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## **Transacting in the Arts of Adolescent Novel Study: Teacher Candidates Embody *Charlotte Doyle***

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### **Abstract**

To help underscore the importance of giving the arts an integral place in the literacy continuum of secondary school language arts, I immersed myself in a careful reading of twenty teacher candidates' transactions in the art of body biography for novel study for intermediate students (grades 7-10). Coming together in groups of five, the teacher candidates used life-size body outlines drawn on oversized paper, along with a myriad of found and stocked materials, such as fabric, pens, and paint, to experience and express the transformation of the main character in the young adult novel, *True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*. Informed by their transactions in the body biography compositions, the teacher candidates reported that they were able to reach a more holistic portrait of Charlotte, while enriching their own instructional repertoires.

## Introduction

According to Rosenblatt (1970), “One of the wonders of art is its multiplicity of powers” to engage adolescent learners in the study of young adult literature” (p. vii). However, Leigh and Heid (2009) state that, “...Opportunities to construct meaning through art diminish as learners progress to higher grades...” (p. 9). To help underscore the importance of giving the arts an integral place in the literacy continuum of secondary school language arts, I studied twenty teacher candidates’ words and work on enacting the arts to study novels for adolescent learners. In our language arts methods classrooms, where the activity of reading is viewed as a transaction or happening between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1968), the walls became pedagogical portfolios of artful inquiries as we collaborated to



make instructional sense of young adult fiction. In particular, body biography, a visual and written rendering of a character’s living life, offered multiple possibilities for providing an entry into arts-based pedagogy, while addressing characterization in one of our readings, *True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*. Coming together in groups of five, the teacher candidates used life-size body outlines drawn on oversized paper, along with a myriad of common materials, such as fabric, pens, and paint, to experience and express Charlotte’s transformation from boarding school student to the captain of a mutiny at sea. Informed by their transactions in the body biography compositions, the teacher candidates reported that they were able to reach a more holistic portrait of Charlotte, while enriching their own instructional repertoires.

It is the application of the body biography to the study of Charlotte Doyle in two of my language arts methods classes that is the focus of this paper. Heeding Rosenblatt (1970), who urges teachers to explore the possibilities of the arts for novel study, I position myself in the practice of action research and ask, *What are the effects of arts-based learning on the twenty teacher candidates’ theoretical perspectives and classroom practices during and subsequent to their engagement in embodied transactions with novels that have been written for adolescent learners?*

### Transacting in Adolescent Novel Study: An Arts-Based Focus

According to Eckstein, Rasmussen and Wittschen (1999), “Adolescents must deal with a flood of new experiences and emotions, and...are often swept away by the totality of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social changes confronting them” (p. 32). Rosenblatt (1970) asserts that literature plays an integral role in channeling “the intensely dramatic process which is so casually called ‘growing up’” (p. 196). Furthermore, Rosenblatt (1968, 1985) urges teachers to turn to the numerous forms of opportunities that the arts offer for literary response as “many of

the subtler potentialities of human feelings and behavior that could have been given common utterance in no other way are revealed and embodied in artistic form” (p. 168).

In academic research, , the arts have been increasingly recognized for their potential to optimize learning on both intellectual and emotional levels in the secondary school English curriculum (Caswell, 2005; Hynes, 2003; Long, 2008; Murata, 1997). More attention to research on practice; however, is needed to address the increasing exclusionary agendas of standardization and testing (International Reading Association, 1999a, 1999b; National Council of Teachers of English, 2006), which keep relegating the arts to cameo appearances in many secondary school English classrooms, prompting many adolescents to either reluctantly conform to the limitations of a restrictive pedagogy or drop out of school entirely (Altwerger, 2002; Lenters, 2006; Siegel, 2006). As stated by Zoss, Smagorinsky, and O’Donnell-Allen (2007), “...Artistic texts are not necessarily authorized in most English classes because they do not fit within the verbal and logical economies of schools writ large, and the language arts curriculum in particular” (p. 6). In their study on using aesthetic representations to understand reading comprehension, Cuero, Bonner, Smith, Schwartz, Touchstone, and Vela (2008) maintain, “...We must hearten educators to explore, validate, and implement *forms of representations* that go beyond our literal, linear, and quantifiable understandings of the world and expand our minds cognitively and aesthetically (e.g., through painting, dance, sculpture, poetry, etc.)” (p. 3). To add to the growing body of research which endeavors to expand the range of opportunities for adolescent learners to stretch their minds and emotions by way of imagination, insight, varied viewpoints and personal interpretations, I conducted a study in two of my language arts methods classes that involved 20 teacher candidates who experienced the body biography, a visual and written rendering of a character’s development, as an integral component of meaning making in relation to the book, *True Confessions of Charlotte*.

### **Body Biography: A Background**

Underwood (1987) first formulated the body biography as a project on expressive writing to entice his eighth-grade students to examine their pasts, while “dashing in and out of the waveline of adolescence,” (p. 44). After being engaged in a compilation of autobiographical writing activities such as their first memories and descriptive poems involving comparisons between themselves and unlike things, the students then arranged their finished products, along with collected memorabilia, on life-size tracings of their bodies drawn on large sheets of paper. The memorabilia, consisting mostly of visual images, extended or complemented the written autobiographical information in their writing, while adding an aesthetic feel. Underwood observed that “the body biographies, which provide students with a second outlet for self-expression, achieved...a vibrant visual and written metaphor for a life” (p. 48). First sharing the content of their body biographies with classmates and eventually family and friends was an

important aspect of the expressive process. In fact, students had the opportunity to transform the library into an art gallery where they hosted a viewing of their work as a community event.

To create a learning environment rich in both individual expression and collaborative engagement, O'Donnell-Allen and Smagorinsky (1999) applied Underwood's work on body biography to character analysis in a senior English class. In particular they reported on three young women's embodied compositions of Ophelia, "arguably the most isolated character...and the one whose welfare is most routinely abused and disregarded" (p. 35) in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. O'Donnell and Smagorinsky discovered that the four students established a supportive way of working together as a team, while making use of both literal and symbolic interpretation of Ophelia's character on multiple levels. A special observation was the students' collective representations of Ophelia by the color and location of related images in concert with written text such as Ophelia's hair drawn in the form of phrases. O'Donnell and Smagorinsky concluded, "...This group appears to have achieved an unusual power in their ability to interpret the play through their original use of the artistic medium" (p. 40), which nurtured mutual respect, collaboration, and a fuller range of expression for them in the English classroom.

Inspired and informed by the bodywork of the above researchers I ask, *What are the effects of arts-based learning on the twenty teacher candidates' theoretical perspectives and classroom practices during and subsequent to their embodied transactions with novels that have been written for adolescent learners?* I now turn to the action of my methods classroom practice where I contemplate twenty teacher candidates' aesthetic and efferent transactions in their body biographies of *Charlotte Doyle*.

### **The Learning Context**

Part of my work within a post undergraduate teacher certification program at a Canadian university involves teaching a methods course on language arts at the intermediate division (grades 7-10). Last fall, twelve students enrolled in one section of the course, while thirteen students enrolled in the other one. An integral component of the course is novel study, which features the reading of adolescent fiction as personal and social transactions. According to Rosenblatt (1982), reading involves a transaction—a reader and a text as well as a community of other readers—all three acting on each other, while offering different responses and alternative interpretations fueled by the efferent—that which is carried away, and the aesthetic—the stirring up of personal feelings, ideas and attitudes, or a mixture of both (Chaplin, 1982). As McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) state, "Readers are always making choices about their thinking, focusing on both stances and sometimes more on one than the other" (p. 52). Such transactions of reading occur in the various texts encountered in the English classroom as well as those across the entire school curriculum (Caswell, 2005; Marlett & Gordon, 2004; Morawski, 2008).

In order to enter more fully into the transactional reading of a text, Rosenblatt (1982) urges teachers to build communities of readers where “discovering that others have had different responses, have noticed what was overlooked, have made alternative interpretations, leads to self-awareness and self-awareness and self-criticism” (p. 276). Such exposure to multiple understandings, can lead to more complex and sophisticated readings that feature both personal and interpersonal awareness and responsibility, including revisions of ideas or hypotheses—essential parts of transactive reading (Johannessen, 2003; Morawski, 2008; Spiegel, 1998). According to Rosenblatt (1970), students’ personal and social engagements with literature in the adolescent years “can have a particularly significant effect when they are related to problems and conflicts intimately involving themselves” (p. 200). Making reference to Rosenblatt’s reader response theory, Magro (2009) emphasizes that “the world portrayed in a literary text can become a critical point for learning about new cultures, values, and experiences” (p. 3). That is, through seeing their own problems apart from themselves, they are helped to think and feel more clearly about them. With a wider spectrum of possibilities for expressing and representing their responses in the transactions of literary works, adolescents are better able to move into opportunities for future texts that emerge with their lived readings of young adult fiction (Rosenblatt, 1982). That is, according to Cowan and Albers (2006), the “transaction between the meaning maker and the reader/viewer then becomes more complex, both in the design and creation of the text and the reading of the text” (p. 136).

Recognizing my ethical responsibility (Slomp, 2005) to engage the teacher candidates in current research and practice, including addressing the ever growing agenda of exclusionary practices of standardization in language arts, in the thirteen weekly three-hour classes the teacher candidates had many opportunities to pedagogically experience adolescent novel study on both personal and interpersonal levels, while moving back and forth along the continuum of efferent and aesthetic perspectives grounded from the lenses of their active pasts and presents. Making use of varied expressive means, from small group process to textured paper and paint, the teacher candidates individually and collectively reread and reconsidered the texts of teenage life portrayed in the plotlines of young adult fiction. Arts-based learning in such forms as graffiti walls—pictorial and written representations of a character’s life expressed on large sheets of paper attached to the classroom wall—, whirligig installations—desk-top size re-cycled wooden structures, complete with a whirling arm and symbolic expressions such as signs, postcards, and maps signifying segments of a character’s journey—, and body biographies—a visual and written rendering of a character’s



life— all played a major role in studying specific novels, including *True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* (Avi, 1990).

This book, the nexus of the study, recounts thirteen-year-old Charlotte Doyle's compelling coming-of-age passage in the summer of 1832, when she makes a dramatic move from boarding school pupil to captain of a mutiny at sea. When the novel begins, Charlotte who is educated in the proper placement of society's multiple tiers, views the ships' captain as a gentleman to be trusted and respected. Suddenly exposed to the harsh elements of power and revenge raging on the open sea, Charlotte soon replaces afternoon teas with coarse clothes and one decisive slash of a derk.

Using the body biography as the main vehicle of literary transaction, I worked with two of my language arts methods classes to study *True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*. With a research agenda that focused on the integration of the arts in the language arts classroom, I asked, *What are the effects of arts-based learning on the twenty teacher candidates' theoretical perspectives and classroom practices during and subsequent to their engagement in embodied transactions with novels that have been written for adolescent learners?* Although a number of the teacher candidates in the language arts classes had recently obtained their undergraduate degrees, others were considering teaching as a new career path after leaving positions in such areas as the film industry and the news media. Except for two participants, the teacher candidates had no formal education or experiences associated with the visual arts. Furthermore, many of the candidates had experienced a more linear and conventional secondary school language arts education, which valued limited forms of engagement supported by formulaic assessment (Slomp, 2005). Although many of the teacher candidates expressed initial reluctance and even fear regarding their capacity to use materials other than pencil, pen, and voice to study the characterization of Charlotte Doyle, they were, nevertheless, eager to create opportunities for their future students to construct meaning with a broader range of responses. According to Short, Kaufman, and Kahn (2000), "Many adults are uncomfortable with some...sign systems, but that is the result of a lack of exposure to, and use of, those systems in school" (p. 169). Acknowledging that English language arts teachers need to confront and process their apprehension about doing art, Orzulak (2006) states, "This means walking through the potentially uncomfortable steps students will experience and allowing ourselves the room to implement (and revise) new types of lessons" (p. 83).

To offer an entry into the practice of teaching adolescent novel study via arts-based means, I considered the learning needs of the teacher candidates in concert with the multidimensional capacity of art to make and communicate meaning. For their first experience, a body biography, I encouraged the teacher candidates to initially experiment (Siegel, 1995) with different kinds of found and stocked materials to compose their characterizations of Charlotte Doyle, with the view

to gradually increasing their knowledge and application of art for the study of the adolescent novel.

In the studio of our methods classroom, teacher candidates worked in groups of five to create multidimensional portrayals of Charlotte Doyle's journey of identity, including her emotional, physical, and cognitive self, as well as any related environmental forces. More specifically, they first drew life-size body outlines drawn on large sheets of paper. Then using a variety of colored markers, crayons, pens, various craft supplies, they filled in their body outlines with pertinent



quotes, descriptive words, symbols, phrases, and physical features such as clothing and facial characteristics. The candidates then included external influences, such as parents and social class, in the blank space surrounding the body outline. Across the floor, various split-images of Charlotte Doyle appeared. Lace and jute, pink bonnet and weathered skin, coward and hero, white glove and blade, buttoned boot and calloused foot, are some of the conflicting sites of Charlotte's struggle rendered in tissue paper, pen, glitter, yarn and glue. Biographies embodied on the edges of adolescence, churning in currents of what Heilman (1998) refers to as "...the struggles for self, power and identity (p.182).

After tacking the completed works to the gallery of the classroom walls, the members of each group recounted the process of producing their biographies, complete with such considerations as choice of quotes, placement of symbols, selection

of materials, and demarcation of images bounded in colors, shapes, and textures of identity. At the conclusion of the biography presentations, a whole class discussion ensued on the formation of Charlotte's character in relation to the plotline of the novel, variegated with power, pride, and the presence to pick one side or the other.

### **Embodying Charlotte Doyle: Insights from Teacher Candidates' Transactions**

According to Carson and Sumara (1997), "A responsive, embodied scholarship lies at the heart of ...action research" (p. v), or the study and enhancement of one's own practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Reason and Bradbury (2004) contend that action research, "seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to... individual persons and their communities"



(p. 1). In the community of learning, the participation of students is a primary part of the process. That is, as teachers conduct their research, students play a collaborative role in providing feedback regarding the theoretical and instructional practices under study.

With appropriate ethical approval secured and guidelines followed, I invited teacher candidates from two of my English methods classes to participate in the study on the body biography component with the view to improving the development and implementation of pre-service language arts courses, with particular attention being paid to teaching adolescent learners. To obtain their responses to what has been lived through in their “making and acting” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 561) within the implementation of the body biography component, I invited them to respond to an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix A) and follow-up e-mail conversations which were intended to clarify comments and obtain additional information. In compliance with ethical guidelines, which were established to protect student as participant, an informed research assistant administered the questionnaires and carried out the follow-up e-mail conversations under my guidance. I was not present during the recruitment, questionnaire, or e-mail administration phase, nor did I have access to the identities of the teacher candidates.

Rosenblatt (1981) emphasizes the importance of constructing open-ended questions that “lead the student to think back over what has just been lived through...to see the structure of the experience more clearly” (p. 8). In order to help illustrate their work in relation to *True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, the teacher candidates also readily agreed to provide me with photographs of their completed body biographies. For a variety of reasons, such as illness and prior commitments, five students were not able to participate in the collection of the responses, which was carried out with the support of a research assistant. The average time for completing the questionnaire was approximately forty-five minutes, while time spent on the e-mail responses was approximately fifteen to twenty minutes. The e-mails provided opportunities to clarify and elaborate on answers contained in the responses to the questionnaires. I now turn to twenty teacher candidates’ words and work garnered from their responses to open-ended questionnaires and follow-up e-mail conversations concerning their transactions in the body biographies of Charlotte Doyle.

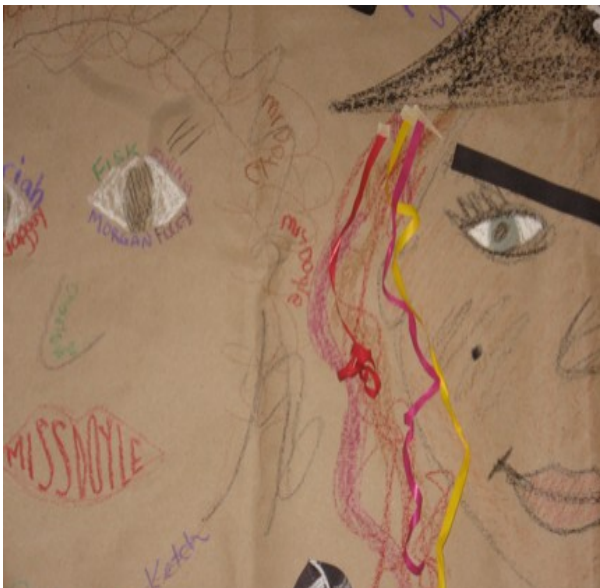




In a novel, the author makes use of different perspectives to convey the thoughts, feelings, and actions of a character's story to readers. In turn, readers reconsider evidence and formulate patterns by actively constructing meanings from what they experience. According to Gillis (2002), "Readers become immersed in the action; they make inferences, decipher plot, and construct themes from what the voices show and tell" (p. 52). In this paper, I immerse myself in a careful reading of all the teacher candidates' responses to the questionnaire and follow-up e-mails to thematically plot their stories in transactions of art-based learning. To obtain an additional perspective on the candidates' responses throughout my reading, I consulted the research assistant, who administered the questionnaire and carried out the e-mail conversations. As Rosenblatt (1982) states, "this implies a constant series of selections from the multiple possibilities offered by the text and their synthesis into an organized meaning" (p. 268). Articulated in two sections—personal response and self into practice, the plot now thickens.

### ***Personal Response***

Rosenblatt (1968) emphasizes, "Few teachers of English today would deny that the individual's ability to read and enjoy literature is the primary aim of literary study" (p. 65). Emerging throughout the teacher candidates' responses is an overwhelming sense of enjoyment that the body biographies brought to their reading of *True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*. In particular, they associated fun, creativity, imagination and fascination with their biography experiences. For example, one teacher candidate voiced her enthusiasm by stating "I found them to be especially fun and creative!", while another one commented, "This was my favorite activity". Other candidates used such expressions as "fantastic activity!", "very effective", "engaging" and "captured my imagination". Blair and Sanford (2004) emphasize that when learners experience reading as an enjoyable activity, they are more likely to transact in the possibilities that the text offers. A further reading of the candidate's responses, which unfolded into two parts—individual and interpersonal—provides a fuller understanding of their initial comments.



As stated by Rosenblatt (1986), "The physical text is simply marks on paper until a reader transacts with them" (p. 123). Furthermore, she emphasizes that each reader's unique reservoir of public and private significance, garnered from past experiences with life situations, assumes a pivotal place in the transaction of a work (Rosenblatt, 1986). Contained in the candidates' responses are numerous indications that the body biography activity

affected them as individual learners, increasing their capacity to tap their reservoirs of meaning making on both critical and creative levels. As one candidate explained, "...this activity allowed me to think specifically about the character and the influence (both internal and external) on her in the novel", which up to this point had only been "subconscious until brought to the surface through this activity." Furthermore, she claims, "I made many connections and discoveries I may not have before." Even the one candidate who initially expressed reluctance to participate in the body biography activity soon admitted, "Ultimately though I quite liked the end project. I liked integrating many aspects of the book and the challenge to pick words and phrases that would visually represent those ideas."

In their work on the application of multiple sign systems to the reading curriculum, Short, Kauffman and Kahn (2000) claim that the arts provide a viable venue for fostering creative and critical thought by allowing individuals to go beyond their original conceptions as they "critique, think and reflect critically, and revisit and edit those ideas" (p. 170). By transacting in the novel via the body biographies, the candidates reported that they found themselves moving outside their usual range of literary engagement. As one candidate explained,

It brought many of my class and course readings to life. It was a completely different experience than writing a response, but it fascinated me and, although I am not a creative person in the traditional sense (being able to draw, paint, etc.) it appealed a great deal to me.

The potential of art to facilitate a productive transaction with a text appeared in the words of another candidate, who attributed the body biography, rather than "a written paper", to helping her reach a more critical understanding of Charlotte Doyle, especially her duality. "You could witness the transformation, feel what the character felt by way of divisiveness. It was motivating for certain and...meaningful." Similar reactions came from yet another candidate, who asserted that the body biography stimulated her analytical and visual creative sides, thus allowing her to gain significant insight into Charlotte Doyle's character. "It was a great way to put all the information I had gathered about her into one comprehensive unit. I will always have the visual representation of Charlotte in my mind when I think about this book." As Ali (1993/1994) states, "The form affects the reader's experiences of reading, and how this awareness throws a new light on his or her idiosyncratic understanding of the text" (p. 290).

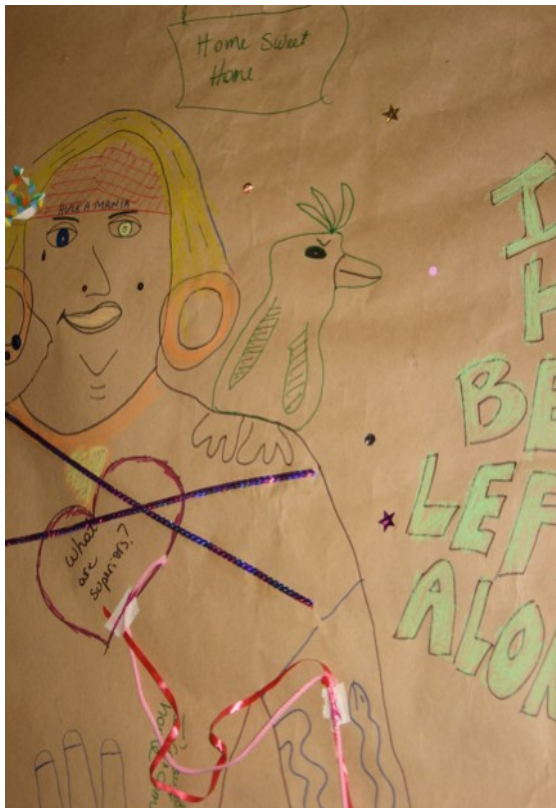
### ***Interpersonal Response***

Furnishing ongoing opportunities for learners to continue building a store of prior knowledge and experience is a priority in the recurring act of becoming a reader. Collaborating with others is an integral part of this process. Spiegel (1998), a proponent of Rosenblatt's reader response theory, celebrates the broad spectrum of meanings that learners bring to a literary experience. More specifically, she states, "Within any group of peers, many different interpretations of the



### Self into Practice

In her transactional approach to literary studies, Rosenblatt (1981) placed great importance on the recursive nature of a learner's lived-through experiences. That is, she encouraged teachers to facilitate students' understanding of current events or texts by having them make personal connections to previous ones. Influenced by Rosenblatt's reader response theory, Ali (1993/1994) underscored the importance that individual and collective involvement with a text



can have on increasing a reader's self-knowledge and keener sense of what the work offers.

Recounting her own experiences in a theatre immersion course, Orzulak (2006) remarked, "The course revitalized my understanding that when teachers can experience teaching techniques as active participants, they can imagine new methods for engaging students as creative participants in the classroom" (p. 79). As active participants in the text of the study of the body biography component in our methods class, the teacher candidates indicated that their personal and interpersonal connections with the artistic form of meaning making encouraged them to want to use similar pedagogical materials and practices in their future teaching for adolescent learners. As one candidate, capturing the essence of everyone's responses, claimed, "Absolutely! I will definitely be using this activity in the future! Can't wait to try it." A different candidate pointed out that

"these activities are engaging and meaningful ways for students to interact with literature." A closer reading of the teacher candidates' enthusiasm for the pedagogical potential of the body biography activity points to the possibilities of the following two instructional considerations: collaborative work and multiple ways of knowing.

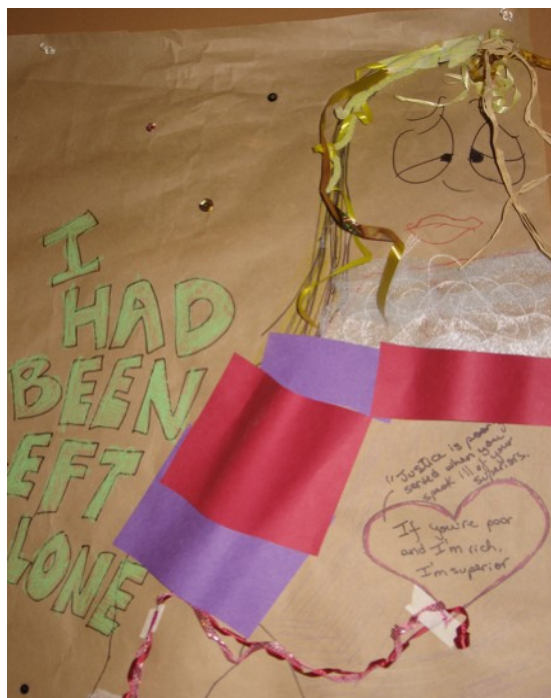
### Collaborative Work

Rosenblatt (1982), who urges educators to establish a sense of classroom community in the study of literature, emphasizes, "As students grow older, sharing of responses becomes the basis for valuable interchange...aiding us to understand ourselves and others, for widening our horizons and...illuminating our world" (p. 276). With comments reflecting Rosenblatt's call for a collective of reader response, many of the teacher candidates commented that the collaborative work stemming from the body biography activity would provide students with a heightened sense of personal growth as well as social awareness. One of these candidates said, "I like the



idea of each member in the group being able to contribute—whether designing, searching through text, brainstorming, etc. —with the body biography, all students are accountable. AND there are enough choices to suit the different learners.” Another candidate claimed, “It allowed each student to contribute in various ways and at the same time. Group skills are developed: sharing, listening and appreciating other’s contributions. When groups present, students learn “new” insight—as taught by their peers.” Still another candidate, focusing on the inclusive dimension of collaboration observed, “I like the pair and group work—it gives every student, and especially some weaker ones, a chance to contribute to an activity and benefit from it.” Researchers (Bussert-Webb, 2001; Leland & Harste, 1994; Whitin, 2002) have found that the incorporation of arts into the implementation of literacy curricula leads to what Murphy (1998), an advocate of Rosenblatt’s work, refers to as “a live sense of literature in our classrooms” (p. 94) enacted by the social possibilities of the group.

Although the comments of the teacher candidates indicated that they definitely recognized the pedagogical value of the group work surrounding the body biography activity, one teacher candidate voiced a concern pertaining to the potential for unequal distribution of student responsibilities: “What I’m afraid of, though, is that in group projects like this, some students can focus solely on the artistic component while others look at the literary component. Ultimately, each student should be somehow “obliged” to fulfill as many roles as possible...” Focusing on classroom management, another candidate speculated, “If you had a very difficult class it may be difficult to keep them on task. In her vision on what adolescent literacy could be, Santa

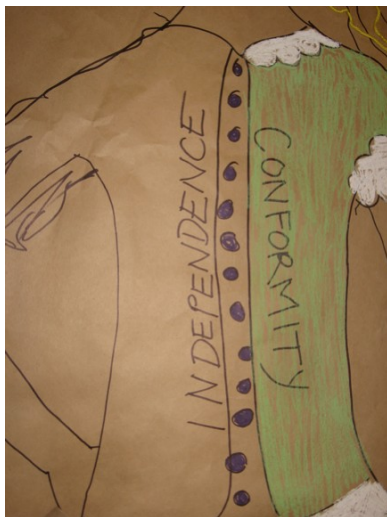


(2006) underscores the importance of furnishing adolescents with a supportive means of “...sharing power, providing choice and maintaining a sense of freedom” (p. 468). To help establish such an environment in the classroom, Townsend (1998) proposes a variety of strategies such as employing a round robin format for sharing initial reactions, rotating roles, and taking occasional brief breaks to refocus.

It is, however, critical to point out that the purpose of incorporating the body biography activity into the study of Charlotte Doyle was to nurture the engagement of students’ responses via what Rosenblatt (1982) refers to as “various forms of...expression or response; Drawing, painting...”

(p. 275), which evoke intellectual and emotional participation. That is, it is not a matter of whether or not students elect to react by way of “the artistic or literary component.” Rather, the arts should be viewed as another means of transacting in the literary event. Furthermore, texts, as viewed by Marlett and Gordon (2004) can range from “a discussion to a musical score, from a film to a piece of sculpture...from a painting to a footprint” (p. 214). That is, the more options that students’ hold in their portfolios of learning, the more likely they are to become proactive participants in a learning event. In their research on responding to literature across multiple sign systems, Short, Kauffman and Kahn (2000) found that their students “could more fully enter into and reflect on the story world” (p. 170) because they had experienced it collectively with a broad range of sign systems, including art. Echoing Short et al’s (2000) findings, Schofield and Rogers (2004) report that the application of multiple literacy genres, including the arts, to an alternative literacy program inspired struggling youth to dedicate their emotions and intellect to retelling their life stories, rather than resisting the curriculum. Hynes (2003) observed similar reactions from a reluctant middle school reader and writer, who conveyed a strong sense of understanding after being encouraged to make sense of stories by drawing—a nonlinear and nonverbal way of knowing for him.

### ***Multiple Ways of Knowing***



Underscoring the importance of recognizing each reader’s responsibility within the transaction of a text, Rosenblatt (1968) maintains “The literature program should be directed toward enabling the student to perform more and more fully and more and more adequately in response to texts” (p. 341). More specifically, she (1981) states, “You have to create the situation to what they are living through as they shape the story, the events and the characters...” (p. 7). Sign systems, such as mathematics, art, music, drama, and language, have been created to express multiple ways of knowing in our world. Leland and Harste (1994) emphasize that together, disciplines and sign systems, provide learners with new perspectives on knowing, foster inquiry, propel learning, and start much-needed conversations” (p. 344). A further

combing of the teacher candidates’ responses uncovers numerous instances of confirmation that the body biography activity spurred on multiple ways of knowing that inspired creativity, promoted critical thinking, and encouraged multiple engagements with learning, while offering cross-curricular experiences.

One candidate’s set of comments seems to capture the overall effect of their views on these matters: “The body biography is a great cross-curricular activity. Not only is it appropriate to



cover reading, writing and oral and visual communications strands of the language curriculum. It also draws in the arts curriculum.” In addition, the candidate continues, “This activity...allows students a unique and engaging way to study a novel. Getting students out of their seats and actively participating is infinitely more valuable than seatwork or traditional essay or writing activity.” In addition, another candidate explains, “This activity is wonderful for all levels of learners and can easily be adapted for gifted or LD students. It allows students to explore the beauty of a novel in a fun way. It also allows the students to be critical about it.”

In his presidential address at the AERA annual meeting in April 1993, Eisner (1993) stated, “By defining the forms of representation that matter within the curriculum, the school significantly influences the kinds of meaning that students can learn to secure and represent” (p. 6). Bustle (2004), whose work concentrates on arts-based learning across the curriculum, “recognizes the ability of the arts to reach different learning styles, as well as their power to unearth individual expression” (p. 419). As Stanford (2003) claims, “when teachers expand their repertoire of techniques, tools, and strategies beyond the typical linguistic and logical ones,...” (p. 82) they open up learning to an ever-wider and more diverse range of students. To quote a different teacher candidate, “It offers cross-curricular options and ...works well in terms of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences...through creatively blending writing activities, drawing and other arts-based activities, discussion and oral presentations.” That is, “the visual representation of the character helps those students who may have difficulties with reading and writing see the end result of the character.”

Focusing more specifically on the realm of character study, Rosenblatt (1968) maintains, “The students need to be helped both to understand the author’s presentation of ...characters and to acquire some means of critically relating it to other views of human nature and conduct” (p. 13). Characters in young adult literature can provide adolescents with a vicarious focal point for the realities of self-reflection and action. A contemporary of Rosenblatt, Maxine Greene (1991) endorses the arts for learning across the curriculum because they: “...offer opportunities for perspective, for perceiving alternative ways of knowing and being in the world” (p. 32). The notion of art as a catalyst for creative and critical engagement in the study of Charlotte Doyle came to the fore in the responses of several teacher candidates. First, one candidate said, “This is a great activity for character development and awareness,”



while another one mentioned, “The novel tackles issues of identity that were naturally expressed through the body biography. I think many of them (grade 7 and 8) would enjoy the large motor aspect of it, and thinking about one’s character in such a graphic way.” A third candidate proposed that the body biography “certainly helps students to draw out the history of change in the character.”

A fuller accounting of the body biography’s contribution to character study materialized in the specific words of other teacher candidates. For example, focusing on the inner and outer vistas of character study one candidate reflected:

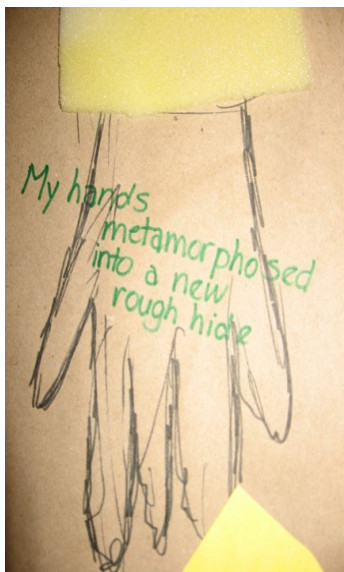
This activity was effective because it provides an in-depth look at the character in an artistic way. Students will benefit from this activity because it is very detailed and descriptive; it shows the internal and external influences that helped to form the character’s transformation.

Another candidate provided additional thoughts on how the body biography would allow her students to address the physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual journey of a character: “They can show the difference in clothing, relationships, things thought and said, which can then be discussed with the rest of the class.” By extending the definition of text, more students, Short, et al. (2000) insist, will “have a wider range of connections to consider as they read and respond” (p. 165). Of particular importance is the pedagogical capacity of the body biography to unearth and activate students’ personal connections to the text, especially that of a character’s story. Rosenblatt (1986), a long-time patron of arts-based novel study, advocates that teachers need to help students “discover how the new experience, the evoked literary work, related both to the text and to their earlier experience and assumptions” (p. 126). As one teacher candidate expressed, “Body bio allows for uncovering what is not said/written AND/OR reading between the lines (making inferences) of what is written.”

### **Considerations for Practice**

Leland and Harste (1994) emphasize, “A good language arts program is one that expands the communication potential of all learners...” (p. 339). By experimenting with various found and stocked materials to transact more fully in the characterization of Charlotte Doyle, the teacher candidates were able to take initial steps into the possibilities of using arts-based learning as a regular part of the language arts curriculum. The body biography as a pedagogical site, however, offers more possibilities for literacy educators to move students “toward a more complex understanding and development of literacy that is explicitly linked to the visual...arts” (Cowan & Albers, 2006, p. 124). Drawing from the practices of pertinent research literature (Callow, 2008; Cowan & Albers, 2006; Cuero, Bonner, Smith, Schwartz, Touchstone, & Vela, 2008; Greco, 1996-1997; Zoss, Smagorinsky & O’Donnell-Allen, 2007), opportunities can be created for teacher candidates to enter into transactions of Charlotte Doyle that motivate them to live

through and produce a work “as it is reflected on, interpreted, evaluated, analyzed, criticized afterwards” (Rosenblatt, 1986, p. 124).



Lead-in lessons on elements of art, regular exposure to relevant critical inquiry, and activities involving both local and virtual community resources such as galleries and visiting artists are examples of practices that would place teacher candidates in a better position to reconstruct their own reader responses and “consider how viewers and readers will respond to the...texts that they design and produce” (Cowan & Albers, 2006, p. 136). For example, examining the social meanings behind the function and style of women’s clothing depicted in pertinent paintings of earlier 18<sup>th</sup> century life, the setting of *True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, would allow teacher candidates to bring a more informed sense of representing Charlotte’s physical transition from proper lady to a captain of the high seas. Studying the purpose and form of book illustrations (Olshansky, 2008), especially in relation to

Charlotte’s appearance on the cover of different editions of *True Confessions of Charlotte*, would provide teacher candidates with further working material to make meaning of her coming-of-age story. A visiting artist’s lesson on the language of art including elements such as shape, color, and line, would expand teacher candidates’ ranges of expression as they make affective connections between the novel and their emerging body biographies of Charlotte’s life. Changes in the color of Charlotte’s skin after being exposed to the harsh conditions on the ocean, positioning of her body and face on the large sheets of paper, textures that best capture each group’s thoughts and emotions evoked by Charlotte’s coming of age story, are just some of the numerous considerations that would expand teacher candidates capacity “to pay attention to the infusion of sensuous, cognitive, and affective elements that can enter into the process of selective awareness and synthesis” (Rosenblatt, 1986, p. 127).

To move the body biography from a single experience of learning to a canvas of critical revision and response, teacher candidates can use their newly acquired knowledge as described above to both individually and collectively re-enter their embodied texts of Charlotte and reconsider and recompose their thoughts and feelings anew. That is, according to Albers (1997), “They draw upon their past experiences with these concepts and connect them to future constructions of meaning” (p. 8). Integrating the use of reflective journals in such forms as dialogue journals (Bean & Zulich, 1989) and learning logs (Moore, 1991), into the regular implementation of the course would provide teacher candidates with a means to reread, revisit, and analyze their experiences with arts-based learning in relation to their efferent and aesthetic transactions in body biographies and related forms of representations and expressions of literacy. At the same time, the course instructor would have the opportunity to hear the teacher candidates’ thoughts

and feelings, which would provide working material for improving subsequent lessons (Morawski, 2000).

### Concluding Comments

Britzman (1986) calls for teacher education to occur in an environment “which enables prospective teachers to engage in their professional development as students and teachers” (p. 455). Consequently, Leland and Harste (1994) state, “New voices can be heard and new perspectives on knowing can come to be valued. The result is not simply more access, but that everyone’s education is expanded.” (p. 339). Landscaped across previous pages in both words and images is a class portrait of twenty teacher candidates transacting in the body biography of Charlotte Doyle. A close reading of the candidates’ responses to the arts-based experience revealed a rippling effect of pedagogical possibilities originating from the (re)visions of their own curricula and radiating across their instructional portfolios of the future. That is, the teacher candidates’ own multi-dimensional transactions with the body biography inspired them to expand the educational opportunities of students in relation to creativity, critical thinking, multiple signs of expression, collaboration, and content area learning. To quote one teacher candidate, “I would use this activity because it incorporates a more holistic approach to education and uses creativity to teach a novel by stimulating our senses.” Although framed by a close reading of the reported responses of a specific group of teacher candidates transacting in a specific activity, the findings of this study provide persuasive support to pursue further application and research of the arts for novel study at the intermediate level. As Rosenblatt (1970) so fittingly affirms, “Many of the subtler potentialities of human feelings and behavior that could have been given common utterance in no other way are revealed and embodied in artistic form” (p. 168).

### Epilogue

Soon after the completion of my methods course, several of the teacher candidates had opportunities to go beyond the borders of their recommendations and implement the body biography activity as part of their required fieldwork. Working under the usual constraints connected to stepping into an already established classroom situation, these teacher candidates managed to incorporate various versions of the body biography into their assigned placements. One teacher candidate eagerly conveyed, “I did try the body biography with grade sevens during an *Outsider’s* novel study and they absolutely loved it, as did my mentor teacher. ...and they were very proud of their work.” Another candidate adapted the activity to teaching *Underground to Canada* to a group of grade sevens by having them do “a sort of body doodle on a skeleton (on standard size paper)—also in consultation with the text.” A third teacher candidate used the body biography with a different novel about a boy’s journey from being a child to becoming an adult, and asked students to “show the differences in his clothing, relationships, things he thought and said then present and discuss them with the rest of the class.” Yet another candidate integrated



the body biography into two projects in her teacher education courses and “considered it very accommodating of just about any text with a definable protagonist.” Lastly, a different teacher candidate modified the body biography to help fifth-grade students research current and past political figures and observed “The students were able to use their creativity to present their subject in a personalized way.” In

particular, one fifth-grade boy who claimed that he couldn’t draw, “figured out how to express himself without being an artist.” Rosenblatt (1980) noted, “Some teachers have made the literary experience the center...of discussion...utilizing music, painting, creative dramatics, and writing” (p. 393). The above instances of taking the body biography and successfully applying it to specific classroom situations provides further support for the integral role that the arts can play in novel study for adolescent learners.

## Appendix A

### Questionnaire

1. In the space below, please include your comments on the pedagogical effectiveness and appropriateness of the body biography activity for engaging you in the study of teaching language arts to students in the intermediate division (7-10). Please be as specific as possible.
2. In the space below, please include your comments on the influence that the body biography activity had, or could have had, on your pre-service classroom practices. Please be as specific as possible.
3. Would you use the body biography activity in your own future teaching? In the space below, please explain your response in detail.

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