Admitting Their Worlds: Reflections of a Teacher/Researcher on the Self-Initiated Art Making of Children

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Abstract

"I'm trying the least of anything to control this drawing… in fact I want it to run away with me." says Billy, a fifth grader who reads at 13th grade level. He clears his throat and begins to sketch and his stories flood the page. This qualitative research paper looks at what free sketchbook drawing does for a group of boys ages 8-14 who participate in an after-school drawing club. The writing blends critical pedagogy with the influence of the adult media culture (e.g, war, television, movies, video games, and the internet) and my perceptions as researcher/teacher.

Introduction

> I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been
> only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then
> finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean
> of truth lay all undiscovered before me. (Sir Isaac Newton, 1855)

A steady grinding fills the room as two electric pencil sharpeners get a constant workout.
Sometimes drawing becomes a sort of animation, drawing while explaining a scene with
accompanying dialogue and sound effects. Alan, a nine year old, draws and narrates, "Oh,
here is the cool teleporter. The Rock Monsters are guarding the energy crystals that power . .
.and this is the Chrome Crusher." Alan's drawing is alive for him; he is his own audience,
unconscious of the bigger circle of listeners. Alan's performance draws a crowd that makes a
connection between popular video game characters and Alan's ability to appropriate those
same characters for a story in his sketchbook.

Seventeen children hunch over drawing tablets to sketch Dr Hurricane, warring bunny tribes
dubbed the Pupa and the Larva, walking hearts, death by big Greek Fire, the skateboarder,
Sponge Bob, and a pig policeman. I notice children are animated in conversation, constructing
detailed drawings and engaged in self-talk while they draw. All except two of the young
artists are boys and most are between the ages of nine and fourteen. These young artists are
regulars in a Tuesday after-school free drawing club.

I am the organizer and overseer of the drawing sessions where dialogue, environment, and
collaboration are believed to be the best approaches to teaching. This dialogue acts like two
oars hitting the water with equal thrust. The teacher respects the child's knowledge and
curiosity with the charge to challenge, to expand experience, to develop empathy and self-
awareness, and to decode the larger culture. The teacher has clarity of direction and skills to
listen, to respect what the child knows, and to put forward new techniques, subject matter, and
collaborative exchanges. He/she is not an outrigger, cradling the oars, only observing the
rhythmic efforts. To sweep her oar in sync, the teacher must also share personal experience, to
offer a slice of a different life, to broaden the young artist's perceptions, empathy and self-
understanding. I see both student and teacher as learners (Freire, 2005; hooks, 2003) and in
this grace a humane crossing launched.

Visiting a Public School Art Classroom

The following is my response to hearing a child's story, what I observed in her art class, and
my own struggle to construct an understanding of that life. The lack of punctuation and
jammed together fragments reflects an attempt to represent the profound visible world, to use

language as an image (Lyotard 1989, as cited in Crome and Williams, 2006). "The eye listens" (Claudel, 1941, as cited in Crome and Williams, 2006,p. 34).

School Drawing

Here is a drawing of my grandmother.
I'mprettytiredIwonderwheremypencilis
MaybeIcanborrowonewhatthefucking
Idon'thaveapencilIgetanotherzero
careIdon'tcareIdon'tcareIdon'tcareIdon't

What is that red all over her? Is that blood?
ThisisnotmydayIhaveonlyonefriend
Andsheisnotnotnotreallythatmuchofa
friendIhatethewayshedidIremembermy
lunchdidIdothiswrongwrongwrongwrong

My grandmother is bleeding because she died.
Mymothercriesandcriesandcriesandcrieswhy
Shealwayscrieswhensomethinghappensthat
stopstopandItrytogotobedbutitistooloudsoIwatch
televisionandwaitforrthecryingtostop.

You cannot show blood in school. Draw again.
Mymotherishavingherfootcutofftomorrowand
Ihaveto staywithmydadandhisgirlfriendandherstinkyson
Whowhinesandisinawheelchairandisboring
AndifmygrandmotherwasnotdeadIcouldstaywithher.

Here is my drawing of my grandmother.
AtleastmydadhascatsandIlovecatsandIcanpetthem
IwishIhadoneofthosebratzdollsIlovetheirmake-up
IwishIhadmoremake-upIwonderifmydad'sgirlfriend
Hasanymake-upIcouldhavemybadstreakisgettingbigger

What are those marks behind her and on the floor?
TearstearsandeveryoneiscryingandIcan'ttellanyone
IwaswatchingTVandeatingandwaitingforthecryingtostop
Mygrandmotherhadadrawerformethathadlotsofneatstuffinit
Likemascaraandquartersandnailpolishandgumandbracelets

Tears. Everyone is crying because my grandmother died.
Idon'tknowwhymygrandmotherhdiedbutIthink
ShewasgoingtogetmeaBratzdollandnowsheisdead
Andoncemygrandmothershowedmehertomatoplantsand
Toldmeshelikedhertomatoplantsmorethananythingelse

No. Draw again. Your drawing must be happy.
WhenIwokeupthe housewasdarkandIsawAdam
SandlerinfluffyhairsingingataweddingandIpeedand
thesamedreamastepbrotherwhocaresandmakesmepopular
AndIwonderifmyteacherwilletmeborrowapencil

What the teacher misses, and what the young artist experiences, is authentic art-making, the creation of something that stands for a feeling (Langer, 1953). The girl works in complexity, using her "utmost conceptual power, imagination," (p. 40) combined with a technical know-how to represent her feelings. The thought process involves memory, selecting and rejecting the essence of the memory, reflection, and self-assessment. The student's drawing connects different emotions: her frustration at not having a pencil hence her own feeling of inadequacy, her confusion about the emotions triggered by death, loneliness, the worry and anger of acceptance. These feelings emerge from the impossibility to connect different ideas completely. In turn their meaning is transferred to new forms, in this instance, a drawing (Lyotard, 1988 as cited in Crome & Williams 2006).

The teacher's censorship of the student's violent drawing implies an ignorance about what art does for anybody. But is the teacher's act unconscionable? Perhaps the art teacher adheres to a modernist tradition, recognizing "universalization of values" (Lyotard, 1992, p. 68) to see "the whole in the part" (Clifford,1988, p. 4). Yet to create a simplified homogenized truth, the story of the Other must be lost (Mazzei, 2007; Markham, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). "To make the whole appear Rational the contradictory stories of others must be erased, devalued, suppressed. Any appearance of unity presupposes and requires a prior act of violence" (Flax, 1990, p.33). The teacher may be acting with good intentions, believing the aspiration of the arts and sciences is to liberate and to produce happy people (Lyotard, 1992). But her decision to censor the students undermines the Other's right to tell a story. Or, perhaps, the drawing, raw and exposed, leaves the teacher anxious, either worrying over administrative disapproval or her own fear of listening. Adults like to imagine children are untouched by loss.

This Is How It Goes

The CD player is usually my last thought. Scattered on the table are silver scarred disks, the pickings of a tired collection left behind. The boys have clear opinions on what they like. I hope to find Travis, Rolling Stones, or Flaming Lips. I try to hold the disks by the edges to read the titles: Abbey Road, something by the Backstreet Boys, Sutra Chanting and the Four Tenors singing Tosca. Not good. Last week I wrote "NEW MUSIC" on my knuckles in ballpoint. I overhear a table of heated talk. "Why would anyone want to take over the world? That's crazy." Two boys are drawing thin cylinders dropping from airplanes on small houses. Some tiny houses are smoking and in ruins. A third boy stops drawing fangs on a monster: the airplane attack has him mesmerized. "BAM-BAM-BAM-KABOOM," said the two. "And now we have control!"

All three sketchbook artists are nine years old; the boy drawing a monster and concerned about the worlds' fate is home schooled for religious reasons. "We are not allowed to draw anything gory at home," he tells me, "I really like Pokémon but my parents won't buy anything like that. Last week my mom fussed at me for drawing pirates and dead people with blood on them." Someone puts on *Abbey Road*. The Fab Four harmonize "Because" and I see an ongoing negotiation among the boys as they wonder, "How are the others like me or not?" There is so much going on at each table; the wooing of self-reflection by the drawn performances. The boys are all selecting or rejecting from enormous backlots of others to decide their own world. I sit down feeling overwhelmed in trying to sort this all out. Wally tells me he has been drawing since the age of three and puts the last touches on his Albino Psychotic Squirrel. Then says, "The problem with me is I can't say no. And you know what is the problem with my friends? They always ask if they can come over to my house. Sometimes I just want to be alone."

I glance at the table of the two boys drawing bombing raids. The young artists never erase, just add to earlier marks. The third boy has titled his work, "You will NOT take over the world. Not if I have anything to say about it." I find the boys' raucous drawings more compelling to study than the cute images drawn by the girls. The boys' drawings are thick with a rebellious quality, their energy intoxicating. The boys' drawing is like a stream of consciousness and what I also hear in their language-–sporadic, lightning fast, and flip. The boys are seduced by callous, nervy, media and unleash a bizarre aesthetic of "laughing grammar" (Bakhtin, 1984 as cited in Shohat & Stam, 1998, p. 36), a clamorous language released from tidy norms of propriety. They are likely to participate in what Bakhtin (1984) calls the "carnavalesque" challenging conventional aesthetics, everything built from the flipside of meanings (as cited in Shohat & Stam, 1998, p. 35) Filled with catchphrases referring to the destruction of something virtual or dodging airborne villains, the drawings are performances for the artist and all within earshot.

The boys' merrymaking, a freedom from censorship, has a carnival ethos of deviancy and risk-taking evidenced in studies by Dyson (1997, 2003), Grace & Tobin (2002), Hilton (1996, as cited in Thompson, 2007). The boys' aesthetic also inhabits an audacity and a fragmentation not only of language but also in a style similar to a *rasquachism,* Chicano artworks that goad Anglo-American superiority by mixing historical ballads, images from Walt Disney, Mexican cinema, mass media and American Pop Art (Rogoff, 1998). The common thread among the carnival, rasquachism and the aesthetic of the boys is about poking fun, the luscious freedom to fling norms to the edge, and then to give a final nudge.

A Guided Tour

Drawing Club began two years ago as a place for children to experience self- directed drawing. I needed to quiet the officious voice of traditional pedagogy rattling around in my brain, something about mastering a "canon of exemplars," situating the teacher's knowledge as truth, and the idea of a child as a sponge to soak it up (Choi & Bresler, 2001, p. 28). Brent Wilson (1974) introduced the idea of *self-initiated play art*, or art children do "to please and inform themselves" (Thompson, 2007, p. 899) versus school art with its agenda of deciding what's best. In Wilson's school scenario, the child and a deflated balloon are interchangeable. The art teacher with missionary zeal pumps up the little balloon, resuscitating the elements of art, idolizing white European culture, and defining multiculturalism as the Exotic. The use of props, picture books, rules of behavior and consequences, routines and enticing materials are gimmicks art teachers use to control and inform. The prefabricated lesson plan feigns curiosity, playfulness and intellectual rigor but misses the mark like the worst stand-up comic.

The children in Drawing Club arrive after a day of school. The room has five rectangular tables with chairs that are scaled to fit adolescents. After choosing their sketchbook from a stack, the fourteen boys sit anywhere except near the two girls, who have segregated themselves at their own table. The boys wear oversized clothes, knee length tee shirts and saggy pants, their hair is either cropped short or curled at their ear lobes like rock stars in the early 60's. The children don't seem tired after a day of school. The room fills with an aroma of Cheetos, sweat, and gum erasers.

This is how art-making works: problems arise and are solved. While the artist selects and rejects media, meaning, and voice, there is a personal uncovering of style, multiple and shifting, manifested in a self-talk or personal performance. Doubt and time become bedfellows as the artists try maneuvers, refigure, think on their thinking, and bounce twice before bending around to find their drawing speaks clearly. Through the natural process, the young drawers learn that "artworks have exact definitive meanings intended by the artist" (Efland, 2002, p. 12) and through the intersubjective community and a teacher worth her salt, the artists learn to decode the symbols of the Other.

There is an intellectual rigor based on this self-reflective curriculum of "visualizing inquiry" (Irwin & Chalmers, 2007, p. 184). This "reflective intelligence" (Efland, 2002, p. 17) is quite unlike the flat work of memorizing the right answer, the stepsister for following directions, a common in-school practice requiring no decisions, no risks, and few demands, a kind of learned helplessness (Duckworth, 1996). Most boys in the Drawing Club don't like their school art class, complaining about boring projects. Wally lists his worst art assignment: copying *Starry Night* with construction paper mosaics (paper cut into inch size squares). Wally tells me that he used purple paper for the Starry Sky since there was no blue and got a D for not matching Van Gogh's colors.

After spending twenty hours with these young artists, I identify with their "hurrious" (Young, 2007, p.22) need to free draw. As a child my school papers were adorned with doodles. I was a poor arithmetic student, amusing myself by refiguring story problems into drawings. I was disappointed with textbook illustrations, never in scale and lifeless. In art class I sat next to Dan Fogelberg who taught me how to draw a wheeled robot and to appreciate idioms. I drew comic strips about an insect rock band called the Beetles, designed mock homes and filled pages of lined notebook paper with fictitious family portraits. In school art we were taught how to draw caricatures, at which I was abysmal, but transfixed as my school art teacher, a very tall gray whiskered man with a flat top, took a crayon and transformed my manila construction paper into a big nosed man wearing a bowler. None of my friends drew so I saw my pictures as superfluous and, like my overbite, something to cover up with a cupped hand.

My childhood felt peculiar from the others. I accepted this as my lot in life. I did not expect to be included in social events or classroom jokes but in 7th grade I found a companion, even more invisible than I was, who also drew. Together we formed the school art club and on Tuesdays after school, drew on notebook paper during chorus. We also started a secret agent club spying on one particular tall boy, set apart by his extreme thinness and the quirky habit of carrying a briefcase. I ached with the awareness of my incongruity. My isolation from the clique that wore fishnet stockings and sang in chorus was a low-grade dismissive feeling that bell hooks describes as "what some people fear in themselves is their own 'differences'" (2003, p.9).

Bunnies at War

Jack, a ten year old, pulls two 15-inch plastic monsters from his backpack and sets them up in front of his sketchbook. Boys on either side ask to see the models and twist the creatures into violent attack postures. The head gets real torque abuse and I expect this to worry Jack but he seems unconcerned. Jack pulls out his drawing from the previous week and begins a camouflaged creature with a sucking mouth. He mutters, "I messed up," erases and fixes the mouth and adds a slime man. Between drawing moments Jack adjusts and repositions his plastic monsters. He watches the boys drawing next to him. The boys are drawing fields of

one-inch bunnies labeled "Ivisible Bunny, Claw Bunny, evil sienctist bunny, bionicle bunny, the most powrile full bunny, rapping bunny, spiper bunny, engineire bunny, singer bunny, trooper bunny, ice bunny, air bunny, robo bunny, robo bunny's evil clone, shark bunny, mega bunny, fist bunny, kid bunny, big tooth bunny, flash bunny, towns bunny robber."

Jack asks the boys why they are drawing so many bunnies. "Because my bunnies are declaring war on his bunnies." A close look at the bunny war filled with Pac-man-sized bunnies tells me the artist is very aware of adult culture: included here are sharks, mad scientists, Freddy Kreugger, Troopers, robbers, bionics, and evident fixations with larger sizes, rap music, and Robo Cop. The boys' drawings do not represent intimate moments of their daily lives, but excerpts from popular culture. Perhaps drawing is a means to decode or to understand. Or their drawing could be a method of ownership. The heavy influence of video games in composition, plot, portrait, language is also obvious. The bunnies are cute like Japanese Pokémon, yet have a bite as if the artist is deconstructing the idea of cute. In the machine drawings of many boys, the maze-like compositions are reminiscent of Rube Goldberg diagrams, a predecessor to video games.

Pencils dart across the pages in a kind of duet. Two boys elaborate on the Bunny Wars. One boy puts his bunny on a chopper with sawed off shotgun and dark glasses. There is a visual reference to The Terminator. I can see an intersubjectivity, or a tip-of-the-hat to the Others' drawn symbols. These symbols hold a personal curiosity and in turn, deepen friendships among the boys (Hodge &Tripp, 1986; Thompson, 2007, p. 860). Two boys whisper about battle plans, pick up pencils and begin to shape mountains and storm clouds. Across the room three boys describe a video game: how to capture a cave monster.

These are performances of text and image that concoct collective memory, ask what we all know of this, and also act as a springboard for new ideas (Smith-Shank, 2004). Around the room community dialogue is tangled like kites; young artists skip the unraveling to add more jumble and serious talk. The drawn performance–either a self-narrative, between two or three, or among many boys around a table–is where new ideas are performed, re-interpreted, sometimes appropriated. Elvis flips *Scientific Progress Goes Boink* by Bill Watterson open to a strip about a transmogrifier, a cardboard box for morphing. Calvin in this story duplicates himself. "I'm working on juxtaposition for my art class" says Elvis, an 11 year old. "It is of the mountains and a city. Now I will draw Calvin." He chooses a drawing pencil and begins to work. He continues, "Well, I really like video games, the kind where you are a mystical hero, like *Worlds of Warcraft*."

Wally, about 13, sits next to Elvis. Wally has bushy hair and a broader, more mature build. Someone asks Elvis if he has seen the Simpson movie, and Wally, like a fan blade, whips that he saw the movie, loves the Simpsons, crying, "I can really draw them really well." He then

sketches a Simpson family member followed by a spaceship adorned with the letters NASE. "I can't use the letters NASA because it's a trademark," he says, now sketching Alphie the Lizard, inspired he murmurs by a lizard on Disney's *Animal Kingdom*.

Elvis, curled over his paper, sketches arrows-flying, battling stick figures and calls out movie twists to Wally who transforms Alphie the Lizard into an arrow pincushion. By the end of the first class, Wally and Elvis are narrating with pencil and paper, "Hooza, acupuncture!" "Ow my spleen!"   A skirmish ensues with stick figures and Alphie all pierced with flying arrows. A bomb is added and captions for sequences "Lets [sic] Go Booom!" "A Bomb Continued," and   "Ow! My Spleen," fill five pages until Elvis's big-eyed stick figures are crisp.

This large-scale attack throws Wally into maniacal glee. He is weak with laughter, rolling his head side to side. His ears are pink and tears crawl from the corners of his eyes. I am surprised at Wally's jubilance from the hypothetical death of his beloved character. Isn't Alphy a treasured creation, drawn and redrawn? Borne from Disney's cast of characters, is Wally poking fun at the innocent, superficial aesthetic of Disney? Or is the massacre of Alphy poking fun at what adults find so tragic (Zizek, 1991)? Perhaps, Wally is experiencing the sublime to "present the unpresentable" (Lyotard, 1992, p. 71).

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime;* …but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful, as we every day experience. (Burke, 1990, p.36)

Too bad that I feel self-conscious about interviewing: I worry that I may alter the peculiar or force an intimacy. To be an effective teacher working in a "visualizing inquiry" curriculum, the boys' curiosities are important. If I value self-reflection and critical thinking, I must begin with their questions. But is it realistic to expect a nine year old to explain what's behind his work? Drawing has its own language (Langer, 1953). Using text to explain the gist of a drawing seems clumsy. What if I ask a question that confuses or distracts? How can I connect with ten-year-old boys? Maybe I should feign ignorance. I have this overpowering urge to demonstrate a technique. I know the boys like to draw: television cartoon characters, comic book heroes, strange scientific-like phenomena, movie text, and war scenes. How can I help without the heavy promotion of my own agenda? I sometimes fear teaching is winning or losing. I sit next to Jack who tells me, "Now I am going to draw something gruesome."

The abundance of their drawings lessens the importance of each one. I must resist that thinking. Similar to their language, fast with abrupt changes in topic, so the drawings are quick sketches, like gestures on paper, with little editing. Few boys will work on two

drawings the entire 90 minutes. Neither the longer nor quicker drawings pay heed to adult aesthetic concerns like consistent depth/shadow, the blank page as serious compositional issue, or balance. The greater truth in the drawings lies in their accurate portrayal of the boys themselves more than a faithful adherence to the subject matter. The drawings have varied lines, energy, rhythm, tension, narrative, complexity, and meaning for the artist and for the audience of their peers. I see drawing techniques, emanata, subject matter and narratives copied among the boys.

I ask Elvis how he learned to draw. He tells me, "Most of my characters come from games and some of these characters are me and my brothers." The topic of video games keeps coming up in this group. I am not a gamer but know that video games offer participation in new worlds of fantasy, war missions, urban planning, conflict resolution, and social change; the electronic media pulsates sound bytes and quick slices of visual dim sum as virtual rewards are divvied out (Parks, 2008). Video games incorporate symbolism, require the retention of key information and the adaptation to another media culture– all of which means a complex learning of insider phrases, desires of characters, and particular goals (Tobin, 2000).

Video game companies and toy manufacturers have done their research, listing "daydreams, absurdist humor, hero worship, and a keen sense of group identity" (Kline, 1993, p.18) as key "boy" qualities. I see the thrill of power, good versus evil, the allure of the coarse/vulgar/offensive/disgusting, outrageous silliness at physical humor, fearlessness, the desire to achieve mastery, affection that is direct, tenderness with a bravado. Should it be worrisome that toy and video manufacturers offer products that exploit these desires, pleasures the boys find difficult to resist?

All the boys who play video games have evidence of video games in their drawings. In a study by Joseph Tobin (2000) questioning the effect of media violence on children, findings show little cause for concern with imitative violence or violence as a reaction to something experienced second hand. When I see the parents around town, they complain about the children's video game obsession. Others talk about the games' artificial content and the narrowness of problems and solutions. Parents worry that the guided play of computer games restricts imagination and prevents the practice of self-regulatory play.

The Scroll of Destiny

Toby's dragons span the width of two sketchbook pages. The dragons are full of detail: minute scales, wet nostrils, curved claws and transparent wings. When Toby speaks about dragons, he looks you in the eye and gestures. His conversational style resembles ad men on television, lecturing fluently, with well-timed inflection. Toby is eleven years old with short dark clean parted hair, slicked flat and cut close in a style reminiscent of the 1950's. Toby has

a cleft lip and is overweight. I have never seen him being silly, coarse or provocative, characteristics of most boys. It is rare to see Toby talking to a peer. While observing at a local grade school last fall, I saw Toby being bullied:

> "Hey, Dragon Boy, tell us more about your immortal winged snakes." The boy changed his voice at "winged snakes." "Get lost." "No, you get lost, Dragon Boy," impersonating Toby's diction.

Today Toby draws horses in tall grass. There are fences and hills and blue skies. I ask him about his drawing:

> "This is a drawing of Katie and Glory. On Saturday Katie died. She had blood in her urine. We think she has twisted something inside her like her liver. (He points to a second horse in the picture). Glory has been standing near the fence for a long while; she is standing by another horse and pony for a long while. We think she's lonely. My dad cried when Katie died. She was my dad's kissing horse. My dad taught her to kiss him. She'd come over and lick him and he would kiss her. Then, she'd come over and do the same to me. We were very attached to her."

> " Have you ever had anyone die that you loved before? "
> " My grandpa. I knew very much about him. He told me stories about being a ground soldier in World War II."

I'd like to say I know a lot about what drawing does for these boys. But it is hard to be involved with one boy, to follow his drawing, and miss so much else. To focus on one boy means to miss another. Even more, I am still concerned that I have too much influence and inadvertently point the boys towards an adult aesthetic or to my own vision. The "visualizing inquiry" curriculum whispers in my ear, leading me into the overgrown woods. I listen harder but it's all guesswork. How do I know what the boys are really saying? Paths are hidden and my hypotheses are riddled with intuition and empathy. I wonder if I am teaching art or passing out self-identity maps? Is there a difference?

I have many unanswered questions. Are the boys drawing battle scenes from a memory of authentic images of war found in print publications? Or do their drawn bleeding cadavers emerge from the stylized online games that are several steps removed from the actual event? Do the boys see differences between the cartoon explosions and the reality of war? Their sketchbook performances exaggerate battle narratives with blood spouting like volcanic activity. I cannot be positive how the boys see war; their parodies do not tell me if they have internalized the tragedy or not.

Last weekend while I was leaving a movie theatre (I saw *In the Line of Fire,* a violent movie with a scene in which Leonardo DeCaprio's character gets his fingers broken by hammer blows from a terrorist-The torture is brief but horrific) I heard "Hey Vicky," and there was a drawing club boy. I was surprised to see him. He looked shaken and confessed, " That scene with the hammer was awful. Oh that was so terrible. Oh gosh. Oh gosh." The boy's extreme discomfort suggests that his gory drawings do not hold the same meaning for him as the realistic depiction of violence.

Moreover, from seeing their drawings filled with karate fights, television cartoon characters, vampires, video game creatures, my perception of the media and its pull on the boys is altered. In their enthusiastic appropriation of different media sources, I see an intertextuality like the connection between war images and Disney cartoons, imposing Alphie the Lizard into a Helms Deep battle scene; or their melding a violent movie hero and an adapted video game character, to create the Terminator Bunny (Tobin, 2000). Perhaps, the appropriation of a variety of media sources indicates that all of these are equally unreal to them?

Traditional teachers have little interest in the authentic work of children. Perhaps, it is too bizarre, nervy or preposterous. But change requires disruption. The boys are moving towards adolescence and the inevitable reconstruction of a new reality. If the teacher imposes obedience to an adult-tested aesthetic, the opportunity to learn much from the young artist is lost. How can the teacher see what's coming, if what is happening now is ignored? "If ignorance controls behavior, it takes on the risks of action in ignorance" (Bateson, 1994, p. 226), like a misstep into war or electing the wrong President. Video games, Skittles, internet, shortcuts, hideouts, gaming crises, movies, Twizzlers, web comics, trading cards, skateboards, television, loneliness, bullying, abuse, prostitution, rape and too often maiming and killing, paint an erratic background as the child dashes from birth to adulthood. Adults bury their heads and the boy fashions tiny swords on the page.

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About the Author

Vicky Grube is Assistant Professor of Art at Appalachian State University. Dr. Grube received her MEd from the University of Illinois, her MFA in Theatre Arts and her PhD in Art Education from the University of Iowa. She has taught painting, theatre design, art education and early childhood education at the University of Iowa and surrounding colleges in the Midwest. She has a national and a regional NEA in the Visual Arts, has shown her work throughout the midwest notably at the Chicago Cultural Center, the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City and at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha and won Best of Show at the Nelson Atkins and at the Des Moines Art Center where her work is in their permanent collection.

She has designed sets and costumes for University of Iowa theater productions working with Rinde Eckert and Ducks Breath Mystery Theatre, Leon Martell. In 1988 she received a Diverse Visions Grant from the Mc Knight Foundation of Minnesota for her theatre troupe Pinkys Custom Cakes. Pinkys has performed at the University of Iowa Museum of Art

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