of “women and other oppressed groups in many patriarchal societies” (p.9). Maritza incorporates staged objects and figures that the viewer wouldn’t expect to find in the natural surroundings. Examples are textile silhouettes of female figures in the trees that encircle a woman and her spinning wheel, and the artist draped over a clothesline among clothes and other objects. “Maritza Molina’s work is as powerful as it is complex, full of layers that reflect the reversal of our actions in society” (Carvalho, 2008, p.9).

Jeff Wall, whose early works of the 70’s reflects Quan’s category of “intuitive opaque” with staged scenes, seem real but are founded on historical paintings. Murray Whyte (2005) describes Wall’s *The Destroyed Room* as a “contemporary appropriation of Eugene Delacroix’s *The Death of Sardanapalus* (p.118). Whyte sees Wall’s early works as “*near-documentary*, pictures conjured from a remembered scene that Wall reconstructs later, as a painter might: removed from the event, but marked, somehow, by having seen it” (p.118). More recent works by Wall seem to be less staged and Whyte says they are

“bereft of both figures and any hint of narrative” (p.120). However, while Wall says he primarily considers the composition, Whyte continues to find the works “teeming with meaning” (p.120).

While these artists have used photography as their choice of medium, their primary intent has been to reveal a personal view of their self in a social, cultural, or political context. Students in responding to the works should pay close attention to the creative process which selects and manipulates the setting for photographic purposes. The created images depend on our acceptance of photos as documents of reality and use strategies of metaphor to link personal stories with a focus on social comments. As Quan (1979) has suggested, the documentation format of the imagery creates a sense of validity that viewers respond to by searching the imagery on a deeper level.

The Use of Narrative in Contemporary Art Education

Narrative strategies as the focus of course content are being incorporated by educators in some post-secondary fine arts programs. Both art education and visual arts programs have had success with students using the narrative to create meaningful works that deal with self-identity issues in the context of social, cultural, and political communities. In both programs, students often use photography as a method of expressing their views.

In teaching a graduate studio course in art education, Linda Szabad-Smyth (2005) used personal narratives based on “Denizen’s metaphor of discovering new meanings by revisiting the past” (p.7). Her course description declares that “students will be encouraged to investigate the use of metaphor, reflection and interpretation as they

explore memory, identity, and autobiography in their own art production” (p.7). Students were given topics such as “places, spaces, the body, interior/exterior self, and gatherings,” as possible starting points for locating their narratives (p.7). Many of the resulting student works incorporated photo images. They ranged from images of childhood and family members to places sacred and familiar. Some photos were the support for additional text, images, or objects while other photos were applied to a variety of medium supports including windows and tiles. The photos were not the reason for the work but were an integral part of creating the meaning. Szabad-Smyth cites graduate student, Marrisra Largo, who stated “the framework of the narrative supports multiple approaches and themes and provides a conceptual field where artists of different media and intents come together on common ground, yet maintain their unique ways of working” (p.15). Szabad-Smyth concludes that “by shifting emphasis from product to process and working from self, students were free to experiment and acquire new layers of meaning about how they produce art and what they produce as art” (p.15).

Sandra Semchuk (2004) developed her third year photography course based on students using personal stories. In the course offered at Emily Carr Institute, she asks:

How do we tell a story in an age of information using photography? Story can locate both teller and recipient in the transitional experience of coming to know. Where we come to know, how, when and with whom are questions that lead towards the authorship of our own lives - those stories that constitute living immediate culture.
(<http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/206/288>)

After the submission of images to the course website, students partake in a dialogue about their narratives and explore the meaning of their own work and how others perceive their work. The photographic images are digitized and

posted to the website. Using digital software also allows students to select, alter, and montage images to suit their needs to express their story. The discussion on the website helps students to clarify their work as a personal narrative and to see it as part of a global community. Having been a student in the course, my imagery progressed from gathering an inventory of interesting and familiar images to exploring their connections to personal meaning and reframing my experiences in a more global context as I shared my stories with other artists both locally and, through the internet, with artists in a similar course in Australia.

While contemporary artists and post secondary institutions have shifted their approach to meet the needs of finding self in personal and global contexts, secondary school art programs need to do more. Students need to be challenged to explore personal narratives through guided steps and discussion. In 1984, W.D. Greer described the learning approaches of Disciplined-Based Art Education as shifting art education away from product making to idea generation. The ability of students to acquire ideas “takes place by studying specific works of art, using activities designed to develop specific student knowledge and understanding” (Greer, 1984, p.214). The components of art history and art criticism are reinforced with studio practice which “teaches that the artist skillfully uses various media to make visual images that are metaphors for something of human import” (p.214). Secondary school students are usually familiar with the use of metaphor and narrative in their writing. I believe they are capable of understanding how images like text can convey meaning. I also believe that students have valid experiences that are worth sharing. Thus, given the structure

for idea generation and the strategies to explore personal memories and stories, they will be able to create images “that reflect personal contexts, that express, defend, or challenge beliefs, values, and traditions, (and) that reflect historical and contemporary themes” (BC Ministry, 2005, p.46).

Transferring Experiences from Other Disciplines.

Students, familiar with using personal stories in their English classes, should use those experiences to assist them with their art making. Photographic art as a form of communication can give visual voice to personal stories as it has to global events. From fleeting images of fragmented memories to harsh, dramatic “neo-documentary”, photography should engage the viewer in the dialogue. Using experiences taken from other subjects has potential to enhance learning across disciplines. An example of such practice is when photographs are used in the language arts classroom to initiate writing projects. While educational research focuses on the ability of the visual arts to enhance literacy and while it may consider the enhancement of the visual arts, it does not elaborate how the transference is to be reciprocal.

Judith Burton (2000) in a study of data on transference declares that it may not occur unless there are shared skills. For example, she cites that “Perkins (1994) has long argued, and persuasively, that thinking skills do not generalize beyond the context in which they are learned unless teachers directly address transfer and encourage youngsters to use their skills and competencies in other subject domains” (p.230). Secondly, research has primarily considered the transference from art to other disciplines but Burton (2000) offers that “teaching that assumes transfer along a one way street denies to arts learning a

measure of dynamic interaction back and forth along a two way street that might add richness to youngsters' competencies and skills" (p.254). Thus, art teachers should consider their lessons supporting student's learning in other disciplines and that reciprocity is possible through a consultation process with teachers of other disciplines, thus ensuring shared skills.

James Catterall (2002), in his essay "*The Arts and the Transfer of Learning*", makes the case for more study between learning in the arts and student achievement but he cautions it is an assumption not always supported by research. However, he suggests that the possibility of transfer may be linked to how the brain learns and refers to studies of cognition and the role of the brain when confronted with new experiences.

"Experiences reorganize neural pathways, neural receptors and function of specific brain regions such that subsequent experiences are received differently" (p.152). Experiences in the fine arts can, he states, provide the laying of new neural paths that "create capabilities of motivations that show up in non-arts capabilities" (p.152). Based on the studies present in *Critical Links*, he compiles an inventory of experiences in the fine arts and aligns them with "cognitive capacities and motivations to learn" in non-arts areas. His list, he believes, is "valid results of learning or engagement with the arts" (p.154).

Nick Rabkin (2002) in his review of *Critical Links* states that the music educator Larry Scripp proposes:

that if learning is a process of integrating knowledge from multiple domains, then teaching will be most effective when it, too, is integrated. The new frontier in arts education will be self-conscious efforts to maximize transfer through curriculum and pedagogy that is "circular" rather than linear (<http://www.ijsa.org/v3r3/>).

As an example of that circular process, teachers of English should consider alternate approaches that integrate skills from other disciplines to enhance learning and skill development in writing. Darlene Proulx (2002) suggests introducing visual strategies to young writers to enhance their learning and she cites Olsen when he states that “the visual child can be taught to improve his or her writing skills not *in spite of* visual inclinations, but through them” (Olsen as cited by Proulx, p.32). Proulx, in considering methods to improve writing, suggests visual prompts such as allowing students to draw their ideas as part of the prewriting process. She cites research by Olsen who also confirms that support of visual imagery to the written can be reciprocal as “pictures can provide additional information to word for the visual learner, and words can provide additional information to pictures for the verbal learner. One informs the other” (p.32). Olsen is further cited that “when children are educated with both the visual and the verbal modes of learning (the verbal mode being presupposed), they can move back and forth between these domains without effort” (Olsen as cited by Proulx, p.32).

The prewriting process in language arts has similarities to the process of art making and thus the possibility of transference of experiences should be considered. Catherine Read (2006) in her paper *Fine Art, Imagination, and Literacy* examines “how exercising one’s imagination in the fine arts can contribute to the development of literacy” (p.1). She concludes her paper stating “participation in various parallel forms of expression that integrates art, imagination, and language create a solid foundation for excellence in literacy” (p.13). In the appendix to her paper, Read illustrates parallels between the processes of writing and creating art. The stages of writing are compared to

stages of art making as they both share the steps of “brain storming, creating initial product, revising it and sharing it with others” (Read, 2006, p.14).

Both art and language art share the experience of analyzing works for meaning. Art criticism is an essential component of art education. Using E. B. Feldman’s (1982) model of analysis, students should be able to create an inventory of objects, colours and elements, to consider relationships between the selected details as essential information, to find meaning in the treatment of the details and in the associations created within the work, and finally to achieve an informed understanding of how the work is part of a continuum in art practices. “Explaining or interpreting a work of art, then, involves discovering its meanings and also stating the relevance of these meanings to our lives and to the human situation in general” (Feldman, 1982, p.645). Then, in the converse, students should be able to not only apply Feldman’s model when studying great works of art but also during the process of their own creations. T. Barrett in “*About Art Interpretation for Art Education*” (2000), states that “by carefully telling or writing what we see and feel and think and do when looking at a work of art, we build an understanding” (p.7). Using art criticism to self critique helps students to ensure that the details of their work help to build their story. Understanding how to interpret works helps students to structure the components of their story in their work and then others may find connections in the work to their own experiences.

If lessons in other disciplines use parallel processes, there is the potential for enhanced learning. Art educators can acknowledge the parallels in various stages of writing when assisting a student’s creative search for meaning in their art. Through

critical viewing and reflection, students will hopefully develop a clearer understanding of the art process which will lead to meaning making in their own work.

Examples from the Language Arts curriculum, based on text writing, and the creative approach of a narrative writer, illustrate how the writing process, ideas, and vocabulary could be integrated into planning the art lesson. The BC Ministry of Education in the curriculum guide for English 11 states “a literacy of thoughtfulness is primarily a process of making meaning (not just receiving it) and negotiating it with others (not just thinking alone). It is fundamentally constructive” (Brown, as cited in BC Ministry of Education, 2007, p.18). In order for students to become thinkers, “they need opportunities to read, discuss, and respond” (Steineke, as cited in BC Ministry of Education, 2007, p.19). “With modeling, practice, and support, students’ thinking and understanding are deepened as they work with engaging content and participate in focussed conversations” (Steineke, 2002 as cited in BC. Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 19). Writing as described by the Ministry is influenced by three contemporary approaches: process, genre, and metacognitive. Process is the *recursive* stages of writing from draft to published work. (BC Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 28) Genre is the approach of introducing and providing experiences with the various forms of writing. (BC Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 28) The metacognitive “seeks to expand students’ ability to stand back and reflect critically on his or her ideas” (BC Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 28). Metacognitive approaches are important as “researchers have also shown that “metacognitive practices... increase the degree to which students transfer [their learning] to new settings and events” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, as cited in BC Ministry of Education IRP p.19).

Using the Elements of Writing

In the text, *Developing Writing Skills*, the authors West, Bailey, and Wood (1981) suggest that you begin to write the narrative with your own personal experiences. This is the raw material from which you explore and find “new significance and many additional meanings” (p.261). “Many events without additional insights might not be worth reading about, but with the action sharpened and highlighted and with the meanings explored, they become interesting and important” (p.261). In order to give clarity of meaning to a work, it is critical that the details be carefully scrutinized for their intended meaning. Ambiguity is only useful if “all possible meanings are appropriate and enrich your narration” (West et al, 1981, p.266). Cropping in photography is a similar skill where the art student like the writer must “choose, ... the incisive, important details, and make them clear and memorable” (West et al, 1981, p.272).

Jack Hodgins (2001) in *A Passion for Narrative* when describing the writing process states that “a story can begin with anything, however small, so long as it fascinates or worries or puzzles me enough” (p.31). He suggests that writers look to a person, event, idea, place, voice, or metaphor as a starting point and “sooner or later a second element will present itself – equally puzzling at first – which may be eventually seen to have some connection to the first” (Hodgins, 2001, p.31). He asks writers to look for the connections and it will be at that point “where some kind of explosion occurs, where fuzzy characters come clear and a story begins to take on life” (Hodgins, 2001, p.31). Hodgins like West asks writers to consider the use of details that can reveal the message of the story. Details including the setting of time provide in the short story “a

sharp insight into a moment of human life” and so the writer must focus on a “wise selection of telling details, the surprise, the caught out, the strangely absent, and the ominous hint of a future” (p.84). The photography student in composing images should use Hodgins suggestions and consider time, place, as well as whether to include or crop out details as important factors in conveying their message.

In preparing the student to create images, there are many elements of the writing process that art educators should consider when using narrative strategies. Knowledge and experiences in the English classroom can be acknowledged by the art teacher and can provide familiar ground for students to build their exploration of ways to communicate their ideas visually. Art students can not only model their stages of writing and the metacognitive approach but can use the suggestions of writers on how to select details and use them to connect to the meaning of their creative works.

Summary

The use of narrative is a viable strategy to help students create photo images with personal meaning. Students who use personal stories to generate ideas for art meet the visual art learning outcome that “reflects a personal context” and “to express, defend or challenge beliefs, values, or traditions” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 46). Narratives strategies allow students to begin with personal memories and then through a process of sorting, reflecting, and selecting find connections that are significant. Through this personal process of experimentation and critical thinking, students will discover details that convey unique meanings in their work. Using the problem solving process that is

inherent in narrative will help them to identify themselves in context of their social, political and cultural community. It is the visual process of editing that Eisner (1984) says will “develop the ability to judge, assess to experience a range of meanings that exceed what we are able to say in words” (p.9).

Secondary students in the graduation program are in transition and narrative strategies can help them locate themselves and recognize that they are at a “turning point” where they may find themselves at odds with their previous beliefs. Narrative is a strategy used by contemporary artists which offers a means of personal expression and is a reflection of current social, cultural, and political issues. Students should use approaches that incorporate their personal context and yet give them permission to explore the new and challenge traditional materials and methods. The development of new materials and technologies has led to the artist’s freedom to experiment both with new and traditional techniques. This freedom has meant that choices need to be made with consideration to the significance of the application and its effect on the meaning of the work.

Photography is a form of art which is ideally suited for this purpose. Images are easily appropriated, altered, and added to, and traditional photo prints can be staged in order to tell their story. For students, photography is a viable contemporary art form which encourages them to select, crop, emphasize, and manipulate details within the image to tell their story.

Finally, art educators should look to the recommendation of Howard Gardner (1999) who suggests that a “multiple intelligences perspective can enhance understanding” (p.186). Using the narrative strategy engages students in personal narratives that provide “a powerful point of entry”, using approaches to writing offers “models from familiar

territory”, and allowing freedom to explore a variety of methods supports the uniqueness of each student. Students so supported will be partners to effective education in which, Gardner states, “deep understanding should be our central goal” (p.186).

STUDIO EXPLORATIONS

Introduction

My studio work explores personal narratives as a strategy to bring meaning to the creation of my images. It is guided and inspired by my studies in art history, my living on the Coast of British Columbia, and my ever changing involvement in teaching students about art. The studio work in this chapter documents my process of exploration of imagery as story telling.

I have always enjoyed a good story. Long after the story is told, I mull over the bits. Fragmented details of my memory are triggers to building chapters that eventually complete my story. As an art historian, I have come to understand that my journey although personal is also intertwined with the past. I have walked among temple ruins in Athens, Greece, visited centers where Renaissance art and architecture flourished in Florence, Italy, and touched the ancient totem poles of the Haida people in Skidegate, British Columbia. In the traditions of artists before me, I have sculpted, painted, and carved. I have studied the stories of master artists and like them have struggled to create meaningful works. As an artist and teacher I have applied the approach of the masters to problem solving in my own work and have modeled these approaches for my students.

I use my camera as if it were a sketchbook. It records a multitude of objects, locations, and events that become the beginnings of my search for a story. Some of my photos reveal things I missed at first glance. The physical cropping of an image removes clutter and focuses on salient details. Working with black and white negatives allows me to see composition as forms and shapes. This refocuses my attention, often revealing a

new direction for my art making. I am both a critical viewer and a creator in this interplay. Not all of my photos start as records of natural occurrences, some are staged. By adding or juxtaposing selected objects, the created images are personal metaphors. Reversing the situation is also possible. Natural objects can be relocated in unexpected ways.

Dislocation is a theme in my life's journey. As a new teacher, my first assignment took place in a small, isolated coastal village. The occasional trip to visit my family in the city required a long and arduous ride on a float plane or an overnight trip on a coastal ferry. My cultural background was different and often at odds with my students. However, they, too, were suffering a dislocation from the traditions of their past. The community and school had recently regained control of their local government and were on the verge of a reconnection to the story of their past. Language and dance were being taught to the children and *potlatching* was once again becoming an important event to acknowledge coming of age, marriage, and memorials. In those years of living on the coast, I was honoured to attend several potlatches and it was from that history that the themes of story and witness emerged as a foundation for my work.

Finally, teaching has been an opportunity for artistic growth and it is often my students who are my teachers. Their ability to fearlessly use technology has pushed me to explore its use as a contemporary tool. Digital photography has not only made collecting and altering images easier, but has allowed for the more effective reproduction and combination of images with a variety of mediums. The ability to mix and apply traditional mediums with new technology has provided innovative ways of expressing my ideas. My studio work, although photo based, includes painting,

printmaking, and sculptural methods as part of the creative process. They are integral to telling a story. In sharing ideas with my students, they too, have come to understand that digital technology is only one of many ways to express ideas. They have also learned that while they may feel the pressure to constantly upgrade to keep up with new methods and technologies, it is how effectively they communicate that is really important.

Objects As Witness: Telling Their Story

I wish to begin my story telling on a small beach on the west coast of British Columbia. I lived and taught in the area for three years in a small, coastal village. Weekends were spent hunting and fishing from a small boat. I gradually became familiar with and came to recognize changes in the natural features of the shoreline. Occasionally, there appears along the coast, beaches that are without the usual jumble of rocks as if someone had swept and tidied. Going ashore at these locations, there seems to be a planned order and if you step into the woods, you might find a depression that was once the site of a great longhouse. These were the ancestral homes of my aboriginal students. Under heavy blankets of moss you can still find enormous cedar beams. As I walked through the hushed forest, imagined memories of burning cedar, drumming, and sweet salmon are stirred within me. As I walked back to the beach, on one occasion I kicked over a stone and a face etched into the rock stared back at me. How long had it been there? I thought of the potlatches where a guest is invited to witness important moments in their history. This beach had at one time been cleared to allow great canoes to come ashore. Was this rock a silent witness to such great events? I could put my fingers into

the grooves where an artist, perhaps the ancestor of one of my students, had brushed the dust away as he had sculpted the stone. What stories could be told?

The idea that inanimate objects contain stories became the starting point to a series of art works. Beginning with the concept of rocks as silent recorders of time and events, I photographed them first with natural objects found in their location and later juxtaposed them with man-made objects. The rocks, embedded and resilient to the passage of time, have become silent witnesses to a multitude of stories.



Figure 1 Mask in Water
Media: Digital print
Dimensions: 16.5" x 11"
2008

In some of the images, water is incorporated to represent the passage of time. As time alters our memories, a wave washes and brings change as it erodes, dislodges, or buries the rocks and objects. In telling about various events that have occurred in my life, I have created a series of imagery anchored by the rock and washed by water. From this series emerges a theme of change that is marked by loss: loss of memory, loss of abilities,

and loss of optimism. Among those images, I see myself as a mask that is a witness to my stories and while time may fragment or erode details, there is a moment when I remember. I have stories to tell.



Figure 2 Waiting for Inspiration
Media: silver gelatin print
Dimensions: 16" x 11"
2005

What is the connection of an empty coffee mug, an open window, and a small plant? This is the story of reflection and anticipation. The morning light shines, the coffee has been consumed, time is passing, and yet we are waiting. The plant, having sunlight and soil, is healthy and growing. Why are we still there looking at the image? This collection of objects represents my days at university. Like Albrecht Durer's etching of *Melancholia*, I am surrounded by objects that have significance. Many an hour was spent mulling possibilities. Seemingly unable to grab hold of an idea, waiting, and yet

unlike *Melancholia*, there is optimism as indicated by the open window and morning light. There is the possibility of a beginning. Ideas will come. The window is open.

This work marks the beginning of my interest in gathering objects in the tradition of the still life yet they are selected to tell about my state of being. The still life has had many functions in the history of art. At times, its painting was a display of masterly techniques with the artist able to illustrate his skill at reproducing the texture of hair, the fine stitchery of textiles and jewellery, and the quality of light reflected from metal, glass, and water. The use of still life changed with the surrealists: objects had the ability to reveal the world of dreams. If you were to compare my work to the work of Dutch masters, you could see it has not laboured to extol perfection. In fact, it shows the window is smudged. You may want to compare the work to that of the surrealist and while not representative of dreams, it tells of my dreaming for what may come. It is the beginning of my study of the object as witness to my story.

I continue to photograph objects and collections of objects. In 2005, when I first started my Masters project, I photographed rusted and broken objects on beaches, rare and precious objects in antiques shops, and ordinary objects in thrift shops. I explored several possibilities for telling story. For example, man-made objects, at one time carefully drafted, crafted and used, told the story of use and abandonment. This story, is similar to the story of aging as the elderly, once important individuals, appreciated for their contributions, when they grow old, are often forgotten. While objects are tools for work, creativity, and pleasure, they are also connections to our stories. We make choices on whether to keep objects based not just on their functionality but also on their value.

Our collection of objects can reveal status, beliefs, and memories. Do we cherish our elders in a similar manner?



Figure 3 The Minutiae of Memories
Media: contact silver gelatin print
Dimensions: 16" x 20"
2009

At present my mother is the keeper of our family story. She values that history and has recorded it in her collection of miniatures. Each building is a story from her life: a general store from her youth, a farm house filled with memories of her husband, a bakery she liked to escape to when caring for her elderly mother. Will this be my future role? As an elder will I be the keeper of our family's memories?

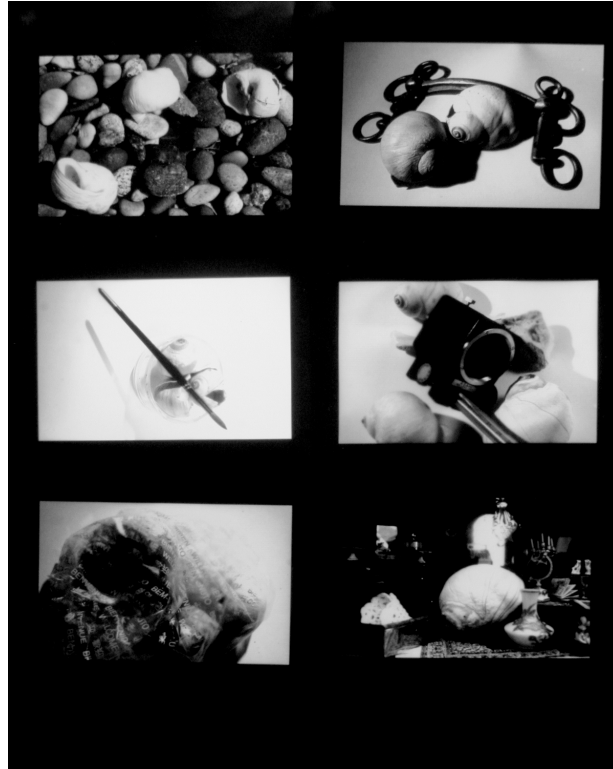


Figure 4 Shell Journal
 Media: contact silver gelatin print
 Dimensions: 16" x 20"
 2009

This panel of six prints is connected by one constant: moon shells collected from the Queen Charlotte Islands or Haida Gwaii as it is now known. The shells record *turning points* of my life. Each image is a chapter of relocation or reinvention in my story. The first of the shells among the rocks meets our expectation yet the setting is staged and the shells have been relocated some 750 kilometers from their original location. The shells represent my sense that who I am lies in my attachment to nature and, like the shells, I am dislocated from my true home. Three plates in the series contain the shells juxtaposed with objects: the water colour brush, a camera attachment, and a horse bit. These are the tools that have been instrumental in my reinvention. Each has been a challenge to learn and each has sustained me. They represent my continued quest

for creativity, knowledge, and physical activity. The shells contained within the plastic bag represent a period when I was not able to access the full capacities of my brain due to a fall and concussion. Yet the bag is covered with text of various translations for the word welcome. While an accident has interfered with my life, it has also provided opportunities to generate new ways of thinking. The final plate of the shell among the miniatures suggests that my life story has a place. It will become a collected memory stored with the other stories that have been told.



Figure 5 Garage Sale Safari
Media: water colour
Dimensions: 8" x 10"
2008

Living in the suburbs of Chilliwack, British Columbia, the weekend is heralded by the inundation of cars loaded with potential buyers who are in search of garage sales. The front yards of neighbours display an array of objects that are also a collection of

personal memories. In this setting, there is barter for stories. Both the seller and the viewer have made connections of value with the objects. While the seller is prepared to let go of a fragment of the past, the buyer is searching for and prepared to buy a memory. This recalls the work of Canadian painter D. P. Brown and his painting *The Auction*, 1975. Brown's work records the dispersal of a farm, and so too, the ritual garage sale has similar economic overtones. While Brown's work is rich in colour, I have produced a collection of fading water colours much like the faded prints you would find at such a sale. I have used frames found at garage sales and boxed the paintings so the viewer must *dig* through the box and discover the images. Like an archaeologist, the viewer is invited to make summations of their finds.

Personification: The Allegory of the Horse.

When I am not in the classroom, I am outside usually working with horses. At times, they have been my mentors. I have learned to be patient, to break complex tasks into simple parts, in the knowledge that it is better to reward the positive and ignore negative behaviour. While horse behaviour is based on fear and survival, they can learn to accept you as the lead member of their herd. A bond of trust is built and they rely on you to keep them safe and to provide for them. This relationship between horse and rider has become a source of inspiration for my work. I have personified the horse and used it to advance my story telling.

Horses are majestic creatures that artists have used to embody strength, courage, and power. The importance of the horse is often used to personify the qualities of heroism, evident in art as early as the sculptures on Greek temples. Greek sculptors used them to

capture the mythological struggles of the gods. I have discovered that the use of photography and digital manipulations can isolate and enhance expressive qualities inspired by the horse. By cropping a horse's head and removing the distraction of colour, photographs can reveal the animated tension of the horse in highly stressful situations as depicted in figure 6. Similar to the literary figure of an allegory, the horse is able to reveal qualities of the human spirit in events of tension.



Figure 6 (page 4 from Rodeo book)
Media: digital image on watercolour paper
Dimensions: 22" x 7"
2005

My first studies of the horse were at a rodeo which resulted in a bound collection of four prints in a book. The images document competitive events where horses are under pressure to excel. I used the book format to inspire the viewer to look at each page individually, privately, and sequentially. The final page in the book was chosen because the horse looks directly back at the viewer. The images evoke empathic transference of responses. I ask the viewer to find empathy by relating to personal stories in which they may have felt similar pressures to succeed. While strength, courage, and power are enviable qualities, I feel there are moments in my life where I am forced to draw on my inner strength and survival instincts to achieve my goals.

Other equestrian events have express emotions ranging from the chaos and fear of the unknown to calmness gained from experience. The confusion of the start of a chuckwagon race, I liken to my own fears of new tasks; while the calmness of the hunter horse completing a successful round of jumps is something I aspire to. In some of the images I've added water colours in unexpected hues as a personal way of enhancing the emotions of the horse's expression. In other works, I have used a single colour in an isolated area to draw attention to an emotional situation. The ability to identify with the emotion and struggle is at the heart of my message.

Searching for Metaphors

My horse riding accident resulted in a head injury and a series of cognitive assessments that led to a search to express my feelings in my artwork. The use of my digital camera allowed me to be spontaneous in gathering images that responded to my story. Upon examining the collection of photographic results, several themes emerged. The first was the presence of red: red flags on fencing, a red hat tied to a bicycle rack, and the red light in a motorcycle. The symbol of red was an alert. If I tried to ignore it, I would crash. If I did not heed the warnings of this intrusive injury, my cognitive abilities would be further disabled. My thoughts would become confused and my memory faded.

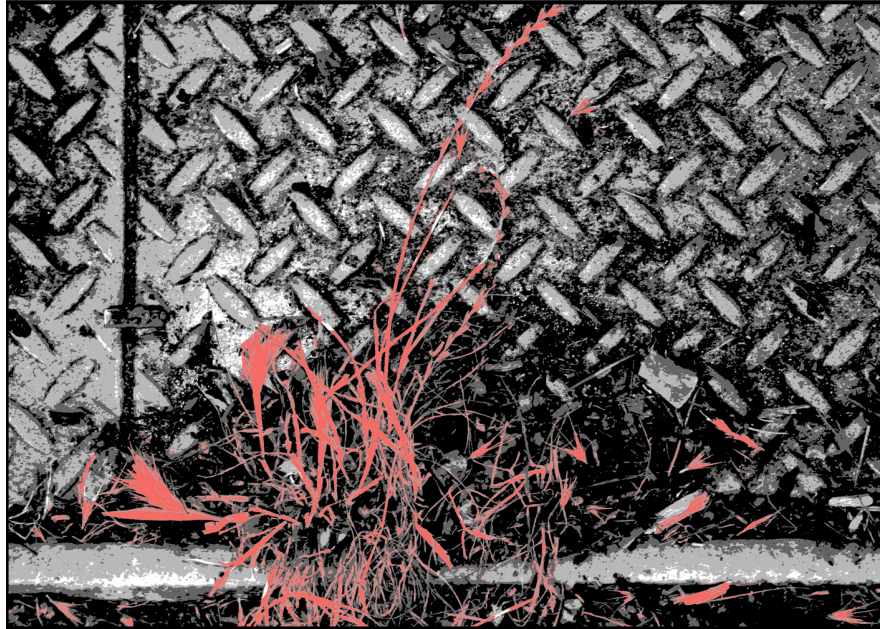


Figure 7 Red Intrusion
Media: digital image
Dimensions: 10" x 7"
2006

The digital print in Figure 7 is of grass protruding through a fracture in the sidewalk. A colour scheme was not part of my thinking. I altered the image; I needed to strip away all natural colour. Only red was allowed and only to identify the intrusion. My thoughts were focused on bare essentials; my emotions were not reachable. At that time, I was too over whelmed with the physical of my accident. There was a darkness that threatened to take charge if I attempted to take on too many responsibilities.

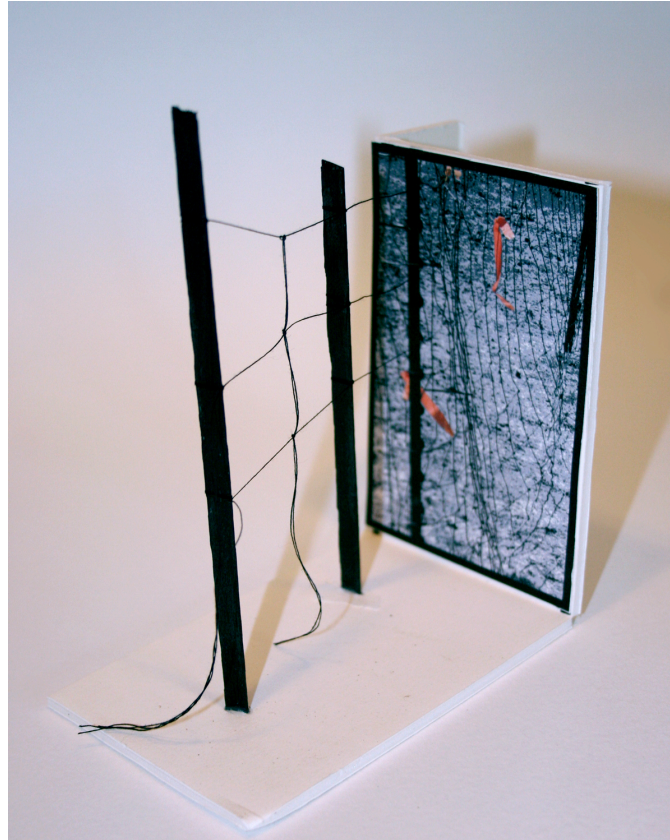


Figure 8 Red Flag Barrier
Media: digital print, foamcore, thread, and wood
Dimensions: 6"
2006

The second theme emerging after my accident was the sense of barriers. I wanted to produce large photos that viewers would want to see but there were parts of the work that prevented them from getting close. Scaled models of possible works were first built using photos from the collection. The photos have elements that become protrusions extending beyond the frame of the image. These barriers prevent the viewer from standing directly in front of the work. The projections speak to my inability to think clearly and to being forced to find new ways of solving problems. My injury has rudely interrupted my journey and continues to interfere with the quieter side of my personality and the story I want to tell.



Figure 9 Some Fractures Can't Be Mended
Media: photo etching with stitching
Dimensions: 5" x 7"
2008

A third theme to emerge was a collection of objects with breaks in them: bits of wood, breaks in a concrete sidewalk, and rocks with sharp edges. My thoughts were fragmented. For several years I have waited for my brain to heal but it has not. The application of stitchery to the broken rocks in Figure 9 is my effort to mend what I cannot fix. The red of the stitchery continues to be an obtrusive element in my work.

Landscapes as Journals

The landscape has been a strong factor in influencing my life. I grew up in towns where the wilderness was a step away. My first teaching assignments were remote villages on the coast of British Columbia. Like the Romantics, the power of nature was a source of inspiration. My first drawings and paintings were of the raw coast with isolated

lighthouses and storm filled skies. Even though I now live in a city, my home is on the outskirts with a farm at my back fence and the forest just minutes away. Living on the edge of an urban landscape has become the basis for my current imagery.



Figure 10 Waterscape Haiku 1
Media: digital print on watercolour paper
Dimensions: 7" x 22"
2005

In my landscapes, the cropped views used in the horse images have also led to cropping portions of landscape photographs. I wanted to reduce the image to a simple fragment or setting and, like the Haiku poetry, reveal a meaningful experience. The second influence in these early works was the brushwork colours of Impressionist painters. In these narrowed views of landscape the initial attraction is the colour, but upon closer examination the discovery of a detail is recognizable. In one work, it is the canoe tied at the dock, in another the bilge port of a fish boat, and in Figure 10, a seal just below the surface of the water. Viewing, like living, is in noticing the details and in our hurried

life experiences we often miss important details. It is essential to take time and be more perceptive.



Figure 11 Landscapes on the Edge 1
Media: silver gelatin contact print
Dimensions: 10" x 16"
2009

My current work deals with landscapes which are more personal in their story. They are journals that record my experiences. They contain images from my past and present. Layering and isolating images is comparable to the way my memory works. I start with a fragment and gather details until a whole thought or a place triggers my memory. Landscape paintings are complex structures that contain at least three spatial planes: foreground, middle ground, and background. Each may be suggestive of space and time or compartments of the journey. In the landscape, the foreground may represent where we are now, the background where we want to be, and the middle

ground, the journey we must take. I superimpose layers and fragments of images over backgrounds to tell of my sense of where I am and what journey I must take. Each layer in my work is significant and can be connected to levels of time or to degrees of importance.

Stories have layers of meaning. We may read to obtain a general view but then rethink and connect its message to significant events in our own lives. Fragments of memory from the past can be triggered by a location, event, or detail of the present. I try to express a juxtaposition of ideas in my landscapes. In a landscape, I live on the edge. I can step back to the time of my ancestors and yet my children, with their access to cyberspace, keep asking me to move into the future. In my search of contemporary landscapes I am continually telling my story of living on the brink of a precipice.

Summary

While my knowledge of art history, my teaching of art, and my living in a coastal landscape have provided the foundation for my artwork, the use of narrative has sustained and given it value. As Jack Hodgins (2001) stated in *A Passion for Narrative*, my stories begin with fragments and small objects that “fascinate”, “worry”, and “puzzle” me (p.31). They are my starting points that connect me to not only my story but to a greater understanding of the human spirit. The use of photography has allowed me to focus on the message of my images. Narrow cropping, the removal of colour, and the ability to layer images have brought the elements of the image to a level of “equality” and “ambiguity” as described by Savedoff, 2006, that has forced me to question their presence and power to carry my message (p. 105). The process of collecting photos,

reflecting, and creating new images has helped to refine my narrative and bring clarity to my message. The process of using narrative as a strategy for exploring my ideas has brought a personal and unique touch to my studio work that is shared with my students at every opportunity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Introduction

This chapter describes the classroom use of personal narratives as a strategy for students to bring meaning to their photography. The lessons are grouped in the three art genres: still life, places, and portraits. The following lessons challenge photography students to create images using still life objects, buildings and landscapes, or portraits to represent stories with personal connections. Students are asked to journal their creative and technical processes as well as critique their final work for the message they have created. The use of personal narrative as a strategy encourages students to develop their own voice as a necessary and important part of a foundation for photography. It challenges them to produce a number of unique images and to select one image that speaks with clarity in term of its meaning.

Each project is structured to give students opportunities to journal their work. They must use sketchbooks to document their planning, research, and exploration of processes. In addition they are to include contacts of all their negatives and digital work, print samples of their explorations, and written notes of personal thoughts. Once the project is finished, their reflective self critique is essential. Finally, the sketchbook and the “ready to display” framed print or prints are accompanied by a typed artist statement for submission and evaluation.

To begin their work, students are asked to research a list of selected works and choose at least one photographer related to the project genre. Using Feldman’s method of art analysis as a guide, they are asked to respond to the work in their own words.

Furthermore, they are requested to make suggestions on aspects of the photographer's work and its application to their project. They are also encouraged to research the work by selected painters and consider how the artist uses specific content to create meaning.

Students are encouraged to explore how process is related to product. In the first year of photography, they first become knowledgeable about the working components of the camera and are then taught more advanced skills in the darkroom and on the computer. Senior students are permitted to use both digital and film in creating their projects. Digital technology allows them to produce several images without the cost constraints of film. Students may also mix darkroom and digital processes using scans of their negatives manipulated on the computer and digital prints converted to negative transparencies for use in the darkroom. However, my experience indicates that students still prefer to produce their final presentations using film, particularly if they have background knowledge and hands-on experiences in the darkroom.

Evaluation is based on four criteria. Firstly, the student's sketchbook is evaluated for their creative process in developing ideas into images. This involves documenting the planning, research and explorations. Their ability to understand the process and the effects it has on their work is assessed on the basis of personal notations and self critique write-ups. Technical skills, compositional quality, and craftsmanship are evaluated in their final presentation of the framed image. An accompanying artist statement is also used to ascertain their level of understanding and personal expressiveness.

The Still Life: The Object As An Element of A Story

The genre of still life introduces students to the elements of narrative in their work and illustrates the power of simple objects to convey memories and meaning.

In preparation for these projects, students choose from a collection of objects. They are given the opportunity to select a common household object, a tool, a child's toy, or natural objects such as sea shells. They are asked to sketch and then write a brief description of a memory associated with the object. If the student has no personal connection to the object, then they are asked to suggest events where they might have encountered a similar object. From the discussion that follows, students recognize that objects have the ability to trigger memories.

After considering their single object, a sea shell and a plastic cup are paired and students reflect on what they see. They are asked to consider relationships, not only what is different but what is similar. For example, in comparing a plastic cup and seashell, students quickly see the difference. One is manmade; one is natural. Students are led to understand that some objects may be symbolic, that is, they could signify the creations of man or creations of nature.

The similarities seem to be more difficult and are restricted to characteristics such as being white, similar in size, and having qualities of roundness. Upon further discussion more similarities emerge: both are containers, and as such, both could contain other objects but at present are empty. In their present state, neither object is animate yet both have the ability to contain life. Students begin to realize that objects are the basis for many ideas.

Students are again asked to take a closer look at the objects where they think about locale and discover textural similarities in the surfaces of the objects. They suggest that both could be found abandoned on a beach. The difference in finding them would be that one would be collected and treasured, while the other may be removed as trash or left and ignored. Students are then guided to see how themes and stories such as abandonment, being overlooked, or recognized and appreciated can be acknowledged and associated with the objects.

Next, students are given a shell which is wrapped in a transparent bag with a warning label printed on it. They are asked to consider the impact the bag has on their ability to photograph the object. While the bag is transparent, its folds distort views and its reflective surface creates a glare that obstructs the shell. The text on the bag is folded, not easily read, and its presence mars the aesthetic qualities of the shell. Their comments become points of discussion for exploring meaning: feelings of invisibility, suffocating, and containment connected with the bagged object. Students are then asked if they could recall a personal story or recognize an event that may have created a similar feeling. In this case, the shell and its encasement in the bag could be a metaphor for feelings connected to a personal story.

Once students have had practice with interpreting the collection of objects, they are asked to find objects that speak to their own stories. The following are several projects that ask students to tell their story using a limited number of objects as metaphors.

Lesson 1: What's in Your Pocket?

In the first year of photography, students begin with *photograms*. While the focus is on technical skills and introducing them to the darkroom and the process of silver reacting to light, students are also introduced to the concept of images telling about who they are. Students are asked to reveal facts about themselves based on what is in their pocket, purse, or backpack. They use identity cards, jewellery, phones, mathematical tools, photocopies of their writings, photos, small charms, or anything that they carry with them. They then select and create a photogram montage of the items and write about how their choices may not only help to identify them but can represent their feelings or other ideas.

Lesson 2: The Narrative Still Life

Once students are successfully using the cameras, they are presented with one of the following projects that use objects as symbols or metaphors in stories. They must also consider the technical elements of a setting or stage for the object. The manipulation of location, angle of view, and lighting need to be considered to create an appropriate mood. Finally, arrangement, proximity to the camera, and depth of field are also factors that affect the viewer's connection to the image.

In the tradition of a narrative still life, students are asked to find three objects that represent the key elements of their story. One object should tell the viewer about the protagonist, the second may suggest what action was taking place while the third may indicate what caused a change of action. Keeping a box of hats, shoes, and various tools on hand is useful as students are able to select their first object which defines the

character of a story. From the very beginning, they are invited to find other objects representing an action or reaction. For example, the break-up of a relationship may include an abandoned ring, empty glass of wine and a tear stained note. A student point of view might involve a note being replaced by the blurred text on a cell phone and an empty cup of coffee.

It is important to also consider the arrangement of the objects in the space and the role that lighting plays in dramatizing a scene. An object hidden by the others or in shadows may not be easily recognized and read. An object may dominate the foreground and be misinterpreted when it is only used in a supporting role. For example, the placement of the empty coffee cup in the foreground may suggest a breakup has occurred because the lover spent too much time away or in the case of the wine glass, perhaps there were issues with alcoholism. Students should plan for lighting and may need to consider the benefit of cast shadows in emphasizing certain features of their still life.

After considering lighting and photographing the arranged objects, students select two of their print results for critique. In a critique, they need to be aware of how objects remain create a story, how a simple composition can evoke feelings, and how collective elements of their work can create a connection with the viewer.

Lesson 3: Investigating Crime Scenes

A variation of the Still Life project is based on popular television shows which investigate crime scenes. Students are asked to record evidence of a crime or injustice. While some students worked from newspaper stories, the more successful are the personal stories told by students who had been victims of crime. In a three picture

sequence, one student photographed the tire marks on pavement, the marked bumper of a car, and her cat lying on the road. As her cat liked to sleep on warm pavement, it became the subject of the crime scene. Although it was never hit, it represented the loss of a previous pet. A second student having recently had his wallet stolen, photographed an empty wallet surrounded by the bits of paper covered in numbers representing the variety of records connected with his identity. Next, he inked his hand and then pressed it to his print. This final act represented the violation and frustration he felt losing vital parts of his identity.

Lesson 4: The Cup As A Metaphor for Life

Students are given a styrofoam cup. In the introductory discussion, they try to recall cliché expressions that are associated with the cup. They include “the cup is half full or half empty” and “cup runneth over”. As well as citing familiar expressions, students consider the cup as a theme. For example, once the cup is no longer useful, it is discarded or the cup is a cheap substitute for glass or fine china. In order to assist students with their creative search for new ways to examine a common object, they are given a list of image strategies to use. One student uses the juxtaposition of a single cup among fine china. Another elaborates the cup with handle and saucer to make it look more elegant. A series is produced showing the cup in the process of deterioration, while another student fragments her cup and then sews it back together. The cup shows up in a variety of locations including being in a dishwasher. Some of the cup images are complex such as when it becomes the hero of an animated battle with plastic cutlery. For another student, the cup as a model was explored for its simplicity and innate beauty. In their

follow-up reflection, students could explain the relationship their images had with life themes and with parts of their own story.

Lesson 5: The Surrealist's Still Life

This project was first introduced successfully to a painting class, but the ability of digital technology to rescale, layer, and replace images make it possible to create this project with photo images. To begin this project, students are shown the work of Rene Magritte and photography students are often interested in the work of Man Ray. To help students break from traditional still life arrangement and move into the surreal, they are asked to relocate their objects in a room. They may start with photographs of the corner of their bedroom or another interior where they are able to go, relax, and contemplate life. If there are doors or windows, they may choose to have them open or closed, depending on how private they want the impression to be. They are to consider what a closed door may mean in their work. Is it keeping others from coming in or is it stopping them from going out? If the windows are open, students must decide what they can see and what it represents. Is it the future or is it the past? Is there some one looking in? Is there danger out there? Within the room, they will include an object to represent a memory from their past, a second for a current event, and a third for hope in their future. The objects are photographed separately and then imported into a digital image of the room. They can be arranged and rescaled according to their importance. As this project is given to graduating students, there is a relevant connection to their current situation of leaving the familiar life at school and stepping into the future.

Using Place to Tell A Story

The second genre deals with place and uses setting, atmosphere, and point of view to reveal a story. The strategies of isolation, juxtaposition, and distortion can be used to manipulate the description of landscapes or urban structures in order to more clearly represent personal stories or other ideas. Prior to beginning the projects in this genre, students are introduced to the landscape painting of Jacob van Ruisdael and the photography of John Vanderpant. Using Jacob van Ruisdael's painting of the *Jewish Cemetery*, 1655, students observe how selected elements of a landscape can represent life themes. The theme of death is depicted by ruins, tombstones and a decaying tree, yet there is also hope for life affirmed by the inclusion of lush foliage, a stream, and sunlight. John Vanderpant's print, *Colonnades of Commerce*, 1926, is an abstraction using scale and simplicity to evoke the strength of the structure, our sense of smallness in its presence creating a metaphor for the power of capitalism.

Lesson 6: A Sense of Place

This project was at first designed to introduce the use and impact of various lenses available for the classroom camera. However, when the project was redesigned, students were asked to select a building that had some connection to their own history. As a result, the project became more meaningful and resulting images were much more unique.

Students begin by brainstorming a list of building sites that they might visit or could be important to their family. For example, students may select a church where their parents were married, a store they like to shop in, or a bank where they started their first savings. After selecting one, they describe their personal memories of the building with a

story that shows their connection to the building. They then research its architectural style and historical significance. They are to write about the connection the physical features, style and history have to their story. For example, the solidity of the stones walls give them a sense of security, the high church roof makes them feel small, or the history of the building reflects the long history their family has in the community. When the students photograph their selected building, they are to record a series of images: a close up of details they remembered, a shift in view to exaggerate the scale and perspective, and a change in angle of view to locate the building in its surroundings. These are enhanced by the student using a selection of lenses: macro, telephoto, shift, and wide angle. Also, students are asked to consider including a sense of their own presence by photographing their shadow on the building or their reflection in a window. Students complete the project by printing an enlargement reflecting on the relationship of the building's history with their own.

The resulting work has not always been what the student expected and has led to interesting discussion on what the viewer sees versus what the artist intended. Recently, a student proudly presented her print of the front doors of a local church. She was thrilled with how the sun brightly lit the top of the iron gate. What she hadn't noticed was that down in the right corner, behind the gate, was a sign that asked the faithful to use the side entrance. This discovery led to some discussion about irony but also to the recognition that the viewer's interpretation may not always be what the artist sees but ideas "may be present in the work without the conscious knowledge of the artist" (Feldman, 1982, p.645.). On a previous occasion, a student intended to shoot two rolls of film: one of local churches and one of commercial buildings. However, unknowingly the

student reused the same roll of film. The result was that each store, restaurant, or bank image had the presence of a church steeple. While she first thought her project was ruined, discussion led to the discovery of how her unexpected images truly described the ever present Christian faith that dominates this community. These students learned to expect the unexpected in future work. Our mind often filters what we don't want to see, but the black and white print refreshes our vision, removes the effect of colour and depth, to give all details equal weight.

Through these projects, students begin to understand how the details of a setting can alter meaning. They also come to recognize that by connecting the building's history to their personal stories, they can develop an understanding of their own sense of place.

Lesson 7: The Landscape As Narrative

This project was recently introduced to painting students, but again because of computer software use, the project, I believe, is adaptable to the photography classroom. Students were introduced to Chinese landscape painters who recognized the ability of the foreground, middle ground, and background to represent different phases in a journey. The journey is a metaphor for life. Mountains may represent sanctuary but the route may be arduous having to traverse hazardous outcroppings that are obscured by mist. While the foreground may locate the viewer in the work, the middle ground outlines the journey travelers must take to reach their goal. Living in Chilliwack, British Columbia, an agricultural valley surrounded by mountains, students begin to understand the role the mountains play in symbolizing a place of refuge or of time. In the valley, there are many examples where man is replacing nature and farmland with industrial and residential

landscapes. Students may use images from several locations and juxtapose them to create telling landscapes. Students may also want to consider lessons learned from the previous projects and stage significant objects in their landscapes. They could be shown Maritza Molina's work of textile figures in trees. In painting landscapes, students manipulated objects and elements of nature as symbols. Like the painters, photography students can include visual pathways to allow the viewer to move from one area to another; while obstacles such as fences create barriers. Weather and season should also be carefully considered as they are factors that affect the mood of the work. Students may use lens filters to heighten the presence of clouds or to add drama to the tonal quality of their work.

In the projects dealing with place, viewpoint is critical. Students can actively include or exclude parts of the scene to give differing impressions. How often have we moved slightly left or right to remove power lines from the picture? How often have you excluded garbage cans and litter from the scene? This is control of the physical viewpoint; however, students are also able to create a psychological viewpoint. Students can choose to select and emphasize "the details if they were in a particular state of mind" (West et al, 1981, p. 281). By using filters, changing depth of field, and altering shutter speeds, students can sharpen or blur the sense of the location. In a photo of a pond set among trees, a student can use additional burning on the trees to create a darker, dramatic frame. The passage of time in front of a busy store can be captured in the blur of passing figures from a slower shutter speed. In these projects, students learn that by controlling not only the details they include or exclude, but also how they treat those details, adds to the significance of the work.

A further extension of the landscape project is to have students research the stories of aboriginal communities and to note the role nature has in their stories. For the Sto:lo people of Chilliwack, Mt. Cheam, a mountain that dominates the landscape, is represented as a motherly figure that “stands guard over the land and the water so that no harm comes to the fish that come up to feed the Sto:lo people” (Henderson, 2009, n.p.). Students could create a montage using the local landscape and then apply text, designs, and figural images for emphasis. The montage could depict a local aboriginal story or it could depict a location that has personal history to the student.

The use of place as a genre for narrative projects should ask students to link their story to history. The building or location in the landscape has a history within the community as well as a history of family. Both stories must be considered as integral and students should develop an understanding of how their story is part of the complete history of the site and of the community. As students research the history of the area, they will find old photographs and remark on how streets, buildings, cars and clothing have changed. They need to realize that their photos are also future records of community’s history. It was not until I brought in an old negative and made prints that students realized this. For them it was strange to see on the drying rack amongst their work prints from a negative that was over eighty years old. The prints made them realize the value of their own work for not only capturing their story but because theirs was a chapter that will become part of a greater story which should be available to others in the future.

Portraits

Students love to take pictures of their friends. The following projects help students to develop skills that enhance their sense of portrait photography in clarifying how they communicate about the nature of people they photograph. Like the character in a novel, they must, for example, go beyond stereotypes and determine if their figure is heroic or tragic, sincere or outrageous. They must listen to the stories of their friends in order to know them and thus be able to depict them in a sensitive fashion.

Lesson 8: The Classmate

In first year, students are introduced to portrait photography. They are asked to interview a classmate who will be their model for this project. They are to describe at least three interests of their classmate that reveal something about their personality. The models are allowed to bring a limited number of props to their photo shoot. Students are asked to create a character portrait. They must consider several criteria in their planning: the poses for the model, the direction and quality of lighting, the position of the camera in relation to the model, and the expression they hope to capture. Students are encouraged to take several similar shots and to only change one aspect of the photograph at a time. From fifteen negatives, they then select four images that best describe their classmate. Often students are able to select one, but it is harder to find another three with which they are satisfied. There are cautions added to this project: with student access to internet and their awareness of images used in music videos, I discuss what poses are appropriate and

the extra diligence they must take in protecting their work from being posted on the internet. The classroom must be a safe environment and while students have permission to photograph each other, they do not have permission to publish those photos outside of the classroom. While this project is greatly anticipated, students realize the complexity of the project. They also have a greater appreciation for the work of studio photographers such as Karsh who is an icon of Canadian photography.

Lesson 9: In The Family

In their second year, students return to portrait photography and are challenged to photograph a family member. Because some students no longer live with family, they may choose to photograph someone that is important to them. They are also to photograph a setting as they reveal the character of their subject. The subject's heritage, work, successes, responsibilities to the family, and emotional relationship to other family members are all factors to be considered. The students must narrow their focus in an attempt to maintain the quality of their work. While the photo may be staged, the portrait must look natural. They must consider how location, props, and lighting will add to the narrative. In particular, the literary term of point-of-view is discussed. In this work they must express a "psychological point of view" (West et al, 1981, p.281). Their choices will affect whether this is an engaging and warm view or a harsh document of their subject. They need to select camera views and model poses that support their statement of the portrait's character. They need to question whether they need to show the whole subject or presence of the character with partial views and shadows. They are shown the work of Dorothea Lange for her ability to capture the desolation of migrant families and

Jeff Wall's *Mimic*, 1982 for his use of a staged, yet seemingly natural, photo revealing a man's prejudice.

These projects show an increasing level of difficulty; they are complex and of strong emotional context. As West et al (1981) describe in *Developing Writing Skills*, students must choose a subject that is "real, interesting, and worth writing about" (p.297). The selected details must "focus the reader's attention on an important quality of the subject" (p.297). Poses, camera position, and lighting are telling components of the photographic work. When location is used, it must act as a supportive detail. Finally, portrait stories of character may be personal but may also address universal themes.

The Final Word

When I first started teaching, I used a lesson that asked students to restrict their photo images to hands. Some students recorded hands working with tools while others photographed hands creating art. In 2001, the year of terrorists attacking New York, a student photographed her own hand holding the American flag. At the time, she had just learned that her brother, who worked in one of the World Trade towers, had managed to get out safely. Because the photos were not of faces, the work was more universal, yet had personal meaning to the student who created it. The use of familiar yet anonymous figures became the starting point for this revised project.

Lesson 10: The In-between

Students are asked emphasize the space between figures to tell their story. To begin the idea generation, students discuss what distance between two people is

comfortable and whether it is a cultural or personal interpretation. For example, if two students were to sit back to back, the distance created between them and the physical reaction of their bodies might indicate how comfortable they are with the other's presence. Students are asked to look for and record the "in-between" in a manner that reveals relationships. One student, telling the story of long lasting love, photographed the closeness of his grandparents as they walked hand-in-hand. Another student photographed the protectiveness of a mother and child. This project expanded in its interpretation and students recorded the blurred sense of a figure in a doorway as the person moved from one room to another. Students discovered that one word could evoke a multitude of images and because of their personal interpretation, the works created were unique.

Since developing the In-between project, the use of a single word has been the thematic focus for the final projects with both first and second year photography students in my classes. In consultation with the students' English teachers, a word is selected that can evoke a variety of levels of meaning. First year students are given a word, such as *connection*, which they may use the verb form *to connect* or noun form *connection* or the antonyms of *disconnect* or *disconnection*. For these students, the final project is a culmination of their skills plus a sampling of the focus that will be expected in the senior year.

For senior students, the word from their English class is a familiar and descriptive term, such as *dystopia*. Because of their experiences using the narrative as a strategy for developing an idea, they are able to find a context for the term and are able to generate a

list of possible images for each genre. The results of their explorations are rich and unique when they use examples from personal narratives.

Summary

To assist students with developing narratives, they are introduced to the potential of objects as metaphors, researching great works of art and discussing the experiences of other artists in evoking meaning. Journals are used as a primary way of documenting the process. In the lessons, I have referred to elements of the writing process in order to provide terms, methods, and ways of interpreting subject matter. Visual art and creative writing have a common basis and a similarity of process that moves from generalizations to personal and significant themes, as well as clarifying meaning.

Persons, places, and things ... each genre evokes a memory, each is connected to a personal story, and each has the potential to be part of a universal theme. Objects are silent witnesses that carry the weight of a narrative in their symbolism. Places are stages on which we re-enact the stories of our past. As we walk in a familiar setting, our mind can be of two thoughts: the current presence or the shadow of our past stories. Portraits have the strongest ties to our stories. The ability to capture significant expressions reconnects us with the emotions and events of the past. Having students use their own stories helps them to build unique and valid works as cited by Elizabeth Watterston in West et al (1981):

“The artists tell us what they think we are. They help us to hear our own voice, recognize our own shape, laugh at our own follies, rejoice in our own powers. Accepting or rejecting the artist’s views, we become more thoroughly ourselves.” (p. 291)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The intent of this project was to present narrative strategies as a way of planning a photography program to assist high school students in creating meaningful and enduring works of art.

Implications for Students

When students are encouraged to relate their personal stories, the dynamics of a classroom become more vibrant and engaging. Discussions between teacher and student involve taking ownership of their work; students gain a sense of control over their work and are more motivated. When their art is displayed, they are often surprised by the positive reaction and dialogue with their classmates and teachers.

For some students, the switch to personal story telling in photography may be met with resistance. A student who is technically proficient and capable of producing well-crafted works modeled after master artists, may find the change in programming disconcerting. They often need assurance as they step into new territory associated with sensitive, personal issues. Care is required when a student feels uncomfortable in presenting their ideas in a public school venue. Caution is also required in developing clear guidelines on personal issues. Topics that involve nudity, promotion of sex, alcohol and drugs have elements of censorship that are risky in public school settings. Teachers need to be sensitive in assisting students to make appropriate choices. In one case, a student's completed work was not displayed publicly because it was about her break-up with a boy at the school. While his image was not in the art work, she felt

uncomfortable that he and his friends would be able to identify the source of the story and in particular, see her pain publicly exposed.

The introduction of narrative strategies must be done in small steps. Students are not always ready to develop their story in a work of art. They must be given time and encouragement as they approach each project in an attempt to investigate complex issues and problems. For a painting student in my class, personal success did not come until the last project. In a self portrait, the student wanted to include images of his faith. As he researched his religion for images, he started to make connections about how integral religion was in his personal life; he found ways to meld the symbols of his religion into his portrait. As his portrait was being finished, he talked excitedly about how much his work meant to him. This was the opportunity to discuss his plans to become an architect. I asked him to remember this work and how it might provide valuable insight in planning designs in his chosen future career.

Implications for Teachers

Using the narrative as a strategy for teaching art requires time and dialogue. Teachers must give students enough time in the planning stageS to explore appropriate imagery and how it connects to their story. However, teachers must take care that students don't procrastinate. Procrastination can be avoided by keeping the initial projects simple and by breaking the components of the project into specific deadlines for completion. I try to base projects on ten classes. The first week or five classes are focused on brainstorming, researching, and planning; all stages are recorded in their sketchbooks. In discussions that introduce each stage, students are asked guiding

questions. If senior students have digital cameras, they are encouraged to add some preliminary shots to their sketchbooks. By the week's end, students have shot their film; they are allowed to borrow cameras for the weekend. The second half of the unit is more structured. One day to develop film, the second to make contact sheets and plan which negatives will be used. The third and fourth are spent in the darkroom selecting and creating the final print. The last day is spent adding finishing touches and framing the final print as well as writing a critique and artist statement.

It is during the planning stages that dialogue with the teacher is critical. Motivating, helping to narrow the topic, and asking them to think of other possibilities are all part of the discussion. Having to write their thoughts in their sketchbooks helps students to commit to ideas. They are allowed to change their minds but they must record their thoughts. Their thoughts do not need to be of essay length nor do they have to be several paragraphs in length but they must include ideas, sketches, clippings, or poems. More importantly, their ideas must make reference to the story they have chosen. Teachers can assist students with the planning process by asking questions that encourage them to contemplate and reflect before a final decision is reached. Teachers may also assist students through research using Feldman's (1982) guidelines (a description and analysis followed by interpretation and evaluation) and then ask students to apply the same questioning to their own ideas and images. This practice is reinforced when they learn to write their artist statements.

Teachers need to encourage students in becoming self directed as they move from directed to more independent thinking. It is at times difficult but necessary that teachers refrain from imposing their ideas of what the outcome should be. Students have unique

experiences and their outlooks can be challenging but it is important to let them have a voice. However, one of the biggest obstacles is to move students away from cliché imagery or mimicking or copying. Teachers need to ensure that students record their personal reactions and experiences.

Because the use of narrative is a familiar genre of English, art teachers need to approach their colleagues about establishing a working relationship. In my case, it took several conversations with the English teachers and only after viewing student art work, did they become more willing to collaborate. At first, they provided lists of literary terms that were incorporated into my discussion with students. They then provided the *word* that becomes the final project once they understood more about the learning outcomes in art. Now, there is a tentative discussion of other ways of collaborating. Art teachers need to be advocates for their program and show that the use of narrative strategies can support the literacy of other subjects. Visual art has an important role to play in the general education of the student.

Further Recommendations

. In my review of the literature I was able to find a wealth of research on the use of the visual arts to enhance literacy, but there was little documented evidence of a correlation between the study of writing and literacy transference to the visual arts. This dearth of research may be due in part to the fact that art is considered peripheral to the so called core courses of English, mathematics, and science. It may be of value to study how approaches to critical thinking in English are similar to art and how they may affect students' attitude in the visual arts. Studies of this nature may assist teachers in

facilitating students to recognize and understand that similar processes are involved in both the visual arts and the language arts.

In the primary school program, visual arts and writing are often integrated as students write in their journals and accompany text with images. By the time students arrive in my high school classroom, they seem to have lost the connection between art and word. They expect lessons to be a series of how-to projects that must be completed in order to receive credit. Photography students often enter the course believing they will be successful because they know how to take pictures of their friends. A few hope that they will gain enough technical knowledge to take better pictures. They are surprised to discover there is a greater depth of learning involved in the course. However, after using narrative strategies, they declare the final project which asks them to find images that reveal personal meaning to a given word to be their favourite. They have moved from collectors of *snapshots* to creators of visual meaning. I believe that more study of methods for integration of the visual and language arts must occur before students reach the secondary level. More research needs to be done about the efficacy of integrated learning in the early grades and how it affects later learning. This could be done by tracking students in early and later grades to determine impacts of learning in cross disciplinary situations.

I have explored the use of the narrative strategy in my drawing and painting classes but it should also be considered as a strategy for other visual arts areas including sculpture and fibre arts. While the narrative strategy is an easy fit in drawing and painting courses, it may encounter some obstacles in art courses other than photography.

However, Carol Watkins (2009) in *Quilting Arts* magazine, a contemporary quilter, describes how a photo becomes a stitched art work that tells a story.

Furthermore, it would be useful to follow students after completing my classes to see if they continue to use the narrative strategies in future visual work. For instance, do students who have worked with narrative strategy continue to use it if they are pursuing artistic careers? How has it helped or benefitted them? It would also be of interest to survey students to assess changes in their critical writing practices. In using narrative strategies in their art work would they be able to recognize that the process assists them in writing with more clarity and with meaning?

Reflections on the Studio Process

Engaging in the studio process has enabled me to develop a depth of understanding of how the narrative strategy works effectively in the art program. The practical experience of problem solving with words and connecting images to story was challenging and sometimes difficult but rewarding. The process of exploring meaning in response to a variety of selected images has led to encouraging students to explore new possibilities rather than accepting their first idea. Students' sketchbooks became filled with word and story connections and possibilities; they are reminded that they are to keep their sketchbooks as a repository for developing future ideas. As they work through challenges, I keep an accompanying sketchbook with notes and ideas that have come from their suggestions as well as from lists of related historical art references they might want to research. Knowing that I am an active participant in the process, my students seem more confident and more engaged in creating successful works. This process might

have potential for future research. What means do teachers use to develop student ideas as they observe and record accomplishments of art students? A study could compare the results with a group of several art teachers.

When students encounter problems, I am able to assist them in discovering solutions. It is a collegial experience where their innovative ideas tax my expertise. We often embark on several solutions to see what best meets their needs. The students and I accept mistakes as opportunities to go in new directions. I don't have to teach them *solarization* as a photographic process, for instance, because invariably someone makes an error of double exposure in the darkroom and a new method is discovered. Both students and I are more willing to explore new processes and inventive ways of solving problems. If a survey was conducted of the collegial process and how teacher and student learn from one another, what would it reveal?

I would welcome a survey because the reflective component of my studio explorations is critical to successfully transferring what I have learned to the classroom. The ability to listen to students, to understand, and to connect their stories to universal themes has garnered success and positive responses from students. They discover they are working like competent artists and that would not have been largely possible if I had not struggled with my own imagery and recorded my thoughts in my sketchbooks.

Finally, a word about the studio process. It takes time. As an artist, I need time to work through my ideas. My thoughts become clearer and my images are more powerful in communicating my intent. At the same time I have been able to take my experience back into the classroom where my lessons have become more refined and effective.

Summary

In this project, I introduced the narrative strategy in art to help students create work that has significance and connects the life story of students with universal themes. I also propose that the narrative strategy in visual arts has potential in terms of transference of learning to other subjects

A review of current literature indicates that story telling about personal experiences is a viable approach that allows students to explore *truths* about themselves. Students can explore the details of artistic meaning, and that meaning may change as students gain more understanding of their story. Students can at first create work that is personal but they can also see that it extends to universal symbols and themes. Imagery that emerges from personal stories is an effective way of relating ideas to peers about community and culture.

The history of narrative art is common from prehistorical through biblical to contemporary times, reflecting artists' personal experiences. Contemporary artists and photographers are incorporating a multitude of ideas, methods and materials as they explore imagery in symbolic and metaphorical contexts. Szabad-Smith (2005), suggests that having students look to themselves for ideas shifts their work from making a product to exploration for meaning. However, Fiona Blaikie (2006) is concerned that high school art programs are not prepared for this change as students still present portfolios that are too "formulaic"(p. 66).

High school art teachers have several resources available to support their use of narrative. They may turn to the English classroom and adapt familiar writing terminology to introduce students to the elements of a story that can be depicted in visual art. Teachers can and should apply Feldman's (1982) method of analysis to students'

works in order to help them create verbal and written text as a way of amplifying communication.

Using the narrative strategy in my photography classes has helped students to become more confident in the work they create. They realize there may be numerous solutions with self critique adding an effective means of understanding what they have to say. They also seem to be more sensitive to social issues when it arises in their work and they are able to see how their work fits into a continuum of art history. Finally, they seem to become more sensitive to the work and story of fellow students and appreciate their membership in a classroom community where ideas are shared and where difference are respected.

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