Making Visual Arts Learning Visible in a Generalist Elementary School Classroom

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Abstract

This article presents the story of one elementary school teacher's shift in art praxis through her involvement in a research project aimed at facilitating participatory arts-based communities of practice. Qualitative methods and social constructivism informed Professional Learning Interventions (PLIs) involving: (1) a visual arts workshop, (2) facilitations with academics within the teacher's classroom context, and (3) semi-structured discussions to study and curate the teacher's lived experiences. A teacher-facilitator-interviewer triad co-researched the meaning of 'quality' in relation to: Learning, Pedagogy, Environment, and Community Dynamics (L-PEC). Adapted

from Seidel et. al (2009) L-PEC was a theoretical lens to guide inquiry and action specific to the teacher's (i.e., Ali's) classroom. Ali's evolving praxis served as a source of inspiration for the other Grade 3-4 teachers in her school who formed their own community of practice to support student learning through the visual arts.

Introduction

There is evidence that strategic interventions, which are designed to build elementary teachers' experience and confidence as artists, can increase and improve teachers' implementation of arts-based praxis within their classrooms (Chemi, 2014; Gates, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2007; Oreck, 2006). These interventions are particularly effective when teachers consistently reflect on their own arts-based praxis in relation to their students' learning (Burnaford, 2006; Marshall, 2014). The hallmarks of such interventions include teachers applying creative processes coupled with reflective critique (Sullivan, 2006, 2008). An important component of this work is that teachers must view their artworks (and the artworks of their students) as more than aesthetic objects, and instead, as sites of learning and evidence of understanding (Leavy, 2009).

Research on the effectiveness of arts-based interventions often involves the partnering of artists, educational institutions, and academics in gathering reliable evidence for the positive effects of the Arts, and specifically, the quality of these effects (Chemi, 2014; Fiske, 1999). This typically involves an ongoing cycle of reflection, inquiry, and action specific to the teachers' classroom contexts (Gates, 2010). In such cases, learning is viewed as active, social, and constructed (Webster-Wright, 2009). Teachers and academics, for instance, become co-researchers and create dialogic and relational learning environments, on an equal footing. Rather than privileging the academics as the 'experts,' the group participates in a co-constructed, inquiry-based learning journey, where knowledge building is mutually beneficial (Gates, 2010).

Such was the approach undertaken in the 2013/2014 research project *Teachers' Application of Arts Rich Practice* in which a team of University arts educators collaborated with early- to mid-career elementary school teachers in the application of arts-rich practice in classroom settings. This was undertaken through a collective commitment to documenting and studying how effective pedagogy, the classroom environment, and community dynamics contribute to student learning, and to make visible exemplars of each of these dimensions. The project required a shared focus or systematic study to ensure that the learning had transformative power (Gates, 2010). The tenet was that transformation often is inspired by concrete examples of lived experience (Kalin, 2014).

Thus, the project established a culture of evidence (Burnaford, 2006) in which the lived examples of teachers were seen as sources through which other teachers might "gain confidence through identification with the particulars of a setting" (Powell & Lajevic, 2011, p. 36). Institutionally and ideologically linking the teachers and academics required not only deep theorizing and analysis, but also action (Gates, 2010). The goal was to stimulate dialogic exchanges and to document key issues of the teachers' pedagogy and their students' learning in relation to the classroom environment and interpersonal dynamics.

The theoretical underpinnings of the project centered on principles of social-constructivism (Bruner, 1996; Rogoff, 1990), which are based on the belief that reality is constructed through human activity. Social constructivists view knowledge as a human product, which is socially and culturally constructed through people's interactions with each other and with their environment (Gredler, 1997). Hence, learning is viewed as a social process and occurs when people are engaged in object-based and socially-oriented activities (Wright, 2003, 2012).

Complementary to this social-constructivist orientation, the study was further influenced by the 'Qualities of Quality' framework (Seidel, Tishman Winner, Hetland, & Palmer, 2009, pp. 29-45), which regards the most important indication of excellence in arts education to be the quality of students' learning experiences, rather than the quality of the artworks they produce. Emphasis is given to adults engaging with students in explicit conversations about the artistic decisions they are making, and these artworks, in turn, are regarded as evidence of learning. Such evidence is gathered over time through the use of portfolios, reflections, photographs, videos, and audio recordings. Teachers review this evidence regularly with students, other teachers, and parents. Hence, the role of the documentation of learning in action is a valued component of this process, as it provides a record of what actually happens during artistic experiences (Chemi, 2014) and becomes a catalyst for discussing the learning taking place in these experiences in reflective, analytic ways (Rinaldi, 2006).

The 'Qualities of Quality' framework (Seidel et al, 2009, pp. 29-45) centers on four constructs: *Learning, Pedagogy, Environment* and *Community Dynamics*. For the purposes of this study, this framework was shaped into an ontology[1] (see Figure 1), which served as an analytical lens for application and reflection.[2] The goal was to interrogate the meaning of

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[1] Explicit formal specifications of terms within a domain and relations among these terms.
[2] Some key terms have been modified to succinctly capture particular constructs; some aspects of Community Dynamics were merged to avoid overlap; and some aspects of Environment were reduced as a result of merging closely related constructs.

'quality'[3] visual arts education, to scrutinise theoretical perspectives and to interrogate our own assumptions (Mason, 2002).

The acronym 'L-PEC' (Learning, Pedagogy, Environment, Community Dynamics) became adopted by the research team, to succinctly signify this ontology. The belief was that the L-PEC framework would help the university and school-based participants share a common (and most likely, evolving) vocabulary, which might assist in deeper understanding of the four dimensions. This would help provide a shared focus for the systematic study of professional learning and its transformative power (Gates, 2010).

Using case study methodology, this paper elucidates one case (i.e., Ali's story) and the important role of co-constructing inquiry-based learning. In so doing, it foregrounds some principles of 'quality' arts education within Ali's context, as a generalist elementary school teacher, and her transformation of praxis over nine months.

The Context to the Story

With the goal of supporting and facilitating the take-up and delivery of the arts in the generalist classroom, the *Teachers' Application of Arts Rich Practice* project placed the attention clearly on learning *with* teachers, through a Professional Learning Intervention (PLI). There were three key components to the art-based PLI: (1) a visual arts workshop, (2) *in situ* facilitations between academics and teachers within the teachers' classroom contexts, and (3) semi-structured discussions to systematically study the collaborative learning and to curate examples of lived experiences (described in more detail in Wright et al, 2014).

The project began with a broadly advertised invitation to schools in the greater Melbourne area for teachers to choose to attend either a visual arts (or alternatively, drama) workshop, run over two days at the University (in early March). Principals of the schools that volunteered to participate were encouraged to send small teams of teachers to the workshop with the aim of establishing a community of practice in the arts back in their schools. The workshop was organized with a pedagogy driven by *artists'* processes rather than *generalist educators'* processes. A key aim was to engage the teachers in their own artistry, at their own level, and to position them as artists.

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[3] It should be noted that, although numbers are attached to the various sub-dimensions in the ontology, this is not to imply a sequential or hierarchical structure but instead, to provide reference points for the discussion of constructs and related sub-constructs.

Learning (L)

- **L5.3 Sharing Work Publicly** — Exhibiting/Performing, which requires a kind of rigour that is extremely demanding – the risks may be significant, but the rewards make them worth it
- **L1.1 Classroom Experiences** — Buzz of energy or quiet, prolonged engagement, 'flow', attentiveness, inquiry
- **L1.3 Artistic Processes** — Improvising, problem-solving, revising, giving feedback, feeling, searching, collaborating
- **L5.1 Student-Driven/Centred Investment** — 'Owning' learning through commitment, energy, responsibility for relative success of one's efforts
- **L5.2 Working on a Project** — Working on one's own, or as part of an ensemble or team
- **L1.2 Artistic Materials** — Materials that are compelling, aesthetic, demanding, exhilarating, 'serious fun'
- **L2.1 Making** — Creating objects/performances by drawing on personal experiences (from multiple angles, experimenting, exploring, discovering) or integrating understandings through open-ended projects (involving 'rich'/complex problems)
- **L4.2 Back and Forth Shifting of Processes** — Working toward mastery, exploring new possibilities, and experimenting with different approaches
- **L1 Engagement**
- **L5 Ownership**
- **L2 Acting and Feeling Like Artists**
- **L Learning**
- **L4 Experimentation, Exploration and Inquiry**
- **L3 Emotional Openness and Honesty**
- **L4.1 Individual/Collective Experiences of Expressing/Communicating** — Among the students, between the students and the teacher and between the performers and the audience
- **L3.3 Centres on 'Big' Ideas** — Ideas that feel important to students and teachers, that they come see as highly relevant to them and the world
- **L3.1. Requires Feeling 'Safe'** — Safe feelings re one's own work or the works of others
- **L2.2 Looking/Listening** — Engaging with works of visual or performing art, such as demonstrating, discussing and reflecting
- **L3.2 Acknowledges Emotional/Intellectual** — Openness/honesty through serious, intentional engagement in making or experiencing works of art

Pedagogy (P)

- **P5.3 Flexible 'Shifting'** — 'Listening' to what students are doing/saying and adjusting the next 'move' to facilitate the work
- **P1.1 Real Artistic Processes/ Serious Study of Works of Art** — Rehearsal, improvisation, reflection/historical research, critique, curating – the patterns or purposes of this work drives the learning process
- **P5.1 Transparent Intentions and Actions** — Pedagogy is orderly and structured (not in a restrictive way, but for clarity of purpose)
- **P1.2 True-to-Self Teaching** — What teachers do is consistent with their values and integrity – who they are as a person
- **P2.1 Artistic, Social and Learning Processes** — Passionate and inquiry-based approaches to art making, leaving students with a desire to learn more and skills to continue without requiring rewards
- **P5.2 Responsiveness and Spontaneity** — It can be difficult to predict the best path in advance, hence choices must be 'fluid'
- **P2.2 Works of Other Artists** — High aims and a focus on standards that can be named, and goals that can be reached
- **P5 Transparency, Responsiveness and Flexibility**
- **P1 Authenticity**
- **P2 Modelling Artistic Processes, Inquiry and Habits**
- **P Pedagogy**
- **P4.3 Metaphoric Extensions** — Students are helped to see links between things they know and don't know through metaphoric and creative devices
- **P4 Making Learning Relevant and Connected to Prior Knowledge**
- **P3 Participating in the Learning Experience**
- **P2.3 Student-as-Artist Autonomy** — Invitation (rather than instruction), for students to work on projects, teacher circulating as a coach/mentor, guiding students to see possibilities, make decisions, share experience, discuss issues
- **P3.2 Entering Creative Space with Students** — Teachers participate as teacher-learners – putting their own artistry on the line
- **P4.2 Expansion of Students' Interests** — Students are helped to see beyond their own contexts
- **P3.1 Engaging in 'Human Experience'** — Regarding ideas, issues, feelings and aesthetics as aspects worthy of deep investigation
- **P4.1 Links to Students' Lives** — Students' social-cultural contexts, expressive languages, background knowledge, interests and activities are drawn upon to make content relevant
- **P3.3 Working 'Interdependently'** — Artists/teachers/students collaboratively creating works of art (where neither party could finish the work independently

Environment (E)

- **E3.2 'Taking Time'** — Slowing down to allow for deeper social experiences and stronger bonds among participants, watching the students' processes and studying the products they produce to gauge their progress, figuring out how to help students (talking to young artists, finding out their interests, standards, ambitions) to nurture
- **E1.2 Quality Materials** — High standard supplies, displayed in safe, functional and attractive ways
- **E1.1 Physical Safety/Functionality** — Ventilation, lighting, sound-production, space for movement and running water
- **E1.3 Authentic Resources** — Sprung wooden floors, African drums etc. which enhance work processes that are like the work of professional artists
- **E3 Sufficient Time for Authentic, Artistic Work**
- **E1 Functional, Safe and Aesthetic Space, Materials and Resources**
- **E Environment**
- **E3.1 'Macro' Temporal Dimensions of Learning Experiences** — Studying broadly across the arts and deeply within one art form, developing and learning through practice and repeated efforts and richness of cycles of making-sharing-reflecting, allowing teachers/students to consider the effectiveness of particular choices and to make revisions, for students' artistic ambitions to expand and have the opportunity to 'think big'
- **E2 The Arts Occupy a Central Place in the Physical Environment**
- **E2.1 Tangible Evidence of Arts Experiences** — Displays of student works, photos/captions of processes, sounds of music-making, performers coming and going, students practicing, displays of works of more experienced artists, posters and flyers of local performances, workshops
- **E2.3 Environment as a 'Third Teacher'** — The environment is an inviting and compelling magnet for learning – it provokes serious work and significant accomplishments and offers an invitation to and inspiration of students and parents (e.g., Reggio Emilia)
- **E2.2 Documentation of Processes** — 'Evidence' for open dialogue about achievements/standards, the subject matter/form of the works and what they provoke (e.g., photographs, notes, quotations, reminders of earlier work, provocation for the next steps)

Community Dynamics (C)

- **C3.2 Authentic/Productive Student Effort** — Students interact, working together in authentic and productive ways on projects that compel them
- **C1.1 Shared Commitment** — Being part of something bigger than oneself offers an identity and sense of purpose that sustains commitment to learning and fosters compassion
- **C1.2 Belief in Student Capacities** — Students are seen as knowledge-bearers, with voice, who can handle artistic challenges, and intense psychological and social dynamics
- **C3 Collaboration**
- **C1 Commitment, Belief, Trust**
- **C3.1 Behind-the-Scenes Work** — Prior to or outside of the class or workshop, teachers (and students) collaborate on lessons, coordinators stay in touch with logistical information
- **C Community Dynamics**
- **C1.3 Trust in Group Backup** — Faith to fall back on the teacher and peers, often through the group's support, kindness and high expectations
- **C2 Open Communication**
- **C2.3 Respectful Dialogue** — Questioning, offering ideas, considering other's ideas, expressing feelings, sharing work, engaging in constructive critique, reflecting on processes and products
- **C2.2 Non-Verbal Meaning/Sharing** — Communication can be visually orientated, as in dance classes, and involve perception – seeing, hearing, sensing – and recognition and response
- **C2.1 Multi-Directionality** — Listening is as critical as speaking or sharing one's work among students, between teachers and students, among teachers and between everyone and works of art

Figure 1. The L-PEC Framework (adapted from Seidel, et al., 2009)

Selected case study teachers were then each partnered with an academic (university arts educator) who had facilitated the workshop and an academic to undertake the research interviews—forming a teacher-facilitator-interviewer triad. Over the course of nine months (March to November), the teachers participated in three face-to-face facilitations within their classrooms and two phone dialogues focusing on their learning experiences. Members of the teacher-facilitator-interviewer triad were positioned as co-researchers, and several measures were used to track all participants' insights throughout the period to explore the temporal aspects of their encounters with arts education.

Methods

Qualitative case studies were undertaken, which involved methods that had an emphasis on ethnographic-style 'close up' shots of teachers' lives, with a focus on 'plot, story line, turning points and defining moments' (McLeod & Thompson, 2009, p. 61). The following tools were used, and data were triangulated to investigate how pathways are constituted and to provide rich examples of participants' voices.

Post-workshop interviews with all teachers in the larger study were held soon after the workshop event. With permission from the teachers, these interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in full, and participants were given the opportunity to check the accuracy of the interpretation. Using open-ended questions, the teachers were asked to reflect on the workshop experiences in relation to their professional learning through engaging in the workshop, shifts in beliefs and values, possible pedagogical transformations and new perspectives on children's learning.

The *in situ* facilitations were modeled on an inquiry-based approach, where arts educators defined and structured their own professional development (Gates, 2010). Hence, a focus on learner-defined content required a careful conceptualization of the sensitive role of the facilitator in the co-construction of meaning (Wright, 2010). Facilitation dialogues were tape recorded, and field notes were taken.

At the conclusion of the *in situ* facilitating sessions, the teachers were each interviewed in relation to their nine-month PLI. These interviews were semi-structured, using questions to probe more deeply into each of the key L-PEC theoretical dimensions pertaining to 'quality' visual arts education (where the interviewee was encouraged to elaborate). Examples of such questions are:

- Did art allow you or your students to participate in experimentation and exploration?

- Has your confidence to work artistically, alongside your students, changed in anyway?
- Have you had opportunities to devote sufficient time for authentic arts projects that extend across several linked lessons?
- Were there indicators of your students collaborating with each other through art experiences?

Analysis

Using the transcriptions of the interviews and facilitation sessions, Content Analysis[4] was undertaken by the authors, and excerpts of dialogue that illustrated theoretical constructs within the L-PEC ontology were coded (Krippendorff, 2013).[5] Results are presented below in relation to the PLI of the focus case study teacher, Ali, where codes have been inserted within her story to illustrate the areas of L-PEC that were foregrounded within her classroom context.[6] The conclusions, and implications that follow, center on the impact of the participatory PLI formats on enriching our co-construction of learning (Kooy, 2009).

Ali's Story

At the time of the research, Ali, the focus of this paper, was an elementary teacher who had been working at her school for three years. She was teaching a class of children aged 8-10 years old. Ali began teaching three years earlier and had a PhD in science but minimal experience in the visual arts. Her school had high support from leadership in the area of teaching in and through the arts. With plans in place for a whole-school arts program that coming year, her school signed up three of their teachers for the visual arts workshop: Ali, one of her senior colleagues, and the school's visual arts specialist teacher.

For the visual arts workshop at the University, the studio had been transformed into a form of Wunderkammer (a 'cabinet of curiosities') offering an array of resources to inspire and support artmaking (e.g., stuffed animals, science artifacts, displays, books) and equipment (e.g., microscopes, magnifying glasses, a lightbox). The workshop began with warm-up art experiences and exercises purposefully curated by the arts educators' extensive work with pre-service teachers to break through any potential *blockers* they might bring to class *('I can't draw!' 'I'm not creative!')*. These warm-ups included drawing with continuous line, collaborative drawing, and observational drawing, in order to build teachers' confidence.

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[4] Coding went beyond first level Key terms (i.e., Learning, Pedagogy, Environment, Community Dynamics) to identify specific second level constructs and their key definitions within the L-PEC ontology.
[5] There was consensus within the team on the interpretation and application of each of the codes presented here.
[6] The types and quantity of L-PEC features varied across the group of teachers.

Ali described feeling intimidated on that first day with the prospect of intensive artmaking, but tentatively gave her self over to the array of art warm-ups. While these art experiences were new to Ali she embraced them over the day. By the second day her personal interest and immersion in the rich science-based resources of the Wunderkammer inspired self-directed drawing, painting and printing with increasing confidence and willingness.

In the post-workshop interview, Ali articulated a marked shift in her beliefs and attitudes towards bringing art into her classroom. She expressed how she tried out ideas from the workshop first at home, then in her classroom (e.g., see L-PEC codes L1.3, L2.1). She mined the Internet for ideas and documented her sourced ideas in a visual art diary (C3.1). When asked whether the workshop might have changed her practice, she commented, "Well, I have to say, you have changed me entirely. I am a zealous convert." She added that the process of acting and feeling like an artist significantly influenced how she thinks of herself as having expertise in more than just science (L1.3). She noted that her new sense of expertise in art had given her confidence in her ability to participate in authentic learning experiences and to model artistic processes, inquiry and habits for the children (P1.1, P2.1), saying:

> *I feel it's not something that I should approach nervously; I can actually do it myself (L1.3). And because I feel confident in doing it myself, I can now teach it a lot more effectively (P1.2, P2.1)… Having that confidence to actually describe what I'm doing to the children (P3.2). I'll suggest an art task for the children to work on, and I'll … sit down with them doing the same sort of thing with the same materials, and we're all doing it together and they can see me doing it as well as them – I'm not standing there teaching them, telling them what to do, I'm in there with the pastels or whatever, playing as well (L4.1, P3.2, P3.3, E1.2).*

The workshop had blurred the boundaries between science and art for Ali. The Wunderkammer artifacts, tools, and technologies took on new, emergent possibilities, and artistic purpose. She was able to draw upon concepts, understandings and skills familiar to her experience of being a scientist—testing, challenging, probing, being curious, staying open to the unexpected, being patient, and taking risks. This helped her see the intersecting points between being a scientist and being an artist.

At the first *in situ* facilitation session in June (after a period of time in which the case study teachers were selectively sampled and interviewed), Ali described her curriculum focus of 'Intergenerational Communication' and an idea was co-constructed through a reciprocal exchange of ideas. The children would be asked to analyze the techniques artists use to convey an emotional connection between people (P2.2), and then they would be encouraged

to embody the pose and use this physical memory to create their own artwork depicting a personal relationship with someone whom they loved (L3.2, P4.1, P3.1).

In the second facilitation session (in August) Ali and one of the university facilitators returned to this idea and negotiated how it might be team-taught. Ali sourced four picture book illustrations that showed eye contact as one strategy to convey an emotional connection between two family members from different generations. Likewise, the facilitator collected images from picturebooks, artworks and photographs based on this theme. The facilitator and Ali invited the children to study these images and to co-investigate the strategies and techniques the artists used to convey 'closeness', such as eye and body contact, physical proximity, similar articles of clothing, mirrored/mimicked body posture, or looking at the same focal point (P3.1, P4.1, L2.2, L3.3). Images and magnifying glasses were distributed, and the children, working in pairs, identified many artistic strategies within the images.

Ali then led the children through their draft planning and final drawings with black fine liner and watercolor pencils. She invited the children to think of a loved older family member doing something with them that they enjoyed. She removed the stimulus artworks, encouraged the children to select strategies for depicting closeness, and invited them to draw 'from their heart' (L3.2). The examples in Figure 2 illustrate the high quality, emotionally charged and personalized drawings rendered by the children, incorporating many strategies that had been discussed. Every child used at least one strategy, and some used several.

Importantly, the children were able to articulate what they had done and why (L5.3. C2.3). The children's sustained engagement prompted Ali to extend the task after lunch. There was not a sense of the children being rushed to finish and they responded positively with focused interest in their drawing (C3.2, E3.2).
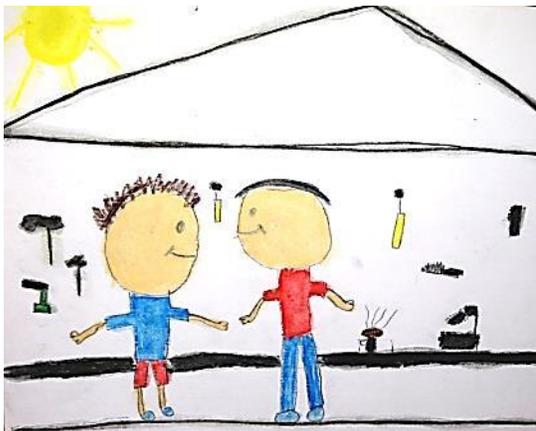
Eye contact, physical proximity, similar colored articles of clothing and mirrored body posture

Physical proximity

Physical proximity, body contact, looking at the same focal point

Physical proximity, body contact, looking at the same focal point
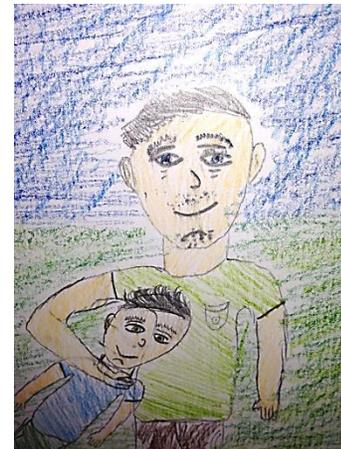
Physical proximity, body contact, mimicked body posture, looking at the same focal point

Figure 2. Sample drawings from Facilitation Session Two.
Employing artists' strategies to draw themselves with a loved older family member.

The third and final facilitation session (in November) was initiated and led by Ali, with the facilitator taking the role of observer and documenter. The Grade 3-4 teachers were working on the curriculum focus of 'May the force be with you!' investigating the cause and effect of forces through activities based on wheeled vehicles, and Ali's idea was to invite the students to engage in close observational drawing of her old Citroen car 'Dolly,' parked in the school playground (E2.3). Her two Grade 3-4 teaching colleagues expressed interest in joining in, and Ali happily agreed to lead all three classes (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Drawing 'Dolly' the Citroen Car

Ali encouraged the children to look closely at the structure of the car, and to only draw what they could see, not what they assumed to be there (i.e., to not revert to iconistic versions of 'car'). She prepared them for the idea that their drawings would look different from each other's, and posed the question why this might be so (L5.1, P2.3). This opened up a discussion on perspective (E2, L2.2).

The art materials were introduced. To slow down their drawing, focus their looking, and avoid multiple rubbing outs, it was decided that pencils and erasers were not to be used, only black fine markers (L1.2, L2.1). They could do as many drawings as they liked from the various perspective of where they chose to sit. The teachers moved in and out of the drawing circle offering gentle support (P2.1, P5.3, E3.1) and encouragingly suggesting drawing strategies (L3.1, L3.2, P5.1).

After an hour and with at least two drawings each, the 65 children came inside with their drawings (see Figure 4). In the classroom Ali asked everyone "how did you feel doing the drawing?" and the children made comments, such as "When I started to draw I didn't think I'd complete it. I kept working at it and I finished it" and "When I started to draw I felt frustrated but it got better". One boy excitedly commented that "I used to draw cars like this" (gesturing a schematic version of 'car'), "but now I draw cars like this" (holding up his drawings done through close observation) (L5.1, L5.3).

Figure 4. Sample 'Dolly' Drawings

The children were asked to select their two favorite drawings and these two artworks were
photocopied. The children then colored in with watercolor pencils, and mounted and displayed
their work (see Figure 5). The session unfolded over several hours (E3.2), with a sense of deep
engagement by all (L1.1, L5.1, C3.2).

Figure 5. Car Drawings with Color Added

Ali commented with surprise at the high quality of the children's drawings and their prolonged engagement on the task. She speculated that allowing longer than usual time (E3.2), access to a range of resources (E2.3, L1.2), and engagement in multi-directional dialogue had influenced these outcomes (C2.1). Ali commented on the authenticity of the students' efforts and expressed pride in their capacities and in her role of modeling artistic processes for the children (P1.1, E1.2, P2.1).

> *It's lovely the way the children have rushed up to show somebody else their artwork.*
> *And I have to say, you get a lump in your throat of pride that you've brought that out*
> *of the child. I never expected I'd be able to bring that out of children.*

Ali's enthusiasm for and commitment to this new (for her) pedagogical approach was underpinned by a belief in herself and the children as capable and creative learners (C1.2, P2.3). She embraced the lived curriculum, 'read her audience' and how they were travelling, and offered time for sustained engagement (P5.3, C2.3, E3.2).

She described how the children enjoyed working like artists through the processes of looking, making and talking (L2.1, L2.2, L4.1) and how they developed a sense of 'ownership' through the task of drawing Dolly, setting themselves new challenges (L5.1, P4.2).

> *The children went and drew the car from another angle. They actually challenged*
> *themselves and did some diagonal on and from the back or the front and so they pushed*
> *themselves.*

Ali was interested in providing authenticity in her pedagogy, to engage children in real artist

processes (P1.1), and facilitate quality creative and artistic responses with her students. In relation to modeling artistic processes for the children, Ali commented:

> *Originally I was desperately uncomfortable. It was something that was quite alien to me. But when I do it with the children, the more I am enjoying it and the more they realize that you don't have to be perceived as a brilliant artist to be able to enjoy art.*

Ali valued working on a project that sustains children's interest over a sufficient period of time (L5.1, L5.2, L5.3, C3.1, C3.2) and recognized the importance of documenting student learning processes to show tangible evidence of arts experiences (E2.2, E2.1). She took several photographs of all of the children's drawings, which illustrate that each child engaged in an authentic effort with the drawing project (E3.2). Numerous artifacts of the children's work demonstrated deep engagement with the artistic materials and artistic processes (L1.2, L1.3).

Ali reflected on how the community dynamics within her classroom were multi-directional. This involves respectful dialogue, which can, at times, be non-verbal sharing (C2.2, C2.3).

> *When it's a little bit more open for them, I tend to just sit down with them and do the art with them. So they can see that I am joining in as well.*

Ali was reflective about the authenticity of her pedagogy and the impact of this on children's learning collaboration and her teaching in general (P2.1, P3.1, P3.2, P3.3).

> *Through art, the children collaborated with each other… sharing ideas, offering positive suggestions, offering encouragement to each other. It's brought so much of that good out in them.*

This helped her understand the learning dynamics within her class (C2.1, C2.2, C2.3) and to empathize with how the children were thinking and feeling (L3.1, L1.3, P3.3, P4.1).

> *Sometimes I'll sit next to a child and draw with them. And I find if you sit with them in the classroom there's this gentle chitter-chatter. There's this beautiful buzz while they are drawing. And you sit next to a child that you know you need to spend some time with… If you're not making eye contact and you're spending time over a drawing you can actually have a really deep conversation with them.*

Seven months after the end of the project, Ali had continued to scaffold and document the children's learning (P2.1, E2.3) and encouraged them to curate their own work (E2.1, L5.3).

> *We frame our artwork, and we have it on display. So we're not just doing the artwork, we're also celebrating it afterwards.*

Ali continued to be a deep reflector on children's learning in relation to her praxis (P5.3). She and the children set high standards with regard to their art (C1.1, C3.2, P2.2, P3.3).

> *They know that THIS is how long they are expected to spend on their drawing because that's the amount of time it should take them to come out with a piece of art. And so they've got the time to go into that detail.*

Ali's distinct science-art blended focus helped her continue to see common learning processes across these two disciplines. As evidenced in her follow-up interview, Ali encouraged the children to develop their observational skills and analytical processes (L2.2).

> *We start off by talking and we don't put pen to paper for five or ten minutes. We just look. And I think it's that, not rushing into it [that is important]: it's that, 'Actually, what do you SEE? And I think it is the conversation you have while they're drawing that brings it out, that rich art of the children. I walk around the room and we discuss what we're doing, like 'how many colors can you see in one pumpkin?' We'll discuss what we're seeing and I'll try to bring out some of the rich observations.*

She also encouraged the children to engage in respectful dialogue when critiquing each other's work (L3.2, P3.2, E2.3).

> *The children are familiar with the language. Like, 'I really like the way that you did this,' or 'If it were mine, I might have done it this way.' They come out with the right language so that everybody feels very positive at the end of it.*

In summary, Ali's story interrogates some meanings about quality visual arts education through excerpts of her praxis and her reflections on this in relation to L-PEC principles: her students' learning, her pedagogy and the classroom environment and community dynamics within it. A broader perspective of what might be learned from Ali's case and the methodology used to surface her learning throughout the PLI is discussed in the concluding remarks below.

Conclusions and Implications

The partnering of a teacher with university-based arts educators provided an opportunity to collect evidence for the positive effects of art, and specifically, the quality of these effects

(Chemi, 2014; Fiske, 1999). The co-researchers were committed to documenting and studying how effective pedagogy, classroom environment, and classroom dynamics contribute to student learning in the arts, and how children's artworks can be seen as sites of learning. As a result, we were able to make visible exemplars of children's learning and to illustrate the unfolding of adults' shared knowledge-construction in relation to a theoretical ontology based on L-PEC. This process is schematically depicted here in Figure 6.

Figure 6. A Schematic of L-PEC in relation to Making Learning Visible

Dialogic relationships between Ali and the academics opened avenues for a "living experience of inquiry" (Issacs, 1999, p. 9), and a chance to understand each other's meaning while suspending judgment. Together the teacher-facilitator-interviewer team established a proactive and supportive community of learners (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996; Sinclair, Watkins & Jeanneret, 2015). They became co-researchers and, together, interrogated the meaning and attributes of quality learning, pedagogy, environment and community dynamics (L-PEC) in visual arts education. As critical friends (Costa & Kallick, 1993), all members of the team examined their work and how to improve their practices. The intended outcome of increasing and deepening a collective involvement in arts practice required asking provocative questions and examining data presented through an analytical lens.

The professional learning intervention with Ali was particularly effective because she consistently reflected on her own arts-based praxis in relation to her students' learning (Burnaford, 2006; Marshall, 2014). Through deep immersion as an artist, Ali's praxis broadened and deepened, and the PLI helped her reflect on the physical, aesthetic and emotional qualities of her classroom environment, the community dynamics within it, and the role she played in enhancing the learning of her students. Ali applied creative processes coupled with reflective critique (Sullivan, 2006, 2008). The examples of Ali's students' work, along with transcribed excerpts from interviews with Ali, demonstrate how artworks and personal reflections are sites of learning and evidence of understanding (Leavy, 2009). As surfaced in Ali's Story, engaging deeply with the meaning of quality visual arts education helped her feel prepared and motivated to adopt an arts-based pedagogy in her classroom.

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that Ali's Story (her 'lived experience') cannot be generalised to other contexts. Indeed, her learning journey might have been quite different if she had been teaching in a less supportive context – one in which art was not as highly valued – and if she had not been a PhD graduate, which often encourages divergent thinking (a quality that is applicable to both art and science). The community dynamics within Ali's school, and within the Grade 3-4 teaching team in particular, illustrate the importance of behind-the-scenes work and adult synergy to make things work (C3.1, C3.3).

This school-based collaboration was apparent in the follow-up visit with Ali, after seven months of co-researching with her school colleagues. Ali saw herself as the facilitator within the Grade 3-4 teaching team. She would share with her colleagues her arts-based experience that had been undertaken within her own classroom, and her colleagues would then try the ideas out in their own classrooms. But rather than focusing on Pedagogy, Ali continued to center on student Learning, which is consistent with the learner-focused orientation of the L-PEC framework. She commented on her colleagues' interactions with the children, saying, "I've noticed them bringing out that same depth in their students as well."

As illustrated in many aspects of Ali's work, she embraced the teacher-as-researcher role, seeing her own practice as research – something to be documented and shared with others (E2.1, E2.2, L5.3, C3.3). As such, she and the other teachers began to view children's artworks as more than aesthetic objects, and instead, as sites of learning and evidence of understanding (Leavy, 2009).

Under Ali's facilitation, the grade 3-4 teaching team established a culture of evidence (Burnaford, 2006), where documentation of learning in action provided a record of what actually happens during artistic experiences (Chemi, 2014) and a catalyst for discussing the learning in reflective, analytic ways (Rinaldi, 2006). Ali recognized the mentoring role that she experienced with the university team during the PLI, and commented on how she applied components of this in her collaborations with her colleagues, saying "So you've not only helped me, but you've helped another three teachers as well."

Ali's Story provides some preliminary and positive findings related to a university-school partnership and the interrogation of the meaning of quality visual arts education in the context of one elementary school context. L-PEC was used as an ontology that underpinned the social-constructivist perspectives surrounding Ali's case study. The epistemology centered on the view that knowledge is socially co-constructed through interaction and through embodied engagement with the arts. Follow-up, larger scale research, which is forthcoming, will build upon this pilot study, to further explore how, as Gates (2010) describes it, a shared focus and systematic study may ensure the transformative power of learning. It is hoped that such

research will add to the collective understanding of how teachers build knowledge about their students' learning in relation to their pedagogy, and the significance of the environment and community dynamics in providing support for all participants. Making visible examples of evolving praxis may serve as sources through which teachers might gain confidence through identifying with other teachers' lived experiences (Kalin, 2014; Powell & Lajevic, 2011).

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