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Towards the Use of the 'Great Wheel' as a Model in Determining the Quality and Merit of Arts-based Projects (Research and Instruction)

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Abstract

Building upon a First Nations circle metaphor this paper explores how employing the interrelated concepts of pedagogy, poiesis, politics, and public positioning can provide a more holistic approach in designing and assessing arts-based projects be they for instructional and/or research purposes. It takes a 'postmodern' stance (Giroux, 1991), integrating Western and First Nations epistemologies to provide an organic framework that articulates how these and other concepts interrelate, providing a more inclusive model of assessment. First, it outlines a conceptual framework that follows Paula Underwood's (2000) suggestion to use a "traditional medicine wheel for enabling learning and for gathering wisdom." It then utilizes the constructed model to examine a few arts-based cases, indicating how each project will have its own particular emphasis within the various quadrants with unique characteristics.

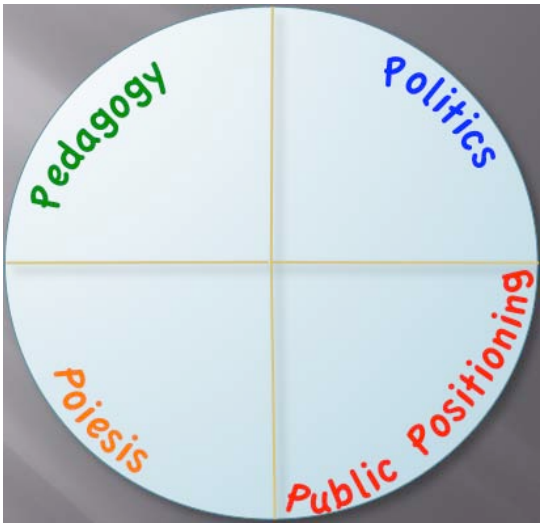
Toward Establishing 'a' Holistic Model on Quality and Merit

Paula Underwood (2000), giving a general Iroquois perspective on the "Great Hoop of Life" (p. vii), claims,

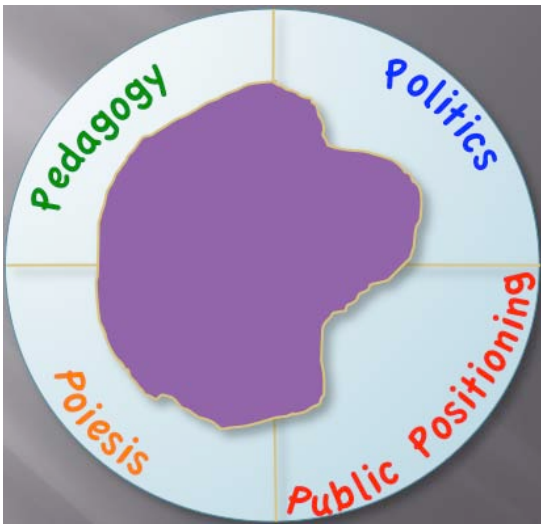
> Words and phrases mean different things in different cultures. In my tradition, instead of bifurcating life with oppositional nouns like "health" and "sickness" we only use the positive term "health." The way we describe a specific condition is "We are moving toward" or "We are moving away from health." Location and direction are the critical elements. (p. xiv)

Knowing, for her people, is an act of positioning. She tells a story of how her father assisted her in finding North. He asked her to close her eyes, spun her in circles, until she was dizzy and waited until she felt a 'nudge of energy' (p. 1). He then picked her up and whirled her asking her to find North once again. Finally, he held her by her feet and swung her upside down. Underwood states, "You see how it is? How, in my tradition you are asked to learn each new vital lesson three times . .in three different ways" (p. 1). In this way Underwood introduces her book on how one may use the 'Great Wheel' (p. 2).

Adopting her position that learning has a minimum of three perspectives, I suggest that our discussions surrounding arts-based projects employ 'polyocular vision' (Maruyama, 2004), and examine arts-based projects using the *Great Wheel* to assist in the determination of the position or stance one can take in designing arts-based research and instructional projects and assessing their quality and merit. To begin, we divide a circle into four quadrants. In the place of North, South, East, and West, we insert Pedagogy, Poiesis, Politics, and Public Positioning, equally spaced along the circumference of the circle.



In so doing one can simultaneously map these four dimensions of arts-based projects. Unlike a geographic position, however, in which an object or person can only occupy one position at the same time, in this framework, an arts-based project can be moving 'toward' all points simultaneously. A complete mapping may look like the following with the arts-based piece; in this case, dissemination to a large public is not deemed strong.



The quadrants, therefore, are not necessarily opposing directions. Although a greater emphasis may be placed on some criteria over others, by devoting more time and effort to specific dimensions, it must be recognized that sometimes an emphasis on one may implicitly enhance the other dimensions. For example, an artist with a strong political position may desire to improve a piece's pedagogical dimensions in order to assist skeptical others in understanding the political position taken.

Each arts-based project can then be defined and assessed based upon how well it achieves its intended purposes. Most will have a particular emphasis or position and it is towards these characteristics that an assessor can look. While other positions, or lack thereof, can be noted, making distinctions among appropriate criteria is part of an assessor's responsibility and should be articulated. As Barone (2001) suggests, "Most arts based research texts will exhibit some, but not all, of the qualities [he] listed and may, therefore, not achieve the status of art. Hence, the research may be characterized as arts-*based* rather than as full-fledged art" (p. 25). 'Arts-based' does not, however, imply that such projects are of lesser quality. Rather, it is an indication of a different genre. The issue of quality then is not universal but contextual and an assessment of arts-based projects can be better served when the appropriate criteria are utilized. Adapting the *Great Wheel* to one's own circumstances, as Underwood encourages, provides a conceptual framework that moves us away from universal standards and towards more holistic discussions about quality and merit. In some cases the meanings that the research participants provide or the insights that students obtain from a role-play in drama supersedes the need for polish, and the *Great Wheel* can chart this stance/position/location. In the following section I explain the four quadrants in depth and in the following section provide cases of its usage.

Towards an Understanding of the Pedagogical Quadrant

Gadamer (1975) claims that "the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience changing the person experiencing it" (p. 92). This change could be considered pedagogical, as there is a sense of intellectual or emotional growth in the individual. Such growth can take place with the artist as s/he comes to understand the world differently as a result of blending the content to the unique artistic form. It could also have pedagogical effect on the viewer of art as one views Picasso's *Guernica* or watches Brecht's *Three Penny Opera.*

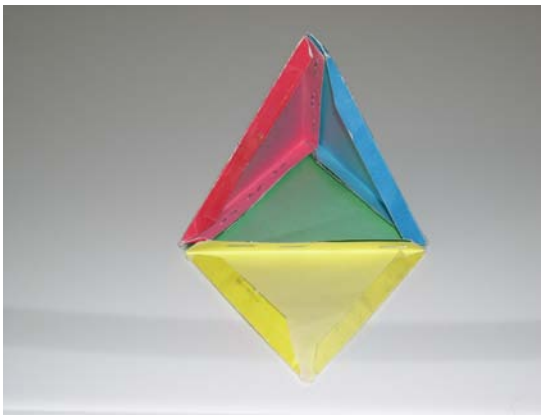
These works have value in addition to the aesthetic. The aesthetic understanding merges form with content (topic) of the composition assisting both artists and their audiences in a reconceptualization of the world. Such can be the pedagogical intent and ability of arts-based research, or qualitative research, in general. It reflects Denzin's (2003) claim and challenge that qualitative research and arts-based research must recognize their pedagogical and political nature/intent. As Eisner (2005) suggests:

> the aim of research is not to advance the careers of researchers but to make a difference in the lives of students. That aspiration is not only realized by sharing conclusions about matters of fact, but by changing perspectives on how we see and interpret the world. (p. 21)

For Eisner (2005), Denzin (2003), Corbin (2009), and many others, research in the postmodern world will recognize and accept that their works do intend to teach their audiences and are therefore pedagogical. Researchers with such a stance expect changes in the perspectives and behaviors of their readers and/or research participants.

Schwab (1978) outlines four commonplaces of curriculum: the subject, the student, the teacher, and the milieu (physical, social, and political environments). Each plays a role and each exerts a certain power. A subject-centered curriculum would be prescriptive, predetermined by a government's educational ministry, relying on the works of previous experts in the fields, privileging previously held values over emergence, similar to Eisner and Vallance's (1974) description of *academic rationalism*. A teacher-centered one would give the power to the teacher who would determine what is worth knowing and possibly mediate such knowledge with the students. A student-centered approach would create an environment conducive for students to explore using their own devices, possibly looking like the Reggio Emilia approach to instruction (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman,1998), Waldorf schools (Petrash, 2002), or Summerhill (Neill, 1966). A milieu-centered curriculum would bring in the greater environment, including physical, social, and political dimensions. Each, alone, is problematic; their integration provides a well-rounded curriculum.

While we could also use the compass diagram to chart a particular classroom's emphasis on Schwab's commonplaces, here, I employ what I label a 'balanced tetrahedron' as the operant three-dimensional metaphor. I encourage classrooms in which the four commonplaces interact dialogically, all four interfacing with one another equally, informing and supporting one another and all four taking turns serving as the base. Its center relies on its constituent members and obtains its power from their dialogic union.



How the researcher frames (Goffman, 1974) data collection, and a teacher frames instruction always influences the products generated. In the case of research, the content (subject) rests with the participants (student/research participant), albeit mediated by the researcher (teacher) and the literature (milieu). For me, curriculum and research are negotiated spaces and an understanding of the interplay among the four commonplaces can assist us in creating appropriate pedagogical spaces. Only then can we assess arts-based research projects based upon their pedagogical context and the degree that they have reached their aims.

There also exist two complementary but sometimes competing foci. One is an understanding of the 'content' upon which artists base their compositions. The other is a mastery of the 'form' that one chooses to represent that content. In an acting class, the emphasis will be on theatrical form. In an English class using 'process drama' techniques (O'Neill, 1995; Perchard, 2010), where role is used to explore content (arts-based instructional approaches), the emphasis would be on an understanding of material. Both have merit within their own contexts. However, Goodman (2005) cautions that an overemphasis on form is a misplaced focus, distracting the learner "from what he or she is trying to say or understand through language" (p. 5). One learns form as one uses it to mediate content and vice versa. We must be pedagogically patient as we witness our students experimenting with form as they create meanings for themselves and others. Through exposure, they are moving towards the arts as dynamic forms of expression.

The same argument applies with arts-based research. Drawings, paintings, photographs, videos, performances, poetry, songs, and music, generated by research participants, may not achieve a high artistic standard but nor should this be expected. The arts are used to assist in the articulation of meaning and the projects move the participants towards poiesis. Their artistic merit will most often be not of gallery quality, but the attempt of employing a medium different from words may uncover stories and beliefs that further elucidate not only what one knows but also how what one knows is transformed by the medium chosen. An artistic act can be, and often is, a pedagogical one (Isenberg& Jalongo, 2010; Norris, 2008; Ogden, DeLuca, & Searle, 2010). One does not ask those being interviewed to speak as orators, so why should we expect that level of quality when we ask research participants to paint, compose, dance, or act? Like Kostera's (2006) use of narrative collage as a means of assisting participants in articulating their existing meanings on a topic, one does not expect publishable stories.

Rather, the stories are a creative arts-based approach of generating data. By making arts-based requests, we are encouraging and inviting research participants and our students to move towards our art forms. By not asking them to use the arts, we, by neglect, are reinforcing the hegemonic research forms of number and word.

Towards an Understanding of the Poiesis Quadrant

Johnston (1997) defines poiesis as meaning making, referring to "all common forms of artistic creativity in the visual and plastic arts, music, drama, poetry, and prose fiction" (n.p.). An artistic endeavor, therefore, is one in which there are two products, the artistic piece and the emergent meanings that the artist evokes as a result of the art making. Depending upon the context, one may have greater emphasis. With an 'arts-based' project, significant meaning may be the desired outcome. In an art class, it may be the execution of artistic form.

Best (1982;1992), however, makes a distinction between the aesthetic and the artistic. For Best, a natural phenomenon, like a beautiful sunset, can elicit an aesthetic experience but to define something as artistic, one must consider intentionality. Art, therefore, is created in order to create an aesthetic response from either in the artist and/or a larger public. For Best, many things in the environment can have an aesthetic quality but only things made by humans are considered artistic.

Berger (1972) reinforces this distinction between the aesthetic and the artistic by claiming that there is a difference between being naked and nude. Everyone without clothes is naked but to be nude means to be aware of the gaze of another. To be nude is an intentional act of portrayal. The song 'Poetry in Motion,' written by Paul Kaufman and Mike Anthony (1960) is misleading. At times walking down the street is just that, 'walking down the street;' a pipe is just a pipe. If a painting of a pipe is accompanied by the phrase 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' or the walker becomes aware of an audience and adjusts her/his walk accordingly, there is artistic intent. As Best would define it, a walk without intent can be aesthetic (poetry in motion), but with intent, it is artistic.

We read pre-historic cave drawings, for example, by referencing other works that we understand. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) attests, perception is influenced by previous knowledge and understanding. The historical and political are always embedded in poiesis, as poiesis is influenced by generations of cultural traditions. Like Culler's (1982) claim that women can only read as men because language itself has patriarchy embedded within it, we must recognize that poiesis is fraught with hegemonic frames that often go unquestioned. Such questioning is a dimension of the political quadrant.

Still the goal of creating an aesthetic experience for another is noteworthy. Hansen (2004) calls for a poetics of teaching in which aesthetic, intellectual, and moral elements are drawn together (p. 119). To deny the aesthetic is to deny the experience of wonder and awe in one's life. Arts-based research and instructional approaches most often invite the novice to move towards poiesis. In so doing these approaches foster the development of an artistic appreciation. When determining the quality of art-based approaches, an understanding of the current location of the emergent artist must be considered an important variable.

Towards an Understanding of the Political Quadrant

The determination of the standard of poiesis of arts-based projects cannot be completely separated from their cultural and historical contexts. As Berger (1972) and Baudrillard (2001) aptly point out, no art is politically neutral as the lens or position of the artist is a form of framing. In addition, neutrality itself is a political stance. Given this, the quality or merit of art can also be assessed on its degree of political stance, as Denzin (2003) encourages.

There are, however, two different political stances when it comes to arts-based pedagogy and research. First there are the political statements made within works of art, be they protest songs, political cartoons, social issues theatre, visual arts, or contemporary dance. All deliberately make statements about the world.

Monkman's paintings and other works (2010) are imbued with layers of political overtones that reveal multiple frames and framings. His painting, 'The Academy' (Monkman, 2008), portrays an assortment of painters and their subjects. A bride sketches the posing Greek figures while what appears to be a circus ringleader finishes his painting of the same models but in color. A Native American sits in front of a blank canvas. Among other things, the painting makes explicit the colonization of Native American Peoples through art. By using the art form of the colonizers as both the medium and the content, he adroitly brings both into question. Giroux (1991), in his definition of the postmodern, includes the political points-of-view of art and research whether they be tacit or overt. It is works such as Monkman's that make obvious the 'man behind the curtain,' pulling the strings. In assessing art, it is important to note its political position, whether explicit or deceptively appearing benign.

The second is the politics of the process. My first experience with an art teacher was to trace a template of a body of a rabbit, cut it out, assemble arms and legs from other templates and have a puppet just like hers. There was no imagination and I was judged by my conformity to the connoisseur (Eisner, 1977), Miss Henry. The process was a political one of the top-down kind, not that of the enabling of students to become producers, that Freire (1986) encourages.

I must confess that I do have a fear that prescriptive standards of the quality of art, based solely upon an assessment of its high degree of polish, will silence those emergent voices who are moving toward our art forms. I have encountered many an art-phobic in-service teacher in my graduate classes who tell horror stories about their art making experiences where the judge entered too soon and discouraged exploration. Such experiences move many away from art making. As Flinders, Noddings, and Thornton (1986) point out, all teaching is a political act by what we choose to teach or not and the manner in which we teach.

Sir Ken Robinson (2006; 2009) claims that children are born creative and are educated out of it. As teachers and researchers of, in, and with the arts, we must reverse this trend, inviting all to move towards the arts as ways of knowing, doing, being, and living. When the only criteria is a strict lens of a high degree of polished poiesis, the pedagogical process takes a political stance reinforcing a narrow definition of art that can dissuade people from moving towards an appreciation and usage of our art forms. I consider an acknowledgement of the politics of the process to be vital when discussing the quality of art works. The authority/authorship must rest with the creator/student/research participant. It is their voices that inform the research and the lessons. The teacher/researcher is the guide on the side, the muse beckoning the creative voices of those present.

Towards an Understanding of the Public Positioning Quadrant

Beyond stylistic preferences, quality can be an issue even when it is not the primary focus. Some arts-based projects are not ready for public consumption. I have witnessed productions that have been ‘slapped together’ with no apparent desire to move toward poiesis and/or pedagogy whether they be in music, dance, theatre, the visual arts or the written word. I also admit that sometimes when non-theatre people suggest that they can do a play about a particular topic, I shudder with the realization that they know little of the discipline and in all likelihood will produce a piece that will lack both depth and luster. Still, I do not want to deny them the opportunity to try if they are serious about moving toward the art form.

But it needs to be recognized that the bringing of one’s piece and/or oneself into a public domain means entering into an aesthetic type of political arena. Once there, an assortment of judges becomes ever present. The popular television shows *So You Think You Can Dance* and *American Idol* clearly show a range of talent in the performing arts, with many eliminated participants obviously not possessing the necessary ‘star quality.’ They have not reached a degree of poiesis necessary for public recognition. Those who do succeed either possess a raw talent and/or have dedicated their lives to mastering the art form. Within the ‘acceptable’ range there are various strengths and weakness. Some are critiqued on their song choice, others on their lack of emotional connection to either the song or, in the case of dance, their

partners. The judges or connoisseurs recognize the importance of the integration of form with content and comment accordingly. Still, as one show wisely puts it, the winner is "America's 'favorite' dancer." The producers recognize that at a certain point it is not about who is 'best' but about public perception. The finalists have merit but the ultimate quality is one of popularity. Even the judges don't always agree, reinforcing that 'beauty' or value is in the eye of the beholder, always possessing a degree of subjective preference that can tip the scales one way or another.

For those not making it to 'Hollywood,' a comment that is often made is, 'You're not quite ready.' The judges recognize there is a moving toward mastery and applaud these contestants for it. However, at this time, a degree of quality is lacking. For those falling into this range some go home, work hard at improving their skills and return the following year, having taken the pedagogical steps suggested by the panel of judges. They have chosen to dedicate themselves to a higher degree of personal mastery.

Chapin (1973) tells a story of Mr. Tanner, a cleaner from the mid-west, whose clients appreciated his voice, encouraging him to go further. He did and received poor reviews. He retreated to his business and since then only sang late at night when no one else was around. Chapin sings:

> Music was his life; it was not his livelihood
> and it made him feel so happy and it made him feel so good.
> And he sang from his heart and he sang from his soul.
> (And) he did not know how well he sang; it just made him whole.
>
> (Chapin, 1973)

Unfortunately, Mr. Tanner retreated, not recognizing that he did have an appreciative local audience, far away from the critics of Carnegie Hall. His public was on a smaller scale.

Displaying student work and the work of novice arts-based research participants enters a contentious, grey area that spans the private/personal/public chasm. By private, I mean works that are meant for the eyes of the artist only. Diaries may fall into this category. By personal, I refer to works, stories and thoughts that are meant to remain within a small circle of peers. The individual doesn't mind sharing but it is not for public consumption. Going public means that the individual feels ready for some form of public audience. Memoirs would be an extension of private diaries to a public audience.

Most student works in the majority of school subjects are created for one purpose, as class assignments. They exist for the teacher's eyes only and are infrequently viewed even by

parents and peers. They are personal communications between a student and the teacher. In the arts, public display is much more expected. High school music recitals, art displays, theatrical performances, and dance routines all fall into a unique category. Their intent is both pedagogical and poiesis but all too often the only criterion brought into the conversation is poiesis. Eisner (2005) claims that "there is a tendency to allow aesthetic considerations to trump the need for an epistemic orientation to disclosure" (p. 11). When determining quality or merit I position all artwork on a private/personal/public continuum. An understanding of the context or audience for which a piece of art is intended positions it in an appropriate frame from which it can be discussed. I have found that some conversations about quality omit the context from the discussion, always assuming that a paying public standard of poiesis is the only legitimate criteria for display. How the public positions someone can inhibit her/him from moving towards the arts as ways of knowing, doing, and being. As teachers and judges of arts-based research we must question whether our comments are stumbling blocks or steppingstones as we advocate the use of art forms.

Nachmanovitch (1990) claims that the creative act can be inhibited by the fear of the judge; that such fear interferes with the artistic flow. I challenge those judges who uphold some higher moral precept regarding the artistic quality of arts, suggesting that they might be dissuading many others from our art forms (either as producers or consumers), by insisting upon a degree of artistic quality to which people are moving towards but have not quite achieved. Such a judgmental stance must be tempered with an understanding of developmental (pedagogical) concepts that recognize others as moving toward poiesis and encourage them accordingly. Like the parable that cautions against the opening the chrysalis before the butterfly is ready, our zealousness for a certain degree of poiesis when art is publically displayed can be pedagogically limiting, stunting student development and success, and research participants' voices. In the case of displaying the works of novices, including or ignoring the political and artistic context of the artists is a political act that can either give voice or silence.

Applying the Great Wheel to Arts-based Projects

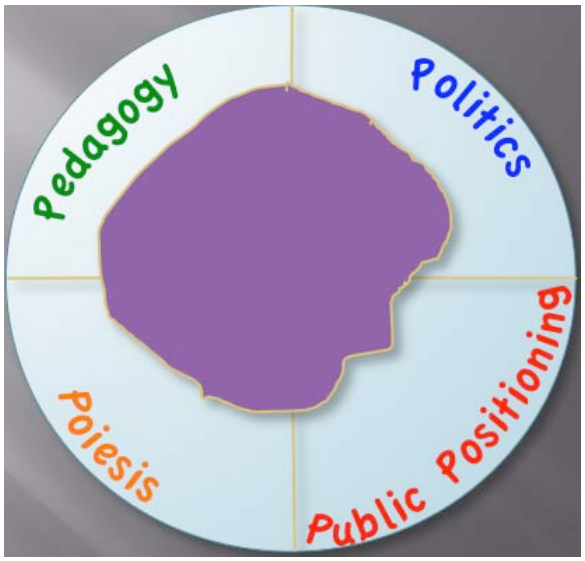
Having established a conceptual framework that can be used in the determination of quality and merit of arts-based instruction and research, it is now applied to specific cases of both arts-based pedagogy and research demonstrating how the *Great Wheel* as a tool/model/framework can inform the creation and assessment of arts-based projects.

Case One – Concrete Poetry for Pedagogical Purposes

In my graduate course with in-service teachers, I begin with an icebreaker activity that asks graduate students to introduce themselves using concrete poetry[1]. My intent is to assist them in thinking about self in nontraditional ways and to begin using the arts much more to both process information and to communicate it.

The 'J' is a broomstick that represents my like for all things 'Harry Potter.' The 'O' is the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1975) full of spirals and tangents. The 'E' is a capital 'E' representing stage lights and my interest in theatre. The activity moves my students and I toward both a more intricate understanding of self and simultaneously enhances the use of art in analysis and expression.

We can also now define or assess this activity and its products using the Great Wheel:



Its purpose was pedagogical, to assist students in the reconceptualization of self (Pinar, 1995), and student responses clearly indicated that I achieved that aim. It affirmed and supported student knowledge, moving the class toward an environment in which their voices would be expected and accepted. While the content was not necessarily political, the process of writing fostered a climate conducive for student voice, making the process a political shift in classroom power. These and most concrete poetry examples made over the years would not be considered of enough value to display publically much beyond the class and the students' immediate circles. They did not possess a degree of polish to be gallery ready. Yes, there was a strong sense of artistry or poiesis, as

[1] *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2010) defines concrete poetry as "poetry in which the poet's intent is conveyed by graphic patterns of letters, words, or symbols rather than by the meaning of words in conventional arrangement."

people found new forms of representing self. However, given the time constraints and experience with the craft, its polished poiesis was not as strong. Still the activity had merit. It had strong political and pedagogical emphases and was moving toward a stronger sense of a "poiesis of curriculum" (Trueit, 2005) in that the process/activity itself had artistic merit. Students explored and found their own voices within the flexible structure. Many students, some of who were resistant at first, were proud of the meanings that they uncovered. Some eagerly tried the activity with their own students, with equal or greater success. Some returned to class claiming that a few students who seldom participated became animated in discussing their name. In these cases, teachers and students considered themselves moving toward all four quadrants and many were impressed with the degree of poiesis in their peers and themselves. These four broad criteria, collectively, produce a better description of an arts-based project and an assessment of it.

Case Two – Concrete Poetry for Research Purposes

Wihak (2004; 2007), a former student of mine in an arts-based research course, employed concrete poetry as part of her doctoral research methodology. Having participants draw their names with both before and after pictures, she assisted them in articulating their emotions. "The Before drawing (Figure 8a), with a sense of conflict and tension represents the turmoil in Soshana's life before going to Nunavut" (Wihak, 2004, p. 86-87).

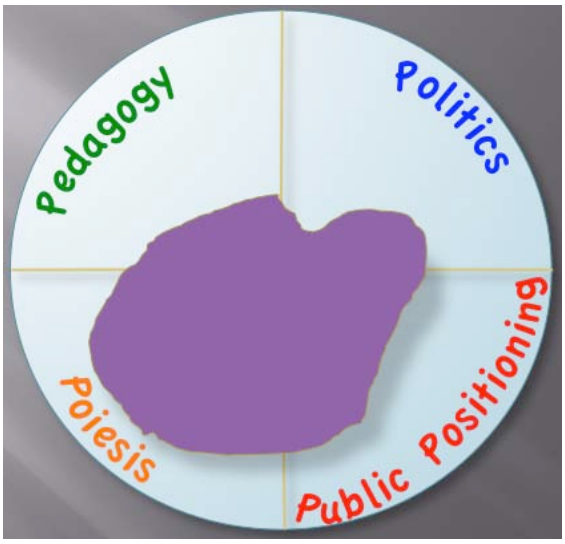
Before

After

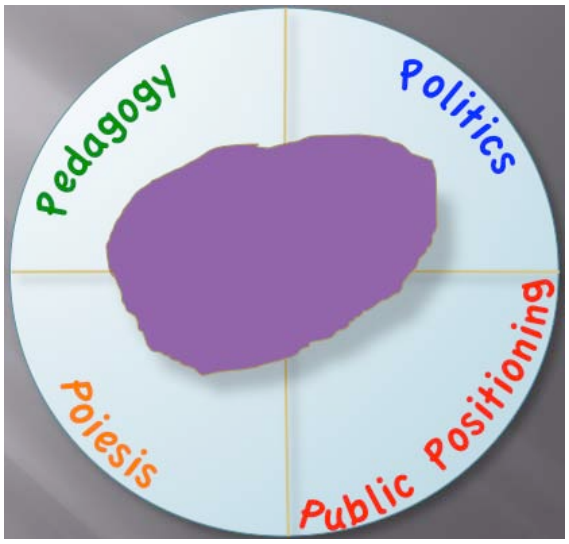
"Soshana's positive experience about her Nunavut experience shines in the bright colours of her During/After picture" (p. 87). Clearly, these drawings possess what Leavy (2009) considers the capacity of "conveying emotion and the multiple meanings articulated via the art" (p. 228). The public or audience to whom they are destined is a research audience, not an art critic, and they should be appraised accordingly. A charting of this project, using the Great Wheel, would be similar to the use of concrete poetry for pedagogical purposes. Such projects promote the arts and need to be applauded, not discouraged, as they move our greater community toward the arts as ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Case Three – Drama-in-Education as Instruction

In a writing-in-role activity (Neelands & Goode, 2000) that I used with student audiences, I asked them to write letters home as characters during the Klondike gold rush. A language arts teacher could be more interested in the students' abilities to write a standard letter. A social studies teacher could focus on content, emphasizing an understanding of the lived experiences of those who lived in that historical time. While both form and content interrelate and complement one another, different teachers may place more emphasis upon moving toward either the form or the content and assess identical work differently. A poorly structured letter, fraught with technical issues, could demonstrate a rich understanding of dislocation from one's home and loved ones and a polished letter could lack an understanding of the content being examined. If the role were changed to being 'newspaper journalists,' a higher degree of polish would be expected. While demonstrating a proficient degree of both would be ideal, the piece's assessment will, to some degree, be determined whether its pedagogical intent has greater emphasis on form or content within the context of the desired learning outcomes.



English



Social Studies

Case Four – Applied Theatre for Education and Social Change

I work with social issues theatre, which means that the content and the process are equally imbued with political intentions (Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2005; Mienczakowski, 1995; Norris, 1999, 2002, 2009a; & Norris & Mirror Theatre, 2001; Prentki & Preston, 2008; Thompson, 2009). We create, through a collaborative process (Filewod, 1982;1987), a series of vignettes that Rohd (1991) calls 'activating scenes' (p. 103). They are open-ended in that they invite the audience to rewrite them during the devised performance/workshops (Norris,

2009a). Their intent is both political and pedagogical as the presentations move from the didacticism of Aristotelian theatre to a form of participatory theatre that includes the voices of our audiences. The scenes are full of an improvisational raw energy that resists a high degree of polish. Many audience members, through their watching, believe that they could do such work and when we move to audience participation for pedagogical and political purposes, many participants volunteer to devise scenes of their own and present them to their peers. Many times their polished poiesis is not strong, but this is not the point. They are re-conceptualizing through the art form to make important personal meaning. In this case, the political dimension of giving voice to the audience members supersedes the need for a high degree of poiesis. The insights they glean from working through the art moves them both toward artistic forms of expression and an expanded understanding of the concept being examined. As one grade-eight student said, "I thought you were going to come here and tell us not to do drugs. Thanks for trusting us to work things out on our own" (Norris, 2009a, p. 130). Enabling voice is both a pedagogical and political act that can be stifled by an over reliance on polish as the ultimate criteria. The criteria for this type of theatre rest in the performance's pedagogical ability to invite and engage the audience in discussing the issues through effective activating scenes.

Moreno (1983) calls for a theatre of spontaneity in which every performance takes on a new life and cautions against well-polished pieces that can lack heart and substance. Polishing also maintains the status of the fourth-wall (Brecht, 1957) through which audiences gaze. Raw improvisational energy can make it permeable, giving voice to all present. While polish has its purpose, it is not universally desirable.

My fear–and yes it is a fear (just ask many of my colleagues in theatre departments who are relegated to second-class status for their work in Theatre for Young Audiences and Applied Theatre)–is that the quality of social issues theatre will not be valued according to its own set of criteria, but by a Broadway standard that is inappropriate for the context and purposes that it exists to serve.

Gray's work (1998) with female cancer patients provides a good example to extend the discussion. The women themselves wrote and performed their collection of stories. Such stories, based upon their life histories, are empirical evidence. The arrangement into a series of well scripted, polished, and performed monologues, mediates that data into an arts-based research project. The performance had a successful tour with many 'standing ovations' that later became the title of a book that documented this production and others, including one with men experiencing prostate cancer (Gray & Sinding, 2002). The performances were pedagogically strong, both for the participants who grew as a result of the project, and the audiences, who appreciated this form of presentation over didactic and boring written or

spoken research reports by 'talking heads.' By having the participants playing themselves, the approach gave them political agency. Since it was well accepted by the types of audiences for whom it was designed, it was positioned for the appropriate public. I do, however, question certain aspects of its poiesis.

Handle with Care (Gray, 1998), in a video format, presents a number of people talking to the camera. There is little interaction, little drama, and little shift in style and energy, collectively making the entire piece theatrically weak, albeit, much better than the reading of a research report. Gray confides (2002) that he entered the project with little knowledge and understanding of what he and those assembled were up to. They eventually chose the monologue as their primary form of presentation. Monologues are theatrically effective when used sparingly. As a primary theatrical style, they can become tedious, as stories begin to drone on, one after another. I am torn. I celebrate the pedagogy, political stance, and the acceptance of a particular public, but I wanted more. But the audiences to whom they were directed were appreciative. Knowing the audience to whom the piece is directed is also an important consideration when determining quality.

The *Great Wheel* has helped me to reconcile my own position on this important work and I chart my own description/assessment of Gray's work:

The pedagogical process for both the participants and the audience is sound. The political stance provides a space for agency and is an example of working 'with' people. The public for whom it was created was appreciative. Its theatrical quality, while moving toward poiesis, was lacking. The monologues were strong in themselves, but there were too many of them. Still I accept the work and applaud its efforts. The voice of non-actors (Boal, 1992) must not only be encouraged but forums must be created to provide them with a variety of media through which they tell their stories. If not, we lack good manners by not minding our P's (poiesis, pedagogy, politics, and public positioning) in Q (Quality). I ask, "What is our responsibility in assisting those who desire to move towards poiesis to do so, as we assess their work?" "Should not assessment take a pedagogical position?" In the case of *Handle with Care*, the writers/performers elucidated many important aspects of cancer and its treatment by moving toward poiesis. They appeared to have no aspirations of taking it to Broadway, as some of the characters in the mockumentary, *Waiting for Guffman*, (Guest,

1996) did. The cast of *Handle with Care* recognized their context and wrote and preformed accordingly. This is/was their right and I defend and applaud them for it.

Case 5 – Assessing Children's Work

Maddox (2002) takes it upon her/himself (gender unknown) to cruelly critique children's drawings on his/her web site, "I am better than your kids" (http://www.thebestpageintheuniverse.net/c.cgi?u=irule)

The site states:

> If you work in an office with lots of people, chances are that you work with a person who hangs pictures up that their kids have drawn. The pictures are always of some stupid flower or a tree with wheels. These pictures suck; I could draw pictures much better. In fact, I can spell, do math and run faster than your kids. So being that my skills are obviously superior to those of children, I've taken the liberty to judge art work done by other kids on the internet. I'll be assigning a grade A through F for each piece:

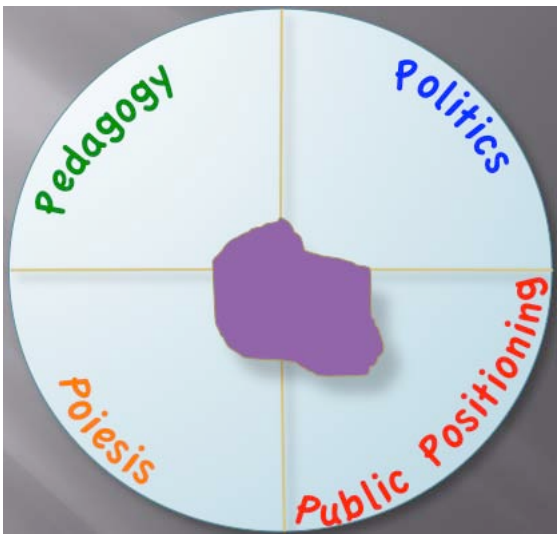
An assessment of the work of Bryce, age 10 reports,

> This one wouldn't be too bad if the color were kept inside the lines, you picked a new perspective, used non-abrasive colors and asked someone with talent to paint it for you. On one hand I want to give an A for effort but... F

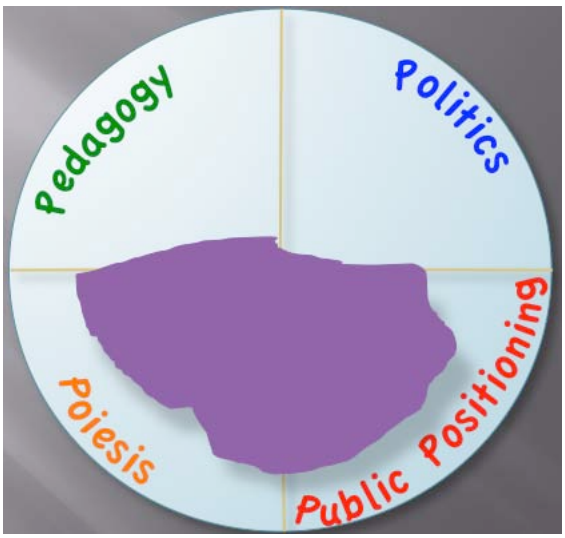
While the example is extreme, it highlights the type of violence that can take place when something is judged outside of its context. This assessment defines the context then proceeds to completely ignore it by establishing an inappropriate frame that dismisses the work. Like Li's (2006) assertion that the framing of 'civilization' gives those within it impunity to act unjustly towards those outside of that frame, the art critic can equally fall into solipsism by ignoring the legitimate criteria of others frames. I ask, "Who judges the judge, the critic, the connoisseur? How do we define and determine the quality of poiesis of the child, novice, student, research participant, or different Other and the appropriateness of them going public? Should all children's art be judged by the recent work of the prodigy, Kieron Williamson?"

Williamson, 2010. Permission granted.

His work is exceptional for a person his age but to deny others from picking up a brush, in order to move toward art for personal exploration rather than mass appreciation and consumption, is a travesty. Most of my poems remain private but were of value as they assisted me in thinking through things. Only a few entered the public arena (Norris, 1993, 2007, 2009b). Art must be judged/assessed for the context in which it resides. Without employing this variable we may prevent many from moving toward our art forms.



Office/Refrigerator Drawings



Kieron Williamson

In the case of both these examples, other than the process of artists creating their own works, there is little to no political stance in the compositions. Little understanding of the extended content of the work is made evident. Williamson's pieces are far more polished and consequently have a wider public appeal. Still the works of many young children are displayed by a close circle of friends and family and are appreciated for what they are. They could be included as research data, and doing so, would make them arts-based.

Towards an Inclusive Stance on Arts-based Research and Instruction

Our statistical colleagues label an event that includes items that don't belong, a 'Type I error' (a false positive). A Type II error (a false negative) is when something is excluded that should belong. They recognize that all assessment instruments have limitations. In assessing arts-based instruction and research, my (dis)position is moving towards a willingness to make a few more Type I errors with the hope that this will avoid making more Type II errors. My preference is to invite those who are admitted to move towards all compass points. That's the pedagogue in me.

I take to heart Sir Ken Robinson's (2006, 2009) question, "Do schools kill creativity?" He critiques the structure of schools and their narrow-minded unholistic approach. We, as teachers of the arts and practitioners of arts-based research, must be continually cognizant of both our political stance and our pedagogical intent in how we position (frame) those working with the arts. We must continually question our role as gate-keepers, asking, "Whose voices are heard and whose are silenced?" Assessment is always a political act, underpinned by allegiances to particular philosophical values and epistemological beliefs as determined by those who have power. Nothing is neutral. Even the perspective of being neutral is a political positioning. Any stance positions one in reference to the Other. Criteria may tell more about those judging than those being judged. The *Great Wheel* model demonstrates that various individuals can describe and assess themselves and their works in a variety positions on the wheel. One may desire to look more closely at the meanings generated by the participant through the process of creating that piece and another may prefer to examine its political message. They are different but both are legitimate. As Maruyama (2004) claims, we must develop polyocular vision and look through multiple lenses.

Leavy (2009) in her discussion of participatory arts-based projects also takes an inclusive stance:

> When considering participatory visual arts-based methods the issue of aesthetics becomes important. Despite the potential for visual arts to captivate and impress messages upon viewers, when amateurs are invited into the art-making process,

> certainly they cannot be expected to possess artistic ability or training. Therefore, in participatory projects the aesthetic quality of the resulting visual art takes a back seat to the other advantages of the methodology. More over, although produced by amateurs, the visual art produced by research participants can still be quite powerful with respect to conveying emotion and the multiple meanings articulated via the art. (p. 228)

Jongeward (2009) discusses such a research participant who had become intrinsically motivated to move toward poesis:

> She bought a blender, a book about paper making, and jumped right into the process. Discouraged at first because the paper didn't turn out well, she persisted and gradually learned the steps, adjusting her ideas to the needs of the materials. As she made more paper and got better at it, she enjoyed the process. (p. 243)

I suggest that we cease our quest for the 'gold standard' as Barone (2007) suggests, but, rather, employ an inclusive set of criteria that is "a step forward in moving away from facile and simplistic answers toward nuance and complexity" (Gutiérrez, 2010. p. 448). By asking, "What are the pedagogical, poetical, political and public positioning stances of any arts-based research and/or pedagogical project?" we can act responsibly, looking at the bigger picture. If not we run the danger of desiring only what select connoisseurs or aristocrats (Boal, 1979) appreciate. Let's invite, not exclude and run the risk of a Type I error.

In conclusion, I return to my doctoral research question (Norris, 1989), asking what Henderson (1992) calls an 'unbounded question' (one that influences practice but is never answered). I ask, "What do we do as teachers that fosters creativity and what do we do that inhibits it?" I have found that using this adaptation of Underwood's 'Learning Way' has assisted me in moving towards a holistic evaluative approach that may better foster creativity through the recognition of the value of the poetical, political, pedagogical, public components in arts-based instruction and research. Different positions don't necessarily mean better or less quality. Many works of art have strong aesthetics and weak political positions and vice versa. Both have a place at the table (Woolf, 1977) as each provides insights to both artists and audiences as form and content uniquely blend to create meaning.

> The Learning Way begins with the assumption that it is the responsibility of each of us to learn to understand who we individually are, the unique way in which we learn, what we need from our community, and what we can give in return (Underwood, p. xiii).

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