

Espacio para dibujar: La mujer, el arte, el afecto y el temor
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En el amor no hay temor, sino que el perfecto amor echa fuera el temor, porque el temor involucra castigo, y el que teme no es hecho perfecto en el amor. 1 Juan 4:18

Investigar cómo las mujeres mayores desarrollan sus destrezas en las artes plásticas en un ambiente de dibujo en grupo es el objetivo de este proyecto de investigación basado en el arte. Dicho ambiente formó una comunidad para la práctica en la cual nuestros conocimientos situados se convirtieron en la base de creación del sentido y el espacio donde emergieron nuevas formas de pensar relacionadas al arte comunitario en la educación y al aprendizaje continuo. La construcción social de la identidad de artista entre las mujeres y mi enseñanza de artes plásticas constituyeron la base del estudio.



Figura 1, 2: P. Zantingh (2013). *Mesa de comedor*. FDotografía.

Se seleccionaron cinco mujeres de forma deliberada y se les invitó a asistir a clases de dibujo particulares en la casa de una de las mujeres. Aparte de entrar al curso de dibujo, el grupo de mujeres, provenientes de contextos socio-económicos diversos y de edades entre cincuenta y setenta y nueve años, participó de manera desinteresada en mi estudio de investigación, titulado *Espacio para dibujar* (SFD, por sus siglas en inglés), reuniéndose semanalmente por un total de veinticuatro sesiones en el curso de dibujo que se convirtió en estudio de investigación. Yo le había dado clase al grupo el año anterior, época en la que reconocí e identifiqué el papel crítico que jugaban el afecto, el cuidado y el temor en este grupo. De hecho, a algunas de las mujeres les daba miedo dibujar y sus sentimientos de incompetencia dificultaban sus habilidades. Un número de elementos hacían juego en las complejas relaciones en cuestión, unas superficiales, otras profundas;

unas se expanden, otras se contraen. Es precisamente en dicha fluctuación que ocurre el crecimiento, no de manera lineal sino orgánica. Y sin duda esperaba encontrar numerosos puntos de comprensión tan impredecibles como significativos a través de este trabajo sencillo y a la vez complejo y cambiante.

Reseñas académicas

¿Por qué es importante dibujar? El espacio se define como un área ininterrumpida, un área libre que aún no se ha tomado ni ocupado. Los espacios son aberturas, posiciones, situaciones, habitaciones, áreas amplias para la exploración. Como intervalo de tiempo, el espacio también constituye la libertad de descubrir a su albedrío. Desde el punto de vista psicológico, fue el lugar donde algunas mujeres lograrían crecer y sobresalir como dibujantes. Físicamente, el espacio fue el lugar donde pasamos tiempo explorando las dimensiones del dibujo y llegando a conocer las excentricidades de las demás en un ambiente cómodo y bien pensado.

Espacio para el afecto y el cuidado

Nuestra capacidad para cuidar y la ética del cuidado se originan en el momento en que comprendemos que nosotros mismos hemos sido objeto de cuidado, es decir, que hemos recibido la atención de otras personas, produciendo en nosotros la responsabilidad de considerar a los demás y/o apoyar libremente a los que nos rodean. Dar nuestro cuidado eleva interrogantes relacionadas a la competencia, el sacrificio y la inclusión (Noddings, 2012). Noddings propone que algunas feministas han planteado la inquietud de que una ética de cuidado podría constituir un factor contribuyente en la manipulación constante de la mujer y que la presión continua del cuidado podría causar que la mujer encargada se descuide a sí misma. Yo considero el cuidado desde distintos ángulos: las mujeres del grupo se dan cuidado mutuo como una forma de afecto y las mujeres se cuidan a sí mismas al participar en el grupo. Muchas de ellas están a cargo de miembros de sus familias y ven nuestro grupo de dibujo como un alivio o un tiempo que han podido sacar exclusivamente para sí mismas y así evitar descuidarse. También reciben mi cuidado a través de mi enseñanza y yo recibo cuidado de ellas. Todas estas formas de afecto y cuidado han sido ventajosas para este grupo de amigas y artistas. El cuidado se convirtió en una base para construir un espacio seguro en el cual producir arte sin ser juzgadas.

Espacio para dibujar:

El dibujo se define como una manera de crear marcas visuales características; los dibujos son representaciones, contornos, bocetos, retratos. Hacer marcas durante la niñez es una actividad fundamental que por lo general precede a la escritura (Maslen & Southern, 2011), (Betti & Sale, 1997). A medida que su conciencia de lo que es el mundo va aumentando, los niños intentan volver a crear y hacer ajustes para producir una réplica más fiel a la realidad de lo que ven. Cuando no lo logran o se les dificulta la tarea, se pueden sentir inseguros o avergonzados por aquello que consideran una falta de habilidad que genera un alto grado de autocrítica. Según Lowenfeld & Brittain (1982), dicha etapa marca el final del desarrollo artístico a menos que el niño o niña reciba más formación; es precisamente este punto crítico donde se hayan muchos adultos. El dibujo de observación

se percibe a menudo como un talento y no como una destreza adquirida, de manera que cuando el resultado del esfuerzo no es fotográfico en semejanza, el valor del trabajo disminuye. El dibujo para Berger (2011) es un ejercicio de orientación y una forma de investigación. Dibujar es visualizar como se verá el objeto una vez capturado por la imaginación. De este modo, el dibujo es una forma de ver con una visión y una perspectiva nuevas que nos cautiva al ofrecernos más de una manera de ver el mundo.

Espacio para el temor

¿Por qué algunos educandos sienten temor a explorar maneras de expresarse a través del arte y, en particular, a través del dibujo? En mi enseñanza he presenciado un temor extremo y paralizante en algunos estudiantes de tal grado que los forzó a abandonar la producción o inclusive ponerse a llorar. No obstante, cuando perseveran y continúan trabajando, logran encontrar la satisfacción de seguir adelante y el proceso de creación artística sobrepasa su temor. Bayles y Orland (1993) afirman que, “vencer la aprensión y la incertidumbre en todo esfuerzo nuevo fomenta la confianza a medida que se alcanza dominar el conocimiento” (p. 15).

Espacio para envejecer

Al trabajar con este grupo, pude examinar los tipos de posibles problemas a los que se pueden enfrentar las personas que participan en formación continua en una destreza creativa. Los vínculos con otros educandos constituyen un factor esencial en el proceso de aprendizaje de los adultos porque dichos lazos los ayudan a sentir que pertenecen, creando así ambientes seguros y positivos. Un aprendizaje significativo se expresa a menudo de manera emotiva; evaluar y reconocer dichas emociones ayuda a promover la confianza y la empatía. Adquirir destrezas en actividades creativas “va más allá y ocupa la mente, el cuerpo y las emociones, despertando la curiosidad, la resolución de problemas y el logro artístico” (Patterson & Perlstein, 2011, p. 28). El dominio de sí mismo como destreza aumenta la confianza en sí mismo y exploración y experimentación más profundas en las artes. Tanto una mayor conciencia de sí mismo como un entendimiento más profundo de los demás —y el permiso para experimentar y explorar cosas nuevas— contribuyen al crecimiento creativo. La historia de Meadowcroft en *Painting Friends* (1999) demuestra cómo la comunidad y la amistad son esenciales en el desarrollo de nuevas destrezas y del dominio de sí mismo. En ella, Meadowcroft evoca historias de las vidas de varias mujeres artistas, amigas y educadoras de arte a principios del siglo XX en Montreal. Su investigación es fuente de inspiración y una guía importante en mi propio estudio en un contexto contemporáneo.

Metodología

La estrategia de método mixto utilizada en este proyecto me permitió recoger una abundancia de datos con una multiplicidad de perspectivas con respecto a mis preguntas relacionadas al afecto, el arte y el temor. La Fenomenología y las experiencias vividas lograron la recopilación de anécdotas y conversaciones de forma auténtica desde el punto de vista de las mujeres en el grupo *Space for Drawing* [Espacio para dibujar]. Gracias a la investigación de acción se generaron oportunidades de participación para las mujeres, al mismo tiempo que se alcanzó un nivel de transparencia en el proyecto al reafirmar los

aprendizajes y facilitar la apropiación del material enseñado. El uso de la auto-etnografía me ayudó a situarme en un punto de vista privilegiado que me permitió observar con mi propio lente de educadora y artista, mientras que la investigación basada en el arte me proporcionó información gratificante y fascinante en lo visual. El uso de la investigación basada en las artes (ABR, por sus siglas en inglés) facilitó la representación alternativa de resultados y conclusiones en comparación en vez de usar únicamente métodos tradicionales. El trabajo artístico se convirtió en un componente integral en lo ilustrativo y como respuesta “fenomenológica visual” a lo enseñado. Mediante mi propia práctica en el dibujo he podido permanecer vinculada e involucrada en las conversaciones, entrevistas y obras de arte que creamos, aportándome así una mejor comprensión del proceso (Leavy, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Springgay & Irwin, 2005). Como forma de expresión, este trabajo artístico, las capas de imágenes y los textos se pueden considerar un foco de conocimiento, de creación de sentido y de función como una manera de entender los contextos y de realzar las metodologías acompañantes.



Figura 5: P.Zantingh (2013) *Mapa visual de los datos recogidos*. Collage digital.

Reflexiones y descubrimientos

Crear una comunidad de búsqueda y desarrollar destrezas en la práctica del arte a través del dibujo dio paso a la amistad, el cuidado y el afecto y efectivamente ayudó a algunas mujeres a superar sus temores. Desde el principio, una de las mujeres admitió sentir miedo de dibujar porque creía que nunca sería capaz de llegar a producir nada. A menudo se comparaba a otras participantes y daba hondos suspiros cuando se sentía frustrada; no logré convencerla de que abandonar la tarea no era la respuesta adecuada sino que “el arte es empezar de nuevo” (Bayles & Orland, 1993, p. 10). Por otra parte,

otra mujer admitió temer enfrentarse al papel en blanco pero logró abrirse paso hasta encontrar la confianza necesaria para continuar de manera que el placer de dibujar le permitió hacerlo por su cuenta. Efectivamente, muchos artistas le temen al lienzo vacío. El trabajo artístico es trabajo corriente que exige coraje para continuar y “los artistas o aprenden cómo proceder o no aprenden” (Bayles & Orland, 1993, p. 117). Algunas mujeres aprendieron como vencer sus temores; otras no. Me siento nuevamente convencida de que el desarrollo de una destreza creativa —como el dibujo— más adelante en la vida está vinculado al rejuvenecimiento y la renovación y a ayudar a que un individuo supere el miedo. El arte es comenzar de nuevo una y otra vez y exige amarlo lo suficiente como para continuar avanzando. Como educadora de arte, espero que mis alumnas logren capturar e integrar mi dedicación a la enseñanza de mi arte de tal manera que empiecen a desarrollar su propio amor a las artes, el entendimiento de requiere compromiso y el placer de ver.

No obstante, quedan las siguientes interrogantes: ¿La habilidad de “ver y dibujar bien” está relacionada a un aumento en la conciencia emocional y la empatía hacia los otros? ¿Es desarrollar “buen ojo” una destreza de vida transferible a otras áreas? Ayudar a los demás a ver la belleza en la fealdad es algo que muchos artistas (Edward Burtynsky, Kathe Kollwitz y Rembrandt por nombrar algunos) hacen en su trabajo; si esto logra transmitir cierta empatía en el espectador, ¿cuánto más aún podría ser el caso para una aprendiz de artista en el desarrollo de la empatía? Las cualidades estéticas de la creatividad a través de la práctica artística y, en particular, adquirir un buen ojo se pueden fomentar en cualquier etapa de la vida.

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Space for drawing: Women, art, love, and fear
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There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. (1 John 4:18)

In this arts-based research project, my objective was to investigate how older women develop their skills as visual artists through the medium of drawing in a small group setting. The social construction of artist identities among women and my teaching of the arts are the basis for this study. In this environment we formed a community of practice in which our situated knowledges became the basis for meaning-making and where new understandings relevant to community art education and life-long learning emerged (Haraway, 1988). Considerations such as accountability, friendship, and care became as important as the art making.



Figure 1, 2: P.Zantingh (2013) *Dining room table*. Photograph

Five women were essentially handpicked and invited to attend the private drawing classes that would take place in the home of one of the women — a friend who I have known for many years. The group from various socio-economic backgrounds was comprised of six women. The life stages of the women provide a unique andragogic opportunity to consider more fully a topic that has limited study in art education: aging and art, not in a therapeutic sense, but from a perspective of life-long learning. With four women over 70 (elderly); one women over 60 (senior); and two of us in our 50s (mature), the profile of this class offers insights to teaching and learning that add to existing literature about aging and art.

Three of these women have received their education in Quebec and three in Europe (Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland). In various degrees, their amateur art practices, spanning over many years continues today. For this drawing

class that became a research study, we met every Friday morning to draw together for two twelve-week semesters for a total of twenty-four classes. I had taught this drawing to this group the year before and this was when I recognized and identified the critical role that love, care, and fear played in this group. Some of the women were still afraid to draw and their feelings of inadequacies hindered their abilities.

Working with this group, I examined the kinds of potential problems faced when life-long learners pursue a creative skill. Relationships with other learners are an essential factor for adults when they learn because it is these relationships that contribute to a sense of belonging — producing positive, safe environments. Significant learning is often expressed emotionally and gauging these emotions and acknowledging them helps foster a level of trust.

Using Arts based research (ABR) as a research method allowed the use of alternative representation of results and findings rather than only traditional methods. My responses in my journal sketchbook as well as the digital illustrations I produced on my *iPad* were inspired by our conversations and our lived experiences as individuals in the physical and psychological space we filled during our drawing sessions. Artwork became an integral component in the work illustratively and as a ‘visual phenomenological’ response to the teaching. Through my own drawing practice I remained connected and embodied in the work portrayed in conversation, interviews, and artworks we created, giving me insight into the process (Leavy, 2009; Creswell, 2013; Springgay & Irwin, 2005). Visual research through layered images and texts tells an accompanying story of our shared journey. As a form of expression, this artwork can be considered a site of knowledge, meaning-making, and function as a way to understand contexts.

The foundation of my project was shaped on research into the development and growth of these women as artists, and their budding relationships with each other, as well as their embracing love and overcoming their fears around practicing their art. The women, who are living rich, fulfilled, and diverse personal and professional lives, have formed powerful friendships and bonds, but it is their relational connections as artists that form the basis of my subject matter. I worked with two core definitions: “love” and “fear.” I define “love” as care, compassion, empathy, friendship, and unconditional support for others in the group. “Fear” is defined as paralyzing apprehension about developing, exploring, and taking risks with art-making (Merriam-Webster, 2014). Love and fear were often demonstrated as they learned to draw during these last two years creating a culture of empathy. Understanding and empathy can stem from realizing that in multiplicity, there are different experiences. Many elements are involved in these complex relationships, some of which are shallow, others deep, some expand, some contract. It is in this ebb and flow that growth occurs, not in a linear way but in an organic fashion.

And so it began— a group of women with individual histories, quirks, and attitudes gathered in a beautiful, sunlight space as the smells of coffee, baked goods, and homemade soup simmering on the stove wafted into the dining room/art classroom. We simply began to see and to draw. It was with hopeful expectation that I began to anticipate the many unpredictable but significant

insights that would be gained through this seemingly simple yet complex and ever-shifting work of teaching and learning.

Scholarly reviews

Why is space for drawing important? Space is defined as an uninterrupted area, which is free, untaken, or unfilled. Spaces are openings, positions, situations, rooms, and expansive areas for exploration. As an interval of time, space is also the freedom to discover as one chooses. Originating in Middle English, the dialect of English used between the late 12th and 15th century, the word *space* is a shortening of the French word: *espace* and Latin word: *spatium* (Merriam-Webster, 2014). Physical space is equally as important as psychological, spiritual, and emotional spaces are, and arguably, in the case of my research, a primary location for what took place in a tangible way. Psychologically, it was the place where some would grow and excel in drawing and communication. Physically, it was the place where we spent time exploring the dimensions of drawing and getting to know each other's quirks and eccentricities in sophisticated comfort. Space is both public and private, and in relation to this group, public space became both a place and time when others in the *Space for drawing* group (SFD) could comment, encourage, and critique. Private space away from the group allowed for daydreaming in a cerebral location where ideas could flourish and grow (Richmond, 2009) in a singular way. Expressed individuality of one's inner core may happen in a space that is filled with love. It is with this understanding that I enter scholarly conversations and begin to explore the spaces in relation to my research study.

Space for love and care

Our ability to care and the ethics of care begin with a realization that we have ourselves have been cared for, producing in us a responsibility to consider others and/or freely support those around us. Caring raises questions of competence, sacrifice, and inclusion (Noddings, 2012). Noddings suggests that some feminists have raised the concern that an ethic of care might be a contributing factor in the ongoing manipulation of women, and that the constant pressure of care might cause the caregiver to neglect herself. I think about care from several angles: the women in the group give care to each other as a form of love and the women care for themselves by attending the group. Many of them are full-time caregivers to members of their families and see our drawing group as a reprieve or a time that is carved out exclusively for them to avoid neglecting themselves. They also receive care from me as I teach them and I accept care from them. All of these forms of love and care have been advantageous in helping this group of friends and artists. Care became a foundation for building a safe space where art could be produced without judgment.

Space for drawing

Drawing is defined as a way to make visual, distinctive marks; drawings are renderings, outlines, sketches, portrayals, and depictions. Drawing is the most

basic of art-making skills, not only historically in Western civilization, but also for individuals. Making marks in childhood is a fundamental activity and usually precedes writing (Maslen & Southern, 2011), (Betti & Sale, 1997). As children increase their awareness of what the world looks like, they attempt to re-create and make adjustments in order to produce a true-to-life replica of what they see. When this fails or becomes difficult they may become insecure and embarrassed by what they think is a visual lack of ability. There is a large degree of self-criticism and the drawings remain hidden. According to Lowenfeld & Brittain (1982), this stage marks the end of artistic development unless the child receives further training and it is at this juncture that many adults find themselves at. Although not entirely conclusive, there appears to be enough evidence to suggest that as a child develops, her sense perceptions become corrupted by the surpassing development of the intellect. So instead of seeing what is presented they begin to see through the lenses of what knowledge and logic dictate. Children do not attempt to copy nature visually as adults see it, because they are satisfied with their own methods of illustration (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1982). Observational drawing is often perceived as a talent and not an acquired skill, so when the resulting effort is not photographic in likeness the value of the work decreases.

Drawing for Berger (2011) is an exercise in orientation and a form of inquiry. Drawing places objects in a space that the viewer determines or imagines, visualizing what the object will look like when it is captured by the imagination. Much like in a child's art process when she uses drawing as a way to reconstruct her environment by visually moving it around to satisfy the connection between image and object (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1982). Would it be possible to achieve this as a goal for teaching drawing to the women in SFD? That observational drawing would branch into something deeper and more imaginative with no language at all?

Drawing is a way of seeing through fresh eyes and with a new perspective, engaging us by offering more than one way to look at the world. Even one drawing has multiple meanings involving semantics and aesthetics — a marriage between what we know and what we see (Maslen & Southern, 2011). Finding symbols in a drawing helps us understand the meaning and what the drawing may represent, but if the drawing is only about representation than it is merely a map or a practical image with a narrow and shallow focus. It is a good place to start, but the marks that make up the visual representation are important for uniquely expressing the qualities of a drawing that speak about the artist who drew them as much as the object being viewed.

Observational drawing can help bring this about and it is one of the reasons teaching drawing is important: it transcends the physical documentation of an object onto paper by the uniqueness of the person who drew it. Art derives its vitality from new ideas and feelings through visual depiction. It challenges previously accepted conventions that surpass the rules of composition they need to first be understood. There are many issues in contemporary life and postmodern art often challenges the traditional view of composition. Art is multidimensional and so are people (Betti & Sale, 1997).

Space for fear

Why are some learners afraid of exploring ways to express themselves in art, and specifically through drawing? In my teaching I have experienced extreme, paralyzing fear in some students to the degree that it has caused them to quit producing or even dissolve into tears. However when they persevere and keep working they find that the satisfaction of overcoming and the process of art-making surpass their fears. Bayles and Orland (1993) ask basic but important questions which get to the heart of this fear, and I extend this understanding to my study. What is fear in learning, and can I, as a teacher of drawing, bring qualities of love and care to overcome fear? Assessing how fear and love are related in the process of teaching and learning is an ongoing area of inquiry for me as an artist, teacher and now researcher. Many expert and novice artists link practicing art to who they are and this identity development quickly becomes an integral part of their life and self-esteem, for as Bayles and Orland (1993) state, “overcoming apprehension and uncertainty in any new endeavour boosts confidence as mastery is achieved” (p. 15). Thus fear plays a powerful role in raising swarms of doubt and uncertainty. Although this will never change, say the authors, uncertainty can become an asset by altering this discovery by facing the self-doubt. Does fear become a greater issue as we age?

Space for aging

One of the more significant points substantiated in a research study conducted by Patterson and Perlstein (2011) is the notion of self-mastery. Becoming skilled in creative activities “go[es] farther and engage[s] the mind, body, and emotions, sparking curiosity, problem solving, and artistic accomplishment” (Patterson & Perlstein, 2011, p. 28). Self-mastery as a skill increases self-confidence, deeper exploration and experimentation in the arts, which the authors also claim boosted the immune system of the elderly group studied. Although this study is concerned with positive health outcomes and is focused on a quantitative method of research, it is encouraging to have this particular data to substantiate and contribute to my project in terms of developing drawing skills. Bringing this work from the realm of health sciences will enrich our knowledge in the field of art education by introducing a scope of interdisciplinary perspectives concerned with creativity and aging. Everything grows out of the first mark or brush stroke, making the start so difficult — a metaphor for teaching drawing to people who are apprehensive about making art. White canvases and blank pads of paper are full of expectations and can be alluring, seductive, and frightening. There is risk-taking and experimentation involved in beginning an art project and imagination required to maintain and carry out the visual ideas.

This perspective builds on Maxine Greene’s (1995) argument for the importance of using imagination in art education, aesthetics, literature, and social contexts. Imagination in these realms needs to be revisited as a space where art practice is a means of expressing ideas, advocating the use of unconventional, arts-based approaches. One of Greene’s seminal essays explores how recalling

childhood pedagogies are a means to identify patterns in individualized learning. This relates to my research in a meaningful way by providing insight into how we perceive or learn from our particular situated locations, past and present. We impose our own order and context based on past experience and knowledge, and it influences what and how we learn today. The realization that in multiplicity, our different experiences make way for understanding, seeing, and fostering empathy, from which my conceptual approach to love begins to emerge. Love and friendship teach us how we respond to others in a learning environment, fostering a safe space where we can be vulnerable and where our strengths and weaknesses are shared. I believe love is truthful, tender, and asks for total disarmament. When a person is open to it, good things may be born from a state of vulnerability and weakness because it makes room for self-awareness, openness, and risk-taking (Nouwen, 1969). As we become more self-aware, soul matters that involve self-reflection, spirituality, and other intrinsic matters, begin to emerge. Although these issues are sometimes considered concerns of mid-life or aging because youth appear to be more pragmatic, Palmer (2005) explains that this is not really the case today as youth often deal with far more life-changing events than previous generations. Regardless of age, I believe that it is only from this place of self-awareness that we can begin to care for others, and in my view, caring is an essential characteristic in both love and fear in learning and teaching because if a learner is in a supportive and caring environment she is free to express the ideas that she alone can express.

Art is a dialogue between the artist and an idea, and the artist requires freedom to move and grow her concepts into visual fruition. This involves an element of risk and sometimes losing control. Art-making is also uncertain, but facing that uncertainty or acknowledging it like a constant companion, is important to succeeding. It is through this self-discovery and observation that the benefits of self-mastery and skill can be realized. Doing this together with others raises the success of the experience exponentially. Lindauer, in his book *Aging, creativity, and art: A positive perspective on late-life development* (2003), is mostly concerned with studying aging artists, and this account is important to my research because of the encouraging and positive outcomes regarding successful aging and creativity. Successful aging is often attributed to being vitally involved and fully engaged in new activities, which can encompass creative expression. Increased self-awareness and a deeper understanding of others – as well as the permission to experiment and explore new things – all contribute to creative growth. Mounting evidence shows that as we age we become more in touch with our inner psychological lives (Lindauer, 2003). This increased knowledge can be a benefit in developing creativity. In fact, a sense-of-control mechanism is an important tool to successful aging. Self-mastery that leads to successful drawing technique mixed with social engagement is an important factor when creative and artistic activities are conducted in groups (Cohen, 2006).

Art production – in this case, drawing – within a comfortable group environment account for two important elements in my research. Meadowcroft's story of *Painting Friends* (1999) shows how community and friendship are critical when developing new skills and self-mastery. Working with my group

brought me to this narrative inquiry about the lives of a group of women artists who were called the Beaver Hall Women Painters. Meadowcroft (1999) recalls the stories of their lives as women artists, friends, and art educators in the early 1900s in Montreal. Through historical text, noted conversations, interviews, and artworks, Meadowcroft (1999) was able to piece together the lives of these women in historical and social contexts using story to unravel different layers of meaning and gain insight into women artists at the turn of the century. This research is inspiring and provides an important guide to my own study in a contemporary context, working with a group of women in Montreal. Art in some form is the common denominator with the Beaver Hall Women Painters as it is the *Space for drawing* group. The women in my group genuinely care for one another as evidenced by their relationships and concern for each other's lives outside of our studio time. Caring for one another developed in the group while drawing together and has expanded outside of this space with phone calls, invitations, and offers of assistance while experiencing illness.

Like Meadowcroft, Grumet, in her book *Bitter Milk* (1988), provides an important analysis of women's studies, education, psychology, and philosophy. It focuses on the lived experiences of women teachers by examining and identifying a wide range of theoretical perspectives. Matriarchal patterns in our education systems that promote nurturing are an important notion in this book and are of deep concern regarding my research because most of the women in the *Space for drawing* group were educated in the Catholic school system in Quebec. Similar historical research by Pearse (2006) investigates art education in Quebec through first-person accounts and helps generate insight into the fearfulness around engaging in the arts by looking at the motivations, objectives, and styles of teaching visual art in relation to religion.

Sustained and extended drawing in a space that encompasses and respects the whole person within the confines of an inner circle of friends can produce an atmosphere where fear of learning a new skill is obliterated.

Methodology

Spending extensive time in the field investigating the rapport between the women in the *Space for drawing* group, and the evolving relationships between us all in the physical and psychological space we filled, it became clear to me that this research project was a qualitative and arts based research project. Informed by educational phenomenology (Van Manen, 1989), I describe the lived experiences of the individuals in the group beginning in September 2012. Vast knowledge was garnered through observing this group of six women in the roles of acquaintances, friends, students of drawing, artists, participants, and co-researchers. Over the course of a year, I taught them drawing techniques, observed them as student artists, listening to their conversations and histories, developed teaching methods in response to their work in progress, and participated in art-making with them. All of this was viewed through various lenses and documented through diverse methods.

Adopting Lather's (2006) position on paradigm proliferation, I draw upon several lenses suitable for this study. Informed by phenomenology,

autoethnography, action research, and arts-based research, my approach consisted of mixed methods, with emphasis on lived experiences and arts-based research.

While transcribing the interviews, it was important for me to remember and listen to the intonations of vocal fluctuations in order to pick up on some of the nuances and underlying intentions. Many of the thoughts and ideas lie in the in-between spaces where, for example, a voice would fluctuate and quietly melt into the voice of another or elicit such enthusiasm and excitement that talking over each other and interrupting would occur. These shifts indicated to me the ongoing relationships and distinct personalities being formed in this group of unique individuals with strengths and weaknesses. It was critical for me to make the rounds with each individual during the interviews to allow everyone opportunity to speak. Paying attention to these in-between spaces was important in discerning and dissecting the text. I became a collector of anecdotes as I sifted through the data to find the important “points and cogency” and to recognize what parts of the conversations were significant for the study while in the moment (van Manen, 1997, p. 69). Sometimes the best anecdotes happened in hindsight after the conversations were recalled, making my journal/sketchbook an important site of data collection and information.

My own collection of field notes in the form of a pictorial and textual journal/sketchbook was one of the lifelines for my study because it was here that I recorded my first thoughts, impressions, and reactions before, during, and after the classes. In an effort to remain transparent with my class, I recorded openly, using both text and drawing, allowing anyone in the group to access my journal/sketchbook at any time. It remained my journal/sketchbook however, and although the women could see it at any time, they did not respond, change or add to it. Notations in the book included snippets of conversations between the women because these conversations were often loaded with personal stories and anecdotes. To avoid any perceived exploitation or misappropriation of trust it was the task of the group to decide whether or not to include stories and anecdotes as data. But, perhaps I failed to reinforce the choices they had in adding or eliminating anything from the journal/sketchbooks because they were content to not become involved with this segment of the research. During the compilation of gathering and assembling the text and images, I asked the participants to verify the data and add to it if they chose. The women were only interested in substantiating their own drawings and text as part of the collection and gave full permission for all the data to be included in this study, trusting my discretion.

The actual journal/sketchbook pages were scanned and digitally manipulated (close-cropped) to reveal the book cover edges and the pages to preserve the notion that the actual book is as important as the contents. Scanned images of the pages were lined up to view a group of pages rather than simply two at a time making it easier to be incorporated in the larger visual map. This composition elicited a thought-provoking, non-linear perspective to this particular portion of the visual data.



Figure 3, 4: P.Zantingh (2013) *Scanned pages from visual journal*. Mixed media

Applying these empirical devices enabled me as a visual learner to gain access to the complexity of this project, the nature of social relationships, as well as my teaching practice and pedagogic beliefs. Using a mapping system based on emerging themes, I created a visual chart by way of a video: <https://vimeo.com/74288717>. This helped me decipher and untangle the text, facilitating increased access into the subtleties of the data. Word and image will meet and marry as “they empirically and theoretically examine the hybrid or third space” created as art and inquiry—or image and word—meet, which they view as a merging of subjective and objective” (Leavy, 2009, p. 232).



Figure 5: P.Zantingh (2013) *Visual map of collected data*. Digital collage.

The mixed method approach to this project has allowed me to collect a wealth of data with a multiplicity of perspectives regarding my questions on love, art, and fear. These methods were effective as they helped me gain insight and knowledge into art education practices as they relate to this group of adult women learners in a community art setting. Phenomenology and lived experiences have allowed me to collect anecdotes and conversations in an authentic manner from the viewpoint of the women in the *Space for drawing* group. Using autoethnography has situated me in such a way as to gain a vantage point through my own lens as an educator and artist, and arts-based research has provided pleasing and fascinating information from a visual perspective. The influence of action research opened up opportunities for involvement by the women and allowed for a transparency in this project by reinforcing the learning and

ownership of the material that was taught. All of these methods have facilitated gaining access to the answers to the research questions posed and to increased knowledge in the field of art education. This study unveiled and shed light on my teaching experiences as I explored my own attitude, values, and art educational approaches.

Reflections and discoveries

I gained new knowledge about teaching and the importance of becoming aware of your students' strengths and weaknesses as individuals and as students. In the SFD group, the strengths and weakness in their art practice and their personalities began to merge and it was difficult to distinguish the two sometimes. As an educator, there are times when this is an asset and other times when this realization becomes so significant that it places students in a discriminating and preconceived category where these qualities begin to define the person.

Earlier education was often woven into the conversation as we drew. Many of the women came from a time in education when things were either right or wrong and this attitude quickly came to the fore, causing anxiety in some. After several weeks, however, this began to dissipate as most of the women started to understand that observational drawing is a practice and requires many hours of experience but is something that one can learn.

Describing the space as encouraging, sharing, Zen-like, safe, and validating, the women named several essential ingredients in designing a favourable climate for successful learning. Filled with warmth and care, the physical space was aesthetically pleasing, filled with natural light and delicious smells of freshly brewed coffee and soup. Bonding over food helped us develop our friendships, and this in turn improved our art-making skills, once again merging and blurring boundaries.

Exchanges between the women were peppered with invaluable information about their reaction to what was taught, what they learned, and what seized and spurred them on to more difficult tasks. There is a phenomenon that happens to someone who is learning to draw and that is the expansion that occurs in the quality of skill and technique. As Richmond writes, "in order to satisfy the eye, technique has to serve the work" (Richmond, 2009, p. 96). In other words, the work needs to be balanced and grounded in seeing, making technique neither an opponent nor a star. This balance can only be achieved through experience and with each experience comes more growth.

With the objective of building confidence and reducing fear in art-making, some of the art projects in the weekly sessions were simply included to produce aesthetically pleasing results with minimum effort. For example, using a post-modern approach for a collage project, I encouraged the women to be self-expressive in their individual works and to feel free to enjoy the process, but also to produce an interesting end product. Existing materials like collage and simple line and colour dictated their design decisions, and made it simpler to accomplish affable outcomes. One of the art activities involved an inside/outside self-portrait and required everyone to think about herself and find colours and images that reflected their feelings. Participating in this collage art-making project diminished

fear greatly and gave some of the women enjoyment and a strong sense of accomplishment, but it irritated others because in their view, the art-making was childish and required little skill. What I thought was simply a motivating diversion to help some in the group gain a stronger footing in art-making technique and self-expression became a contentious issue. There appeared to be a strong disconnect between understanding the value and significance of self-expression in an abstract collage compared to self-expression in observational drawing. Debating this issue and attempting to define the nature of visual art and all it encompasses would naturally require much more time and resources. To the women in the group, it was simply a question of realism versus abstract art. Does the capacity and skill to produce realistic art have greater value than work produced in self-expressive abstract art? This incident reinforced the notion and significance of using historical and contemporary examples in art education and to not just teach in a vacuum but to approach art education holistically by including art history and technical skill.

After much discussion as a group, we decided to focus on drawing for the remainder of the lessons. Observational drawing was a good fit for this group because the benefits of training their eyes to look deeply at things increased their confidence. I had developed the lessons in a formalized way and the women became used to the patterns of beginning our sessions with motivational examples of art, demonstrations, warm-up exercises, art making, and critiques.

Working in the small journal sketchbook during the classes helped us form a studio-based space instead of a classroom-type space and the distinction was quite significant. Levelling the playing field and encouraging everyone to work at their own pace, from their own specific place of expertise, it also helped identify problems as we worked. For example, I could show the women how to incorporate shadow and line from my own sketches. I also made a commitment to the group that I would always document the artwork by including examples or by drawing directly in the journal. This weekly journal helped me bridge the gap between clinical observer and participant and the journal itself became an object of interest among the women. By joining in the art-making, a connection was formed with the participants and it established a sort of art studio practice space instead of an art class solidifying burgeoning relationships. Teaching happened in the making together.

Conclusion

From the outset, one of the women admitted to being afraid of learning to draw, believing that she would never be able to produce anything. She often compared herself to others in the group and sighed heavily when she was frustrated. I was unable to convince her that quitting was not the answer but that “art is all about starting again” (Bayles & Orland, 1993, p. 10). In contrast, another women admitted to being afraid of the facing the blank paper but pushed through and found the confidence to progress to the point where the enjoyment of drawing made her begin to do it on her own. Indeed, many artists are afraid of the blank canvas and the materials that fire and awake our imaginations with possibilities. Artists are also fearful of competition and what others think because

we live in a world that is viciously competitive and sets hard standards (Bayles & Orland, 1993). Artwork is ordinary work that takes courage to keep doing and “artists learn to proceed, or they don’t” (Bayles & Orland, 1993, p. 117). Some women learned to work through their fears and others did not.

In reflection on this completed work I am renewed in my convictions that developing a creative skill—like drawing—later in life is related to rejuvenation, renewal, and helping an individual overcome fear. However, fear is a complicated emotion that is closely linked to how insecure one may feel. Although confidence gained in pursuing a creative practice may help an individual gain assurance, it may not be enough to overcome fear, especially if the individual does not work at it. Art is about beginning again and again, and the work required in becoming accomplished involves loving it enough to keep going. As an art educator, I hope that my love of teaching my craft will get caught and transferred to my students in such a way that they begin to develop a love for the arts, an understanding that it takes commitment, and a joy in seeing.

As our populations (world-wide) continue to live longer, the benefits of life-long learning, especially in creative pursuits have very positive consequences. This area of art education demands a closer look and more study in order to fully comprehend these affirmative outcomes.

Is the ability to “draw well” related to increased emotional awareness and empathy toward others, allowing learners to move towards greater understanding of love and care in teaching and learning? Because life drawing involves seeing and looking carefully by developing an eye for detail I believe that this life skill can be transferred into other areas. Helping others see beauty in ugliness is something many artists (Edward Burtynsky, Kathe Kollwitz, or Rembrandt to name a few) do in their work and if this conveys a certain empathy in the viewer, then how much greater could this be for the student artist in developing empathy, love, and care? When you learn how to see many things become more interesting and beautiful. Aesthetic qualities of creativity through art practice and especially developing an eye can be nurtured anytime in life, and create an appreciation for not only art but also beauty and light.

Creating a community of inquiry and developing art practice skills in drawing became an avenue for friendship, care, and love, and did indeed help some of the women overcome their fears. Was it the fact that their confidence in learning a new skill helped them overcome fear or was it the fact that they were part of a community of learners that were all engaged in doing the same work? I believe the answer is both, along with a commitment to persevere in the work and an educator who loves her practice. Community and the commitment to persevere in the work is the answer. The women grew tremendously in their skill as artists and in their appreciation for the arts and aesthetics. Art was the common denominator in the group and the reason the group came together in the first place. However, the friendships that developed in the group became the reason to continue, even when the artmaking proved difficult at times. After all, several of the women concluded their interviews by saying it was “time for soup.”

Although there is no perfect love on earth, love for others and for the making of art does have the capacity to break down fear.

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