Increasing Reflexivity in Service Learning Through Arts Based Research

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

INCREASING REFLEXIVITY IN SERVICE LEARNING THROUGH ARTS BASED RESEARCH

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Psychological Sciences,
Program of Educational Psychology

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ABSTRACT


The purpose of this study was to understand the processes of learning and meaning making that occur when people participate in long-term service learning programs. Service learning is a broad term that is used in many contexts and has a variety of meanings. The meaning used in this research is broad and includes include individuals not currently enrolled in college. Many researchers have noted the importance of reflection for learning through service, but the literature has a paucity of research on reflexivity. Addressing these gaps in the literature, this dissertation focused on the development of participants’ epistemological approaches to service through reflexive arts based research.

The theoretical framework undergirding this research is critical feminism an emancipatory theory that emphasizes social justice and advocates for equity in research, especially for non-traditional ways of knowing and alternative approaches to academic inquiry. The methodology is bricolage, inspired in large part by portraiture and the mosaic approach.

The five female participants in this study came from disparate backgrounds and service experiences; three undergraduate students, one recent PhD, and one retired probation officer. Through sharing their experiences with service, this study provides a
look into the common elements of learning through service, the potential for personal transformation through arts based reflexive practice, and the methodological considerations for using arts based reflexive inquiry in educational research were addressed.

Arts based research is the use of aesthetic representation in any step of the research process, from data collection to analysis to presentation of findings. Art was used in all phases of data collection and analysis. Data were collected through: Arts Based Reflexive Inquiry (ABRI) sessions, where participants created a work of art about their service; observation during ABRI sessions, and semi-structured interviews.

Data analysis took the form of an ongoing, dialectical process for coding inspired by the constant comparative method, but reliant on art as the primary lens for analyzing the data. Findings are presented as both written and visual portraits of participants, and a free gallery open to the public where community members could view the original works created for this research.

Findings include the common elements of the diverse service experiences, including the creation of a positive feedback loop leading to increased future engagement, and a deepened understanding of a social problem. Participants also indicated notable personal transformations, especially in terms of identity development.

This study closes by addressing the methodological considerations of using ABRI in Educational Psychology research. Aesthetic methods are becoming more prominent and accepted within educational psychology research, but are limited to the inquiry phase and do not extend into data analysis or representation. This research addresses the aesthetic narrative reconstruction that participants undergo as they deepen their
understanding of their personal epistemology through engaging in ABRI. Implications for future practice include the need for service learning practitioners to provide a safe space for volunteers to continually remake, refine, and define their personal epistemologies through deepened self-understanding. One way to achieve this end is through ABRI.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Over the past ten years I have been involved as participant, chaperon, and coordinator of various service trips and opportunities. I have served within my community, at various sites around the nation, and in cities and neighborhoods in other countries. These experiences have had an astounding impact on my life, my perspective, personal epistemology; even my educational and professional trajectories bear the indelible mark of service.

My orientation toward service has shifted over the years. How I approach service, what I understand my role to be, and how I experience my positionality within a service context have all evolved and deepened. While some of this growth is likely influenced by my shouldering of adult responsibilities, there are undoubtedly other factors at play. For example, increasing involvement in service, a broadening understanding of issues of equity and social justice, and intentionally reflexive processing of service opportunities have required that I think critically about how service is changing me, and how those changes influence my continued involvement in service.
My decision to pursue doctoral studies in educational psychology led me to investigate the use service learning as pedagogy in undergraduate education. Throughout my doctoral work I sought to understand theories of service learning and to find ways to discuss the unique educational potential that service holds.

In addition to personal experiences, I have (as chaperon and coordinator of service learning projects) introduced hundreds of students to service learning. For some, the outcome is similar to my story. For many, the impact is stunted. To be clear, I have never heard a student remark that the experience of service was a waste of time. On the contrary, the majority of students with whom I have served have uttered some version of the phrase, “This has been a life-changing experience; I will never be the same.” Yet, given a week or two after the service, most participants outwardly exhibit little lasting change. I have often wondered why this is so. What makes service learning transformative for some and nothing more than a memory for others?

Rationale for the Study

Service learning is a burgeoning trend in public education, especially at the undergraduate level, but the movement itself is not new. Service learning has reemerged various times and in various forms in the history of American education as a pedagogical tool in higher education (Britt, 2012). The goal of service learning in undergraduate studies is to enhance academic learning by incorporating civic engagement, community work, and hands-on experiences into the curriculum (Campus Compact, 2016), and to deepen learning through regular guided reflection on the service experience (Britt, 2012).

Researchers have studied service learning in depth and from many perspectives over the years. Major veins of inquiry include investigations into the potential benefits
for students who engage in service learning, including identity development (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Harre, 2007; Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2004); motivation behind engaging in service learning, (Clary et al., 1998; Evans, 2007; Grimm & Needham, 2012; Harre, 2007); transformative learning in adult education (Mezirow, 1990, 1997), and the need for reflection in order for learning to take place through service (Kiely, 2005; Taylor, 1997; Mezirow, 1990, 1997; Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014).

With thousands of students participating in service nationwide (Campus Compact, 2016), higher education practitioners would benefit from investigations into the process of meaning-making through service. Likewise, the students we guide through service-based instruction would benefit from supportive, scaffolded instruction on how to make meaning out of service experiences and how to connect that meaning to classroom-based instruction.

**Statement of the Problem**

Many service-learning practitioners are focused specifically on the community outcomes and quantifiable impacts of the service on the community and the student (GPA, continued service, etc.). Such benchmarks are important, to be sure. However, as an educational psychologist I see enormous importance in supporting the less-tangible outcomes of learning and development of students engaged in service. Many researchers have noted the importance of reflection for learning through service (Crabtree, 2008; Harre, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2004), yet their definitions of reflection fall short of the action-oriented reflexivity necessary for reflection to be a meaningful form of learning.
The service learning literature has a paucity of research on reflexivity (Britt, 2012; Sletto, 2010), which is far more intentionally action based than reflection, with the individual actively challenging her previously held biases in light of the new information gleaned through service and intentionally altering her actions and belief system based on that dissonance. While reflexivity is not a commonly used term in service learning, I contend that service without reflexive practice can serve to reinforce stereotypes and marginalizing worldviews. One potential method for increasing reflexivity in service learning is through incorporating art as a catalyst.

**Art in Research and Service**

Art is powerful. A work of art communicates information on levels much deeper than empirical, academic writing (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Music, museum installations, poetry, performance art, works of fiction – such forms of communicating draw us in and become part of us. Art has, over the ages, ignited a passion for activism, rebellion, and revolution. As children we gleefully engaged in arts based, non-verbal forms of communication. Drawing, finger painting, sidewalk chalk, clay modeling, crayons – whatever the medium, the world was simultaneously our canvas and our muse. For most of us, when we reached adulthood our early penchant for arts based communication was been replaced by the illusory efficiency of verbal and written communication. When once we felt such childlike confidence in our creative prowess that we scrawled scenes on bedroom walls, we now are reticent to take anything but pen in hand, and even then only to write.

Clearly the scribbled drawings of childhood are not ‘art’ in the way that adults trained in artistic methods create art. My point is not to minimize the training and
experience of educated artists, but to illustrate a drastic shift in openness to non-verbal forms of communication that takes place in most of us as we age. Art has the potential to reach a wider audience than empirical writing; one that does not need advanced education in the scientific method to make heads or tails of the intended message. Yet even with an implicit understanding of the power of art, artistic inquiry has not been widely accepted in academia as a valid form of research (Eisner, 1997; McNiff, 2008).

**Arts Based Research**

Arts based research is the systematic use of artistic methods and media in any portion of the research process, from the primary mode of inquiry to the analysis or presentation of data (McNiff, 2008). Examples of arts based research methods include photo elicitation; reflexive photography; video diaries; and drawing, sculpting, or painting as data collection or analysis of data. Arts based research is highly relational, reflexive, and constructive, and begs unique ethical consideration in terms of informed consent, confidentiality, vulnerability of participants, and dissemination of findings.

Arts based research is highly relational, as it attempts to understand phenomena through nurturing relationships (Ellis, 2007). Art as research is meaningful, accessible, activist, catalytic, and personal.

I contend that the artistic process has the capacity to foster reflexivity in participants. Service learning puts students in an otherwise inaccessible experience. Through arts based research, the researcher seeks to observe such phenomena and then to re-cast it (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 56).

My goal through this research was to use art as a method of inquiry and meaning making of service learning experiences. Allowing space for non-verbal processing
was not intended to replace verbal or written communication, but to catalyze individual reflexivity and subsequent conversations about the learning associated with the experience. Increasing reflexivity in this way was a means of encouraging students to develop and articulate their epistemological orientation to service so that the service was more meaningful, effective, and transformative.

**Research Questions**

Q1 What are the common elements of learning from diverse service project experiences?

Q2 What personal transformations will participants undergo through engaging in arts based reflexive practice following a long-term service learning experience?

Q3 What are the main methodological considerations for using arts based reflexive inquiry in educational research?

**Assumptions**

In preparing for this research, I identified various assumptions that I brought to the drawing board. First, I assumed that participants in this study would have an overall positive outlook on service, regardless of whether their most recent experience was overwhelmingly positive. I assumed that having the opportunity to engage in arts based methods would powerfully increase reflexivity and meaning-making for participants, and as such would ultimately increase their ability to eloquently speak about the experience.

Because I believe that art holds remarkable power for communicating ideas and sharing knowledge, I expected that sharing the outcomes of this research through artistic means in the community where the research was conducted could be catalytic for promoting service within that community.
Finally, just as particular people self-select into service opportunities, I expected that open-minded participants would be drawn to this research. Having participants who are open to learning in non-traditional ways would facilitate the process for all involved.

**Expected Significance**

I expected that this research would make two important contributions. First, I believe that commonly employed practices of reflection do not go far enough in challenging students to learn from their service experience. I intended to make a case for shifting to reflexive practice over reflective practice, and in doing so promote intentional growth, epistemological development, and increased transformational learning through service.

The second contribution of my research is introducing arts based methodology to educational psychological research in general, and to service learning in particular. I expected that engaging in this research would move participants to either shift their personal philosophy closer to the social justice and equity end of the continuum, or if already there, empower them to articulate their position and perspective.

**Definition of Terms**

*Arts based research:* Arts based research is defined herein as the systematic use of aesthetics in any portion of the research process, from the beginning conceptualization of research to the inquiry and data collection, to the analysis or presentation of findings (Barone & Eisner, 2012; McNiff, 2008).

*Bricolage:* The implementation of all epistemologies and methodologies necessary to best address the research questions (Kincheloe, 2001; 2005; 2008).
Disciplinarity: Staying within only one discipline; the precise application of one theory, one epistemology, and one method, and attempting to answer the research questions strictly from those lenses (Kincheloe, 2001).

Interdisciplinarity: Seeking to understand multiple disciplines at a fundamental level in order to broaden one’s potential for addressing and understanding a research question (Kincheloe, 2001).

Mosaic: Research methodology used in early childhood education research wherein the researcher employs a variety of methods in an attempt to more accurately uncover the children’s perspectives. Mosaic may include any and all of the following during data collection: collage; clay modeling; drawing; photography; photo elicitation; child-led tours of the setting; interviews with the child, her parents, and her teacher (Clark, 2005).

Processing: Processing is a term often used in service learning settings to describe the conversation that participants have about their learning experience immediately following the service. Processing is often used synonymously with ‘reflection,’ as participants are encouraged to reflect on their experience and process what the new learning and understanding means to them.

Reflection in service learning: Following a service learning experience, participants engage in a group conversation about their role in the service and what the experience meant to them (Britt, 2012; Crabtree, 2008; Dirkx, 2001; Eyler, 2002; Harre, 2007; Sletto, 2010).

Reflexivity in service learning: Reflexivity in service learning is an ongoing state of action-based reflection, wherein the participant makes meaning about service through
reflection and applies that new understanding to the next service context. Reflexivity is iterative and growth oriented (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008; Britt, 2012; Higgs, 2008; Sletto, 2010).

**Service learning:** Service learning is hands-on, service-based work connected to education with the goal of enhancing learning and civic engagement in undergraduate students. Service learning can take many forms, from one-time service projects lasting only a few hours to long-term service that spans a full semester or even multiple semesters (Butin, 2006; Crabtree, 2008; Eyler, 2002; Felten & Clayton; 2011; Jones & Abes, 2004; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000).

**Summary**

Service learning is happening at educational institutions nationwide, and benefits to the students who participate and communities or other recipients have been widely documented (Baty & Dold, 1977; Crabtree, 2008; Eyler, 2002; Felten & Clayton; 2011; Jones & Abes, 2004; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). The call to altruism dictates that we serve with no thought to our own benefit, and yet there is potential danger in approaching any context without acknowledging our biases and seeking to learn through the experience. The goals of this research were twofold: to increase reflexive processing and the impact of service learning experiences through participation in arts based reflection and interviews, and second, to introduce arts based inquiry as a useful methodology for undertaking this type of research in educational psychology.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

I began walking this research path because of my passion for and involvement in service learning. The journey of seeking a methodology powerful enough to access unseen and subtle processes of learning through service led me to arts based research, and my interest in the methodological implications of art in educational psychological research has grown equal to my interest in service. This chapter provides an overview of learning through service and an introduction to arts based research. Chapter three contains further and more specific information on arts based research as a methodology.

Service Learning

Service learning has been used in various ways since its introduction to higher education in the 1970’s. Over the years it has been adapted and altered to fit myriad institutional landscapes, budgetary constraints, political whims, and community needs. The varying definitions of service learning across institutions, programs, and departments are so highly tailored that often all that they have left in common is the name and a generic orientation toward service. This identity crisis is perhaps one reason that service learning has faltered as a pedagogical tool and may be a contributing reason that the
approach has not been more widely implemented. At minimum, this crisis of identity has hindered the research and reporting of learning through service.

The potential for many disparate definitions demands clarification, so for the purposes of this paper, service learning is defined as hands-on, service-based work connected to education with the goal of enhancing learning and civic engagement in undergraduate students. Service learning can take many forms, from one-time service projects lasting only a few hours to long-term service that spans a full semester or even multiple semesters. It can involve service to the campus and local community, or it can extend beyond state and national borders to locations overseas. One of the more common approaches to service was described by Bringle, Hatcher, & McIntosh (2006):

Service-learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.” (p. 12)

Many practitioners strive to connect service learning to credit-bearing courses (Campus Compact, 2016); however, this definition greatly limits the scope of service learning opportunities. Undergraduate coursework schedules are demanding and leave little room for taking courses not directly related to the plan of study; thus, if opportunities for service are limited to a few classes on campus they are not accessible to all students at that institution. I believe that, if properly executed, learning can take place through any service experience, regardless of whether or not the service is directly connected to one specific class. What makes service a learning experience is the implementation and the components of reflection and critical reflexivity. It is therefore possible for institutions to offer service learning opportunities that are not directly
connected to a specific course and are therefore not considered “credit-bearing educational experiences” (Bringle et al., 2006, p. 12). For the purposes of this research, the working definition of service learning is a service-based experience in which students work to address an identified community need and engage in reflection and reflexive processing of that service in ways that challenge previously held biases, promote social justice, and catalyze change.

This chapter is a review of the research on service learning, beginning with a general theory of adult learning, and then a review of the major models of learning through service. The chapter ends with a review of literature on the various outcomes of service learning, organized by stakeholder (community or recipient of service, institution sponsoring service, student participants).

**Learning in Adulthood: Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning**

It is important to acknowledge that there are differences in the learning patterns of adults as compared to younger learners. It will be helpful to couch learning through service within Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning (1997). Mezirow’s theory is rooted in Paulo Freire’s emancipatory critical theory, which conceptualize education as political, with social action and critical reflection as key components of the educational process (Freire, 2000; Mezirow, 1997).

Transformative learning is conceptualized as cognitive shifts that take place as a result of experiential learning (Mezirow, 1990; 1997). Transformative learning emphasizes learning as a result of the development of autonomous thinking as an intentional replacement of uncritical reliance on previously acquired points of view.
According to Mezirow, adults have many years of experience with and within the world and have developed networks of understanding, which allow them to quickly make sense of new learning and experiences. Mezirow (1997) referred to these networks as “frames of reference” (p. 5). Frames of reference define the limits of learning because, once established, adults tend to ignore or reject ideas that do not easily fit within their understanding.

Mezirow (1997) divided frames of reference into “habits of mind” and “points of view” (p. 5). Habits of mind are deeply ingrained assumptions acquired through socialization, cultural or political experience, and education. A habit of mind may be articulated as a point of view, but is more enduring. One can hold varied points of view, but a habit of mind is a lived experience and is not easily acquired or changed (Mezirow, 1997). In other words, young adults will bring with them a host of previously acquired points of view that they will uncritically accept and use to interpret the service learning situation. Transformative learning occurs in a multi-step process, wherein the learner participates in experiential learning and then engages in critical reflection on the experience that does not readily conform to existing habits of mind (Mezirow, 1990; 1997).

**Reflection versus Reflexivity**

Within the service learning literature there is an emphasis on the power of reflection. It is widely held that ongoing reflection is the essence of learning within a service context. Reflection should be dynamic and ongoing, not merely a conversation at the end of the experience. Reflection is a critical aspect of service, but falls short of the potential for lasting change as compared to reflexivity. The following section will review
the process of resolving cognitive dissonance through reflection, and then reframe the service-learning reflection into a more robust reflexive approach.

**Dissonance and reflection.** Cognitive dissonance was first conceptualized by Festinger as a conflict in cognition that creates a negative state, which must then be addressed to resolve the conflict (1957, as cited in Elliot & Devine, 1994). Service learning can create cognitive dissonance in the students rendering the service. For many students, service learning is their introduction to social injustice (Eyler, 2002; Felten & Clayton, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2004; Kiely, 2005; Mezirow, 1990). In traditional service learning paradigms, this negative state is addressed through reflection. Reflection on these experiences is necessary for students to develop the skills to resolve complex problems; yet, without intentional reflective support, students are not likely to confront the source of dissonance or engage in the issues (Eyler, 2002; Felten & Clayton, 2011; Kiely, 2005; Mezirow, 1990). As such, dissonance and reflection are important tools for supporting cognitive development.

In a longitudinal qualitative research study on transformative learning as a result of service learning experiences in an international setting, Kiely (2005) identified two types of dissonance: low-intensity and high-intensity. Low-intensity dissonance includes anything that might fall under the ‘culture shock’ heading, such as adjustment to culture, language, housing, transportation, and food. Low-intensity dissonance can result in increased competence in communicating and navigating the culture of the host country, but it does not result in lasting changes to students’ frame of reference (Kiely, 2005).

High-intensity dissonance includes witnessing social injustice, extreme poverty, and disease (Kiely, 2005). High-intensity dissonance is more involved and is the type of
dissonance that can result in students’ reexamination of their biases and assumptions. Because high-intensity dissonance has higher stakes, proper resolution of the dissonance can have a lasting effect on the learning, political understanding, and identity of the students (Kiely, 2005).

**Reflexivity.** Reflexivity is a common component of qualitative research but is almost completely absent from the service learning research literature. Sletto (2010) provided one notable exception to this lacuna in the literature. Sletto (2010) researched a service learning course wherein students worked with various community and university partners to document school children’s knowledge of environmental hazards. Data were collected through online discussions and reflections through Blackboard, and follow-up surveys at took place 1.5 years after the conclusion of the course. Sletto did not elaborate on the need for reflexivity in service learning, but encouraged the participants in his study to think about the socially-contingent processes of knowledge production in hopes of effecting lasting influence on their future interaction with multiple publics (2010).

According to Sletto, the goal of service learning “is to develop students’ critical reflexivity, specifically their understanding of the narratives of people and places that shape their identities and hence their engagements with marginalized and overlooked communities” (2010, p. 405).

Alvesson and Sköldberg defined critical reflection within research as:

Thinking about the conditions for what one is doing, investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction with whatever is being researched, often in ways difficult to become conscious of.” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008, p. 245)

While this definition for critical reflection is crafted to describe a research process, the meaning holds for service. Critical reflexivity builds on this definition by requiring
application of learning to future encounters and continual awareness and revision of assumptions, both of which are at some level epistemological processes.

Within the research, it is clear that a major component of facilitating change through service learning is critical reflection (Crabtree, 2008; Eyler, 2002; Felten & Clayton, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2004; Kiely, 2005; Mezirow, 1990, 1997). Adult learners have a tendency to dismiss information that does not readily fit within existing frames of mind, but critical reflection obliges the learner to confront the source of the dissonance and to adapt their thinking in order to accept and integrate the new information. Education of self is necessary for education of the reflexive practitioner.

This type of reflexivity is the remaking and articulating of epistemology. Reflexivity is generally said to have occurred when subsequent interactions are informed and transformed by reflection on previous interaction in the same or similar settings. Through this study I am focusing on a subtle yet crucial aspect of reflexivity: the unseen, internal reorganization of a personal world view that has to be articulated and remade in order for any change in interaction can be observed.

**Models of Learning through Service**

Approaches to understanding the pedagogy of service learning have commonly included elements of charity and social change. There are two prominent models of learning through service, distinguished by (a) whether they have continuous or discreet stages along which students progress; and (b) whether they are hierarchical in nature. These factors are considered in the following discussion on service learning models.

**Service learning continuum.** For many years, service learning was thought of as a continuum along which students progress through increased experience with service.
This traditional model of service learning is depicted as a continuum ranging from charity to social justice (Butin, 2006; Crabtree, 2008; Morton, 1995). Charity is a well-known concept with moral and religious connotations, indicating that people who ‘have’ privilege and resources should share with people who ‘have not’ (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996). In terms of service learning, charity is a donation-based sharing of resources, such as money, time, food, water, and clothing. Charity is restricted in scope, and limited in sustainability (Morton, 1995).

Charity-based service is associated with marginalizing and limiting terminology. For instance, within charity approaches, terms such as “the poor” and “the needy” are often used to describe the population on the receiving end of service (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012; Morton, 1995). This terminology implies that ‘poor’ and ‘needy’ are fixed identities, not transitional stages, and could reinforce an implicit hierarchy, an ‘us vs. them’ relationship. The feelings of personal fulfillment from ‘giving to the poor’ could in fact arise from a not-so-subtle reminder that, by comparison, the giver is not quite so poor or so needy. In the same vein, resistance to accepting charity out of pride might be better understood as a rejection of the implicit limitations of the fixed identities of poor and needy.

On the opposite end of the service learning continuum is social justice, a theme inherent to critical theory wherein individuals learn to identify and acknowledge social inequity and then work to balance or repair it (Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1998; Mezirow, 1990, 1997). The guiding principles of social justice as service learning are to break down perceived barriers between server and served, to overcome isolation, and to empower and transform individuals and communities (Brookfield, 2005; Marullo
&Edwards, 2000; Mezirow, 1997). From this paradigm, service learning is considered an inherently liberal approach to education, which has limited the introduction of service learning to the pedagogy on some conservative college campuses (Butin, 2003).

Just as charity has its own set of labels and metaphors for service, so does social justice. The language of social justice is empowering, person-forward, and strength-based; for example, people are ‘in need,’ not ‘needy.’ This implies a belief that need is a temporary state rather than an identity and is therefore changeable. Additionally, people on the receiving end of service are participants and partners in the projects rather than helpless victims of circumstances waiting to be acted upon. Service is planned and implemented in collaboration with the population being served, and the emphasis is on sustainable projects that match the community’s expressed needs rather than imposition of service on the community based on needs as perceived by those engaged in the project.

With charity anchoring one end of the continuum and social justice as the other extreme, it is little wonder that the traditional notion of learning through service is hierarchical and value-laden (Butin, 2003, 2006; Crabtree, 2008). Under the continuum model, learning is the result of repeated experience with service, and students exhibit measurable progress by challenging their charity-based approach, shedding that perspective, and adopting a social justice orientation.

**Three paradigm model.** In 1995, Morton challenged the traditional model of learning through service and introduced a new conceptualization as a set of three distinct paradigms within which students operate: *charity, project,* and *social change.* In line with the definition of charity within the continuum model, Morton’s charity paradigm is characterized by the provision of direct service wherein all control rests with the provider
of the service (Morton, 1995). Planning and implementation are limited, and the provider of service assumes that she knows what is best and provides only that service, resulting in a top-down, or a closed provision of service (Morton, 1995).

The project paradigm is characterized by defining problems and targeted solutions and applying deliberate plans to bring about those solutions (Morton, 1995). The project paradigm emphasizes developing partnerships and mobilizing resources to implement the proposed solution. One drawback to the project approach is the potential to bring about what Morton called “unintended consequences,” wherein successful project implementation leads to new problems or exacerbates the original problem (1995, p. 28). This phenomenon occurs when the proposed project is funded by an outside entity and is not permitted to extend beyond the original funding proposal. Such restrictions make service inflexible to the evolving needs of the community. Unintended consequences are unique to project paradigm approaches because charity approaches are not typically funded by outside agencies and are therefore not restricted by the original funding proposal.

Another potential negative outcome of the project paradigm occurs when the person or group planning the project assumes the role of ‘expert.’ This approach magnifies existing power inequality and can result in an incorrect or essentialized understanding of the problem (Crabtree, 2008; Jones & Abes, 2004; Morton, 1995). Such minimization limits the scope of the learning opportunity and can result in reaffirmation of stereotypes and biases.

Morton recognized the tendency for practitioners to view social justice as the “gold standard of evaluating service” (1995, p. 23). As a service learning paradigm,
social change is a transformative model that plans service by first building relationships with community stakeholders and then attempting to identify root causes of problems (Morton, 1995). Social change emphasizes the need to recognize and correct social imbalances in power, resources, access, and equity, and “politically empowering the powerless” (Morton, 1995, p. 23). The goal of social change is to empower individuals to create change in their current circumstances rather than promulgate a hypothetical or wishful version of the world (Morton, 1995).

“Thin” and “thick” versions of service within each paradigm. Each paradigm has what Morton termed thin and thick versions (1995, p. 28). Thin versions are expressions of service that are self-serving and that reinforce or amplify existing inequity; Morton described the actions as “disempowering and hollow” (Morton, 1995, p. 28). Thick versions of service are intrinsically motivated, well-defined values or beliefs that lead to equity and transformation of both the server and the served. Thick versions are sustainable and have the potential to be revolutionary.

Learning as understood through the service paradigms. According to Morton (1995), it is rare for an individual to transition between the three paradigms. Students are most comfortable within one specific paradigm and will approach service opportunities from that paradigm in most cases. Indeed, switching paradigms is not the metric for assessing learning under this model. Instead, the goal is to challenge students who approach service from a thin version of any paradigm and support them in ways that allow them to move toward thick versions of service within that same paradigm. However, under these definitions, thick versions of charity and thin versions of social change are not possible. If charity is limited in scope and imposed on a community
without conversation, how could it lead to equity and transformation? And if the service is disempowering and hollow, how could it be characterized as social change? These inconsistencies shine a light on some of the limitations of Morton’s paradigms for understanding learning through service.

Critiques of Morton’s Paradigms. Morton’s paradigms have been widely cited, but few of researchers have attempted to empirically measure the nature of the paradigms or determine whether the paradigms can be assessed for individual students. Such an assessment would be necessary if, for example, a practitioner wished to match a student’s service paradigm with a service activity or if an instructor wanted to measure learning in terms of progress from thin to thick versions of service participation. There are two notable exceptions to the relative lack of empirical study of Morton’s paradigms: research conducted by Moely, Furco, and Reed (2008) and a study conducted by Bringle et al. (2006).

Moely and colleagues (2008) researched whether a match between a students’ paradigm and a service opportunity would affect that students’ learning outcomes and attitude changes following an academic course with a service-learning component. The researchers focused on only two of the three paradigms: charity and social change. The participants read statements about various approaches to service and then rated how much they might enjoy engaging in those activities using a five-point scale (Moely et al., 2008). The researchers concluded that students whose service paradigms and service activities matched reported greater learning in terms of community knowledge, greater growth in interpersonal effectiveness, and greater satisfaction with their overall college experience (Moely et al., 2008).
There are three noteworthy limitations to Moely et al.’s work (2008). First, the instrument they used to measure students’ preferences for service paradigms was limited, with only eight questions ranked on a five-point scale. Second, the researchers investigated only two of the three paradigms: charity and social justice. It is possible that the researchers made this decision based on an assumption that charity and social justice are the most distinct approaches to service. However, undergraduate students likely do not have advanced enough understanding of the subtle differences between ‘helping someone who is needy’ and ‘empowering someone in need.’ With only subtle linguistic distinctions delineating the paradigms (rather than advanced training on the philosophical approach undergirding each paradigm), charity and social justice are more closely aligned, and together they are more readily differentiated from the project paradigm.

Third, the researchers explained their findings in terms of self-determination theory, indicating that a match between personal interest and service activity will increase autonomous engagement in that activity (Moely et al., 2008). This is a potential problem because the service paradigms should not be thought of as preferences. More appropriately, they are personal epistemologies – individual lenses through which students see and approach service opportunities. Matching a paradigm with an activity could, from a critical theory standpoint, inhibit the potential for learning and growth by allowing participants to stagnate in false concreteness (uncritically applying a personal belief as if it were a concrete reality; Brookfield, 2005). Most undergraduate students do not have first-hand knowledge or experience to back up their frames of mind and opinions. According to Marcuse (as cited in Brookfield, 2005), failing to challenge the
false concreteness of an undeveloped, minimizing approach to service learning only serves to limit learning and legitimize repressive tolerance.

Bringle et al. (2006) did not find convincing support for Morton’s thesis that students have strong preferences for a single service paradigm orientation. In their study, Bringle and colleagues used a questionnaire that measured participants’ intrinsic and extrinsic motives, leadership, familiarity with the non-profit sector, integrity, and interest in or preference for various types of service. The assessment Bringle and colleagues used to determine students’ paradigms was a modified scale based on Morton’s original research, which they evaluated using factor analysis. The limited instrument consisted of three questions with three options and a six-point scale. In the factor analysis, items loaded on two factors, “Identity” and “Long Term Commitment” (Bringle et al., 2006).

Bringle et al. reported that the students in their study tended to have a stronger preference for charity approaches and very low preference for social change approaches (2006). Additionally, Bringle et al. challenged the notion that practitioners should match service opportunities with students’ preferences for service participation (2006). Quoting a personal communication with Morton, the authors conclude by establishing that the goal of learning within the three-paradigm model is finding deeper levels of service through reflection on the service experience. Morton said:

I agree that the original paper probably overstates its case. My thinking is now that the challenge is providing more opportunities for “deepening” across enough variety that students can, as you suggest, find an experience that tracks with their cognitive or affective map. So the goal is not an opportunity for a service “match,” but an opportunity for greater depth. Thus, the reflection process is perhaps more important than the activity itself. (personal communication, January, 27, 2006, in Bringle et al., 2006, p. 13)
In the spring of 2016 I endeavored to test the existence and utility of Morton’s paradigms among undergraduate college students. I designed an instrument to measure service motivations based on a thorough review of the literature and of prior instruments used for this purpose (Beddes, 2016; Bringle et al., 2006; Moely et al., 2008). I then used exploratory factor analysis to explore how the instrument loaded on the three expected factors of charity, project, and social justice. Rather than matching the expected service paradigms defined by the literature, the items loaded on factors identified as External Outcomes, Personal Outcomes, and Expectations, and there was considerable overlap of Morton’s paradigms within each factor.

I derived an average paradigm score for each student based on his or her activity rankings in three distinct service scenarios (Beddes, 2016). Using this method of assessing service paradigms, I found that most of the participants were operating in either the project or charity paradigm, with very few participants operating in the social change paradigm. There was also a large number of students with undifferentiated paradigms, meaning their answers to the service scenarios were inconsistent. This finding led me to believe that either the scenarios were not be an adequate measure of a student’s paradigm, or that Morton’s paradigms are not a meaningful conceptualization of undergraduate students’ approaches to service (Beddes, 2016).

Another interesting finding in my unpublished study was that the participants’ approaches to service learning varied according to the service scenario (Beddes, 2016). Students had a tendency to place greater importance on service that had an immediate human impact, and simultaneously to approach it from what Morton termed the charity paradigm (Beddes, 2016; Morton, 1995). The same students were more likely to
approach environmental service from a social change paradigm. This pattern of varying epistemological approaches to service according to the service context indicates Morton’s paradigms are not universal (Beddes, 2016).

I believe that what Morton was describing as paradigms can be better understood as epistemologies, and that a student’s epistemology influences her approach to and experience with service. Epistemological development is related to identity development, and I believe that, rather than a potential side effect of service, such development should be encouraged and facilitated. This returns us to an iteration that more closely resembles the continuum model, and requires an acknowledgement of the political nature of service learning. Butin (2006) wrote about the difficulties in integrating service learning into higher education. His major claim was that service-learning is at its core an activity with a liberal agenda, available to white, upper-middle class, high achieving students. In order for service learning to survive as a part of higher education it must become bipartisan, offering activities equally representative of the ideologies of liberals and conservatives alike (Butin, 2006). I agree with Butin that service learning is inherently political, but rather than moving to a bipartisan offering of service I embrace the model that learning takes place through movement toward a more socially just service orientation. Without this element, each student would bring her own context and goals to the service, and would likely use the service to reinforce her preexisting ideologies.

**Research on Impact and Outcomes of Service Learning**

The remainder of this chapter is a review of the relevant research on the outcomes of service learning. The research is organized by stakeholder, beginning with communities or recipients and then moving to institutions, and finally students.
Community outcomes. There is minimal research that looks specifically at the impact of service learning on the community or recipients of the service. Most of what has been done looks specifically at how satisfied the community members were with the student participants (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, & Kerrigan, 1996; Greene & Diehm, 1995; Nigro & Wortham, 1998), or how useful the service was perceived to be (Bringle & Kremer, 1993; Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Driscoll et al., 1996).

One potential drawback of service learning from the community perspective is the perception that change requires external intervention (Crabtree, 2008). This view could be held either by the students performing the service, the community receiving the service, or neighboring community witnessing but not receiving the service. One way to mitigate this potentially negative outcome is to involve community representatives in the planning and implementation of the service (Crabtree, 2008).

Institutional outcomes. Very few colleges and universities require service learning as part of the academic core. There is a growing national movement to connect universities to service, as evidenced by the increase in institutions that applied for and received the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification (Saltmarsh & Driscoll, 2015, January 7). In the 2015 classification cycle, 361 institutions received the designation, up from 240 in the 2008 application cycle (Saltmarsh & Driscoll, 2015, January 7). Still, this represents only approximately ten percent of the public and private institutions in the United States.

There are two main institutional outcomes of service learning documented in the research. First, students who engage in service learning are more likely to continue in their studies through graduation (Astin & Sax, 1998). The second documented
institutional benefit is increased and enhanced community relationships (Driscoll et al., 1996). This is considered a positive outcome for institutions whose mission statements include growing a community presence.

**Student outcomes.** Research on service learning is overwhelmingly quantitative and includes both the academic and non-academic learning of the student participants. This trend in the literature is likely a function of accrediting bodies requirements for quantifiable learning outcomes. There has been an increase in the past 15 years in the number of qualitative studies investigating the service learning experience, especially the need for reflection in service and the potential for identity development through service.

**Identity development.** Students who participate in service learning while in college often report enduring influence on their personal identity development in ways that are more compelling than other extracurricular activities available during college (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Harre, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2004). Harre (2007) explained identity development in terms of “identity projects,” meaning the ways in which students project or represent themselves into the world under various conditions. Harre’s identity projects have obvious parallels to Mezirow’s frames of mind (Harre, 2007; Mezirow, 1990, 1997); yet, identity projects may be a more accurate description of the learning process of undergraduate college students. Mezirow’s theory is based on the idea of pre-conceived frameworks established through lived experience being challenged through high level cognitive functioning (1990, 1997). However, many young undergraduate students have not yet developed their individual frames of mind, and in many cases are still living in extensions of their parents’ values and political or religious frameworks (Arnett, 1997).
There are many documented positive outcomes of service learning beyond the opportunity for deeper understanding of the academic connection of the service. For example, research on identity development indicates an increased sense of empowerment, especially when students participate in the planning phases of the service (Giles & Eyler, 1994).

**Motivation.** Over the years since the introduction of service learning on college campuses, researchers have endeavored to explain service as pedagogy and the learning that can take place. There are many theories of learning through service, including experiential learning, identity development and epistemological orientations to service. Research on motivation behind choosing to participate in service indicates that young people will volunteer based on how well the proposed service appears to match their existing political or religious frameworks (Clary et al., 1998). If students are implicitly seeking experiences to confirm existing beliefs rather than new opportunities to expand knowledge, service learning practitioners need to adapt their approach to supporting learning through service. We cannot assume that students will acquire the intended knowledge merely by presenting them with the context for learning, and especially if the students believe that the already know what to expect from a given service situation. Practitioners would be more successful in supporting learning by requiring students to articulate their beliefs and how those beliefs may be challenged or changed through the course of the service project.

Other research on the motivation for service has revealed that a major indicator of involvement is a sense of personal efficacy and a desire to engage in empowering opportunities with potential for leadership roles, experience not typically afforded young
people in the educational setting (Evans, 2007). Studies that examine the motivation to serve do not typically include information on sustaining motivation during service, or the continued motivation for ongoing volunteerism at the end of the initial project. A motivational theory that holds promise for understanding these nuances of motivation is transformative experience theory.

Service learning is a complex system with multiple factors influencing both the students’ motivation to serve and their experiences with the service. Students may seek service opportunities to fulfill course requirements (Giles & Eyler, 1994), for the social aspect (Clary et al., 1998), or because they are genuinely intrinsically motivated to do so (Brophy, 2008; Clary et al., 1998). Major predictors of sustained involvement in service learning experiences are having a perception that change is needed within the community and a feeling of personal responsibility to contribute to positive change (Giles & Eyler, 1994).

There are some potential drawbacks of service learning as well, for example the tendency for participants to “essentialize identity” (Jones & Abes, 2004, p. 161). Essentializing identity is the distillation of the human experience down to the point where all that is left is what we have in common. For example, participants in one study (Jones & Abes, 2004) indicated that their service learning experience taught them “people are really all the same” and that “race doesn’t matter” (p. 161). We do of course have humanity in common; the potential problem with essentializing identity is minimization of lived experiences of people who have significant obstacles and struggles because of their social status, race, gender, or gender orientation. Such minimization limits the potential for learning, growth, and positive change.
Personal development. Some service trips, especially international service, provide opportunities for students learning a foreign language to practice and enhance their language ability (Crabtree, 2008). In terms of social justice, service learning provides a context for students to expand their reasoning abilities and gain new understanding of social issues such as privilege, opportunity, and resource inequity (Crabtree, 2008; Eyler, 2002). through the development of advanced reasoning abilities (Eyler, 2002).

Arts Based Research

Arts based research is the use of aesthetic representation in any step of the research process, from data collection to analysis to presentation of findings (Eisner, 1998; Leavy, 2015; McNiff, 2008). Psychology has a history of ignoring or denying aesthetics in research, from its early roots in introspection as the primary form of data collection through over 100 years positivist and post-positivist orientation, many researchers in the psychological sciences continue to hold fast to an objectivist ideal (McIlveen, 2008; Polkinghorne, 2005).

Art has found its way into limited use in psychology, for example through art therapy in counseling psychology and semiotics, or the study of symbol as meaning, in sociology and cultural psychology. Examples of arts based research within educational psychology are few; aesthetic elements are commonly used as pedagogical strategies, but the tools are limited to inquiry and rarely transverse to the analysis of data or to the representation of research. While a useful step in the aesthetic direction, these examples of art in psychological research can be seen as milquetoast attempts at fitting the arts into
a controllable, quantifiable paradigm; that is to say, attempting to legitimize art through the glow of scientific fact.

“The power of the image, and its role in society, cannot be underestimated” (Leavy, 2015, p. 224). Art in its various forms has meaning, both for the artist and for the audience. Visual forms of art are commonly thought of as a window to the world, but are perhaps more accurately thought of as one purposively crafted perspective. And while visual images have the power to illicit unique understanding, emotion, and reaction, “they are typically filed in the subconscious without the same conscious interpretive process people engage in when confronted with a written text” (Leavy, 2015, p. 225).

Arts based research is not an alternative form of research, because it was not conceived of as a replacement for existing or traditional methods (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Nor is arts based research a supplement, because “we do not wish to conceive of arts based research as something one must do in addition to doing conventional research” (p. 5). Arts based methods are aesthetically grounded tools that may be useful in the adumbration of particular research questions, especially when traditional research methods cannot access the construct under study (Leavy, 2015). For this reason, arts based research is a particularly promising approach to understanding learning through service. Students who participate in service experiences commonly report a sense of grandiose learning and change that is beyond their immediate ability to articulate. As will be delineated in chapter three, arts based research holds promise for helping students engage reflexively with their experience, articulate their epistemology, and inform their future work.

**Summary**
I believe it is possible and indeed incumbent upon service learning practitioners to provide a safe space for students to continually remake, refine, and define their personal epistemologies; to remove aspects of their ways of knowing that do not fit with their new experiences and understandings of the world. If development of a social justice orientation is the goal, practitioners need to provide ongoing, recurring opportunities to practice reflexive epistemology development through service. The first step in refining an epistemology is being able to articulate it. Students will hold incompatible beliefs about service depending on the topic – a service epistemology is complex and will vary depending on the context (e.g., homelessness vs environmental service). I have designed this research to demonstrate a method for aiding students in processing their service learning toward these goals.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Research is not merely a species of social science. … Virtually any careful, reflective, systematic study of phenomena undertaken to advance human understanding can count as a form of research. It all depends on how that work is pursued


Through this research, I sought to understand the processes of learning and meaning making meaning that occur when people participate in long-term service learning programs. I addressed the common elements of learning through service, the potential for personal transformation through arts based reflexive practice, and the methodological considerations for using arts based reflexive inquiry in educational research. In order to be effective in this undertaking it is important first to make known the ontological and epistemological stance, the theoretical framework, and the unique methodology I employed. My goal through this research was to use art as a method of inquiry and meaning making of service learning in order to allow space for participants to engagereflexively with their experience.
Research Questions

Q1 What are the common elements of learning from diverse service project experiences?

Q2 What personal transformations will participants undergo through engaging in arts based reflexive practice following a long-term service learning experience?

Q3 What are the main methodological considerations for using arts based reflexive inquiry in educational research?

Introduction and Personal Research Stance

Before returning to graduate school to pursue doctoral studies, I worked for nearly ten years in various positions at an institution of higher education. Much of that time was spent in outreach to under-resourced students in the public school system. I simultaneously had increasing involvement with service learning both with K-12 and undergraduate students. During my final three years with that institution I worked closely with first-generation college students to ease the transition from K-12 education to college. These varied experiences have in common threads of social justice and experiential learning. Combined with my doctoral work in the educational psychology program I have come to believe that context plays a fundamental role in both learning and research, and I have become fascinated with the potential for reflexive learning through service.

From a constructionist standpoint, context and culture have enormous influence on the development of epistemology (Crotty, 1998). This is something I have believed and have taken for granted for several years, but I did not truly see how it was operating in me until an interesting set of circumstances forced me to reevaluate my beliefs about the nature of knowledge. What follows is an accounting of those circumstances, written
in autoethnographic prose to help elucidate for the reader the development of my epistemological beliefs. Autoethnography is an “autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). Autoethnography is a form of narrative that brings the reader into an otherwise inaccessible experience in a way that enhances understanding (McIlveen, 2008). Additionally, through sharing this intimate experience, I engaged in the sort of reflexive work I asked of my participants.

**Development of Epistemology**

I sat cross-legged on the floor in the dimly lit sitting room of my dorm. I was working a summer job for Johns-Hopkins University, stationed at a university in Los Angeles California. My job as academic dean was to supervise the instructional staff of a program for talented young students. On this particular evening a small group of us had gathered together to commiserate and unwind after a particularly intense week of teaching precocious youth. One of the instructors I was supervising, Cody, had casually mentioned to the other guests present that he usually travels with a Tarot deck. This revelation was surprising, to say the least. At first blush Cody does not seem the type who would read Tarot. He was in his late 20’s and in the final stages of earning a PhD in mathematics. He was at this camp for talented youth as the instructor for a cryptology course.

Some combination of frivolity and curiosity possessed me, and I asked Cody if he would be willing to do a reading. He happily acquiesced and went to retrieve this deck of cards that had, according to Cody, been charged by the energy of a New Mexican vortex.
The Frame: Seven of Wands, Reversed. The main image on this card is that of a young man, clad in a green tunic, yellow undershirt, and orange leggings. A cerulean blue background contrasts the figure of the young man, who appears to be struggling; preparing to fight an unpictured force. On his right foot he wears a soft leather shoe, and on his left a boot that extends to mid-calf. In addition to his mismatched footwear, he stands on uneven ground. His right foot is precariously close to the edge of a cliff, his left foot is planted in the midst of a river. In his hands he holds one of the seven wands as one would hold a staff: defensive, but ready for offence as needed. The remaining six wands extend up toward the young combatant, as a trap or as a barrier between him and the unseen assailant.

Cody flipped the card over and sat back, a flash of interest and restraint crossing his face. “OK, this first card is our frame. The remaining three represent the past, the present, and a potential future. The frame will help us understand the remaining cards. Does that make sense?” I assured him that I understood, and shifted my position, straightening my legs and leaning forward to get a better view of the card in the dim light.

“Ah, ok. The Seven of Wands, but upside down. This card represents a struggle. Because it was upside down, it can mean defensive protection and disproportionate aggression in defending some position.” He looked at me as if reticent to ask the mystic’s question: does this seem relevant to some issue in your life? But he needn’t have worried. I immediately identified with the harried, almost frantic expression depicted on the face of the young man on this card.

In that moment I was responsible for the curriculum delivered by 34 professional educators to nearly 600 students under my supervision. That alone would give anyone the look of embattled frenzy. But of course that was not all. I also had a crumbling long-term personal relationship, and a half-written dissertation proposal. A printed copy of that ominous document was literally resting on the kitchen table of the college dorm where I was living. Resting is not the right word. Lurking. Taunting. And, I worried, slowly dissipating – dissolving into thin air from neglect and lack of framework. So yes,
beleaguered. Wary. Defensive. The Seven of Wands seemed an appropriate frame for this reading.

Cody paused as if to say something else, thought better of it, and with a flourish revealed the next card.

The Past: Three of Wands. This card depicts a figure, probably male, standing on a high bluff overlooking a body of water. He has his back to the viewer. He is wearing a red robe with a green cloak and a yellow and black checkered sash. His head is cocked slightly to the left, and in his right hand he holds firmly to one of three wands depicted in the image. In contrast to the previous card, the wands are planted firmly, resolute and upright, in the ground near the figure. The sky is orange and diffused golden hues of a sunset are reflected in the water, which bears three ships sailing in different directions. A mountain range is just visible in the distance.

“Hm. Ok. This card represents a choice you made in the recent past. His back is turned to you, see? Which indicates feeling resolute and confident – at peace – in your decision.” He paused to consult some website on his phone, not wanting to give an inaccurate reading; not wanting to miss anything. “Ah,” he continued, “based on the framing of the Seven of Wands, it is likely that whatever choice this represents was difficult, but that you were ultimately able to own it. You faced your future – see the water and the ships? Those indicate possibility. You faced your future as a new reality.”

As he explained three of wands I was again struck with a concrete example from my life, and I saw it depicted on the worn, slightly faded image before me.

I was born into the Mormon Church. By this I mean that both of my parents were members in good standing of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS). I was ‘blessed’ as an infant, baptized as a child of 8 years, steeped in the culture and traditions of a mainstream LDS family, and socialized to my proper and established place as a young woman in God’s fold. With only minor indiscretions during my adolescence,
I had little for which to seek forgiveness prior to entering the Temple, and at the age of 21 I served a 19 month proselytizing mission to “California, San Fernando, Spanish speaking” (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Personal Communication, Mission Call).

Being raised on the milk and honey of God’s “One True Church” instilled in me what I now understand as a positivist epistemology. I was raised to believe that one Truth exists; one correct, superior, ideal body of knowledge. And lucky me, I was born into it. This dogmatic, positivist life began to crumble for me around the age of 25, when I felt myself bumping up against a stained-glass ceiling.

Through a painful process and for more reasons than one dissertation could possibly hold, I turned my back on this aspect of my upbringing. Unfortunately, this piece of my personal herstory is inextricably woven with my parents, siblings, home, and many friends. Leaving the faith of my family meant a line in the sand that they did not, could not, cross. Choosing to leave Mormonism, for me, meant rejecting the notion of universal truth. I did not know it at the time, but it meant a seismic epistemological shift toward multiple truths, constructed meaning, the importance of context, and validity in myriad ways of knowing.

Cody was gracious as I sat contemplating the past as depicted on the Three of Wands. He had again consulted his phone to ensure he had not missed anything, and had good-naturedly fielded questions from the skeptical, yet polite, colleagues still present. When it was apparent that I had emerged from my brief reverie, he reached to turn over the next card.

The Present: The Hierophant, Reversed. This card depicts a religious leader seated on a throne between two ornate white pillars. The Hierophant is dressed in a
crimson robe; three white crosses adorn the trim down the front of his robe. Accents of sapphire blue are visible at his collar and near his feet, which are covered in dainty white shoes. His hair is covered by an ornate red headdress and atop it all is an elaborate gold crown. His face is calm, neutral. His right arm is raised to a square and his hand is posed with pinky and ring finger folded and the remaining digits raised. In his left hand, which is raised to shoulder-height, he holds a golden scepter. Two ornately dressed balding men sit at the Hierophant’s feet, in postures of adulation or of learning. Two golden keys are positioned in the form of a cross at the Hierophant’s feet, centered between the two students.

“Interesting. Another upside down card.” Cody said as he picked up the card to get a better look, and placed it back in front of me, again in its reversed position. “It has an overtly religious image, see? But it doesn’t have to mean anything religious or spiritual. It can be interpreted as education or general learning. I mean, look at the two men at his feet.” He paused and furrowed his brow before he continued. “Hm. The Hierophant, when it is upside down, is supposed to represent a desire to push against restriction, tradition, or conformity.”

I noticed as the reading progressed that I had settled on a theme, and in doing so was increasingly focused on interpretation within that theme. It made finding meaning in the cards seem the most natural thing I had done all day. As Cody spoke of education and a strong desire to push back against tradition, I realized for the first time just how much I am shaped by my path away from Mormonism. My half formed dissertation proposal that had been taunting me from the corner of the kitchen with silent aggression flashed in my mind. I saw it in my defiance of convention. I saw it as pastiche of theories, epistemologies, and methodologies, not yet artistic, not yet research; a rough blend of fragmented truths. And I saw an approach I would never have dreamt of without an epistemological and, indeed, an ontological remaking of myself. Because, of course, of the choices represented by the Seven and the Three of Wands.
This powerful realization and self-awareness was jarring; an unsettling experience to undergo in a room occupied by new friends, still strangers. If the experience had ended there I would have come away enlightened with new awareness of my epistemological positionality. But no Tarot reading is worth its salt without a word of caution.

A Possible Future: The Six of Pentacles, Reversed. This card shows a wealthy, well-dressed man in a striped tunic, green boots, and a golden-fringed red robe. He is standing, and we see his left profile. In his left hand, raised to shoulder height, he is holding a balance scale. Immediately below the scale, and outside of his gaze, we see a yellow-haired beggar in a blue robe, sewn in patches. The wealthy man’s right hand is extended downward, and from his open palm six gold coins fall to the hands of a second beggar, who is dressed in a somewhat newer looking orange robe. In the distance we see the edge of a forest and the fortress of a gated city. The sky and ground are pale, washed blue, and above the red-robed man are six gold circles each bearing the emblem of a five-pointed star.

Cody glanced at me and then quickly fixed his gaze on the cards. He seemed reluctant to be the bearer of bad news, and opened with a disclaimer. “Remember, this is just one possible outcome,” his words came out quickly, pointedly, “depending on how you interpret and address the issues raised by the past and present.” I wondered briefly if he was always reticent to give what he thought to be bad news, or if his discomfort stemmed from the fact that he was reading Tarot for his supervisor. I smiled and murmured something I hoped to reassure him, encouraging him to get on with it.

“Usually the Six of Pentacles represents success and attainment, but because it is reversed, and in light of the Seven of Wands, this card forebodes future difficulty and imbalance.” He paused again, shifted uncomfortably, and consulted his phone. “It can also represent dishonesty – either with yourself or with others.” And then after another uneasy pause, “again, this is only one possible future,” he added quietly, lamely repeating himself.
I was not offended. I found the admonition intuitive and helpful. In light of the recent epistemological revelation, I took this omen to mean that I must strive to be aware of my motivations for pursuing this research. Without awareness and transparency I cannot be genuine in my work. Without authenticity, my efforts will ring hollow. I see why I am drawn to non-conventional research, and I realize that I need to be cautious not to reject theories, epistemologies, or methods that do not obviously align with my current worldview. Doing so limits my own learning and potential for discourse and is disingenuous, even hypocritical of my new ‘multiple truths’ belief system.

I realized that I have been holding rather tightly to my experience of leaving the dogma of my youth. I am at times engulfed in self-pity over the loss that resulted from this decision, and readily fall into defensive protection of my new life. Such wound licking is limiting and places me on unstable ground. The experience of leaving Mormonism is ongoing. It informs me, and always will. If I am not conforming I am rebelling. In this there is little middle ground. Denying my roots will ultimately decrease my credibility and potential for success.

Some of this I shared with Cody and our other colleagues, but most I filed away in my mind to open and review later, in privacy. Cody asked my permission to take a picture of the card layout. He has a habit of returning to past readings to study them as he increases his abilities as a reader. I obliged, and am now grateful that I did; I was able to use this picture to guide my reflection of this experience.

No one else felt compelled to ask for a reading. The Tarot deck was carefully wrapped in a soft black cloth and secreted away.
Academic interlude. Beginning at least in my undergraduate studies, I have seen friends and colleagues so passionate about their niche of research that they dedicate their entire lives to one respective field. This has not been my experience; in fact I find such passion and disciplinarity daunting. When I decided to pursue graduate work I did not settle in quickly. I did not feel that I fit with what I perceived to be the ‘normal’ student, likely a leftover message from my conservative background. In any case, I felt that I was doing it wrong. I spent a lot of time second-guessing my abilities and whether I belonged in academia at all. Out of sheer bullishness I pressed on, and I was greatly relieved when I was first introduced to the promise of qualitative research and its array of approaches to conducting and communicating research. From there it was a comfortable move toward bricolage (Kincheloe, 2001; 2005; 2008; Levi-Strauss, 1966), where I felt I was being welcomed home for the first time.

I recognize that qualitative research is viewed by some (perhaps many) researchers in the field of Educational Psychology as being inferior to quantitative methods, but I am not distressed, and I will address such issues of epistemic inequality in this chapter. Many brave and ingenious pioneers of qualitative research have made enormous strides (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Finley, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kelly, Guba, & Lincoln, 1983; Lather, 1986; 1992, Kincheloe, 2001; 2005; Eisner, 1997; 1998; Ellis, 2007), and I am honored to learn from and build upon the framework they have created. Ultimately, I believe that having a home in research is preferable to being lost in academia – even if it is a home that I will find myself defending and rebuilding many times over.
Bricolage – Constructing a Research Approach

To address the research questions, I bricolaged epistemologies and methodologies in a way specific to this study. Bricolage is an approach to research originally put forward by Levi-Strauss (1966), and refined and popularized by Kincheloe (2001; 2005; 2008). In bricolage a researcher, or bricoleur, is a jack-of-all-trades; the MacGyver of research. The bricoleurs employs all tools necessary to best address the research questions.

The successful briocleur pays attention to what is missing or what is absent in a research situation. Kincheloe termed this approach “rigor in the absence” (2005, p. 346). The pursuit of rigor in the absence can be accomplished in various ways, including imagining things that never were; seeing the world as it could be; developing alternatives to oppressive conditions; and understanding that there is far more to the world than what we can see (Kincheloe, 2005, p 346). Imagining things that never were and seeing the potential in a research context are alluring and frightening promises of bricolage. Kincheloe further emphasized the need for such imaginative and innovated approaches to social research in drawing a parallel to other scientific fields:

Scientific inventors have engaged in a similar [fictive] process when they have created design documents for the electric light, the rocket, the computer, or virtual reality. In these examples, individuals used a fictive imagination to produce something that did not yet exist. The bricoleur does the same thing in a different ontological and epistemological domain. Both the inventor and the bricoleur are future-oriented as they explore the realm of possibility, a kinetic epistemology of the possible. (2005, p. 346)

Barone and Eisner (2012) made a similar argument with the evocative statement, “It is better, we believe, to find new seas on which to sail than old ports at which to dock” (p. 4).
Bricolage as a methodology has been criticized as superficial and watered down. Kincheloe (2001) argued that a true bricoleurs produces rigorous research through understanding and questioning the conventions and power relationships within her discipline, thereby gaining a deep understanding of the literature and research within the field. In this sense, the bricoleur begins as a disciplinarian, or an individual steeped in one specific discipline, and evolves as she moves toward interdisciplinarity in an effort to “avoid complicity in colonized knowledge production designed to regulate and discipline” (p. 685).

Indeed, bricolage is anything but the easy way out. To be successful in interdisciplinary research, a researcher must develop a deep understanding of the various disciplines and research methodologies, an endeavor that demands more than casual familiarity with the literature and traditions of each domain (Kincheloe, 2001).

As bricoleur, I drew from various theoretical, epistemological, and methodological wells in pursuit of understanding and illumination of my research questions. Janesick (1994) called this approach theoretical triangulation and argued that research is strengthened when it is supported by multiple lenses. Lather also advocated multiple lenses as a way of strengthening and lending credibility to research (1986):

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\text{Triangulation is critical in establishing data-trustworthiness, a triangulation expanded beyond the psychometric definition of multiple measures to include multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes. The researcher must consciously utilize designs that allow counterpatterns as well as convergence if data are to be credible. (1986, p. 270, italics in original)}
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The theoretical framework for this work is critical feminism. The epistemological framework is social constructionism. Methodologically speaking, I bricolaged arts based research, mosaic, and portraiture case studies.
Theory and Epistemology

To explain and justify my choices in bricolaging epistemologies and methodologies, it is necessary to situate them within a theoretical framework, which “both reveals and conceals meaning and understanding” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 88). The theory undergirding this research is critical feminism; an emancipatory theory that emphasizes social justice and freedom from all things that enslave human life or knowledge (Bohman, 2015). Critical feminism, situated within and informed in part by critical theory, identifies problems within society and seeks to correct those problems (Crotty, 1998; Lather, 1992; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Critical feminism informs this research in several ways, not the least of which is my positionality. As a White woman in academia, I have been taught to pursue knowledge in a culture and tradition I inherited (Brabec & Brabeck, 2009). Women’s voices were absent from the initial establishment of academia and research traditions. The philosophy of current research practices grew out of male thought and ideology; understanding women and women’s experiences continues to be evaluated by a patriarchal system that privileges male insights, beliefs, and experiences. I live in a nuanced world of privilege and inequality. I recognize that my race affords me increased access to political and social power, and yet as a woman I find myself bumping into a glass ceiling.

My feminism is critical, not exclusionary. I hope to use my position to advocate for equity in research, especially for non-traditional ways of knowing and alternative approaches to academic inquiry, because, as Crotty pointed out, “patriarchy and sexism are not fetters worn by females only; they severely limit human possibility for males as
well” (1998, p. 162). From my perspective, all issues are feminist issues. I believe with Lather that “through the questions feminism poses and the absences it locates, feminism argues the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness, skills, and institutions as well as in the distribution of power and privilege” (1992, p. 91).

Because the moral philosophy that currently undergirds research is rooted in male thought and ideology, our understanding of women and women’s experiences is evaluated “under a patriarchy that privileges male insights, beliefs, and experiences” (Brabeck & Brabeck, 2009, p. 40). Knowing this, feminist researchers work to correct the distorting lens of male philosophy that often leads to oppression and marginalization and emphasize strengths-based research through ethics of care, inclusion, and advocacy (Brabeck & Brabeck, 2009; Ellis, 2007). Feminist researchers are “compelled to ask… Whose voices are left out of the research? What populations are ignored in the study of the phenomenon under investigation? Which experiences are not given scholarly attention?” (Brabeck & Brabeck, 2009, p. 40).

Correcting distortion and invisibility are counterhegemonic processes. Michel Foucault, popularly thought of as a philosopher and social theorist, put forward many ideas that have been instrumental in social activism and human rights movements (Rabinow, 2010). According to Foucault, we are constantly engaged in political struggle, the purpose of which is to alter power relationships (Rabinow, 2010). This sentiment has been echoed by various other theorists throughout the years and within various disciplines, including Marcuse, who wrote about the political implications of art and society; Freire, who wrote about the political implications of education (1998); and
Kincheloe (2001; 2005) and Lather’s work on the political nature of research (1986; 1992).

**Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism is an important epistemological lens for this research because of the emphasis on context and interaction (Crotty, 1998; Kincheloe, 2001; 2005). One of the central goals of bricolage is to construct knowledge using accessible tools (Kincheloe, 2001). Constructionism emphasizes context and interaction. Crotty, in writing about constructionism, stated “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (2008, p. 42).

Barone and Eisner (2012) elucidated the constructivist view that meaning is simultaneously enhanced and constrained by the various research tools we use:

> The idea that we advance is that matters of meaning are shaped – that is, enhanced and constrained – by the tools we use. When those tools limit what is expressible or representational, a certain price is paid for the neglect of what has been/omitted. (p. 1-2)

Our tools shape us as we shape our tools, and this reciprocal relationship has inextricable impact on the meaning we make and the research we conduct.

Thus, context has an enormous impact on meaning making in research. The endeavor to understand the essence of a phenomenon requires the researcher to acknowledge the influence of experience and bias in all stages and aspects of the research. The background, age, gender, and previous experience of the researcher and of the participants are tied to the process of research and the presentation of findings. Each participant brings unique experience, the researcher’s biases determine the way data is
collected, analyzed, and presented; even the way an audience perceives and interprets the final presentation is influenced by experience, context, and bias.

Methodologies

As bricoleur, I employed various methodologies in the investigation of my research questions. The methodologies central to this research were arts based research, mosaic, and portraiture. This section defines each of these methodologies and identifies the limitations that require augmenting each with the other approaches.

Arts Based Research

Elliot Eisner is credited with having identified and formalized the term ‘arts based research’ in the early 1990’s as an umbrella categorization for any methodology that incorporates aesthetic elements in any aspect of a research endeavor (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Arts based research is distinct from arts based inquiry, only in that the word inquiry implies its use during data collection. Thus, arts based inquiry incorporates aesthetic elements in the elicitation of data, where arts based research is not limited solely to data collection.

To many, the idea of using art to conduct research may seem alien and counterintuitive. Thus, as Yardley (2008) wrote,

While I felt confident that what I was doing and where I was headed was valid, my research trajectory was not apparent to many of the people present… if I was asking people to travel in, for them, uncharted territory, then it was my responsibility to provide them with a confident and reliable guide who spoke their language or a very clearly [sic] means to chart their journey. (p. 2)

Part of the tension and reticence in accepting art as research stems from a tendency to try to evaluate such research through the tried and true standards of quantitative methodology. Finley (2003) argued for a radical break from science as the gold standard
for evaluating research, and invoked Eisner’s (1997) reconceptualization of research. According to Eisner, we have too long thought of research as the language of science, when it is more useful to think of science as merely one of many tools that we employ in pursuit of knowledge through research.

One criticism of arts based research is that it is not clear and does not result in precise conclusions. This may be in part because we have become overly comfortable with the distillation of information through science, so variation and expansion that result in art can seem daunting and off putting to social science researchers (Barone, 2008). McNiff (2008), however, did not see these two research tools as incompatible. He wrote,

While many areas of science strive for replication and constancy of results in experiments, the arts welcome the inevitable variations that emerge from systematic practice. Science tends to reduce experience to core principles while art amplifies and expands, and I see the two as complementary within the total complex of knowing. (p. 34)

In other words, where scientific inquiry may refine, condense, and quantify, artistic methods can reconstitute and amplify the meaning derived.

Barone and Eisner (2012) were clear in saying that arts based research is not an alternative form of research, because it was not conceived of as a replacement for existing methods. Nor is arts based research a supplement, because “we do not wish to conceive of arts based research as something one must do in addition to doing conventional research” (p. 5). Arts based methods are aesthetically grounded tools that may be useful in the adumbration of particular research questions.

**Criteria for Assessing Arts Based Research**

Having resituated arts based research as a means for conducting research (rather than a supplement to or subcategory of scientific methods), it is important to address the
issue of evaluation of such methods. According to Barone and Eisner (2012), successful and useful arts based research “must succeed both as a work of art and as a work of research” (p. 145). While the authors agree that rarely will arts based research rise to the level of a work of art as it is understood in our larger society, it must nevertheless be of “sufficiently high quality to lead members of an audience into a powerful experience, into a researching of social phenomena” (p. 145). Still, this is a subjective description of the evaluation process. To go deeper we need to differentiate between standards and criteria.

According to Dewey (1934/1958), standards are used to measure and define concrete information in regard to quantity.

The standard, being an external and public thing, is applied physically. The yardstick is physically laid down upon the things measured to determine their length… When, therefore, the word ‘standard’ is used with respect to judgment of works of art, nothing but confusion results… The critic is really judging, not measuring physical fact. He is concerned with something individual, not comparative – as is all measurement. His subject matter is qualitative, not quantitative. (p. 307)

In other words, according to Dewey, because a work of art, and in this case a work of arts based research, does not denote physical fact, attempting to evaluate it through a set of concrete standards is not only useful, it is counterproductive. And yet we are left in need of a common language for judging the worth of such work.

Dewey continued, “But such criteria are not rules or prescriptions. They are the result of an endeavor to find out what a work of art is as an experience: the kind of experience which constitutes it” (p. 309). It was in this spirit that Barone and Eisner (2012) tendered a set of criteria to which we may appeal in the judgment of arts based research. In order to be a valuable work of arts based research, the elements of incisiveness, concision, coherence, generativity, social significance, and evocation must be attended to. I will expand on each of these elements.
Incisive arts based research goes directly to the heart of the issue. The researcher does not get distracted by tangential information or sidetracked by unrelated lines of inquiry. Instead, successful arts based research attends only to the detail that holds substantive relevance to the research topic. In the words of Barone and Eisner (2012), “Incisiveness means that the work of research is penetrating; it is sharp in the manner in which it cuts to the core of an issue” (p. 148).

Concision, according to Barone and Eisner is when research “occupies the minimal amount of space or includes the least amount of verbiage necessary for it to serve its primary, heuristic purpose of enabling members of an audience to see social phenomena from a fresh perspective” (p. 149). Concise research does not waste space or resources. Concision and coherence are elements that operate in harmony. Coherence is achieved if all elements of the work “hang together as a strong form” (p. 151). Thus, effective arts based research concisely presents enough information to achieve the goal, and the elements presented in the findings augment rather than duplicate each other.

Successful arts based research is generative. According to Barone and Eisner, generativity is similar to the notion of generalizability, but the terms are distinct. Rather than producing results that are easily generalizable to other situations, effective arts based research describes “the real potential that arts-based qualitative research has to create understanding, perspectives, and theory, unlike the traditional experimental methods used in psychology that simply seek to confirm existing theory and perspective” (2008, p. 553). In other words, generative research ignites a search for new knowledge or deeper understanding. This quality, in a sense, reals in the consumer of research and transforms her into a research participant.
According to Barone and Eisner (2012), effective arts based research holds social significance. “What makes a work significant is its thematic importance, its focus on the issues that make a sizable difference in the lives of people within a society…We believe that the best arts based research aims to make a difference in the world” (pp. 152-153). In addition to social significance, it is incumbent upon the researcher to explain the social context of the research and situate it within a frame of reference that makes clear the political implications in the work (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

The final elements in Barone and Eisner’s (2012) list of criteria are evocation and illumination; “It is through evocation and illumination that one begins to feel the meanings that the work is to help its readers grasp” (p. 153, italics in original). Evocative and illuminating research reaches off the page and into the minds and lives of the reader. The authors caution, however, that this aesthetic experience may not be well received by all. “The arts traffic in feeling, and they are often anesthetic to those who have not yet learned to ‘read’ them” (p. 154).

In my experience, I have noticed that with age comes a decreased willingness to experience vulnerability. This research required participants to let down their guard and open themselves up to an unknown, unfamiliar emotional experience. Taking brush in hand and attempting to represent emotion on canvas can create a highly vulnerable context. To address this potential barrier, used an adapted version of the mosaic approach, a methodology sometimes used in early childhood research.

**The Mosaic Approach**

The mosaic approach was developed as a means of more accurately understanding the experiences and perspectives of very young children (Clark, 2005). The goal of
mosaic is to facilitate an exchange of meaning between children, practitioners, parents, and researchers. Mosaic methodology shares the critical theory conviction that research participants need to be accurately reflected in the research. This is challenging in early childhood settings, because very young children have not yet developed the capacity for high-level communication, which increases the likelihood that the researcher may misinterpret or misrepresent their perspective (Clark, 2005).

Traditionally, mosaic brings together various perspectives to represent the meaning of the world or situation as experienced by children. In mosaic, the researcher employs a variety of methods in an attempt to uncover the children’s perspectives. For example, one work of mosaic may include any and all of the following during data collection: collage; clay modeling; drawing; photography; photo elicitation; child-led tours of the setting; interviews with the child, her parents, and her teacher (Baird, 2013; Clark, 2005). Mosaic can be thought of as an example of methodological bricolage used in early childhood research. The various data collection strategies “provide different mirrors for reflecting on the central question” (Clark, 2005, p. 17). The intention behind this array of data collection methods is to ensure that children’s voices are well represented in the research. As social researchers we recognize vulnerability in children; specifically, if meaning is to be made and conveyed through words, children are not likely to be accurately represented (Clark, 2005).

My adaptation of mosaic for use with adult participants included various elements described by Clark (2005). Traditional mosaic is multimethod in its recognition and respect of the different voices and languages of children (Clark, 2005). Adult mosaic is
also multimethod in that the participants had varied approaches to aesthetic representation and each brought a unique aesthetic voice to the research.

Traditional mosaic is participatory (Clark, 2005). The children being researched are treated as competent experts and authorities on their lived experience. Additionally, the child participants are engaged in myriad ways to triangulate the message they are attempting to communicate. This participatory approach was present in adult mosaic. The adult participants were invited to select an artistic medium through which to communicate their experience, and were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to expand on the aesthetic representations of their experience.

Traditional mosaic is reflexive and focuses on lived experience. As meaning is made, all research participants are encouraged to reflect on that meaning and incorporate the lessons learned into practice. Internal listening is a strategy for making sense of the world; it is a reflective process (Clark, 2005; Tolfree & Woodhead, 1999). The goal is not to discover preformed ideas or opinions, but to empower the research participants to explore the ways in which they view the world and make meaning of the new experiences (Tolfree & Woodhead, 1999). Adult mosaic is similarly reflexive, though the application of new meaning will be theoretical rather than practical.

According to Clark (2005), mosaic “requires adults to relearn other languages they may be unfamiliar with using in an educational context or to acquire new skills” (p. 26). Within traditional mosaic, the adults (parents, teachers, researchers) need to relearn these other languages in order to communicate effectively with the research participants, the children. In my adaptation, the participants were adults who needed to relearn unfamiliar languages in order to communicate reflexively with themselves. Regardless of
the age of the individual, when we experience powerful, transformational experience it can be difficult to convey the meaning of that experience in words. Thus, allowing time for supported, non-verbal processing can help set the stage both for more authentic expression of the essence and emotion surrounding the experience, and deeper overall learning as the participants engage in a richly reflexive process.

**Portraiture**

Portraiture is a method of inquiry where the portraitist (researcher) seeks to combine science and art. “Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. xv). The portraitist’s work is deeply methodical. It is rooted in systematic data collection, critical questioning, and rigorous examination and confrontation of biases.

Researchers who employ portraiture embrace art as a form of research, with art visible in science and science employed in the creation of art (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). The resulting written portraits are highly descriptive and contextual but are not meant to capture the person or subject or case as a moment of truth, frozen in time. Rather, the goal is to capture the essence of the experience in a way that both represents the research participant and moves beyond the single story toward a more phenomenological, metaphorical, artistic understanding (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997).

I disagree with Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis’ epistemological framing of portraiture (1997). For them, portraiture is the missing link between science and art,
the proof that aesthetics can join the ranks of valuable research. Such framing situates portraiture as a subordinate mode of inquiry that relies on the approval of science to be taken seriously. Instead, I stand with Eisner who positioned science as an expression of research rather than research as an expression of science (1997). This revision of the hierarchy of inquiry puts all approaches to conducting research on equal footing with the more traditionally accepted quantitative approaches.

Documentation of context is crucial in portraiture, and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis detailed three specific aspects of context that must be present in a work of portraiture: internal, personal, and historical (1997). Internal context refers to the ecological framing of a research setting. A portrait is best understood if situated within a vibrant description of the geography, demography, and neighborhood (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, p. 44). The inclusion of this detail must be such that the reader feels that she is a witness; that she is present.

Documenting the personal context refers to the researchers position within the research. The authors use the phrase ‘perch and perspective’ to refer to the personal context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, p. 50). By including the perch and perspective, the research attempts to document and account for any influence that her presence may have had over the research setting. “The researcher is the stranger, the newcomer, the interloper – entering the place, engaging the people, and disturbing the natural rhythms of the environment – so her presence must be made explicit, not masked or silenced.” Transparency in perch and perspective enables the reader to more accurately and meaningfully interpret the resulting research.
Documenting personal context also includes the matter of voice, which is present throughout the portrait

…in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative. Voice is the research instrument, echoing the self … of the portraitist … her aesthetic (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, p. 85)

However, it is crucial that the researcher’s voice is tempered such that it does not dwarf or outshine the participants’ voices. The authors described this balance with a musical metaphor, wherein the participants sing the melody and the researcher alternates between “harmony and counterpoint,” always supporting, never dominating (p. 85).

Finally, the researcher endeavors to document the historical context surrounding the research setting. “In drawing of context, the portraitist … wants to sketch the institutional culture and history – the origins and evolution of the organization and the values that shape its structure and purpose” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, p. 52). The historical context is included to the level that it illuminates rather than detracts from the research.

I employed portraiture in this research in the observations, interviews, and note taking. Findings are presented in a manner consistent with Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ definition of portraiture, including important personal, contextual, and historical context, and in assisting the participants in documenting and sharing their experiences and perspectives.

**Methodological Note**

Examples of arts based research within educational psychology are few. Indeed, as Higgs (2008) wrote, “Psychology, for the most part, is still a traditional social science
discipline struggling with the popular misconception of its mysticism and countering with a positivistic standard for research” (p. 546). In educational psychology, aesthetic elements are commonly used as pedagogical strategies, but the tools are limited to inquiry and rarely transverse to the analysis of data or to the representation of research. Through this research I plan to address the methodological implications and consideration of incorporating this non-conventional approach to research in a more commonly traditional field.

**Ethical Considerations**

Stepping into the role of researcher brings a mantle of responsibility; a requirement for ethical practice (Freire, 1998). While there is mutual agreement among researchers that both behavior and work product ought to be ethical (Eisner, 1998), there is disagreement over the application of existing ethical guidelines to qualitative and arts-based research. In order to rise to the expectation of ethical practice it is necessary to articulate an ethical research stance. This section briefly addresses the historical development of ethical guidelines, with an emphasis on how those guidelines inform and fall short in arts based research.

Existing ethical guidelines in research have evolved out of reactionary response to unethical practice. The history of the development of ethical codes and Institutional Review Board (IRB) committees for biomedical and social research includes an ignominious list of human atrocities and unethical action. The Nuremberg Code, which addresses the issues of voluntary participation and informed consent of research subjects, arose out of a military tribunal holding Nazi doctors accountable for brutalities committed against prisoners during World War II (Hornblum, 1998).
For years after the Nuremberg Code was established, biomedical and social researchers in the United States continued to flirt with the unethical, rationalizing or glossing over questionable research practices in the name of scientific advancement. Examples include the well-known Tuskegee Syphilis Study (US Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee, 2015), and the widely varied experiments conducted on prisoners throughout the United States between the 1950’s and 1970’s (Hornblum, 1998). In light of the persistence of unethical research practices, Congress passed the National Research Act in 1974, which created a commission tasked with identifying ethical principles and guidelines to undergird research in the United States (Belmont Report, 1979). The commission filed their findings in the form of the Belmont Report and published it on the Federal Register (Belmont Report, 1979). The Belmont Report emphasizes three core principles to guide decision making in research involving human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Additionally, the Belmont Report defines issues of informed consent, assessment of risks and benefits, and ethical practices for selection of subjects (Belmont Report, 1979).

The Belmont Report has been the starting point for the development of ethical standards and guidelines for numerous professional organizations, including the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2011). AERA is an organization that supports the professional and scientific endeavors of those engaged in using research to improve education. The core principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice are clearly addressed in AERA’s code of ethics, as well as additional principles and considerations relevant to the field of educational research.
There is no universal ethical code that could possibly address all concerns for the vast array of approaches to research (Papademas, 2006). Additionally, existing ethical guidelines are rooted in a short but disgraceful legacy of biomedical, quantitative, positivistic inquiry. Although the guidelines have been expanded and applied to qualitative, social science, constructivist methods, there is controversy over the goodness of fit (Finley, 2003). Should the emergent shaped peg of qualitative research be placed within the square hole of existing ethical guidelines, even if it seems to fit?

As Finley (2003) put it, “Making art is passionate, visceral activity that creates opportunities for communion among participants, researchers, and the various shared and dis-similar discourse communities who are audiences of (and participants with) the research text” (p. 288). Creating art is an intimate process (Liamputtong, 2007). Arts based research methods often require co-creation of art, which increases vulnerability of those involved and requires elevated trust between researcher and participants.

The intended audience for arts based research is often people directly affected by the subject under study (Sinding, Gray, & Nisker, 2008). This further increases the potential for vulnerability of participants, and the necessity for researchers to be attentive to the shifting needs of participants throughout the research process (Harper, 1978, 1994; Sinding et al., 2008).

Arts based research is constructionist in two ways. First, the act of engaging in research with other people draws their attention to a phenomenon and may introduce a new way of knowing or experiencing the situation (Crotty, 1998). Bringing these themes to the consciousness of a participant is likely to change the experience of that participant.
Second, participants and researchers construct knowledge reflexively as they create art and share their experience through that artwork (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008).

Arts based researchers must embrace the emergent nature of the method (Crotty, 1998), but this can make it difficult to obtain IRB approval. For example, to obtain informed consent a researcher must be able to inform participants of the clear goals and any potential for harm. However, the emergent nature of arts based research can make it difficult to predict the course of a research project (Eisner, 1998). Even the most conscientious of researchers would not be capable of considering every potential outcome of each possible turn the research may take. This is not to say that such research should not be pursued; rather, that ethics should be an ongoing process, informed both by the course of the research project and the needs of the participants (Wiles, Coffey, Robison, & Prosser, 2012).

**Expertise**

There is disagreement in the field as to whether experience with an art form is necessary in order to use that medium in research. Eisner argued that expertise and support are necessary for the successful implementation of art-based research (1997). Finley, on the other hand, pointed out that requiring expertise in art-based research is counter-productive to the goal of disseminating research information to non-traditional audiences (2003). Researchers must be honest in representing their ability with both content and the medium being used (AERA, 2011; Knowles & Promislow, 2008). It must also fulfill an opportunity to reach an audience that may not normally be accessible to educational research (Knowles & Promislow, 2008).
Anonymity or Confidentiality

Using visual media, such as photographs, drawings, or paintings in the results and discussion portions of research introduces ethical questions about confidentiality (Wiles et al., 2008). Even when images include only empty buildings, environmental settings, or other contexts, the image of the research space risks the identification of the location and from there it is but a short step to linking participants to the study. In some cases participants may wish to sign a release stating that their image or photograph can be published as integral to the article in the journal. However, it is questionable as to whether a participant can understand such a decision and foresee the potential negative outcomes of such a practice.

Another ethical consideration when using images in results and discussion sections is the human tendency to assign authority to photographic images as concrete, evidentiary information. The reality is that such media are as much influenced by the subjective experience and point of view of their creator as a poem or a written manuscript (Harper, 1978, 1994; Wiles et al., 2008). It is therefore incumbent upon the researcher to attempt to address the potential for exaggeration of the results by clearly stating the viewpoint and context that led to the creation of a particular piece of arts based research.

Arts based research has a tenuous role within academia. Finley wrote “Even among interpretivist research traditions, which have themselves so recently attained the cloak of respect, arts based approaches may not yet have reached the point of acceptance as serious (i.e., “rigorous”) inquiry” (2003, p. 289). As an alternative form of qualitative research, it is easy for arts based researchers to fall into the defensive rhetoric of ‘physics envy,’ striving feverishly to prove the value of this form of inquiry by measuring it with a
ruler created for the scientific method. However, Eisner argued that research is not solely a method to express data obtained through the scientific method (1997; see quote at beginning of this chapter).

No longer is qualitative a secondary method to quantitative; they are different expressions of the same endeavor: research. Reframing the relationship between research and science in this way places all forms of inquiry on equal ground, so long as it is approached from ethical footing with an eye to the advancement of human understanding.

**Procedures and Data Collection**

**Participants**

I used various approaches to recruit participants, including contacting community agencies in Fort Collins, Colorado, and departments at local colleges and universities that focus on sustained service (see Appendix C for copies of contact communications). Populations designated as ‘vulnerable’ were not recruited. In total, five women participated in the research: Emily, Jessica, Bernal, Addy, and Steph. Initial contact with participants was through email, though most preferred texting once our relationship was established. All participants were living in Fort Collins at the time of the research, and brought with them a variety of service experience. This mélange of service experience allowed for unique and interesting comparisons in each of the portraits of service.

Emily, a 21-year-old in her senior year at Colorado State University (CSU), was the first to respond to my search for participants. Emily was born in Australia and moved to Fort Collins at the age of four. The service she focused on for this research was team-teaching art classes at a local elementary school as a component of her Art Education degree. She, along with two other students in her program, had planned and implemented
Friday afternoon art classes for (21) elementary school students for ten weeks. This service had recently concluded when we began our first research session.

Jessica (Jess) was in her early 30’s at the time of this research. I met her through research advertisements posted at VanCo School of Art. Jess had attended a figure drawing class and emailed me for more information. At the time of this research, Jess was working as a Postdoctoral Scholar at CSU, conducting research on environmental impact and sustainability. Jess was born in Namibia and raised in South Africa, and had recently earned a PhD in Biodiversity from the University of Oxford in England. The service she chose to communicate through this research took place in Nepal in 2013 as a part of her master’s program. Jess had spent several months gathering data for research on land use, and had offered farming workshops and other services to community members in the villages where she stayed.

Berna, a recently retired probation officer in her early 50’s, responded to an email announcement I had sent through a community organization to volunteers of the Restorative Justice (RJ) program in Fort Collins. Berna had worked extensively with the RJ program for over 20 years. She chose to focus on one particularly meaningful case she had facilitated involving three people; a drunk driver and the two women severely injured because of the drunk driver’s actions. The case, which crawled through the legal system for three years, was resolved in 2014. Berna chose it as a clear example of the power of RJ and because of the deep personal meaning it held for her.

Addy, an 18-year-old freshman at CSU, learned about this research through announcements from her service and leadership group on campus. Originally from Sacramento, California, Addy was working toward a career in zoology when we met.
The service she focused on for this research was her involvement in equine-assisted therapy in California, a program with which she had served and worked for approximately two years prior to moving to Fort Collins for school.

Steph was also a freshman at CSU, and she learned about this research through Addy. For the art sessions, Steph chose to focus on an ongoing service project she was involved with, bringing art programs to at-risk youth at local middle schools where arts funding had been cut. Steph was from Greeley, a sprawling city with a population of roughly 98,000 about 30 minutes east of Fort Collins. She actively worked to stay connected to family and friends in that area even as she forged new connections in the Fort Collins community.

Coleen, or Coco as she prefers to be called, is the owner and teacher of VanCo School of art. She was one of the first people I met when I moved to Fort Collins, and she immediately drew me in with her abundant charisma. Coco is a vivacious person with a conversational – almost immediately familiar – style that puts people at ease. This quality serves her well when she steps into her role as teacher in the studio. Coco often wears her shoulder-length, tawny hair pinned back from her eyes, or if the season allows, covered by an oversized felt hat that complements her often whimsical attire. In the spring of 2016 I met with Coco at The Artery to discuss, over iced coffee and hummus, the potential for this research. As the project grew, lurching forward like food through a snake as qualitative research often does, Coco proved an invaluable partner and sounding board for me and for each of the participants, encouraging and assisting all of us with the artistic expression of our experiences.
Art School

Art sessions took place at the VanCo School of Art, a classical training art school integrated in the Old Town community of Fort Collins. VanCo moved from the Old Town Square to the Downtown Artery (The Artery) in 2015. The Artery is on the eastern border of the rapidly gentrifying edge of Old Town. Two blocks east of The Artery is a set of train tracks running north to south, and on the southeast side of the street sits a Salvation Army and soup kitchen. These crucial social service programs are fighting to stave off closure as the surrounding blocks are being developed into new bars, hotels, restaurants, and dance clubs. Only weeks before the beginning of data collection, the city park on the northeast side of the street was decommissioned and sold to a private developer. Once a peaceful resting place for homeless individuals, the park is now cordoned off with a large purple fence, pushing the homeless further and further from city center. This story of gentrification is not unique to Fort Collins, and it is no surprise that such a neighborhood is home to the newly expanding art district.

Because of the proximity of the decommissioned park to The Artery and VanCo, it was common for strangers to walk in during art sessions and strike up a conversation. Topics usually centered either on the art being created or the strangers’ aesthetic preferences. In general, however, it was small talk of the sort to justify their presence, if only briefly, in a space away from the Fort Collins wind.

VanCo is a cozy space. The full school is a long rectangle, with an open studio at one end, and then a long narrow hall with a storage room and a bathroom at the other end. The walls of the hallway are lined with portable, heavy duty shelving, stacked with
untold numbers of canvases and other art supplies tucked away in a tumble for the
upcoming summer youth art camps. The studio is encased by windows on three sides,
two of which face the street, allowing natural sunlight to grace the studio during the day,
and the headlights of passing cars to flash through the room like a giant copy machine in
the evenings. The third window faces The Artery Emporium, a gift shop where local
artists display their creations for purchase.

The studio is a dynamic space that Coco, the owner and teacher of VanCo, shifts
and adapts to fit the needs of each class. Ten easels, dappled in drips of oil and acrylic
paint, stand at attention on the east and west windows. Oil pallets rest against the
windows behind the easels, and stools, inadvertently decorated to match the easels, are
pushed to the perimeter of the space. The north window, facing the street, is home to a
low table bearing elements of an ever-evolving still life scene. Bins holding large bottles
of acrylic and tempera paints are tucked under the table. A large cart holding the oil tubes
and brushes waits in the northwest corner.

For each of our art sessions, Coco set up a long, heavy duty plastic table in the
center of the studio. The table held all the various supplies we would need for a given
session, from pencils and watercolor to wire cutters and hot glue guns. Solo cups with
water, a cookie jar full of erasers, a roll of paper towels, and paintbrushes were always
within reach.

Data Collection

After completing informed consent, participants filled out a written questionnaire
(see Appendix D) covering basic demographic information and information about the
service learning experience on which they wished to focus for their art project for this
research. Participants were encouraged to keep a visual journal throughout this research (Leavy, 2015), including written and visual memories and impressions of their service experience. Part of the visual journaling included watching a video clip about ‘out of balance moments’ to assist participants in thinking about the powerful learning experiences associated with service (see Appendix D). Coco and I encouraged participants to use their visual journals during art sessions if they seemed stuck or in need of inspiration, or to sketch and test new ideas before committing to canvas.

Arts based reflexive inquiry. Participants took part in at least four, two-hour sessions of arts based reflexive instruction. In total, there were three sets of four art classes. The first set, of Art Based Reflexive Inquiry (ABRI) One took place in December over the course of two weeks. Jess and Emily were the participants in attendance, and the classes ran on Mondays and Thursdays from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. The second set, ABRI Two, took place in February, once per week on Wednesdays from 10:30 am through 12:30 pm. Berna was the only participant in these classes, as another potential participant withdrew from the research the morning that sessions were to begin. The final instructional set, ABRI Three, took place in late February and early March, once per week on Thursday evenings from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. Addy and Steph were the participants for this set of art instruction session, and navigated the somewhat difficult public transit system to arrive at VanCo from their CSU dormitory. In addition to the three full sets of art sessions, there was one extra session on a Thursday evening in late March, ABRI Four. This session was attended by Jess and Addy, both of whom needed extra time with their piece to feel comfortable showing it in a public gallery.
ABRI’s began with introductions and a brief description of each participant’s service experience. The first session for each ABRI included various warm up activities designed to get participants thinking about their service and how they wanted to portray it aesthetically. After warm ups, Coco assisted participants in developing their ideas and planning for session two. During sessions two through four, I encouraged participants to develop a metaphor for their art experience that extended beyond a concrete symbol. Coco provided guidance on selecting a medium and technical support in conveying meaning through the medium chosen by each participant.

In ABRI One, I encouraged participants to approach two projects: a map of their service experience, and a work that represents the essence of learning through service (see Appendix E for instructions given to participants). I gave little guidance on what it means to make a map of service, and I left the essence of learning through service to each participants’ interpretation. By the second session of ABRI One, Coco and I realized that eight hours of art classes was barely enough time for one polished piece, and the remainder of the sessions were condensed to focus on the creation of one story or visual metaphor to portray each participants’ learning through service.

Observations. As artist-researcher, I observed in the studio during art instruction, conversing with participants. At times, I offered my aesthetic opinion to participants, consulting on color choice, scaling, or technique. This was especially true with Addy, who chose watercolor as her medium, because I had more experience with watercolor technique than Coco. Aside from helping Addy, I made a deliberate effort to step back from art instruction to focus instead eliciting conversation about the participants’ service experience. In each session, I made field notes and sketches in my research journal, and
took photographs of their art as it progressed. None of the photographs included participants’ faces, though their arms, hands, or back of their heads appeared in some of the photos. As part of the observations, art sessions were audio recorded and transcribed after each session.

**Semi-structured interviews.** At the conclusion of the art classes each participant engaged in an in-depth, semi-structured interview. I also interviewed Coco for five to ten minutes following each art session. I audio recorded and transcribed all interviews, and kept detailed notes on the context and environment of each interview. Upon completing transcription, I permanently deleted all audio recordings. Informed consent forms will be kept for the requisite three years in the UNC Educational Psychology offices.

**Data Analysis**

I immersed myself in the data at all stages of this highly emergent research (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). In line with Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis’ process for portraiture analysis (1997), I used an ongoing, dialectical process for coding inspired in part by Glaser & Straus’ constant comparative method (1967). After each Art Based Reflexive Inquiry session, I reviewed my notes and the recorded audio to allow impressions from that data to inform subsequent research interactions, including additional arts based reflexive instruction sessions and semi-structured interviews.

Upon conclusion of data collection, I created art to frame the analysis of the data set (McNiff, 2008). For each participant portrait, I engaged in a creative and contemplative process of drawing or painting to discover the aesthetic meaning present for me in that subset of the data. Once I had a visual representation formed for a
participant, I returned to the data and used the aesthetic information I created in the visual representations to further interpret the findings. The visual portraits that I created for each participant were included in the open gallery, and are presented with the written portraits as inseparable components of the findings.

**Trustworthiness and Authenticity of Representation**

To meet the standards put forth by Barone and Eisner (2012), especially those of social significance, evocation, and illumination, it is important to consider the quality of the art and research as assessed through the constructs of trustworthiness and authenticity (Leavy, 2015). Rather than asking if a work of arts based research is valid, the standard set for other methods of research, we ask if the work is useful, trustworthy, and authentic. According to Barone and Eisner (2012),

To be useful, a piece of arts based research must succeed both as a work of art and as a work of research. It must be, that is, of sufficiently high quality to lead members of an audience into a powerful experience, into a *researching* [italics in original] of social phenomena. (p. 145)

Arts based research is trustworthy and authentic if it resonates with the audience and if that audience interprets the representation as truthful (Leavy, 2015). However, creating a work that rings true does not require the literal and verbatim accounting of all data gathered. Rather, the successful arts based research strives to distill those data down to their essence and present that essence both as a work of art and a work of research in a way that rings true for the audience (Leavy, 2015).

Leavy further suggested evaluating the “personal fingerprint of the artist,” or the artistic voice, when considering the authenticity of arts based research (2015, p. 280). The artistic voice can be seen in a consistent, engaging style evident in the works. The
voice shows rigor and commitment to the mediums being used; awareness of and engagement with the audience; presence of the artist-researcher in the work, and a commitment to questioning boundaries of form through “innovative and creative practices” (Leavy, 2015, p. 280).

Throughout the process of analyzing the data, I discussed the emerging visual and written portraits with Coco, relying on her perspective to crystalize the truthfulness of my findings. To further lend trustworthiness to the research, I invited each participant to review and comment on both my written and visual portrait of her experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997).

Authenticity is a side of triangulation experienced by the audience. Without an audience, authenticity is a moot construct. This combined with the social action directive of arts based research and in response to the critical feminist stance that research must be accessible to the people with whom it was conducted, this research culminated in a free gallery showing open to the public (Barone and Eisner, 2012). The gallery installation was held at the Community Creative Center in Fort Collins, near The Artery where the research took place. The gallery consisted of selected art produced by the participants supplemented by my visual and written portraits of each participant that emerged from the data. I actively sought feedback from the audience on the resonance and authenticity of the installation.

For this research, I relied heavily on the artistic process and on representing the voice and experience of each participant. Findings were shared with the community in which the research was conducted through a gallery presentation of participants’ artwork and findings that emerged through the research process. With these goals guiding the
research and in keeping with the convention of artists acknowledging creations in public, I used participants’ first names in the visual and written presentations of research findings. Participants read and signed informed consent twice during this research; first, at the beginning of the research process, allowing permission to collect and use data associated with their personal service-learning experience. Upon completion of the artwork, I sought consent once again to use the final version of the art in the community art show and in written presentations of findings.
CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PORTRAITS

In this chapter I present the written and visual portraits for each of the five participants. The narrative offered in each portrait is not a chronological accounting of the information as I received it. Instead, I drew from art sessions, interviews, participant journals, and my research journal to construct a narrative of each participant’s service overlapping the experience of participation in the arts based research sessions. The portraits presented in this section are written in narrative style, and all quotations are presented in quotation marks. I made this style choice in an effort to make research findings accessible to the layperson by not breaking the storyline with formatting uncommon in traditional narratives. Quotations below are taken directly from the transcripts. Much of the data were captured during art sessions, where conversations split participants’ focus between art creation and question-answering. ‘Um’s’ and ‘uh’s’ were quite heavy, and most, but not all, were edited out for flow.

Jessica’s Portrait

Jessica, or Jess as I would come to know her, was not what I had anticipated when I first started down this research path. Having recently concluded her doctoral work in ecology at Oxford, Jess was in Fort Collins as a postdoctoral scholar. She came to this research with ample service experience spanning four years and multiple countries. I met
her in her office on campus. I stood in the hallway outside of her shared office, waiting as she rushed from a meeting that had run unexpectedly long. Even on a cold and windy November afternoon, with threat of snow on the horizon, she commuted by bicycle, computer and notebook tucked safely in a drybag, the sort of thing you might pack your food in for a river rafting trip. We sat at her cubicle near the door, and I shifted my chair slightly so that her office mates could easily walk past.

Jess spoke in a calm, quiet voice, graced with lyrical cadence of her Namibian upbringing. The day we met to sign informed consent and to discuss her service, she smiled almost continuously, and expressed genuine and enthusiastic interest in exploring her service through art.

To get to know her, I asked that she describe the service she would most likely focus on for this project. “Sure,” she smiled. “Erm, for my studies for my PhD I was doing research in two countries, comparing potential impacts of climate change on biodiversity and ecosystem function in small agricultural landscapes. The project involved five months of field work in Nepal and four months of field work in Ghana.” She went on to describe several months of participation in field work for an overarching research program focused on climate change and adaptation planning. In addition to the project, participants had communal jobs and independent research projects. She worked alongside approximately 15 other participants, including the principle investigator, communications officer, fellow graduate students, and a handful of research assistants and logistical support staff.

“There were different parts of the project. We all were on the same research team for our PhD’s, but we had our independent chapters that we had to work on. When I was
doing my own data collection I was moving across the landscape to get a landscape sample, so at that point I was independent,” she corrected herself, “well with my research assistant. We were doing the community planning process and that was when we were doing farmer exchange programs and living and working in the village and facilitating workshops, that sort of thing.”

We chatted a bit longer about service before I left her office. I thanked her for her time and encouraged her to email me with any questions prior to our first art session.

**Session One**

As a warm up activity, Coco asked Jess and Emily to illustrate a positive memory from their service. Jess drew a couple of symbols on the sheet of paper Coco had provided; a plate with various foods on it, a mat, and a hut. “My memory,” Jess said when it came time to discuss the drawings, “is eating delicious rice, with bean, potato, and tomato, the food was spicy, and really good.” She smiled, and added, “Erm, I’m sitting on the mat, a woven mat, eating with my hands, out of metal and glass. And a hut, sleeping on a hard bed” she concluded, and smiled again.

“Did you stay with a host family or did you have your own hut?” asked Coco.

“I was moving around a lot, so some of the time I rented a place, which was like more for my house but the rest of the time I was doing workshops and surveys, and I stayed with families in the villages. It was amazing,” she smiled. “It was really cool. And the food was amazing,” she reiterated.

Coco had not heard much about Jess’s service; only what I had recounted from my initial meeting. She gently pressed Jess for more detail.
“My first field season was in Nepal in 2012, and I’d never been to Asia or India before, and I’d never seen such a high dependence on agriculture. It was a very different society which, erm, is very closely tied to environment in terms of the dependence on fuel and building material. Everything is really basically from scratch, they have to go collect it, build it, and they’re really dependent on rainfall,” her already quiet voice trailed off as she thought. “And access to natural resources and protected areas in order to really live.”

Jessica was fascinated by this immediate reliance on the environment, and contrasted the Nepalese against our Western comforts. “We are so sheltered and everything is at our fingertips. Yes, we have to work for income and there’s a lot of inequality in our own society but to, to see that level of reliance on the environment was very impressionable. It became a very personal experience. I just felt that it was a very… a very different way of seeing the world in the sense of community values, good and bad.”

“In what ways?” I asked.

“Gender norms are very restrictive, for example. Women don’t have a lot of opportunity to speak in public. If they were with their husband they wouldn’t answer questions if I wanted to speak to them.”

“Did gender restriction extend to you also as a woman in Nepal?”

“No it didn’t,” she replied, “which was quite interesting because I was White and so somehow…” She hesitated, casting back for an example to illustrate her point.

“Perhaps the privilege associated with being White offset the negative privilege of gender?” I offered.
“Yeah,” she agreed, and continued, having summoned a memory to share. “Not completely though, because I worked sometimes with men who I felt a bit of, well they would just be like ‘you are the woman, you sit to the side,’ but on a subtle level, you know? For example, when I first arrived to Asia I did a short trip to India. I remember sitting at a table in a quaint rural area, and I was with men who were other researchers. The women were standing on the side, serving us food. One woman, every time we’d finish a bit of food she’d come and fill our plates up again. It was quite nerve wracking to see this woman just standing waiting for us to eat. I was the only woman at the table that day so I guess I felt like ‘yeah, I’m being treated a bit differently.’”

With these memories indicating a mental immersion in the service experience, we moved into the next activity. Coco asked Jess and Emily to create a ‘before and after’ drawing, representing how they ‘were’ and how they ‘are’ because of the experience. She suggested tracing hands, or drawing empty faces as a framework for the activity. Jessica traced her left hand on one page of her journal and her right hand on the other side of the spread. Sketching with colored pencil and adding words and phrases, she began to develop the image. Ten minutes passed before I asked if she would like to share about her drawing.

She smiled, and softly began, “erm, so it wasn’t a dichotomy, there were lots of experiences before parts of which I’m sure transferred or emphasized. I was studying a lot, trying to understand and describe the potential towards trying to quantify motivations for conserving the environment…” Her voice trailed off briefly. “It's a very interconnected thing, so before and afterwards” Jess held up her journal showing two hands; a fiery orange and red hand on the left, and a green, pink, and yellow hand on the
right, each intentionally portrayed in earthy tones. “My service was very involved in the environment,” she explained. “The red is also for passion. I was excited, I was going to Asia, I had just started on my project and I really, really wanted to make it work. I felt rushed, but I was trying my best.” Jess paused a moment, reading the words she had written on the left side of the illustration. “I was anxious, I wasn’t sure about myself, and I was confused about my project.”

She paused again, and this time referred to the right side of her sketch. “I was very motivated, and I came back feeling more motivated, feeling a larger sense of responsibility, but also feeling very humbled, held, and protected.” Again she paused, contemplating her shift. “I gained a different sense of poverty and my own ability and a very big sense of wonder, and wondering what my role is in all of this.” Her words increased in speed, spilling out in a tumble toward the end of her thought. “I was also feeling guilty and confused about why everything is so unequal. And pained because I had conflict with the people I was there working with.” Jess lingered quietly in these memories. “Basically I gained a sense of wonder and struggled connection to the planet and to different types of people.” She took a breath as if preparing to say more, but only “Yeah,” a punctuation; an affirmation that this account was accurate.

The end of Session One was quickly approaching, and we had not begun the brainstorming process for the larger pieces. As ‘homework,’ I encouraged Jess and Emily to write and sketch in their visual journals in preparation for the next session. Coco added that photographs can also be helpful, but the general instruction was to work toward a metaphor. And with that the session ended, the two women bundled up to face the wintery night.
Session Two

Jess arrived for the second session, armed with her laptop and various pictures from her time in Nepal. She shared the images with Coco, trying to decide which moment from her service she wished to portray through painting. The two consulted on ways to pull emotion and story from the memory into the painting. Jess had narrowed her choice to two major learning experiences.

“I was thinking one particular image that I could paint is of me and three women after we crossed a river. We were in a bit of danger because of the river and that was a big experience for me because, you could see how afraid they were of the river rising and then I was personally in danger as a consequence of it.” I heard her brief account of this experience and asked her to elaborate.

“I was asking people about their exposure to flooding or extreme environmental events, and what the impact. I was working in Madi Valley, which is in Chitwan National Park in the western region of Nepal. It’s the shape of an eye between, two national parks, Chitwan Valmiki Wildlife Sanctuary, on the northern border of India. There’s a river called the Reu, I asked where are the areas, the towns most susceptible to flooding. Everyone I asked pointed to one place, across the river, as the highest risk. So we went across. I was working with a women’s cooperative, and they took me across. My survey involved both physical measurements and interviews, so it took a few hours to do it, and the only way to cross the river is by foot cause there’s no, there’s no bridge. We had to actually go back and forth to do the survey three times because each time we failed to complete it because of the rain. When it rains, even if it’s not raining where you are, the river level rises so quickly.”
“Oh, is it like a flash flood? Say it’s raining in the distance but it funnels down and floods where you are?” I asked. Having spent much of my childhood in the Southwestern United States, I was quite familiar with this particular danger.

“Yeah,” she said, nodding her head.

“Yeah exactly. I just really wasn’t aware of the fact of how quickly and how dangerous it can happen. I didn’t speak Nepali and I was very enthusiastic to get my work done, so I didn’t really capture the emotional fear of these women through my translator. I was like ‘no let’s just keep it, let’s just wait, let’s wait a little bit longer, let me just finish, let me just finish.’ But the women were standing there, like” at this point she physically acts anxious and jittery, wringing her hands and then tapping her fingers on the table. “like, ‘come on we need to go. We. Need. To. Go.’ Eventually they just said ‘no, you’ve got to stop, we’re leaving now.’ When we crossed, the river had risen maybe a meter.”

“Wow,” I exclaimed, “how long had it been?”

“That was within an hour. When we crossed, we took the picture because we were really happy and relieved,” Jess paused, and then sheepishly admitted that she did not learn her lesson from this experience. “It happened again in another site, in a completely different region.” Coco and I laughed at this admission, perhaps more than a little amazed at her good fortune in surviving both times.

“In the second case, it was just me and my translator and a man. My translator was so petrified!” she laughed, embarrassed at the memory. “She couldn’t swim, and at that time water had actually risen up to here.” She stood up from the table and held her hand to her shoulder. “Our feet were getting pushed away by the current.” Sitting back
on the stool, she acted out having her feet pulled out from under her. “I mean, just for my stupid research, the poor woman!” She laughed again, Coco and I still joining in.

Jess continued her story, this time in a more somber tone. “In these places, there’s no roads, there’s no evacuation facilities. When it rains they have to climb onto their roofs and wait for the water to subside. A lot of the times children are crossing the river to go to school and then they just, you know, they die. It’s… it’s really pretty scary.”

“Yeah, that sounds scary,” I said, Coco nodding her agreement.

“But I often think back to that moment I was there.”

“At the river?” Coco asked, and Jess nodded.

Sobered by the thought of such extreme weather, Coco and I waited quietly for Jess to find the other image Jess was considering painting. The photo shows a man in maroon and orange robes, seated in the shadows of what appears to be a simple market. In one hand he is clutching beads, and in the other he is holding, but not looking at, a prayer book. His face bears the expression of intense devotion, seemingly oblivious to his surroundings. There are two male figures in the background, and two birds – pigeons or doves – flying past.

“This is at a Buddhist monastery called Kopan, in Kathmandu. It’s such an old monastery, and Kathmandu has got this incredibly long history, rich culture and heritage. I think that’s what really made an impression on me because the smells and the color and the ritual practice.” She stared at the photo. “I like the fact that there is movement in the picture and there’s just normal people standing around, but he’s very dedicated.”

Coco nodded her head and used the laptop to zoom in on the photo for clearer detail.
“There’s all these like beautiful structures and mosques in the area, and…” Jess searched for a way to explain why the picture was meaningful, “these very ancient statues. All the coloration is due to the incense falling and then putting Tikka, which is a holy rice flour on top.”

“Oh, ok” said Coco, again nodding her head.

Coco was quiet, thoughtfully considering how to best guide Jess in selecting her photo. I was hoping the river crossing would be the moment Jess focused on, because at this point at least, it seemed to be a more powerful memory. Rather than force my opinion, however, I removed myself from the conversation to consult with Emily.

“So I really like those images,” Jess stated, and switched back to the picture by the river. “The other one is, yeah, I mean, you can…” Although her story behind this image was much deeper, she worried that the picture would mean little to the viewers.

“Yeah,” Coco agreed, “it doesn’t seem to show that much. And that’s tough especially when you just see an image um, you know the exciting part of art is when people view it and have their own interpretation. If you were trying to convey the feeling and kind of that moment, other people might just look at it and say, ‘ladies by a river!’ You know?” Jess was nodding her agreement. “So, either we can figure out how to pull more of the emotion out of it, maybe add more elements, or you know, how we display it maybe that could you know add to it.”

Having decided that the praying monk would be a more engaging story for the viewers, Coco helped Jess select a canvas. Jess spent the remainder of Session Two sketching the image onto the canvas, lightly and meticulously.
Session Three

Jess came in to Session Three, ready to start painting, so Coco pointed to the large bin of acrylic paints and provided brushes and water. Jess began sorting through the bin and pouring puddles of color onto a Styrofoam plate, referring to her photo as she search to create the perfect palette.

“How comfortable do you feel with the paints?” Coco asked.

Jess looked at her, not having fully understood the question. “How?”

Coco tried again. “Do you paint a lot or not so much?” Smiling, Jess opened her eyes wide and shook her head no, curls bobbing side to side. “OK, then let’s grab some others too, cause for this, this is pretty like a soft red kind of brick but I’m gonna have you get some of these darker tones that can be intimidating.” Coco, a painter herself, teaches through demonstration. She deftly added several rich, dark brown and black puddles to the palette. Painting as she spoke, Coco finished her sentences with marks on the canvas or movements of the paint brush. “Get these…” she said, picking up paint with the bristles. “But do the back walls first, I don’t know if I have all the colors… but I see some browns, it’s got a green … a little tan…” She continued blocking in the image, and Jess studied her movements. “Then do any of the darks here… so start with that, and you can just draw in where you see the dark bits and then where it’s kind of the lighter stone color on the wall, come in and blend it a little.”

“Ok,” Jess said, smiling.

Jess’s goal for Session Three was to cover the canvas by blocking in large areas of color, so that she could come back in later with detail. Coco and Jess quickly settled into familiar interaction; like old friends collaborating on a project. Between stretches of
comfortable quiet, Jess would ask for advice or assistance, or Coco would break the stillness with encouraging words or advice on color, shading, scale, or brush strokes.

Hesitant at first, Jess dabbed color at the canvas. Careful not to hover over the adult students, Coco worked on a project of her own, a large oil painting portrait of a dog. At regular intervals, she would walk around the studio, monitoring progress and offering advice or assistance. Jess worked slowly, and as new artists often are, she was easily bogged down in detail before the larger structural tasks were complete. Coco was aware of this propensity, and gently redirected her several times.

After spending some time working on the stone walkway, Jess asked Coco, “It’s ok?”

“Mhmm,” she responded in a bright and cheerful voice. “Just a be aware of the brush strokes too, because if we leave too much texture it will make the surface look textured. If we had all these little spikes it might seem like the ground has breaks or rocks to it. So when you want to add the variation of the stones it might just be adding the color, changing it up if it’s darker or lighter or something. But the strokes are unfortunately important.”

Nodding, Jess went back in with her brush and picked up the excess ridges of paint. “Is this better?”

“Yeah,” Coco encouraged, “yeah much better.”

**Session Four**

“Can I get straight into it?” Jess asked as she walked in, removing her winter coat and scarf and securing her belongings in a paint-free area under the table.

“Yes, please do!”
“Cause I’m gonna take forever, I know, I’m worried about not finishing.” To mitigate deadline-induced anxiety, I introduced the idea of a ‘make up session,’ Relieved at the option, Jess set up and began to work. It wasn’t long before she leaned back from the canvas with a look of frustration.

“How are you doing?” Coco asked, making the rounds through the studio.

“I don’t know what color to, could you maybe help me with this face color?” Jess replied.

“Yeah, I’ll go get some skin color, if you get boxes and other stuff I can help you get the skin color” again, Coco talked as she worked, explaining her approach and narrating her movements as she mixed paint on the palette. “His face is still light. We don’t really have to go too dark, it just seems dark because of his cheek bones. I’ll check and see what we got.” Coco dotted paint on the canvas to test the color. “You can add a little bit more red to kind of ‘up the tan.’ It’s interesting with skin, whenever it’s different than us the thing is to not make it too sunburned or too dark. It’s subtle,” she said, still mixing paint and testing the color as she worked. “This might be a little too peachy, so just a little tan-white, a little red to it…” transferring the neutral hues from palette to canvas in short quick strokes. “Keep it light to start and then add little bits more of anything darker to it.” Coco handed Jess the brush and watched as she applied the new instruction. “This will be a little too red,” Coco cautioned, “so maybe avoid any more of that, especially with everything going on here,” she pointed at the maroon moss growing above the monk’s head, “it’s kinda picking up that red. So use little short swatches. Does that sound good?”

“Yes, thank you,” Jess replied, and she leaned back in to her work.
Throughout Session Four, Jess worked to add detail. Candles on the table, the wrinkle in the khaki jeans of a background figure, the moss and the stones. Several times she circled back to the monk’s face, and with Coco’s help, the intense expression of devotion began to emerge.

“Those candles look really good,” Coco praised.

“Really?” Jess asked, dubious of the compliment as the candles did not meet her standard. “Maybe, could you maybe help me with the eyes a bit?”

“Sure,” Coco agreed, “could I sit down?”

“Or the face in general…” she added, and laughed.

I laughed along, and added “and the ears and the hair and the…”

“Can you just do the painting for me please?” she asked sweetly, batted her eyes, and then laughed again.

Coco, recognizing the playful frustration, laughed along before offering encouragement. “It’s especially hard because it’s small scale and he’s got such an intense stare.”

“Yeah,” Jess agreed, watching the rapid transformation.

“And the nose…” Coco murmured, touching brush to canvas. “I’m starting a little extreme and then we can kind of blend it. Hm. His ear needs to be lower.” She turned to face Jess. “A quick lesson, in figure drawing we say you find lines, so if you were to take a line from his nose across it’s in the middle of his ear,” she traced the invisible line on the canvas, “so we see his earlobe is in line with his mouth, which tells us to bring it down. And let’s watch his hairline too, his hair is really to here,” she pointed to the photo.
and then to the canvas, “and then tucked.” Coco worked quickly, gesturing with her paintbrush and narrating her movements.

“Ooh,” Jess exclaimed, as Coco sat back and the monk gazed out from the canvas.

Jess’s prediction at the start of Session Four held true; she did not finish her painting, at least not to a level where she felt comfortable sharing it in a public gallery. However, she was scheduled to leave for Zurich on an extended work trip. When she returned to the studio for Session Five, nearly three months later, she and Coco sat side by side, refining the painting as a team.

Figure 1. “Tolerance,” a progression of work created by Jessica. Final work, 20.5” X 16” Acrylic on canvas.

Jessica’s Interview

The stories and the lessons that Jess shared about her time in Nepal hinged on two themes. First, we are part of – and reliant on – nature. Second, there is a feeling associated with service that is fundamentally difficult to put into words. In the visual portrait I created for her I attempted to embody these themes. It took Jess two river crossings to realize her dependence on nature. The bold orange line in “Jessica” (Figure 2) is Jess walking back through the river, walking through culture, and being faced with the realization that she was not as ‘smart’ or as ‘in control’ as she had thought.
The strong edge of the storm can be read as a representation of the high intensity cognitive dissonance Jess faced during her time in Nepal. This was Jess’ first time witnessing such immediate and vulnerable reliance on nature. With great self-awareness she identified the draw to romanticize her memories of Nepal, and her commitment to identify and remember the difficult lessons she learned during her service. I portrayed these aspects on the right side of the painting; it is an easy place from which to observe other cultures. It is more difficult to walk through that dissonance and experience the more complicated aspects. Both aspects are beautiful, but it is the juxtaposition of the calm and the storm that create reflexive learning.

Figure 2. “Jessica,” a visual portrait. 24” X 30” Oil on canvas.

Jess invited me into her home for her final interview. It was a sunny but frigid day in late December, only days before her departure to Zurich. We sat at the kitchen table of her on-campus apartment. The room was filled with natural light from the large
sliding glass doors. On the wall behind me was a large display of unframed photographs, many of them from her time in Nepal and Ghana.

“Were you able to create a metaphor for your service?” I asked, diving headlong into my list of questions.

“A metaphor?” I nodded, allowing her the time she needed to formulate her thought. “I used at the beginning of my thesis a four or five word quote, and I think it’s the same thing. It sounds really basic, but ‘people are part of nature.’ It isn’t basic, because there’s no way in a society like ours we can really understand that. Even if you do the outdoor activities, when you’re really dependent on nature then it’s a whole different game. And feeling like we are animals, we’re not this dominant species we’re just, erm, able to manipulate everything which, which is pretty amazing. If it was one sentence it would be that.”

“Interesting. Was that service experience the first time you made this realization?”

“I think so… I mean, my parents brought me up being very appreciative of nature and having lots of holidays and doing what we can, conserving water, recycling or doing community work. But still it was only in Nepal, working with farmers in remote areas, when I realized how important nature is for survival; that there are societies that still really need this.” She took a deep breath, and added “Oh, also the, the, the communal aspect rather than the individual aspect. Not being so focused on personal drive and personal gain and personal success. I guess having a sense of feeling a lot smaller than we are, like our world is not just about us, it’s about the environment and community and time.” She laughed as if she had just surprised herself, and then summarized her previous statement, “Feeling connected to a lot of bigger things.”
Through the image of the monk praying, undisturbed in a public place, Jess hoped to convey a feeling; a richness associated with the experience that was, for her, beyond words. I asked her to describe her reason for selecting this image.

“Kathmandu has got this incredibly long history, rich culture and heritage, and I think that’s what really made an impression on me.” Jess smiled at the beauty and peace of the memory. “Although it wasn’t where I spent most of my time during my service, I think what it captured was the richness of the spiritual affiliation of the people and the smells and the colors and the sense of age, and holiness. There was also a merging of modern and old, and an intentional maintenance of history which is not necessarily seen as archaic or oppressive. Sometimes I think that is the reason why history is forgotten by younger people.” Feeling that her painting did not capture fully the details of the experience, she added, “In the picture there’s mold, or fungus that grows on beautiful Sanskrit sketchings in the rock. It’s actually not in the image but just behind the photo there’s a Star of David and two other symbols, each kind of, although it’s also a Buddhist sign, the six-pointed star, but I liked it because it felt like there was this merger of different belief systems within one, which was still accepted. So, tolerance.”

“I also liked the fact that there were birds moving, and the fact that he has a cardboard box and a piece of plastic. He’s got these really beautiful maroon and orange robes on but then he’s also got kind of, you can see he’s just putting together, uh…” she seemed at a loss for words.

“Just making do with what he had?” I offered. Jess nodded her agreement. “Did painting your experience influence how you understand what you learned through service?”
“I think so,” Jess smiled. “I’ve been thinking about this for a few days. I really enjoyed the physical process. When you’re focusing on a place it gives you a feeling of that moment when you were actually there. I’ve traveled to quite a lot of places, but for some reason I yearn to go back to Nepal, and I don’t know what the reason is. Perhaps because it’s so different, and because I spent a lot of time and it was my first time doing that kind of service and in-depth research in a completely different place. But also…” she fell quiet. “I guess I wonder if the attraction is romanticism, that Nepal is so ancient and smells nice and there’s beautiful music? I don’t have an answer of why it is, why did that place have such an impression on me compared to other places and experiences I’ve had.”

I was moved by her words. I’ve heard similar, though less eloquently phrased, statements from others who have traveled abroad for service. Hearing her lovingly describe the nostalgia of her experience, I was powerfully transported to my own version of this experience. My reverie was brief, as she continued to speak.

“From a personal level I think my main drive from this is to keep on understanding and building the stories of what’s happening, because it seems like people know about this deprivation but it still doesn’t really change. Well, maybe it doesn’t change fast enough, you know? And it’s sad that we collect and share these stories but the structural situation doesn’t really shift for people. I feel a stronger sense of responsibility to do my work not because I want to get a good career but because we need more advocates for this perspective. We are a growing movement of people but there’s still not enough of us, so I have kind of a sense of responsibility because I have the skills and I have the education that people might listen.”
Emily’s Portrait

I first met Emily at a coffee shop on campus at Colorado State University (CSU) in Fort Collins. It was a Tuesday afternoon in late November, and I sat bundled in the overheated building, winter coat draped over the back of my chair. I fidgeted with consent forms and unmarked journals, anxious to start my dissertation research and nervous for the tasks that lay before me.

The building was bustling, with study groups and individuals competing for every spare table and chair as they studied for final exams. Emily arrived a few minutes late, as neither of us knew exactly who we were looking for, and greeted me in a friendly if businesslike manner. Such formal cordiality would characterize the whole of our interaction; after nearly 10 hours spent together in art and interview contexts I always felt that I was interacting with a friendly stranger.

At the time of our interaction, Emily was a senior in the art education program at CSU. She had recently completed service required as a component of her major, and had eagerly responded to my research advertisements that had gone out via email to CSU students. As we spoke, I felt that Emily was more comfortable with electronic communication than face-to-face conversation. In this first meeting and in subsequent classes and interviews, Emily tended to begin her response before I had finished asking my question. She seemed uncomfortable with direct questioning, but was reticent to offer information unless probed, and she rarely looked at me, rather through me or down and to her right.

She described her service experience in concise terms, as someone often does when they have been so immersed in a project that the details seem overly obvious and
are omitted from the description. “I just finished this, uh, co-teaching service that I did for a fourth and fifth grade class, um we kind of, we were teaching art and we were their only art teacher but we were doing ‘art on a cart’ so we would bring it in to the kids on Fridays.” She paused for a moment, and I did not interrupt. She continued, “I think we had ten days…” she continued, as if asking for verification. “And it was really amazing because it was me and two other students who are going to be art teachers and it was completely up to us what we would have the kids do, um, how we would organize the time and doing, we did all the documentation for showing what kids had learned, um, and kind of reflecting on that and making lesson plans, um, yeah so it was obviously a service to the kids but also kind of the school giving us an opportunity that we wouldn’t have otherwise to try our hand at teaching?” Through gentle probing I further learned that each ‘art on a cart’ session lasted approximately an hour and a half, and the three preservice teachers took turns in leading the class sessions.

“And what types of mediums did you have on the cart,” I asked, curious about the format of each class. “Uh, well, we kind of came in with a plan we were going to have them do, uh so I don’t know, I think it was pottery or sculpture and like painting or drawing.” The supervising teacher at the elementary school had asked them to focus their instruction on drawing and painting skills, “kind of those um lower level ability to draw from observation sort of things, um so we did a little bit with that. We kind of, we would do sketch activities where we would try to draw each other in a pose or something.”

The larger project, however, was more engaging both to the students and the volunteers, and Emily spoke with pride and excitement as she described it. “[The students] made little figures, clay characters, based on like if they were to imagine a
videogame. We said ‘imagine you’re creating a videogame and you have to pitch it to somebody, how would you show them the character?’ And so they made these little characters and then they made environments to go with their character.” With cardboard and craft supplies, Emily and her co-teachers facilitated the construction of elaborate dioramas, “and they painted everything and they were using you know cotton balls and tinsel and craziness,” she paused and laughed at the memory. “Um, so those were our two projects and it wound up stretching to fill almost the entire time and then we spent the last couple of times um using those characters and settings to create a stop-motion animation.”

Emily briefly mentioned other service experiences she had been involved with prior to participating in this research. The list included teaching art to high school students with special needs, a few “smaller” projects in schools, “and then a couple summers ago I went to Nicaragua with, um, a missions group and kind of worked with local schools.” The mission service to Nicaragua lasted ten weeks, and seemed to have left an impression on her, as she talked about the experience of living in a ‘not touristy’ region and being one of only a handful of White people in a town of 20,000.

**Art Based Research Sessions**

Emily attended four art sessions within two weeks. She was one of two students in these sessions, Jessica being the other. In the first session, we began with a few warm-up art exercises, one of which was to show a ‘before and after’ of how participating in service had changed us. Emily used an outline of her hands, one on each page of a spread in her journal. After approximately 20 minutes of thoughtful independent work, I asked “Emily do you want to share at all?”
“Oh, sure, yeah. Uh so I did, this is before and after I just kind of had a very rigid outline of what I thought it would be like or kind of this sketchy idea of what actually every day would be like” she said, showing us the black, sketchy lines she used to fill in her left hand. “And then the afterwards” she continued, referring to the outline of her right hand, “is a little bit looser but also a bit more comfortable with like being in a classroom and stuff like that. And then I started writing because I got bored” she said, laughing, and added “it’s not really necessary to the thing.”

“How did you choose your colors?” I asked, curious about the bright variations included in the right side of her sketch. “I chose all the colors” she said, and laughed again. “I didn’t, I, I,” she seemed to search the ceiling for her words. “It wasn’t symbolic or anything, I just, I was having fun.”

At the end of the first session, Coco and I encouraged the Emily and Jess to work on a metaphor to represent their service. Using the prompts provided in their journals, and thinking back on the powerful moments they experienced during their service, the two women were instructed to add to their visual journals and to bring in any important images that would help with their project development for Session Two.

**Session Two**

“Emily, were you able to come up with a metaphor,” I asked, “or some ideas?” She had entered the studio, and though we had all greeted each other and caught up on pleasantries, she had spent several minutes sitting alone, flipping pages in her journal and occasionally adding a few lines to the existing drawings.

“I didn’t plan a metaphor,” she responded. “Um, I was assuming they were two separate projects? Like, the map and the metaphor? Or did you want them combined?”
Not wanting to see my fingerprint too heavily in the Emily’s work, I had attempted to leave the parameters quite loose. I shrugged my shoulders and smiled in response, hoping to indicate that it was really up to her. She laughed uncomfortably, perhaps in frustration. “I’m open to any guidance…” her voice trailed off.

I wanted to find the right balance, to give her firm enough parameters that she felt comfortable and loose enough that she could truly express her experience. “Yeah, that’s one of those difficult aspects of a project like this, um, I don’t want to give too much guidance because then I feel like I’m telling you what to create. It’s ultimately your, your metaphor, your experience.”

“But parameters,” she insisted. “I need parameters.” I felt the resistance, I knew I was pushing, but I tried to do so in a supportive manner. “Sure.” I smiled and shrugged my shoulders comically high. “Um. Make art about your service?”

“OK, I’ll do that,” dubious laughter still lining her voice.

I let her contemplate for a few minutes longer while Coco consulted with Jessica. “Do you have some sketches that you maybe…” before I could finish the question she began her answer. “Uh, yeah, they’re, none of them are very self-explanatory,” she paused to laugh and then continued. “But um, OK, so basically this would be like a map of like the classroom plus like how the students and I would move through it.” The image was of a scroll map, visually similar to a treasure map, but with dashes and dots representing traffic patterns in the classroom. “I like the movement patterns, it’s a really cool idea,” I said, encouraging her to go on.

The second image was a parallel idea, but drawn as a circle with increased detail in movement but decreased detail in classroom mapping. Laughing nervously Emily
continued, “Yeah, um, and then this would be like kind of, I taught with two other people so it’s kind of like our three different teaching styles.”

“Oh cool, as a map?” I asked. She nodded. “Yeah I like that idea, it’s really neat.”

“Oh, and then this” she said, turning the page as she spoke, “would be like a timeline of a lesson I taught. Um. But.” The sketch was a timeline hybrid, showing the progression of activity and chaos through time an art lesson progressed. After musing over the drawings, I offered my input. “I think the element of the movement patterns is really neat here, but I really like the idea of representing teaching styles.” She nodded. “Um, or the timeline.” I added. “Those are really interesting ideas, interesting approaches. Who is, who is whom here?” I asked, seeking further information about her sketch.

She laughed again, though whether at herself or at the question I was unsure. “Let’s see um, the green, so the orange would be the students and then the green would be me, uh, pink was this girl named Kara and then black was this girl named Ellie.”

“So, you’re checking in with each student?” I said, checking my interpretation of her sketch. “This is representing…”

“Yeah … uh, yeah I guess. Um. Kara was very much like, good at being like in front of the class and kind of getting everyone’s attention, and you know, yeah.” I nodded and after a pause she added, “And Ellie was quieter and she would be a little bit more contained as a teacher.” I nodded again and flipped through the few pages she had just described. Perhaps frustrated with the pace, and having silently resolved to focus on representing teaching styles, she asked, “So… is there like a schedule? Can I get started?”
“Yes,” I said, “you can, yeah do you want to get started sketching or um, do you think you want to try 3D?” She indicated a desire to create a sculpture, and I turned to Coco who was still consulting with Jessica on her piece, waiting for an opening to interject.

“Coco, so Emily has some ideas and wants to start with sculpture. Do you want to grab some supplies as we’re still brainstorming other, other ideas? That way everyone’s moving.”

“Cool, yeah!” she responded, and Emily added, “Whatever you have.” Coco moved around the table to sit next to Emily. “And then what were you thinking about for a sculpture?” she asked. Unsure of her options, Emily asked for examples. The two landed on papier mâché as the ideal option considering the time constraints, and Coco asked for more information about the project and metaphor to get an idea of what sizes and shapes of supplies she would need to procure.

“What we’ve done before” she explained, “is just doing like, depending on the shape then you can kind of figure out what supplies to grab and whatnot.” Emily responded in a non-committal tone, spacing her words. “Um, I think it’s gonna kinda be, it’s not gonna be like huge and tall, it’s gonna be like…”

“Emily, do you want to show her your drawing, which one you’re thinking of doing?” the idea had not occurred to her, perhaps because she had very recently explained it to me. “Oh, sure.” She opened her journal and showed Coco the first two sketches. “Well, it’s either going to be like, circular with shapes coming,” she paused to turn the page, “or kinda more square with shapes to it, like, I think you would have to look down on it, it wouldn’t be very 3D, so,” she started to laugh, “I don’t know what
that tells you about what stuff I needed.” This was the extent of the explanation Emily offered, and because Coco had not been present for the earlier conversation she missed the meaning behind the shapes. This misaligned communication framed the remainder of their interactions.

To start her piece, Coco suggested that Emily crumple and tape pieces of newspaper or magazines to a rectangular piece of foam core. The two worked together on and off for a time, with Coco mixing a slurry of glue, flour, and water and offering input and guidance, while Emily quietly listened but did not always accept the offered help. She would later indicate that such moments were productive for her, saying that quiet work time was exactly what she wanted. “That’s the thing about making art,” she told me. “For me at least is it kind of, you know, my mind gets to wander, and the repetitive process of making something and then just, you know responding to what you’ve made with a new idea. I usually zone out. I think for me like art is the one thing that I could sit and do for hours and like, forget that I’m thirsty or need to go to the bathroom or something. I’m very immersed in what I’m doing.”

“Are you good on that shape?” Coco asked.

“I think so,” Emily responded, not sounding fully confident.

“I was gonna say what we could do and might be a little better is to do maybe, I don’t know if you like this shape though?” Coco held up a plastic bowl.

“Ummmm” her face indicated a distaste for the new shape. “Yeah, not quite.”

“I was gonna say, you know, we don’t have to cover it all,” Coco added, gently pushing for a sturdier, more uniform base. “I’m alright with it being wonky,” Emily replied, putting an end to the suggestion. “So.”
Ever cheerful, Coco moved on to the next phase. “Are you ready to get dirty?” she asked. “There’s an apron, um, in the back restroom there’s a coat hanger with some aprons, cause yeah this splatters and gets everywhere.”

“I should try to protect my clothes a little bit,” Emily murmured, looking down at her pale blue wool sweater and crisply pressed slacks before walking away in search of a smock.

I sat across from Coco, watching as she dipped her finger in the sludge to test its consistency, rubbing the gritty, dripping paste between her fingers “Your papier mâché mixing face is pretty funny” I joked. Coco looked up at me and laughed. “Yeah, I’m kinda glad we’re not videotaping this.”

Emily returned wearing a denim apron splattered with paint. She and Coco continued to discuss options for adhering the shape to the foam. Coco urged her in various ways to be more precise, to round out and build up the edges, and to use longer anchoring pieces, often demonstrating the various techniques. “Yeah, you want that smooth top if you wanna like draw and paint or whatever you’re gonna do on it later,” she said. Emily thought for a moment and replied, “yeah, I’m thinking maybe paint over it? I’m so bad at planning ahead and if I do plan ahead I don’t follow that plan so,” she paused to laugh and then added “great life skills.”

Emily continued to build up her dome-like shape, comparing the process to that of frosting a cake. Coco walked out of the studio in search of more newspapers, and I attempted to assist Emily with her piece. “Do you want it to be pretty dome-like?” I asked, planning to offer some assistance to build up a few pitted and sagging areas. “Do you want to smooth it out at all?”
“Um,” she paused and stood back to stare at the soggy mound, water and glue glistening on her hands which she held out like a doctor preparing for surgery. “I might just smoosh it down. Ready?” and then to herself, “See if this works at all.” Using both hands she firmly press the mound of wet, gluey paper into a flattened, off kilter heap. She stepped back again and laughed. “Ooh, that’s nice. It’s perfect, just what I was planning on.” Her voice held notes of self-deprecation, as though she hoped to distance herself from the outcome to avoid potential disappointment. “Oh well,” She said to herself, and then more loudly, “OK.”

“What are the different lines?” I asked. She had drawn four different patterns on the foam core before beginning to apply papier mâché, and drips of glue were starting to smear and distort the marker she had used.

“Um, well,” she said, again drawing out the space between words. “We’ll see if they stay, but um, it’s kind of the, when you’re making a lesson plan the art standards are comprehend, create, uh, reflect and transfer.” As she named each standard she pointed to the corresponding pattern. “And they kind of nicely link up to like, I guess, the art making process. Understand what you’re doing, make it, um, you kind of think about it, and make more in response to it and then like transfer that knowledge to what you do next.” Again she pointed to each pattern as she spoke.

“Ah, I see,” I replied. “That’s interesting.”

For the remainder of the session, Coco and Emily worked to build up layers on the now lopsided, flat topped mesa-shaped object. They consulted on various ways to add texture and the represent the lines Emily had in her drawing, and ended up using
drinking straws, cut to size and wrapped in papier mâché. Near the end of the class Coco asked, “And what are you thinking for the rest of the board?”

“Uh, so, I think after this dries I’m gonna paint it and hopefully,” Emily paused and chewed her bottom lip. “Do you think that there will be a big difference in between or will I be able to kinda just make it blend, kind of a smoother transition?”

Still unsure of the goal in creating this piece, Coco had adopted a neutral but supportive air. “Yeah, yeah I think we can make it blend. Are you happy with how it’s working out?”

“Yeah, I think so, I’ll look at it from a different angle.” Emily stepped away and tipped her head to the side, and then without answering the question added “I think I actually have everything covered. Yes!” laughing as she spoke.

**Session Three**

Between the second and third sessions, Coco spent a few hours adding a layer of papier mâché to Emily’s piece, smoothing out the bumps and filling in the cracks. She worked to stay true to the shape and design that Emily had set up as the base. At the beginning of Session Three, Coco greeted Emily and added, “So, I just kind of put another layer on here, I just wanted to make sure it was smooth.”

“Thank you,” Emily said, sounding sincere, “I appreciate it.”

“It’s always such a pain when there’s like a, big gaps you know, like that,” gesturing to a small flaw on the now hardened shell. “That’s tiny, but I think there were some big ones so I was just being extra … papier mâché cray-cray” Coco broke into contagious laughter at her own joke.
“Papier mâché cray-cray?” I repeated. She nodded, still laughing, and Emily and I joined in.

“I think it’s good, it’s fine to paint over too.” Wiping at her eyes and still smiling, Coco refocused on the art. Emily smiled. “OK, awesome.” Coco revealed the large selection of acrylic paints, and Emily began selecting her colors and mixing them on a Styrofoam plate.

The session proceeded with Emily quietly painting, and Coco checking in from time-to-time to offer advice. Reading increasing resistance in Emily’s responses, Coco’s input became less advice-driven and more supply oriented, such as offering clean water for her brushes or a blow dryer to speed up the drying of each coat of paint.

After several long stretches of consultation with Jessica, and with time in Session Three running low, Coco returned to touch base with Emily. “How you doing? Is that a fun surface to paint on?” she asked, smiling.

Laughing, Emily replied “Pretty good. It’s a bit hard but,” she laughed again. “I’m a horrible painter. It’s one of those things I always felt I should work on but I don’t really like it. Some day. Someday I’ll actually practice it and start liking it maybe.” The piece looked nearly complete, completely covered in a deep blue paint with colorful detail added back in.

“What do you think you’ll work on on Wednesday?” I asked, wondering what else she had planned for her project. “Do you want to do more with this or…”

Once again she began to speak before my question was out. “Um, Well I’ll finish that up and then I guess I might have extra time so maybe I’ll start something else?” I nodded. “Oh,” Emily continued, “we’ll see.” I encouraged her to make some sketches in
her journal in order to maximize our time in the last session if she wanted to do a second piece. “Ok,” she agreed, “yeah I’ll think about it.”

**Session Four**

We began Session Four under the assumption that Emily was all but finished with her papier mâché. “What do we feel about this guy?” Coco asked, “is it done or does it need touchups or anything?”

“Not quite,” Emily said. “Actually I was wondering, do you have like modeling clay or anything to make little like spheres out of to stick on there? I could even use Play-Doh, I don’t care.” She added, laughing.

“Yeah I’ve got some clay that’s kind of buried I’m sure I can go grab it, I think I have a couple different things.”

Coco disappeared into the storage room and rummaged around for a few minutes. Emily fussed with her project, turning it this way and that, silently planning her approach. Coco returned with modeling clay, which ended up being rather dry, and various tubs of colored Play-Doh. Emily chose the colored dough as her medium, and began shaping spheres the size of large marbles to represent the students, little people on her three dimensional classroom.

“What do you think about the size of those guys?” Coco asked. “I was thinking they’re maybe a little too big what’s your, what’s your take?”

“Uh, I think they’re about right.”

“Are they good?”

“They might be a little bit big, I can reshape them.”
“I was just thinking if there’s a lot then it might take over the whole surface, so maybe you can use those scissors and cut them down?”

Emily paused, and then agreed. “Yeah, that’s true, that’s true.”

Within about an hour, the spheres were shaped and, although not nearly dry, fixed to the project using hot glue. These spheres would fall off, crack, and be re-glued multiple times between this moment and the gallery showing.

“Well that looks weird enough,” Emily proclaimed. “I’m gonna call it good,” she added, and laughed.

Figure 3. “Teaching Styles,” a progression of art created by Emily. 15” X 21” Papier mâché and acrylic.

Emily’s Interview

In the visual portrait I created to represent Emily, I focused on her organized and analytical style. In “Emily” (Figure 4), I created a piece intended to be read as a technical manual. I went out of my way to make each aspect of the piece make sense, with subtle attempts at humor hidden below the more ridged surface, and tying the two sides together with uniform washes. The piece represents Emily’s theoretical focus on how art is made and disconnection from why art is made.
Emily seemed to have difficulty thinking metaphorically about her service, and despite her perfectionist tendencies rushed the steps of her project. I discovered later that she did not have a specific metaphor in mind as she created her representation of teaching styles. The metaphor came after, and was articulated in our final interview.

Figure 4. “Emily,” a visual portrait. 18” X 24” Watercolor and Ink.

An appropriate bookend for our interaction, we met on a bitterly cold snowy morning at another coffee shop, this time off campus. The Wild Boar is popular with college-students both for its variety of food and beverage offerings and for its homey feel and rambling layout. We found a quiet room with French doors to block out some of the noise from the espresso machines, games being played, and conversations being had. Emily sipped an Irish breakfast tea with milk, and I sipped light roast coffee and nibbled on a gluten free muffin while we visited.
“The weird sculpture-ey thing that I wound up making kind of looked like, to me, like a pinball machine or a gumball machine,” she said, “which I liked cause it’s like, you know, lots going on, lots of different things and they’re kind of bouncing around and chaos but hopefully purposeful chaos.” I thought this an interesting metaphor for service and for teaching art. There are times when such projects seem to spiral into chaos, and you are left to hope that, when all is said and done, you will be able to find meaning and purpose in the experience.

Curious about her perception of the dynamic she shared with Coco, I asked

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but I don’t feel like you and Coco had the opportunity to really talk about where you were going with your piece in the same way that she and Jessica talked about her piece, or the way you and I talked about your piece, for that matter.”

“We did, I think we did talk about it, um, well after I had made the sketch and before I started on the sculpture and then I think, I don’t know if we talked about it before I made the sketch but…”

I pushed her here, having recently listened to the recordings and coded data from the art sessions, I was unfairly familiar with the timeline and conversations. “Well, you and I talked quite a bit, but Coco didn’t hear the stories behind your sketches. Going back through and listening to the recordings, she was uncertain about sizes and shapes and why you were doing what you were doing.”

“Which is, I think, fair enough,” she paused to sip her tea and laugh. “Because I had a very specific idea, um, and she was kind of a little bit hesitant about it because it wasn’t like um, I don’t know, it was kind of a strange idea so, fair enough.” She indicated, then, that their miscommunication was because Coco did not agree with her
concept, rather than the perception Coco and I both had, which was that Emily never fully articulated her ‘very specific idea.’

“I read that completely differently.” I continued, wondering how far I could push her in this line of reflection. She continued to stare at her lukewarm tea and tap at invisible smudges on the table. “I don’t think she thought it was a strange idea, I think that her hesitancy was more a misunderstanding of what you were doing because she hadn’t heard any of our conversation.”

I paused, took a bite of my muffin, and picked up my coffee cup. “Umm, maybe,” she finally said, lingering on every syllable. She sounded unconvinced, but was too polite to verbally disagree. I let Emily think for a moment, hoping she would continue, and after another sip of her tea she did. “I mean we didn’t talk about it that much, um, and I guess we could have done but I don’t know that that would have um changed what I made.”

“Oh, no,” I interjected quickly, “and I’m not suggesting that it should have! But let’s switch shoes and put you in the role of Coco. You want to help your student develop her piece, what would you do differently?”

“I mean I guess like you’re right, like talk to them more about it um … I don’t know, it’s a different like purpose to the art making than I’ve seen before. I don’t know.” She seemed to be growing increasingly uncomfortable. Rather than her usual languid way of injecting space between words, the speed of her sentences was accelerating. “I guess personally I was like ‘well I guess I don’t need to talk to anybody else about changing it because it should just be how did I think about this’ but I, I don’t know.”
I felt I had wrung as much as I could from the topic, and changed tack, hoping to reestablish common ground. I nodded, “You’re definitely on point with saying that it’s about how you thought about an experience.”

“It’s funny isn’t it though, because we’re trying to like portray something just visually but then I can’t just say ‘look’ you know?” She paused and laughed. “Words are so necessary to describe any experience to another person.”

“I think that even words are inadequate to describe an experience to someone,” I countered, “because the experience is personal.” Almost out of politeness rather than earnest agreement, she hesitated and then replied “yeah.”

“The goal through the art is not to create a literal representation” I continued, wanting to bring her along on this reflexive journey. “How do you, how would you ever create a literal visual representation of a feeling? The goal all along was to increase the opportunity for you to think about what you learned and find a new way to talk it.”

“Hmm” she replied, staring into her now cold and empty teacup. “Yeah, I think it, it helped with that. So. Yeah.”
Berna’s Portrait

Berna and I met at The Artery for our first meeting and to sign informed consent. It was early February, and unseasonably warm. Coco was also present for this initial meeting, which proved helpful in starting everyone off on the same foot. Berna came to this research, a retired probation officer, with 20 years of experience with service through a Restorative Justice (RJ) program. The three of us sat at a café table on a busy Monday morning, and Coco and I listened as Berna described RJ and the scope of her involvement over the years.

“So, what is, um, what is Restorative Justice?” Coco asked.

“The focus of RJ,” she explained, “is on rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with all impacted parties. In RJ, crime is more than a broken law. Crime is harm against real people and communities. So, RJ provides an opportunity for offenders and victims to come together, for victims to have their questions answered, and for the offenders to become fully accountable”

“OK, that’s really interesting. And needed. Can you talk about your role or the service, or maybe some of your cases?”

“Sure. I love to share about the RJ work I do and the cases I’ve been in.” Berna spoke with practical confidence. She had bountiful experience with service through RJ believed in the philosophy behind the program. “I learned about RJ, um, wow. Over 20 years ago at a “Real Justice” training sponsored by the school district. I was working as a probation office at the time. Soon after the training I did my first RJ circle. The case involved a kid who had skipped on a taxi fare. And um, I was impressed, you know? I
had all this experience with the justice system, but the system does so little to heal harm
or answer questions.”

Coco and I were quiet, sure there was more that Berna had to say, allowing her
the space to say it.

“So after that first case, I dove in. I helped develop the RJ task force for Larimer
County, I became the RJ coordinator at probation and parole. Let’s see. From there I
helped develop the ‘Impact of Crime ‘class.”

“What is that, the ‘Impact of Crime?’” I asked.

“Oh, it’s a 3-month course for offenders, and the goal is to increase their empathy
toward the victim,” she explained. “Um, I also helped start RJ in Fort Collins, and the
RESTORE program, which is specifically for shoplifting cases. Um,” she paused,
wanting to give an accurate picture of the scope of her involvement. “I also train and
mentor volunteers. So yeah, I’ve done a lot. I mean, I’ve facilitated conferences ranging
from theft to DUI to vehicular homicide.” She thought for another moment, shifting in
her chair. “So, I wanted to make sure, because I know how research can be particular,
and I wanted to make sure that this service counts, because some of it was for work
before I retired. I mean, it was connected to work, but it wasn’t, I didn’t get paid, you
know? I can always talk about the work that I did but I wanted to be true to your study.”

“Yeah,” I responded, “I appreciate that. But I definitely think this works, I mean,
you have ample service experience, and if you think you can make meaning out of that
experience through art, I say let’s go for it.” Berna smiled and nodded.

“Yeah,” Coco, chimed in, “and what mediums are you comfortable with? Or what
do you have experience with?”
“Well, I’m not an artist like the two of you,” she said.

I was surprised that, without even seeing any of my work she elevated me to the status of ‘artist’ over ‘researcher.’ “Oh, that’s ok,” I fumbled my response, “it’s more about the process really.”

“Mhmm. Well, I do a lot of beading and some wire work. So maybe a sculpture? I’m not sure, do I have to decide now?”

“Oh no, of course not.” Coco replied.

As I had done with all Jess and Emily, I gave Berna a list of questions and a visual journal and encouraged her to think about what she had learned, to try to come up with a metaphor for learning through service, and then we set the times for our art classes.

**Session One**

Berna completed all of the suggested homework before our first session. She watched the suggested video clips and wrote answers to the list of research questions in her visual journal. For all other Jess and Emily, project planning took the form of sketches in journals; for Berna, the process was more dynamic. One reason for this difference was the circumstance of her being the only participant in the Wednesday afternoon art based research sessions. Over the course of the four sessions, her project became ‘our’ project, with Coco and I assuming assistant roles as Berna thought aloud and worked her way through the piece. Another reason for this difference was her familiarity with physical, three-dimensional creations. Rather than sketches in her journal, Berna arrived at Session One with a brown gift bag filled with inspiration.

She started pulling items from the paper bag, describing them one by one. There were beaded charms, metal supplies, aluminum cut into interesting shapes, and
interesting patterns that had caught her eye. “And then this is from a beer can, I cut these out two weeks ago and hadn’t done anything with them. The pattern is from New Belgium’s Dayblazer, their new Mexican Lager. I thought the symbol on the can was really cool.”

“Yeah, I like that,” Coco said.

“This is, well I tried to cut something out but I didn’t,” she frowned indicating dissatisfaction with the result.

“Metal is hard to work with,” Coco said.

“Yes, it is.” Berna agreed, and laughed.

“Did you have a chance to do some sketches or come up with some ideas?”

“No, I didn’t. But you’re welcome to look at what I have.” She passed me her journal, and I flipped through several pages of notes, almost a bulleted list of her extensive involvement with RJ. “It’s not very great,” she added, “But I’m gonna do something about RJ. I have one case in mind. It was a three-year case, and then it was probably,” she sighed, “probably three years ago that I finished, so it was at least six years back. Is that timeframe ok?”

I nodded, appreciative of Berna’s attention to detail. “One thing I’ve found in this process is that people are coming to me with a specific memory that they want to explore through art, and that memory might not fit within my ‘one year’ guideline, but that’s ok. I think that the process is more useful if the memory is vivid, but who am I to say that a powerful experience six years back is any less vivid than maybe a less-powerful but more recent experience. Does that make sense?”
Berna was nodding as I spoke. “Ok. Can I tell you more about that case? I have been thinking about how these three lives kind of intersected.”

“Yeah, I’d love to hear,” Coco prompted.

Berna proceeded to weave the details of the case into her idea for the sculpture. “It was a DUI that resulted in a horrible crash” she began. “So I was thinking about a wire for the offender, we’ll call him ‘Joe.’ So a wire with Joe’s journey, and then these other two people, a woman in her 40’s and her mother. They kind of collided and got entangled for a while and then went their separate ways and then came back together.” She used her hands to animate her story.

“Oh OK, interesting,” I urged her to continue.

“And then I was thinking if I add beads to the wire, that could represent their personal journey, and maybe show where they started out and then hopefully at the end they had more of their original colors back.”

“OK, yeah, I like that. Awesome.” Coco’s creative wheels were spinning as she listened.

“So form and color to represent a journey, or three journeys?” I asked.

“Right. And I was thinking the car crash could be a metal mesh, literally like a car crash. With the wire I can show them more enmeshed for a while, and then I don’t know, I’ve never done a sculpture before…” her voice trailed off.

“Neither have I,” I smiled. “We’re in it together. So, where the wires are enmeshed, is that the RJ process?”
“Yeah, well they came together but with different processes. The daughter had a restorative process directly face to face with Joe, and the mother her own kind of in-witting process with him, so it wasn’t as direct,” she clarified.

“Oh that’s interesting,” I said, and wondered aloud, “Were they both in the crash? Why did they have different processes in one case?”

“Yes, they were both victims, but the daughter was more injured. It was interesting because Joe thought initially that the mother was more injured because he knew she had an ankle injury. He truly did not know the extent of the daughter’s injuries until we had the conference. We had to prepare him, because she had a closed head injury and some serious and ongoing problems.”

“Wow.” The thought of such a serious crash hung heavy in the air. “And then, why didn’t the mother face him directly in RJ?” I asked, still curious about the different processes.

“Oh, well the mother was still upset with the legal system. She wanted Joe to go to church. She was stuck on that and was… well, was more difficult, I’ll put it that way.”

“Wait,” Coco said. “She wanted the judge to mandate church attendance?” She asked, surprised by the statement.

“Yes,” Berna answered with her whole face, blinking her eyes and nodding her head as punctuation.

“Wow.”

“So she put that in her written statement for sentencing and she said it in court, and the judge said ‘I think that’s a great idea but unfortunately we cannot order that somebody go to church’” Berna chuckled at the memory.
“A tactful response, I think.”

Berna continued, “so she was just, she was still really upset about that, but she had some questions so we just had her submit them in writing, which was so much better.”

Coco redirected the story to the sculpture. “And how would you describe the end? You said three journeys, coming together and then they collide, and then kind of go their own separate ways?”

“Yes, now they’ve all kind gone their own way. Although, he did send the daughter flowers.”

Coco raised her eyebrows, and Berna went on. “He had already been sentenced, he had gone to jail, he had done everything right. So, the only thing she wanted was for him to send flowers on the three-year anniversary of the crash. He sent her this beautiful bouquet, it must have cost $200. And then he did it again the next year just on his own, and again the next year, another huge bouquet of flowers.”

The weight of Joe’s gesture settled in the room.

“Ok,” Coco said. “For any piece, I always say start out with a sketch. So, we have these drawing pencils, colored pencils, markers,” she gestured at the stacked supplies in the center of the table. “But for 3-D, sometimes it’s helpful to get a feel for the form, so there’s those guys,” she pointed at a tub of pipe cleaners, twisty ties, and pom-poms. “But either way the idea is just a basic sketch.”

“Right,” Berna replied, scanning the table and taking in all her options. “I’m going to try a sketch I think, like a picture and see how it goes.”
“Great!” Coco said, shifting the colored pencils toward Berna. About ten minutes passed while Berna thoughtfully sketched and wrote in her journal. “So, what do you have there?” Coco asked.

“Well, what I have is Joe’s path here,” Berna used her finger to trace a fiery orange line, “literally colliding with the mother and daughter here,” She pointed to where the orange line intersected with two others, a blue and a purple. “This was the accident, here are the court things, and they were all going along with the court process.” On the other side of the brown lines indicating the court, Joe’s line changed to a more subtle, calm orange. “And then they all continued and went on with their life. I wrote ‘chaos’ here, ‘healing and understanding’ here, and then this is me here, in green. I felt I was a conduit that allowed them that opportunity. There would have been no other way that they could have come together except through a conference, and I feel that it’s a sacred honor that I can bring people together in a safe place, that people trust me with that.”

Coco and I nodded, our understanding of both the case and Berna’s vision for her sculpture beginning to gel for both of us. “Somehow I’m stuck on the flowers,” Coco said, thoughtfully. “That’s interesting that he would send flowers for, what did you say, several years after?”

“Yeah, three years, on the anniversary of the accident.”

“That’s so interesting. Maybe we could do something with that, like a bouquet?”

Coco stood up from the table and disappeared into the back storage area. After a few moments of rummaging, she reemerged with four or five long-stemmed craft flowers.
“Yeah,” Berna said, “I guess I’m stuck on the flowers too. You brought real flowers, but I was thinking…” she reached for a flower and turned the stem between her fingers. “What if we make metal flowers out of beer cans, because he was drunk?”

“Oh that’s a cool idea!” I said.

Coco laughed, and glancing at me with a sly, conspiratorial look on her face, turned to Berna. “We can have a weekend if you need us to contribute cans to the cause,” she said, tipping her head in my direction.

“That’s a big sacrifice!” she responded, laughing.

Berna pulled the wire mesh toward her, feeling its pliability, turning and bending it. Starting from the edge, she started rolling it tightly, creating a long, silver, snake-like tube.

“I like that idea,” Coco said. As the two experimented with the sculpting supplies, their sentences trailed off and they finished thoughts with hand gestures. “We can figure out if this is the beginning…and then how big the rest… it could go…we could add some length, too, if you wanted… or put the beginning information and then push it longer.”

Berna nodded, and cut the tube free from the mesh screen. “It worked pretty easily, that’s good. It goes quickly. What if…” she tested the integrity of the mesh, bending and folding the tube. “what if we had the two ends, kind of in the middle?”

“It does fold in on itself,” Coco observed.

“Yeah,” Berna agreed. “The one I do for Joe can be kind of chaotic because he was drinking.”

“Maybe how you do the string treatment on the different tubes, the mother and daughter could be more nicely knit to contrast Joe’s chaos.” Coco added.
Berna brought the ends of the long slender tube to meet. “This stuff is really pliable. Look at this.”

Session One was drawing to a close, and the conversation turned to supply acquisition. “I’ll pick up some more of that wire mesh, in case we need it.” Coco offered.

“And I’ll look for some flowers that I like, I was just thinking all the same, like a white or yellow bouquet.” Berna said and made a note in her journal.

“What if I do an Internet search for ‘how to make flowers out of beer cans?’” There might be a straightforward process and we could mass produce some?” I suggested.

“Oh, right,” Berna said, remembering the idea she had floated earlier. “That’s true I can do it out of beer cans.” Each of us turned to our smartphones, and within seconds were comparing images.

“Oh wow, look at this.” Coco held her phone to show an intricate and large flower made from a large iced tea can. “Now that, I think we would spend four classes just doing one flower!”

“Oh gosh, there are so many.” Berna said, scrolling through the images. “I put ‘How to make soda can flowers,’ not beer.”

“Here’s another one,” Coco said, again turning her phone so that we could see.” “I’m assuming that’s the base, and then cutting… so maybe put those in the middle of your flower and have the can around it. That could be cool too.” She looked up, caught Berna’s eye, and laughed. “Or if you want to find flowers…”

“No, I like the idea of the metal ones,” she smiled.
“Ok.” Coco responded. “Can you think of any other supplies that you’ll need?”

We made a plan for the next session, and Berna tucked the items she had brought back into the gift bag. “OK, thanks,” she said, standing from the table. I’ll see you next week.”

**Sessions Two and Three**

The next two sessions blurred together. Berna arrived with a pattern for beer can flowers, and several blue and yellow Dayblazer cans, dissected and ready to form into roses. Coco and I had also raided our recycling bins for back up supplies. Berna had originally planned to have the flowers be all the same, but it wasn’t long before the backup cans were thrown into the mix, and a mass of patterns and colors were formed into a bouquet of thirteen aluminum roses. This stunning aspect of the sculpture took all three of us working for two and a half sessions. Coco and I cleaned and cut the cans, measuring circles of varying sizes. I used scissors to snip small cuts into the circles, and round nosed pliers to shape them into petals. Berna punched holes and thread wire through, binding circles together and forming each flower to her liking.

As we worked, Berna spoke of new RJ cases she was working on and frequently mentioned the goings on in her family. These were pleasant and supportive studio sessions, where Coco and I worked to help realize the emerging vision of Berna’s sculpture.

**Session Four**

Half way through Session Four, we had used pliers and wire cutters to turn a pile of discarded beer cans into 13 roses, a handful of small buds, and a pile of green and yellow leafs. Berna spent some time personalizing the three wire mesh tubes to represent each person; the daughter, the mother, and Joe. Joe’s journey leading into the crash was
wrapped in blue wire and pegged with scraps of aluminum and tabs from the tops of the cans. The daughter’s journey was adorned with purple wire and hearts, and the mother’s with gold wire and Christian crosses.

“Ok,” Berna said, leaning back on her stool. “It looks like we only have an hour left, and I’m getting nervous about doing this top part. I think I need to work on that.”

“Yeah,” Coco agreed, “good plan. So, we want stems and flowers coming off the top end of the three journeys?” Berna nodded. “OK, do you have ideas about how to connect the flowers? Do you want them loose and scattered or?”

“I’m thinking all together, you know, have a whole big bouquet here.” She procured a Colorado license plate, folded in on itself, and snaked each journey through it, and then picked up a flower by its wire stem. “They’re pretty flimsy. We might need to reinforce them”

“Once you get those at a good position do you want to just glue them in place?” Coco asked, plugging in a hot glue gun.

“That’s probably a good idea,” Berna agreed, arranging the base to her liking. “It’s kind of like an RJ conference where you have to make sure everything is lined up… there. Would you hold those down for me please?”

I reached across the table and held the pieces in place with gentle pressure while she glued them. From there we all stood around the table and fill into a routine of weaving the wire stems through the mesh tubes and applying fair amount of hot glue in strategic places for added support. We muttered to each other in half sentences, our conversation accompanied by a steady hollow rustle of aluminum roses and deep intermittent bass of setting (or dropping) tools on the plastic table. At times, one or the
other of us broke into song, adding backup vocals to whatever was playing over the house speakers.

“Well, that’s the last little leaf,” Coco announced. “What do you think, Lindsay?”

“I think it looks great. The bouquet looks balanced, but I wonder if it needs more beer-can-chaos in that bottom right corner, more elements to weight the bottom half?”

“Mmhmm,” Berna intoned, pulling a crumpled PBR can toward her. After ramping up the symbolism of the crash, she added stronger visual elements to each of the journeys to ensure that they weren’t swallowed by the mass of flowers.

As Session Four ended, we stood back to survey our work. “Cool,” Coco exclaimed.

“Yeah,” I agreed.

Berna reached in to adjust the flowers. “I bet we’ll have to rearrange and re-glue a few things before the show.”


“Yeah, I’m happy with it.”

We began the studio cleanup, sorting tools, recycling unused cans, and picking up sharp corners of aluminum that had fallen neglected to the floor.

“Well, thank you for the lessons,” Berna said, and hugged me. “It was fun.”

“Thank you,” I replied, “it has been fun!”

She turned to Coco to hug and thank her as well. “I’ll see you at the art show?”

“Yeah! See you at the show!”
Figure 5. “Harm Transformed,” a progression of art created by Berna. Mixed media; wire and aluminum

**Berna’s Interview**

Berna’s metaphor for learning through service came from the RJ philosophy, ‘trust the circle.’ During our art sessions, she referenced the circle and the process multiple times, and expounded on it further in the final interview. In the portrait I painted of Berna (Figure 6), I incorporated circular, iterative, and human elements, using color to underscore the transition from harm to healing. The lack of eyes represents the RJ philosophy of setting aside your immediate perception of a situation and waiting to react. This requires that RJ participants become aware of the heuristics they typically apply, set them aside, and approach the situation from a new, perhaps uncomfortable position.

The circular, iterative, continuous line represents growth as the individuals changes perspective and deepens understanding through the RJ process. Each figure is facing a slightly different perspective, changing as they pass through the process. The more ideas and perspectives an individual is exposed to, the more she can grow.

The lines extend off the edge of the work to represent the ongoing nature of RJ. Nothing that Berna has done through RJ is a final answer to any one problem. She is in
effect providing the tools for people to restore the harm they caused through poor choices, but the onus is on the individual to use those tools going forward.

Figure 6. “Berna,” a visual portrait. 16” X 20” Oil on canvas.

Berna and I sat at a picnic table on the patio of The Artery. It was a sunny afternoon in late March, and I had ridden my bike to the meeting. My dog, Steadman, sat in the shade under the table, tired from the four-mile run and still damp from his romp in the river. He occasionally sniffed at Berna’s shins, and she reached down to pat his head and scratch his ears.

“Have you always been service oriented?” I asked. “I mean, twenty years is a long time to be volunteering with the same organization.”

“I think so,” she nodded. “When my kids were in school I volunteered, helping teachers with homework packets, you know, things I could do in the evenings because I
worked during the day. Um, I stay involved in service with my church, and of course RJ is community-based.”

“What is it about service that draws you in or keeps you coming back?”

“Well,” she leaned down to pet the dog. “I think it just makes me feel good, you know? I guess it gets me out of my routine. And people appreciate it you know? It just feels good to you know you’re doing something good and you’re helping people and becoming more connected to the community.”

“Yeah, that makes sense.” I agreed, and glanced at my list of interview questions. Because of how intimate the art sessions were, I felt she had already provided answers to my standard list. “Tell me about the process of creating the piece. Maybe some likes or frustrations from the art classes?”

“It felt a bit odd at first,” she admitted. “I guess it would have been nice to have another student so that the focus wasn’t always on me,” she laughed, “I mean, it was a little intense.” She laughed, and added “but like in RJ, I just decided to trust the circle.”

“Can you tell me more about the concept of the circle, and what it means to trust the circle?” I asked.

“Sure. A circle is never ending, right? So in RJ, we bring everyone who is at the meeting together to sit in circle. There’s no head of the table, no rows. Everybody can see everybody, and it’s an equal process. There are no tables, no barriers. And this way it is a collaboration. Each person offers their insight and experience. Everybody gets involved. In RJ, I might be the facilitator, but it isn’t MY process. It is our process, and it evolves. And since I’ve never done a group art project like this before, I decided to approach it like I would an RJ circle.”
“What a beautiful way to look at it, and I am relieved that you didn’t feel like Coco and I were commandeering your idea.”

“Oh, no,” she replied. I really appreciated the input, especially Coco’s help coming up with the design.”

“Did you find the visual journaling helpful at all in understanding learning through service?” I asked. I noticed that there were only a few pages that were marked on, and most of those were handwritten. Only two pages bore sketches, both done during the art sessions, and one page with a diagram of the dimensions for the aluminum roses.

“Um,” she paused, and then laughed, “no.”

I laughed along. “Journals are useful for me to process my understanding of a situation, um, is there something contemplative or meditative that you do that serves the same purpose?”

“Um, probably talking with my co-facilitator and processing it out. Also, before I have a circle or before I meet somebody I meditate to try to get into a good spot. It helps me remember to be open to the process before going into a circle. So I wrote in the journal, and I tried to draw, but it wasn’t particularly helpful. I think just doing the sessions is what worked best for me, understanding grew out of discussion and input from everybody.”

“And how did you feel about the final product?” I asked.

“I’m really excited about it. It isn’t what I imaged at the beginning, but I think it is better.”
Addy and Steph

Addy and Steph came to this research together. They became friends in August of 2016 when, as freshmen at CSU, they moved into neighboring dorm rooms. After exchanging introductory emails, the three of us arranged to meet at a student center on campus. We chatted briefly about the goal of the art sessions, and I learned that they were both involved in ongoing service through a social change and leadership program on campus.

During our brief meeting, Addy expressed interest in learning watercolor, and Steph said she would like to do an acrylic painting. The two young women navigated a surprisingly complex transit system to travel the two miles from campus to VanCo School of Art. Our art sessions took place on Thursday evenings in the last few weeks of winter.

Addy’s Portrait

At the time of our research, Addy was a zoology major, with plans to pursue a career in animal behavior research. Speaking in a steady, quiet voice, she summarized what brought her to the research and her recent experiences with service.

“My social change group was originally going to work toward getting Internet to the north side of Fort Collins, because that’s a huge problem, but that was a little bit too big for us. So instead we are working with Foco Café raising money.” Foco Café is a not-for-profit, pay what you can restaurant that provides affordable access to nutrient-dense food for economically struggling people in the Fort Collins area. “We are helping them get an outdoor water fountain that goes below the frost line so it can be used all year round so that people have access to clean water in the winter.”
“Oh,” Coco exclaimed, “That’s awesome. So are you wanting to focus on this fundraising service for your painting?”

“I was kind of hoping to go like back, because I worked at ‘Ride to Walk’ in California and it’s basically an equine facility. They help children and any adults with either mental or physical disabilities. I was a horse leader there. Well, I also did grooming, tacking, and haltering. But as horse leader I lead the horses in the programs and then I actually became barn manager part time. The children that came in had varying disabilities, like, some physical and some mental, and you know, a wide range. A horse’s gait matches our own, so that builds up strength and mobility, but I also saw how the horses could give this peace and calming energy. Anyway, that was when I was in high school, and it is a huge part of what makes me love community service so much.”

“Oh that’s great,” Coco said, nodding. “How long did you serve with that program?”

“Well, I did service for like two months, and then they hired me as a part time manager.” As a 16-year-old, Addy supervised the other volunteers, most of whom were older than her, and some of whom could have been her grandparents. Her gift and comfort with the horses made her right for the position. “In fact, besides like the manager of the program, I was the only person that could work with Ranger, a giant Frisian mix that had high anxiety.”

“That sounds like a really incredible experience,” Coco said. “So, to start with the art, we’d like to create post cards about your service project that you wish you had sent. So either you could illustrate one side and then tell a story or describe a good day or
a maybe even a bad day on the back. The idea is to reflect on your memory of the service.”

“Is this supposed to be about our current service project we’re doing?

“Ideally it is about the service you’ll be doing your larger art piece about,” I clarified, “so think about what aspects of that experience you would like to develop further for the larger piece. Oh, and also it’s a good opportunity to try out new mediums.”

“Yeah, we’ve got water color, pencils, and markers when you’re ready. But I'm definitely a big believer in sketching it out first. Kind of a warm up for the warm up,” Coco added, laughing. “You can use your journals to sketch it out or kind of brainstorm first.”

The studio was quiet but for music coming through the walls from The Artery’s event stage. Addy thoughtfully make some sketches and notes in her journal. About 15 minutes passed, before Coco asked, “How are you doing on your post card, Addy? What are you thinking?”

“Well, pretty basic so far,” she responded, still sketching in her journal. “How long are you planning this warm up to take? I need a time limit.”

Laughing, Coco turned to me. “I don’t know, what do you think, Lindsay?”

“I think we have two goals for today, the warm up activity, and then make a plan or maybe start a sketch for what you want to represent through your watercolor. That way when we come in next week we have a skeleton and we can move forward with adding in the color. It’s amazing how quickly the four sessions go, so it’s important to try to maximize our time.” We settled on 30-45 minutes for the warmup, and then project planning for the rest of the session.
“That’s a great horse, Addy,” I remarked, watching her brush color onto her postcard.


“Horses are hard though,” Coco

“I’ve drawn a horse so many times you’d think I’d be pretty good at it by now,” Addy returned.

“Well, I think it’s great,” I affirmed. “And remember that everything we do in these classes is more about the process than the end result. So, tying to accept this piece as it is, but think about what can you take from it as you move forward with your next piece.”

“Ok,” Addy smiled, and added a few finishing touches to the child, reaching up to touch the soft muzzle of the horse.

“Why does it say ‘magic’?” I asked.

“Well, it says ‘experience the magic,’” Addy corrected. “I was just thinking about like, the experience, because, like, the bond and the empathy between the horses and the children. It was transforming. Like, magic.”

**Session Two**

Addy arrived to Session Two with a stack of pictures, printed in grayscale from a campus lab, and several pages of her journal filled with sketches and notes. “What did you come up with?” I asked.

“It was just amazing working with the kids and that’s really where I wanted to pull from. So I started with writing down some words first, I was thinking a lot about the transformation, so I thought of magic and connection. So, I drew a horse, and then I
zoomed in and just drew the horse’s eye and a person’s eye for the bond.” She showed me corresponding pages in her journal as she spoke. “Um, and then I drew Disneyland,” she pointed to a castle with fireworks in the sky above it, laughing, “because it makes me think of magic.”

“And then I was thinking and looking at images trying to get ideas.” She turned to the pile of printed images and pulled out a picture of two people in business attire facing each other in profile, with gears floating in the air between their minds. “So, I found this one and I think that’s what I kind of want to do, but instead it will have a child facing a horse, with some kind of wispiness in the middle or something. So, I’m thinking like, half abstract, half realism. I’m taking baby steps for myself.”

“And what do you mean, wispiness?” Coco asked.

“Um, I don’t know, like trying to show magic. Maybe some kind of sparklers of something.” Addy turned back to the drawings she had made of the horse and human eyes. “My person eye kind of sucks, but that one I was really proud of,” she said, confidently displaying her journal for us to get a closer look.

“That’s really great!” Coco affirmed. “What does it say at the bottom of the eye?”

“Um, ‘Eyes are the Window to the Soul,’ because that’s, like, where I got the connection idea.”

“I really like that eye,” Coco said, now holding Addy’s Journal. “So of course you’ll do the eye when you do the horse too, but one thing to consider maybe you could really zoom in on the eye and have that fill the whole paper, and then we could put the reflection of a child or some children in the eye, and even figure out how to add that magic element around it.”
“OK, yeah,” Addy sounded intrigued but uncertain.

“So that’s just one option, but whatever you choose. Don’t feel like you have to blow us away with this abstract art piece. Do whatever feels right to you.”

“Yeah,” Addy replied, laughing, “that’s why I say baby steps with this kind of thing. I don’t think I’ll ever get to a super abstract point but I’d like to work with it more because I’d like to challenge myself.”

“I just love to paint eyes,” Coco admitted. “So you could also develop around the eye, you know, add the hair and texture and blend all of that, and then the child might be in maybe reaching out of the horse? I don’t know it’s of hard to figure out how far to really take that, but leave it all soft around the edges and then maybe add the spark and original whimsy to it.”

“Yeah, that would be cool,” Addy said, fidgeting with her journal.

“Like I said, I just love to paint eyes,” Coco laughed.

“Yeah that would be way cool,” Addy said, getting on board with Coco’s vision.

“I was really impressed with myself when I did this because, like, I’ve drawn horses but I’ve never paid this much attention to the eye and I was like ‘wow this turned out really cool.’ How big is the watercolor paper?”

“I have to go look for it real quick, but I know I can get paper at least up to like that size,” she pointed at a large drawing board leaning against the window. “We can really blow it up, and then just figure out what position the child would be in for the reflection.”

“That sounds difficult,” Addy admitted, “but really cool. Could you direct me as to how to put a reflection of somebody in the eye?”
“That’s what I’m here for!” Coco laughed, and struck a pose, lifting her shoulders and tipping her head to the side, hands on her waist, wrists in, fingers to the sky, with a exaggerated smile on her face.

Addy laughed along. “Cause that seems hard to me.”

“I know that’s why I was like I might Google that but we can start at least with everything else big and then we can focus on that.”

Coco and Addy spent the remainder of Session Two finding close up photographs of horses’ eyes through Internet and social media searches. Coco taped a large piece of cold pressed watercolor paper to a drawing board, and Addy faintly drafted a close up image of a horse’s eye, working to figure out proportions and angles. I demonstrated various watercolor techniques, showing Addy how to cover large areas with uniform colors, and how the pigment sits differently when added to wet paper instead of dry. She practiced, but seemed more comfortable working small areas and blending immediately rather than building up color. Before leaving, she added a light wash of golden brown to the area surrounding the eyelid.

Sessions Three and Four

Throughout Sessions Three and Four, Addy worked slowly, with care and intention to capture details everywhere but within the actual eye. A white space the size of a dinner plate at the center of the painting became the object of conversation and frustration. She frequently asked if she should start painting it, apprehensively asking advice, and then choosing instead to add more detail to the eyelid.

“So, now how are we gonna do the reflection?” she asked once again, as Coco came to stand behind her, assessing her progress.
“That’s awesome, right through there,” Coco pointed to the newly applied purple and gray wrinkles in the inner eye before answering. “I think it would be a good idea to do a sketch and maybe figure out the pose,” Addy nodded, fidgeting with the paintbrush in her hands. “What do you think would be a good pose for it? Are you wanting it to be kind of Escher style, like reaching out at the viewer? Or more of a reflection of a person hanging out?”

“Oh jeez,” Addy replied, “I’m like nervous to do that.”

To help ease Addy’s nerves, we suggested that she do some sketches either in her journal or on scrap paper. Watercolor is somewhat less forgiving than other mediums, considering you cannot paint over mistakes and start over like you can with acrylic or oils. This constraint added to the pressure keeping Addy from diving in to the centerpiece of the work. It was with this constraint in mind that we decided to practice using masking fluid combined with the method of adding salt to freshly applied washes to create a speckled, sparkling effect, the suggestion of magic or whimsy.

Session Four wound down and the painting still featured a large area of negative space, smack in the center. Addy had already agreed to return for a fifth session, which would take place approximately two weeks after Session Four. In that time, Addy had Spring Break and planned to visit her parents in California. She committed to taking her journal along to practice drawing the suggestion of figures in different poses in preparation for her final session.

Session Five
“Wow,” she said as we set up for our Session Five. “I forgot there’s like so many
different colors on this.”

“I love it!” Coco proclaimed in passing, moving to the other side of the room to
help Steph set up.

“Yeah, it really looks great,” I agreed.

“Purple and peach and brown,” Addy laughed, the white space gaping up at us. “I
wanna do the eye and then I can finish the rest,” she laughed, “cause I wanna see what it
looks like with the eye and then I can figure all this out.”

“I love all this detail through here, that’s really nice.” I pointed to the lovely
wrinkles below the eyelid.

“Well, thanks,” she said, uncomfortably accepting the compliment.

“I’d like your help in deciding where this sparkly stuff should go too, because,
with the people in there, I don’t want it to not look like an eye.” Addy was rifling
through the pages in her journal that bore the work she had done over the break, small
horse eyes drawn in pencil and shaded with brown and yellow, human figures placed in
the bottom left. “I was trying, well, it’s kind of hard to relate that with like pencil, you
know? Cause I didn’t have watercolor with me. I don’t like the arms of that one,” she
added.

“Coco what do you think,” I asked, drawing her back in to the consultation.

“Yeah I was about to say, I like the arms on there,” Coco pointed to one of the
three figures in the sketch, “but then that one looks aggressive, like,” she jumped into a
fencing posture, and laughed. “Make sure, it’s a reach but that it doesn’t look like a
forceful, aggressive reach. It’s a fine little line.”
Addy nodded and laughed at Coco’s antics. “I think I should keep them more over to the side, too, because that’s where more of the shading comes in on the eye, through there.”

“Mhmm, that makes sense,” Coco agreed, “I am believing that one a little bit more as an eye. Maybe then, if the figures are down here, the sparkles and magic can wrap up around the side?” She pointed to the right edge of the eyeball in Addy’s sketch.

Addy spent a nearly an hour creating yet another sketch. She practiced masking areas and painting over them, creating a mockup of her plan. I looked through her sketches and at her mockup. “I don’t think you really need much detail in the reflection. Maybe the figures could be slightly darker toward the bottom and then a little bit lighter as they go up, but don’t stress too much about the detail,” I advised. I felt the time in our make-up session slipping quickly away, and wanted Addy to apply what she had been practicing for several weeks to her composition.

“Ok. What if I, like, block the figures with that masking fluid, and then we can add some more color after if it looks like too solid of an outline? You know, just so they stay light, and see what that looks like?”

“Sure, that works,” I nodded. I wanted to encourage her decision-making while pushing her to start on her actual painting.

“OK, I’m just gonna draw it like that because it doesn’t need to… should I practice that first?”

“No,” I said definitively. “Let’s just do it.”

“OK, she laughed. “I’m tired of like, waiting. But now I like the way this looks.”

She held the mockup gingerly in her hands as she moved to face her larger work. Using
watercolor pencil, she lightly sketched the figures into the blank space, finally addressing the crux of her work. I assisted her with masking the eyelashes, and encouraging bolder application of color, partially to save time and partially to push her into a more robust feel for the medium.

Coco checked in from time to time, peaking over Addy’s shoulder as they eye finally took shape. “Yes, this is looking great!” she cheered. “What do you think of adding a really light blue, just maybe around here?”

“Oh, yeah.” I agreed, “a glassy blue.”

“Sure,” Addy laughed incredulously and looked at us to gauge whether we were putting her on. “No, I trust you guys.”

“So, if anything the reflection would have some sky to it.” Coco explained as we searched the palettes for the perfect hue.

Addy mixed blue into a pool of water on her palette, and cautiously applied a water line of above the pupil. “You need more pigment,” I smiled.

Coco laughed. “I thought that was just water, so yes, I also vote more blue.”

Addy dipped her brush and tested the color on a thick piece of thick paper, effectively draining the brush’s reservoir of pigment before adding it to the painting. “OK, good color, but dip it again. You just lost all the pigment out of your brush,” I prodded.

“Ok,” Addy said, and held her breath as she added the reflected sky into the eyeball.

“Cool,” Coco cheered, “I think that just came to life with that blue!”
“That made a huge difference.” Addy sounded relieved and amazed. “It like, looks like an eyeball now.”

*Figure 7.* “Eye to Eye.” A progression of the art created by Addy. 23” X 30” Watercolor.

**Addy’s Interview**

Addy’s project focused on the connection between the therapy horses and the children with whom she worked, and she often spoke about the powerful transformation she felt as a result of her experience. In the visual portrait I created to represent Addy (Figure 8), I worked to incorporate two important sides of her; a reserved, soft spoken, somewhat introverted young woman, and a self-confident individual, ready for new challenges.

This piece is about connection and transition; the things we hold on to and the things we grasp at or hope to attain. The figure in the painting is in a state of transition, because service is a catalyst for change, but that change is not dichotomous. The three body positions show a passive, introverted aspect of Addy’s personality and an open, adventurous aspect, with her current state merging the two. The vibrant background represents service, the catalyst of Addy’s transformation. Those colors can be seen in the line merging Addy’s current state to her idealized open state, but there are also other
colors in that transition because, no matter how powerful the catalyst, you still need fuel for a fire.

![Addy, a visual portrait. 31” X 25” Oil on Canvas](image)

**Figure 8.** “Addy, a visual portrait. 31” X 25” Oil on Canvas

The figure looking out at the viewer is in a self-confident, thoughtful pose. She does not see where she is headed necessarily, but she knows it is happening. These elements represent Addy’s awareness of her introverted nature and active commitment to growing away from those limitations. It also represents the limitations that thought without action can have during such a transition.

Addy and I scheduled a Friday afternoon for her final interview. We chose the same meeting location as our first interaction, and sat at a table in an open space in the nearly empty building. Shortly after beginning our conversation, a student decided to play pool at one of the nearby tables, so we moved to a quiet study room. “Do you feel
you learned more about yourself and your service experience through this art process?” I asked. “Through this,” I tapped the cover of her journal, “and through doing the watercolor?”

“Oh yes,” Addy stated emphatically. “It made me think about it all in a different way. When I had been asked about it before it was like ‘what service did you do and how long did you do it and what did you do’ you know? And so this made me have to more critically think about my own transformation.”

“Can you tell me more about what you learned about that transformation? How are you different because of your service?”

“Well, my personal transformation is I found more confidence in myself because I, I was put into a new experience that I thought I would kill everybody,” she laughed, “and…”

“Wait, what do you mean? What a terrifying thought!”

“Oh, well when I first started volunteering at Ride to Walk, I felt really uncomfortable, like out of balance. I only had two trainings, and one of them, like, didn’t even apply to me because it was for side walkers and I was a horse leader. The other training was getting comfortable with their horses and how to actually lead.”

“What’s a side walker?” I asked.

“They just like, walk beside the horse while you’re doing a session, like for support.”

“Oh. So you were a horse leader?”

“Yeah, and um, I was thrown into leading my first time. My boss basically just handed me the lead rope and halter and said, ‘okay, go get your first kid.’ So I walked to
the mounting block and I was confused and uncomfortable and like, really anxious. I had this image of me losing control of the horse and the kid like, falling off.” She laughed at the memory. “But somehow I was calm on the outside and I focused on keeping the horse calm, because I had this kid, this actual human child to take care of.”

“I see what you mean now. That’s a lot of responsibility!” I interjected.

“Yeah, definitely,” Addy laughed. “But, um, it ended up working out fine and I felt more confidence slowly build up. And then the other thing is that like, two months after my first day my boss offered me a supervising position on her days off. She kept telling me how gifted I am in communicating with the horses. And I ended up working there for I think it was just over two years.” She paused briefly, thinking about her transformation.

“I saw like so many kids grow. And also the horses, I could see their transformation too because some of them came from abusive or traumatic circumstances. Like, one of them was a police horse so he was pretty spook-proof, but he was anxious around men and wasn’t very trusting. But over time he knew he was in a safer place so he grew too. So I think that like, I just saw a lot of physical and mental and emotional growth. I remember this one girl came in and she was like slouched over and her knees were bent and she could barely walk, and after one 30-minute session, she got off the horse and she had good posture and walked down the ramp like right afterwards.”

“Oh, wow,” I said, “so you could see a pretty immediate difference?”

“Yeah and so that was like one of my first experiences seeing that, and I was like ‘oh my gosh I’m in love with this now.’”
“Do you think your new understanding of this transformation influences how you approach service going forward?” I asked, hoping to facilitate the reflexive connection between her learning and her current and future engagement.

“Um,” she sat in thought. “I think it’s taught me to be open to more experiences. I feel like I take more opportunities now, like especially here in college. Like things that sound like, challenging I’m more open to doing because I gained confidence from that experience. And then every single thing I’ve tried I’ve liked, so that motivates me to keep doing it. I guess sometimes I still doubt myself, but working with the horses and the children and watching them make that emotional bond, that helped me be more confident and more like, open to new experiences.”

“That’s great, Addy,” I said, admiring her self-awareness and willingness to step into new challenges. I looked down at my list of interview questions, and then asked, “What metaphor for learning did you arrive at?” I asked, aware that my question was poorly worded. She seemed to struggle with question, so I tried a different approach.

“Imagine that your piece is up at the gallery and there’s somebody who is unfamiliar with the project that just walks through and looks at it, what do you hope that they understand or feel based on your painting?”

“I hope they can like understand the magic that happened, and the transformation between the children and the horses. Um, and maybe like, see the connection between them because that was so important and it made me able to connect more with both the child and the horse. So I want people to be able to feel that connection, if that makes sense.”
Steph’s Portrait

Steph is originally from Chihuahua, Mexico. She moved with her family to the United States when she was three years old, and after a brief stay in Los Angeles, the family made their way to Greeley, Colorado, where they still reside. Steph is close with her family, and frequently mentioned her mom and sister during art sessions. At the time of this research, Steph was a freshman at CSU in pre-Interior Design. She was working on campus in New Student Orientation, and the experience had motivated her to think about changing majors to a more human service focus.

“Alright,” Coco settled onto the stool at the head of the craft table after greeting Steph for the first time. “I’m kind of in the dark with you other than I hear you want to learn acrylic?” Steph nodded, and Coco continued, “So tell me about your background or what brought you to doing the art program with us?”

“Um, well I heard this through Addy, and she heard it through the Presidential Leadership Program, PLP.” Steph spoke in a confident, steady tone, and often punctuated her responses with laughter. “They send out emails of opportunities. And um, we’re all involved in a social change project this semester so service is like, one of the requirements for this. And also I thought it sounded so cool because I’ve been wanting to get back into art in some form.”

“Oh, OK, cool. What kind of service are you doing through, uh, through PLP?”

“Well, my group decided to go to into some middle schools and we are planning to bring back after school programs that were cut off because of low funding, so some art classes, music, orchestra, you know all that extra practice time. We’re more focused on
at-risk youth, and it’s all about just bringing those programs back. So a lot of what we will be doing is fundraising and stuff.”

“Oh, so am I understanding that the projects haven’t happened yet?” Coco asked.

“Yeah, I mean we’ve started planning, and we have deadlines and stuff coming up, but in March is kind of when we start taking action,” Steph clarified. “We’ve already had a meeting with a couple middle schools to see what’s available and there’s one school we’ll focus on because they have more of a flexible schedule, like we can even go during their lunches. But yeah, we’re just trying to set up times. We’ve set up a kind of a routine so we would do art this day and then we would do, uh, focus on the fundraiser on this day and then yeah, go on from there.”

“And do you think you’ll focus on the stuff that’s coming up or reflect back on any of your past service for your piece?” Coco asked

“Um, I don’t know,” Steph laughed. “I worked a lot in Greeley with the Boys and Girls Club and it was awesome, I mean like I tutored a lot of kids, and it was like, amazing. But I don’t know, for this class I think I want to maybe focus on this current project.” Steph paused, and then asked, “I mean, do I have to choose now?”

“Oh no,” Coco answered, “you still have some time. Let’s start with a warm up to kind of get focused on the service and also get comfortable with the different mediums. So, we’re going to create postcards about our service,” she said, passing out pre-cut pieces of cardstock. “Usually for this warmup I say, ‘create a post card you wish you had sent,’ but since your service is ongoing, think about one you could send.”

“And this is about my current service?” Steph asked.
“I think that the idea is to build toward your painting,” I interjected, “because it will help you start to focus on the important elements of the larger piece.”

“Right,” Steph said, and then exclaimed, “Oooh, I haven’t used these since high school,” pulling a box of oil pastels toward her. After a quick sketch in her journal, executed in thick heavy lines, she set to work on her post card.

“How are the pastels going?” Coco asked.

“So fun and I love them.” Steph’s response came out quickly, as if she forgot to pause between words, and she and Coco laughed.

“I love the bold bright colors,” I commented, “They’re great together.”

“Yeah,” Steph responded, “that’s what I always end up doing because I can never choose a color to like start with, I mean I just get so excited about color.”

“Tell me about your postcard?” I prompted when it seemed that Steph had reached a stopping point.

“Well, for this I was thinking about when I volunteered for Boys and Girls Club and we did a community art event. So, there’s like a couple canvas stands and I don’t really know what that is there, I think that’s a rug,” she laughed, pointing to a colorful swirl in the center of the card. “Um, and there was, there was the buffet but, I don’t know,” she laughed, seeming dismissive of the drawing she had created.

“So,” I smiled, “everything we do in these classes is more about the process than the end result, so think about if you were to do this again what would you do differently, but accept this piece as it is while thinking about what you can take from it moving forward. Does that make sense?”
Steph laughed, but quickly turned serious. “Yeah, I would definitely change the colors.”

“Really?” I asked, genuinely surprised. “I love the colors. It reminds me of when the snow melts in the spring and there’s a muddy rust color on the hillside, and all the trees are trying to wake up. I love that color palette.”

“Wow, yeah, nice,” she said, looking at her postcard. “I had never thought of it like that.”

“And they’re bold, I love bold colors,” I added.

“Yeah,” she agreed, “same here. Um, so I’m probably going to use bold colors like this and you know maybe even use patterns like that, I would definitely put some of this stuff in there too.” She pointed at the various elements as she spoke.

“For the canvas, are you thinking of recreating this scene?” Coco asked

“Well, I like the scene, but I’d like to incorporate nature,” she started brainstorming aloud. “But maybe something that’s not inside either, you know? Maybe just take that and then put it out outside, and I want to add people in there because that’s what my service project is about, it’s about kids. I don’t know, that’s the idea,” she laughed.

Between the postcard project and some further brainstorming, the time for Session One was already running out. “To prepare for next week, it would be helpful if you settle on what elements you really want to include and then block them in on a page in your journal,” I suggested. Steph nodded, and I continued, “like, ‘I want a sunflower here, a figure here, a tree here, whatever it is so that when we come in on Thursday we can start blocking those elements in on the canvas.”
“So like, map everything out first,” she repeated.

I nodded. “And also, if you bring in some pictures, sometimes that can be helpful, especially for Coco since she’s not inside your head.”

“Ok,” Steph responded, laughing as she bundled up in layers to face the evening commute back to campus. It was uncommonly warm for an evening in late February, but Steph declared, “I hate being cold. Like, that’s one thing about Chihuahua, it is so, so warm,” and with a laugh she was gone.

**Sessions Two and Three**

Steph arrived for Session Two with a few new sketches in her journal and a stack of images, printed in grayscale. Statues, buildings, flowers, children, and puzzle pieces. She flipped through the pictures, consulting with Coco on the symbolism behind the various elements.

“That one example you showed, I think it was a printed off one,” Coco dug through the copy paper and pulled out a page depicting several human-like shapes. “I like these. If you use them, maybe you could do a little bit more form to them, but I like that it the shoulders and then detail breaks down. You could use colors that are bold and childlike.” Coco paused thoughtfully. “I even like how they are cut off at the base, because you were saying it represents funding being cut off, so either colors can change down there or they can fade away, but that can represent something.”

“Oh yeah, I hadn’t thought about it like that,” Steph said, excitedly.

“I’d vote for that one, and the puzzle pieces and of course something graphic like that to find balance. Maybe you could have puzzle pieces behind the figures and then in front so then parts of them could be missing?”
“Yeah, no I hadn’t even thought about that, that’s actually really good, you’ve got a natural talent there,” Steph said with admiration.

Coco laughed. “That’s the thing when you’re trying to get everything together, you have to decide what are your key things and what is the most important part you want to talk about for the service. If there’s anything else you definitely want in there we can totally find ways to incorporate it, but start with your big conversation piece, or your big statement.”

Steph started sorting her printed pictures into two piles. “Yeah, the sculpture I don’t think has to do with anything, and this building I liked because it’s more like, the abstract form. But I don’t know.” She decided to focus on three elements; sunflowers, children, and puzzle pieces. She started a new sketch in her heavy-handed style, four figures and three sunflowers, with puzzle pieces at the bottom of the page.

“Oh, that’s really cool how the roots from the sunflowers wrap around the puzzle pieces,” I observed.

“Yeah, I am trying to decide like, where to put things. I do want the kids to fade away but what I was also thinking like just everything flowing into each other. And that’s an ugly sunflower, oh my gosh,” she laughed at her quick sketch, and then turned to Coco, “OK, this is what I came up with, the roots became the puzzle pieces that are kind of all connected.”

“I like it,” Coco leaned in for a closer look. “I think even not seeing their feet, you know? So truncated, but then soft.”

“Yeah, OK, I could see that,” Steph agreed.
“OK, neat.” Coco started walking to the storage shelves in the back of the studio. “Steph, do you want to come back here and I’ll show you some canvas options?”

“Oh, yeah!” Steph jumped up from her stool and followed the sound of Coco’s voice. Together, they selected a tall, skinny canvas, and Steph set to work sketching in the main elements. Usually vibrant and conversational, Steph was quiet while she worked, intently focused on the task at hand. Nearly twenty minutes passed before Coco checked back in.

“How you doing, Steph?”

“Um,” she sounded startled out of her concentration. “Um, I think it is looking good, once I get over, I mean it will definitely look better, bet I felt like maybe making them big would save a lot of time and it will make it easier to paint, but I don’t know if I should have overlapped them?” she pointed at the large puzzle pieces sketched on the canvas. “Do you get my drift? Cause I had them separated, but I don’t know.”

“I vote for separated,” I chimed in. “Because they’re kids, right? So I guess it just seems like their ‘puzzle’ isn’t together yet, you know?” Steph and Coco nodded.

“OK, yeah, that makes sense, I’ll just move this one like more up.” Steph flipped her pencil and started smudging at the sketch with what remained of her eraser.

“Do you want a bigger eraser?” I asked, looking around for the cookie jar Coco kept full of erasers.

“I only have this little one,” she laughed, “so yes please.” She then spent another twenty minutes nudging puzzle pieces and children around the canvas.

“OK, how’s it going?” Coco asked, sensing that it was time for paint.

“I don’t know,” Steph admitted.
“You can do any corrections and tweaking with the paint so don’t worry too much about getting it perfect,” Coco advised.

“Yeah, I don’t need a perfect drawing right now,” Steph repeated, “yeah.” I guess I didn’t know if it would be too much if above the sunflowers over here the puzzle pieces connected on top of the painting?”

“I think I would want to see more sunflower and sky reference,” Coco counseled. “But of course, if you want to add them later we can see how it looks, and then if we don’t like them we can just, you know, let it dry and paint over it. But I think start with less of the puzzle.”

Coco set Steph up with acrylic supplies; brushes in varying shapes and sizes, a cup of water, paper towel, and a Styrofoam plate. Steph sat on the studio floor next to the tub of paints. She rummaged through the tubes selecting bright colors and squirting them onto her palette.

“So just try to do little dollops, like the size of a silver dollar. It dries pretty fast, but you can always come back for more.”

“Yeah, I was kind of just playing around a little with what tones I want for the background, and then I’ll come back later for darker colors.” Steph stood up from the floor and positioned herself on at the easel. She dabbed a brush at her palette and then proceeded to apply a mint green base as the background. With only about half of the canvas covered, she quickly sidelined into trying to do detail work in the sunflowers.

“Steph you might want to do your background first,” Coco cautioned. “It’s a key thing, and we want to get that done before we get too worried about filling in details.”
“The background?” Steph asked, looking up at Coco. “OK, yeah. I don’t know if I should transition into another color if I should just…”

“I think it should be that same green in here,” Coco indicated a blank region in the middle section of the canvas, “and then we can start to add more detail, either a lighter or darker green for the stalks, and then a band of pretty similar green right in here, just to symbolize the field on that level.” Nodding, Steph agreed and dove back in, focusing on applying the advice she had just received. The green background began to blend into a hazy purple and blue sky. The figures took on enough form to read as children, and the sunflowers began to grow up and out of the puzzle pieces.

**Session Four**

For much of Session Four, Coco and Steph sat together, consulting on how and where to develop more detail. “Have you looked at any sunflower pictures or did you bring any with you?” Coco asked.

“I can look them up right now,” Steph laughed.

“I think what will really say ‘sunflower’ over any other yellow flower is if you add brown to it,” Coco said as Steph used her smart phone to find an image.

“Yeah, yeah totally,” Steph agreed.

“So add brown and green, and the other thing with the sunflower is the petals, see how they are overlapped?” Coco pointed to the image on Steph’s phone. “It’s large, but not individual. Getting a shadow between each petal will help stack or layer them. That will plump it up and make it a sunflower.”

“Oh, yeah.” Steph looked back and forth at the picture on her phone and the flowers on her painting.
Steph spent the rest of the session refining the detail in the sunflowers, and with Coco’s assistance, adding highlights to the puzzle pieces.

“They’re like, right up here, you know?” Steph said, in awe of the changes she had made. “That’s like a perfect representation of a sunflower.” She laughed, and then qualified her previous declaration, “well like not perfect. But I’m happy with them. What do you think?”

“Yeah, they look great,” Coco agreed. “So overall, I think it would be good to have some smaller sunflowers lower or something like that. Get some stalks in and then if the small ones are faded out and less detailed, there’s still those important colors in there.”

“OK, yeah, I can do that,” Steph said, and happily dove back in to her work.

By the end of Session Four, Steph was happily snapping pictures of her finished painting to send to her mother and sister.

“How are you feeling, Steph?” I asked.

“I think it’s ready to sign!” she said, and laughed.

Figure 9. “Hope and Community.” A progression of art created by Steph. 13” X 24” Acrylic on canvas.
**Steph’s Interview**

Steph is a bold and vibrant person who brought laughter and positivity to the art sessions. In the visual portrait I created to represent her (Figure 10), I focused on the elements of hope and community that she sought to represent through her painting. Using vibrant, bold colors, I portrayed her declared symbol of hope and connection to home; the sunflower. Because there is no universal symbol of hope, I added what has always held that meaning for me; the hummingbird. It is unseen but implied that the sunflower has roots supporting the weight of the flower. The fading wings of the hummingbird represent my own roots, experiences, and memories; learning and letting go rather than being held by one set of roots.

*Figure 10. “Steph.” Visual portrait of Steph. Dimensions, 18” X 24” Prismacolor and Pastel.*
It is unlikely that a hummingbird would poke its beak into a sunflower of this age, as there would be nothing but hardened seeds. Through the juxtaposition of these two symbols, I am showing that people build community in unexpected ways, by sharing their personal experiences, those things that connect them to who they are, and their hope.

For her final interview, I met with Steph on a Wednesday afternoon at a coffee shop in Greeley, near her home. It happened to be Spring Break for both of us, and it was nearly 80 degrees. That combined with the loud music inside the shop lured us out to sit in the sun and enjoy the steady breeze.

“How do you feel your piece turned out?” I asked, jumping right in to the interview

“It turned out better than I expected. I honestly, like, didn’t even know the concept of what the painting was going to be when I started. Yeah, I’m honestly really happy how it turned out. I mean, for only four weeks it’s really nice.”

“Yeah, I agree. I think it’s really cool.” I glanced at my list of questions. “Did creating that piece, like, planning it out and painting it, did that process help you think about the service in a different way?”

“Yes,” she replied, confidently. “Like literally all the time, because I just like wanted to connect all of these different things, but like, I didn’t know how. And Coco helped me put it all together, I loved that you know? Like, I knew that there were so many like concepts I could have put into one painting but the way we did it actually meant something you know?”
“Yeah,” I agreed, “the elements hang together in a way that tells a story. And do you think you are approaching your service project differently compared to how you would have if you hadn’t done the art classes?”

“Yeah, you know, I think the difference is I feel like a lot more attached. This makes me really want to know the kids even more. I think the painting really opened my eyes to more options.”

“I’d like to hear more about your process. Did you think about your service a lot while you were painting?” I asked.

Steph laughed, recognizing the contrast between her usual bubbly chatter and her quiet focus while painting. “I think I was a little in and out, but it was always at the beginning. I tried to say, ‘OK, this is the goal for today, finish up here. And why am I doing it this way, and what other things can I incorporate.’ So yeah, it was mostly at the beginning and then later on if I needed a little help of course I asked.”

“And what metaphor did you create for your service? When this is hanging up at the art show, what do you hope people feel or think when they see it?”

Steph thought for a moment before answering. “I guess I want people to know that there’s hope in my painting and that you don’t have to go through it alone, you know, whatever the struggle is. And I think that’s what the aspects of all the main parts of the sunflower and you know like the puzzle pieces and the multiple figures in there it’s a struggle but you don’t have to go through it alone.”

“Do the roots winding around the puzzle pieces have a particular meaning for the story that you want to share?” I asked.
“Yeah,” she responded, “So the sunflower is like, my favorite flower. I grew up seeing them everywhere, and to me they mean hope, you know? They connect me to my childhood and to my future goals. So the sunflowers connected to the puzzle pieces means that hope is connected to the missing piece. That has a lot of significance for me personally.

**Summary**

Throughout this study, I embraced reflexive praxis as a researcher. Figure 11 began as a self-portrait in which I endeavored to communicate the vulnerability I felt throughout this reflexive research process. These feelings of vulnerability were rooted in a hyper awareness of the expanded audience for my research, knowing that I was making extra effort to invite the community to engage with my visual and written findings. I also experienced vulnerability as I intentionally and strategically questioned my work at each phase of the research, reviewing transcripts of each art session before entering subsequent sessions, and discussing options for improving sessions with the art instructor with the goal of refining the methodology throughout the data collection process.

While Figure 11 began as a self-portrait, I became aware as I painted that it was more than a painting of my experience; it is a visual representation of the research process wherein reflexivity was a community effort. In this research, I played the role of facilitator, thinking about and learning from previous ABRI sessions and bringing that knowledge into subsequent sessions. Coco collaborated on each participant’s project, assisting with brainstorming, designing, and technique. And all of us, participants included, came together to share of our experiences and grow together, a level of engagement that resulted in collaborative artwork for all involved.
I used a nude figure to represent my sense of vulnerability as I engaged in this research, and thoughtful expressions to show reflexive engagement at each stage of the research process. The emphasis on vulnerability began with a heightened awareness of my own exposure; knowing my artwork and research findings would be on public display for an audience much larger than the typical dissertation committee. However, this awareness quickly involved to a heightened understanding of the vulnerability I was asking participants to assume.

*Figure 11.* “Reflexivity.” Self-portrait demonstrating reflexivity in art and research, 37” X 50” Oil on canvas.
The varied head sizes of heads and the perspective of each looking just beyond the ear of the next implies two planes of movement: simultaneously spinning in a circle while spiraling upward. The goal of reflexivity in art, service, and research is not to dwell on any one moment, but to experience, learn, and find a way to build on it as I grow.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Through this research, I endeavored to understand the processes of learning and meaning making that occur when people participate in long-term service by increasing participants’ reflexivity through arts based research. Arts based research is the use of aesthetic representation in any step of the research process, from data collection to analysis to presentation of findings (Eisner, 1998; Leavy, 2015; McNiff, 2008). In this chapter, I offer answers to the research questions I used to guide this inquiry; what I found to be common elements of learning through service, the potential for personal transformation through arts based reflexive practice, and methodological considerations for using arts based reflexive inquiry in educational research. I close with recommendations for future research.

Research Questions

Q1 What are the common elements of learning from diverse service project experiences?

Q2 What personal transformations do participants undergo through engaging in arts based reflexive practice following a long-term service learning experience?

Q3 What are the main methodological considerations for using arts based reflexive inquiry in educational research?
At the outset of this research, I envisioned working with undergraduate students who had been or were currently involved in service learning. As the research unfolded, I moved away from the strict interpretation of service learning to include individuals not currently enrolled in college. As a result, I interacted with five women with disparate backgrounds and service experiences; three undergraduate students, one recent PhD, and one retired probation officer.

Participants came to this research from diverse service backgrounds, and in each case the service was connected to a larger goal. For Emily, teaching art to elementary school students was a stepping stone toward student teaching; a requirement for her art education program. For Jessica, the farmer exchange programs and community workshops in Nepal were a component of research and data collection for her master’s degree. Berna’s involvement with Restorative Justice was born out of a continuing education training for her career as a probation officer. And finally, Addy and Steph were each involved in a leadership and social change program at their university, which required service. Despite being required, at least in the beginning, the participants all expressed a sense of ownership over their service, and a deepened understanding of their field.

To address the common elements of learning through such varied service backgrounds, I looked to Eyler’s (2002) review of the importance of reflection in service wherein she identified seven common goals for connecting service to academics.
However, because two of the participants in this research fall outside of Eyler’s demographic, I have condensed the goals into three outcomes or common elements:

1) Authentic service creates a positive feedback loop. Service stimulates interest which leads to positive views of community engagement, which leads to increased future service engagement, and so on.

2) Authentic service results in a deepened understanding of a social problem

3) Authentic service results in a notable personal transformation, especially in terms of identity development.

Because identity development and personal transformation fits more squarely under research question two, in this section I address only the first two common outcomes of service among participants.

**Service creates a positive feedback loop.** The idea that service creates a positive feedback loop hinges on the level of reflexivity present in the service experience. Increased reflexivity is likely to result in higher levels of interest and commitment, and accordingly, in a higher likelihood that the individual will seek out further opportunities to engage in similar service contexts. The positive feedback loop can be seen in the experiences of each participant.

Addy expressed positive feelings toward her first service experience as a horse leader in an equine therapy program. “That was like, one of my first experiences… and I was like, ‘oh my gosh I’m in love with this now,’ like, ‘I need to keep doing that.’” This statement demonstrates her positive feelings toward service, and her ongoing engagement with community and social change as a freshman in college demonstrates growth. Addy
indicated that her continuing experiences with service are feeding further into her desire to engage:

I mean, every single thing I’ve done I’ve pretty much liked, and it just, like motivates me to keep doing it cause it’s so rewarding personally. You get to see people grow and I, I grow and it’s like, I really like it.

Jess demonstrated the positive feedback loop at work as she spoke about her motivation to apply what she had learned to her future career in ecological research.

I feel like a stronger sense of responsibility to do my work, not because I want to get a good career but because … we need more advocates for this perspective in my view. We are a growing movement of people but there’s still not enough of us… I have kind of a sense of responsibility because I have the skills and I have the education that people might listen.

The positive feedback loop can be seen in Berna’s increasing engagement with RJ after a simple training over 20 years ago. She spoke often of her commitment to the RJ philosophy of “trust the circle” as well as her positive association with the potential RJ holds: “I really feel that it’s like a sacred honor that I can bring people together in a safe place and that people trust me with that.”

In contrast to the other participants, Emily did not verbalize an increased desire for future service engagement as a result of her experience. Rather, she felt more connected to her future career as an elementary art teacher. Her service stimulated interest in the subject and some reflexivity as she prepared for student teaching. This difference highlights the epistemological importance of the stated goals of service. If, as in Emily’s case, the service is framed as a program requirement that must be completed before moving to the next phase, the potential for stimulating interested in service is diminished.
Service deepens understanding of social problems. Most of the participants also shared an increased understanding of a specific social problem. For example, Addy spoke with empathy about her expanded understanding of the need to increase ability and independence of children with disabilities.

I saw like so many kids grow… like not only physically did they get so much better um, but just like mentally and emotionally you could tangibly see their transformation. Like, even over one session, and they’re only half-hour long. I remember this one girl came in and she was like slouched over and was like kinda hunching, her knees were bent and she could barely walk… and after she got off the horse she had good posture and walked down the ramp like right afterwards.

Additionally, Addy spoke passionately about the inequity that exists in access to healthcare, as she saw the potential that equine therapy holds and believed it should be accessible to all who might benefit from it. In her words,

[The service] allowed me to like, be more confident in what I was doing and taught me about a whole new type of therapy… And like a lot of people don’t know about that kind of stuff because it’s, it’s not like covered a lot of times over insurance which I think is ridiculous, cause it’s like one of the best therapies.

Steph demonstrated increased understanding of a social problem when she spoke about the need to provide art programs at middle schools where funding has been cut. Additionally, she framed the solution in a sustainable way, hoping to empower the students to take control of the programs:

We decided that we should focus on middle schoolers you know, have them run the program throughout the years, have them do a fund raiser you know we would teach them these skills and then from there on you know it would just be like homerun, you know, throughout the years and they have a great time after that.

Through service in Nepal, Jess increased her awareness of social inequality and the contrast both across and within various cultures.

There’s a lot of inequality in our own society, but to, to see that today was very impressionable. And associated with that, erm, it became a very personal experience because I was hosted by these people in … their homes. I established
relationships with them … and I, I just felt that it was a very … different way of seeing the world.

Berna’s increased understanding of criminal justice shifted from traditional to restorative. Rather than a purely punitive approach, she works to transform harm.

“Restorative Justice provides an opportunity to answer the victims’ questions, help the offender be fully accountable, and allow for healing.”

**Research Question Two: Personal Transformations through Arts Based Research**

The process of creating a work of art based on their service provided a new set of tools for participants to understand and share what they had learned. Art is an innately contemplative process, and as such serves as a powerful vehicle for reflection, a key component in facilitating change through service learning (Crabtree, 2008; Eyler, 2002; Felten & Clayton, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2004; Kiely, 2005; Mezirow, 1990, 1997). In this section I address the role of reflexivity in transformative learning and the potential for personal transformation through arts based research.

**Reflexivity.** Reflexivity is iterative and growth-oriented, and is generally said to have occurred when subsequent interactions are informed and transformed by reflection on previous interaction in the same or similar settings (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008; Britt, 2012; Higgs, 2008; Sletto, 2010).

Through the art sessions, participants increased their reflexivity in terms of service, and concurrently increased their ability to talk in meaningful ways about how participating in service has changed them. Addy provided a powerful example of this transformation:
It made me think about it in a different way cause …when I had been asked about it [before], it was like ‘what service did you do and how long did you do it and what did you do’ you know? I think this made me think about it in a different way … this made me um have to more like critically think … think about the actual transformation that happened and like what I experienced there, does that make sense? I found more confidence in myself, like my transformation personally is I found more confidence in myself.

Jess offered another eloquent description of how the artistic process helped her think about her service in a new way:

I really enjoyed uh, I don’t know just, I really enjoyed the physical process of doing it, erm, and I guess when you’re really focusing on a place it brings you, it kind of gives you a feeling of the, that moment when you were, when I took that photo. And from a personal level I learned so much and like, I think my main drive from this is I wanna keep on understanding and building the stories of what’s happening.

Creating art about a service experience is a vulnerable process (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Liamputtong, 2007); much like service can increase self-efficacy (Evans, 2007), the reflexive art creation process had a similar effect. In my experience it can be difficult, at least initially, to describe what learning has taken place, and this inability to put a powerful experience into words can be uncomfortable. Dwelling on the difficult aspects, the ‘out of balance’ moments of a service experience necessitates that participants formulate ways to talk about them. Putting learning into concrete statements furthers the connection to the service, and discussing how that learning will alter future service reinforces the lesson. Reflexivity is transformative because it results in a cognitive shift (Mezirow, 1997), which in turn influence self-awareness and personal identity.

**Identity development.** Prior research has indicated that participation in service while in college has an enduring influence on personal identity development (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin et al., 1999; Harre, 2007; Jones & Abes, 2004). This seemed to be the case for Addy, Steph, and Emily, all of whom were undergraduates at the time of this
research. Addy expressed a newfound confidence in herself, a sense that if she could be a successful horse leader and barn manager at the age of 16, then she was capable of more than she realized.

Steph’s identity development was evidenced by her expressions of the hope and joy she had found through participation in service. “You know I feel like a lot more attached actually now to this like … of course you know, … this makes me like really wanna know [the kids] more you know.” Additionally, she seemed to feel drawn to service for social development reasons, as service participation increased her network of support and community. This service motivation is in line with prior research by Clary and colleagues (1998) wherein undergraduates were found to be motivated to service involvement by the promise of social interaction.

Emily indicated that she had built a stronger understanding of her identity as a future educator. During her first Arts Based Reflexive Inquiry session, she was asked to create a visual representation, using outlines of her hands, of how she had changed as a result of her service. Describing her drawing, she stated, “[Before the service,] I just kind of had a very rigid outline of what I thought it would be like or kind of this sketchy idea of what actually every day would be like and then the afterwards is a little bit looser but also a bit more comfortable with like being in a classroom.”

Jess and Berna, though no longer in college, also indicated that their service experiences had a lasting influence on their identity in terms of increased self-understanding. Jess articulated a deepened respect for her connection with nature and her desire to be a stronger advocate for change in her field. Berna spoke of the sacred honor she feels for her ongoing role of bringing victims and their offenders together to
transform harm. In her visual journal she wrote, “I love to share about the RJ work I do and cases I’ve been in. I feel very honored to be able to provide a safe space for people to share/express how they’ve been harmed/impacted about their situation.”

**Research Question Three:**

**Methodological Considerations**

Art based research has not been widely applied in the field of educational psychology, though aesthetic elements are commonly used as pedagogical or methodological. Within psychology, and more specifically educational psychology, exists a long history of using inkblots, photos, or other visual elements to test or assess research participants. A recent and more participatory iteration of this approach is the photovoice method, which originated in health and community education (Wang & Burris, 1997). In photovoice, participants are provided with a camera and are instructed to take photographs from their vantage point. The photos are developed and reviewed, and the researchers uses the images to elicit stories and conversation in the interviews. The goals of photovoice are to involve participants in the telling of their story, to help practitioners understand social problems from a previously unconsidered angle, and to empower and educate participants. Photovoice has been implemented in educational psychology (see Harkness & Stallworth, 2013 for a notable example).

While aesthetic methods are becoming more prominent and accepted within educational psychology research, they are largely limited to the inquiry phase and do not extend into data analysis or representation. It is important, therefore, to address methodological considerations of incorporating this non-conventional approach to research in a more traditional field.
Aesthetic narrative reconstruction. A major component of data collection involved asking participants to create a metaphor of their service experience, and to express that metaphor visually. I came to think of this process as aesthetic narrative reconstruction, an extension of Bruner’s (1991) Narrative Reconstruction. According to Bruner, Narrative Reconstruction is the act of storytelling wherein an individual expresses her version of reality (Bruner, 1991). This lens, or framing, reveals how the narrator organizes and understands her memories.

There is precedent in qualitative research for narrative reconstruction. For example, Ellis (1993) wrote an emotional and powerful autoethnography about how she and her family managed their grief after the sudden death of her brother.

Ellis went on to contend that by positioning yourself as both narrator and main character of a personal narrative embraces the assumption that certain experiences can only be fully understood when emotion is accepted as part of the process.

While service experiences are not the emotional parallel of the loss of a loved one, there is often an abundance of emotion associated with the service experience that goes unexpressed. In this research, the Arts Based Reflexive Inquiry sessions provided a forum in which participants could investigate those emotions through creating an aesthetic narrative of their service experience before attempting to express that learning in verbal or written communication.

It was my expectation that participants would think about their service, create a metaphor, and then create a visual piece representing that metaphor. I am unsure why I
thought this would be the process, as it does not adequately reflect my own process of using art in the interpretation of a dataset. Instead, after immersion in the data, I create a set of sketches, and usually one formal work, before using aesthetic interpretation as a lens for understanding the data. Similarly, three of the five participants (Steph, Bema, and Jess) created their visual representations of service, and then used the resulting art to interpret their learning experience. The remaining two participants (Addy and Emily) had a specific idea of the proper aesthetic representation, but their ability to articulate their learning also increased after undergoing the art creating process.

**Adult mosaic.** The adult mosaic approach was a major methodological component of this research. Traditional mosaic is a research practice in which young children are provided myriad means for communicating in order to ensure that their perspective is accurately documented, including drawing, finger painting, photographs, child-led tours, interviews, and etc. (Clark, 2005). These varied forms of communication are meant to ensure that child research participants are accurately represented in the research. Because service can be a vulnerable experience for which participants may not have the means to communicate, I encouraged participants to select the medium that would best help convey their message. On one hand, it seemed to put participants at ease, a helpful tool when asking adults to create art. However, it seemed that participants chose a medium that they were curious about rather than selecting a medium they were comfortable with or that would best help them communicate the meaning behind their story. It is difficult for an individual who does not identify as an artist to plan a composition because they are not familiar with the constraints of their ability with the
chosen medium. For those who have never picked up a paint brush, the first session would be best used in practical instruction and technique assistance as it was here.

**Visual journaling.** Another foundational aspect of this research was encouraging participants to keep a visual journal throughout the process (Leavy, 2015). The purpose of the visual journals was to encourage participants to engage in a contemplative activity prior to the art sessions. This practice proved helpful for some, but not all, participants.

Two participants, Addy and Steph, used their visual journals as intended, with Addy being the most thoughtful and reflective of all. Her journal is over halfway filled with thoughts about her various service experiences and sketches of the various elements she planned to include in her artwork. In fact, she was apologetic during the interview for not having done more:

Yeah, I wish I had done more, um, it was just like kind of hard with all my other work you know, to like but, in retrospect I wish I would’ve just done it like right before bed or something, you know what I mean? So I apologize if I don’t like have enough pages for you.

Despite feeling that she had not provided enough information through the visual journal, she found the process useful, as indicated by her statement “I like practiced it out kind of, and like sketch and like more, it gives more meaning to the painting.” She also expressed a commitment to using the visual journaling technique in the future:

Yeah I definitely think that um, it’s nice to have a different mode of thinking about something, um, cause generally you know we write everything down and like we just talk about it but there’s not a lot of visual stuff so I, I’m gonna hopefully, try to do that in the future… Like I need to make time for it because I do really like creating and stuff… using that part of my brain you know?

Steph used her journal mostly for project planning during ABRI sessions, though she did spend some time outside of sessions to work on sketching components of her panting. She also provided one- or two-sentence answers to each demographic question.
During the interview, Steph was able to describe each sketch in detail; what it was and why she drew it. She often included contextual detail, such as where she was and what she was thinking about while she made the sketch.

Berna did not find the visual journals helpful. For her, the best way to immerse herself in a learning or service experience is through conversation or meditation. Jess did not utilize her journal outside of the art classes, perhaps because her service concluded several years before this research took place. She reported remaining connected to her service experience through photos and memories, although she said “At the time when it was happening I was journaling a lot … because of the anthropological, you know, aspect of it.”

Emily used her journal in the ABRI sessions to plan art pieces, but did very little with it outside of sessions. Ins stark contrast to Steph, Emily was only able to identify certain elements of her sketches, for example, “I think those were supposed to be binoculars and thought bubbles,” though she insisted that she did not know or could not remember why she had drawn them. When I pressed for her to think about it, she said she “drew it too long ago to remember.” This exchange took place over three sketches in her journal. It is possible that Emily did remember, but was hesitant to share with me for some reason, though it is also possible that visual journaling is simply not an effective memory tool for her.

**Logistical considerations.** Practical considerations of the arts based research sessions conducted in this study include time constraints, available mediums, and the number of participants in a session. Time constraints were at the forefront throughout this research. Four, two-hour sessions seemed like a lot of time when I was planning the
methodology. After eight hours of art sessions I felt closer to the participants than I have experienced in other research contexts, which contributed to some of the most comfortable research interviews I have ever conducted. Additionally, because we spent so much time together, a lot was communicated during the art sessions, ranging from trivial to deeply personal.

While eight hours is a lot to ask busy adults to set aside for participation in research, the time in our sessions slipped quickly away. Two participants were not able to finish even one refined piece in that amount of time, let alone the two suggested pieces I had proposed at the outset of this research. Additionally, participants were very aware of time, often referring to ‘how much time we have left’ as they made decisions about their compositions. It could be useful in future iterations of this research to provide ‘open studio hours’ for participants to work on their pieces.

Throughout the various iterations of this arts based research, I experimented with group size and session frequency. I recommend one to three participants per session, and one session per week. If there is only one participant, it is likely that person will feel somewhat overwhelmed at first. However, the initial discomfort is offset by the potential for quality, personalized instruction, and in-depth conversation during research sessions.

It would technically be possible for the instructor and researcher to be the same person, though I found it useful as artist-researcher to be able to focus on the service and data collection aspects rather than being tied up with technique instruction and consultation. That being said, the maximum number of participants I recommend for a session is three, which translates to a total of five people including the instructor and researcher. The reason for this recommendation is out of concern for quality consultation
with the instructor within a two-hour time frame. This constraint could be somewhat mitigated if all participants were using the same medium, as it would cut down on the need for individual consultations about the medium. The other reason for this recommended cap on participants per session is a practical research concern. Overlapping conversations present logistical difficulty in transcription and data analysis. With five people in the room, there cannot be more than two conversations happening simultaneously.

**Ethics.** In arts based research, it is crucial to consider the level of vulnerability you are asking of the participants (Liamputtong, 2007). In an attempt to mitigate feelings of vulnerability, I emphasized in each session that the focus of the art creation should be on the process over the outcome. Despite this frequent reminder, participants often indicated doubt and concern about the quality of their work. This was perhaps compounded by the knowledge that their art would appear in a public gallery alongside their first name. In fact, two potential participants withdrew out of discomfort with the idea of using their given name. It could be useful in future iterations of this research to allow the option to select a pseudonym. I wrestled with this idea myself, but ultimately decided pseudonyms would prove difficult in this type of in-depth writing, as it would not truly be possible to mask the participants’ identity.

The consideration of vulnerability in sharing artwork weighed also on me as the researcher. Using art in the analysis of the data set required a level of exposure more intimate than writing alone. As I worked on each of the visual pieces to accompany this written research, I grappled with the idea that, even for me, the emphasis should be on the artistic process more than the result (McNiff, 2008), and yet my artwork needed to be of
sufficient quality to meet the standards of evocation, illumination, and social significance (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

**Accessibility of findings.** An important aspect of my research stance involved accessibility of the findings to the community in which the research was conducted. I confess to an arrogant expectation that the community was waiting with baited breath to hear the result of this research. The reality is that I was underprepared to traverse the gulf between the two worlds. I was perhaps naïve in my approach to bringing the results to the community. I have been in academia long enough to have a sense of the hurdles and hoops, and felt confident in my ability to successfully navigate them. Indeed, I am grateful for the University of Northern Colorado’s Graduate School for accommodating and facilitating my goal to engage the community in my research. However, I felt at times that I was forcing academia on the community, a sort of Ivory Tower colonization. I found myself fighting two ends of the same battle: competing against an idea from academia that publication is the gold standard for true research, and trying to convince the community that it is worth their time to engage with this research.

While the sharing of results took the form of an open art gallery, the results were not purely art. This made it difficult to explain to the various gallery owners in Fort Collins what I needed and why, and many seemed to turn away once the word ‘research’ was spoken. One potential reason for this hurdle is that Fort Collins has its own university in the center of town, 40 miles away from the University of Northern Colorado. Residents seem to feel that they have some access to the campus – especially the performing and visual arts, and therefore do not need to provide space in the community for academic use.
Conclusion

Future research in this vein should apply ABRI to a group of students going through the same service experience together, beginning early in the service process. This way, participants could employ visual journaling and reflection throughout the service process. It is possible that knowing they will create art about their experience could change the lens through which they approach the service. Additionally, ABRI should be used as a methodology in other fields outside of service learning in which the goal is to increase reflexivity.

Figure 12. “Community.” A collage of sketches and paintings from my research journal. Engaging in ABRI resulted in a sense of community, influenced by the space we entered, our individual context, and the service experiences we brought and shared. I
often sketched or painted caricatures of the participants as they worked. Figure 12, “Community,” is a layering of images from various ABRI sessions, illustrating the collaborative influence on each other’s work despite never having met as a full group in the same time and place.

I believe it is important for service learning practitioners to provide a safe space for volunteers to continually remake, refine, and define their personal epistemologies; to remove aspects of their ways of knowing that do not fit with their new experiences and understandings of the world. With deepened self-understanding as the goal, practitioners need to provide ongoing, recurring opportunities to practice reflexive epistemology development through service. One way to accomplish this goal is through the aesthetic narrative reconstruction accessible through Arts Based Reflexive Inquiry, which, as Addy said, “made me have to more like critically think… about the actual transformation that happened and what I experienced [through my service].”
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
DATE: May 10, 2016

TO: Lindsay Beddes, M.Ed.
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [904269-1] Increased Reflexivity in Service-Learning through Arts-Based Research
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: May 6, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE: May 6, 2020

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years. If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

Generated on IRBNet
DATE: October 20, 2016

TO: Lindsay Beddes, M.Ed.
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [904269-2] Increased Reflexivity in Service-Learning through Arts-Based Research
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: October 20, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE: May 6, 2020

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years. If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Increased Reflexivity in Service-Learning through Arts-Based Research
Researcher: Lindsay A. Beddes, M.Ed., Psychological Sciences, Educational Psychology
Phone Number: 970-351-1058 e-mail: lindsay.beddes@unco.edu
Research Advisor: Kathryn Cochran, Ph.D., Psychological Sciences, Educational Psychology
Phone Number: (970) 351-1681 e-mail: kathryn.cochran@unco.edu

I am researching the process of making meaning out of service opportunities through visual means. As a participant in this research, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, to engage in creation of a visual journal, to participate in four art classes, and to participate in a one-on-one interview at the completion of the art classes. The demographic questionnaire and visual journaling will take approximately 2 hours to complete. Each of the four art classes will last approximately 2 hours, and the interview will last approximately one hour. Art sessions and the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

Your responses not be anonymous; your first name will be used with the artwork you create and in conjunction with the research portrayal of your service experience. The information collected is your personal experience and therefore it your story to tell. Results of the study will be presented in an art gallery open to the community, and in written form.

Risks to you are minimal. You may feel somewhat uncomfortable working with visual representations of your service experience, but there will be an experienced art teacher on hand to answer technical questions. There is no monetary cost associated with this research; the art sessions will be paid for you by the researcher. You will be asked to relinquish the final version of your artwork for use by the researcher in various capacities, including dissertation writing and publication in research journals. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to read the research write-up and to comment and edit the work prior to it being presented in order to ensure that your experience is being accurately portrayed.
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign and date below. By signing below, you give permission for (please initial):

______ conversations to be audio-taped
______ photographs to be taken throughout the research process
______ our written and visual work to be used by the researcher for academic purposes

You may keep a copy of this form for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Participant’s Signature                      Date

Researcher’s Signature                      Date
CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Increased Reflexivity in Service-Learning through Arts-Based Research
Researcher: Lindsay A. Beddes, M.Ed., Psychological Sciences, Educational Psychology
    Phone Number: 970-351-1058     e-mail: lindsay.beddes@unco.edu
Research Advisor: Kathryn Cochran, Ph.D., Psychological Sciences, Educational Psychology
    Phone Number: (970) 351-1681   e-mail: kathryn.cochran@unco.edu

You have been participating in research on the process of making meaning out of service opportunities through visual means. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign and date below. By signing below, you give permission for each of the following to be used in my presentation of the research findings (please initial):

    _____ Audio-taped conversations
    _____ Photographs taken throughout the research process
    _____ Written and visual work to be used by the researcher in the gallery presentation open to the community
    _____ Written and visual work to be used by the researcher for academic purposes

You may keep a copy of this form for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Participant’s Signature     Date

Researcher’s Signature     Date
APPENDIX C

CONTACT AND RECRUITMENT COMMUNICATIONS
For Directors or Coordinators of Service at
Community Agencies and Colleges/Universities:

To Whom It May Concern:

I am looking for students who have recently participated in service learning who might be interested in participating in research on how learning occurs through service.

I am looking for participants who are willing to attend four art classes (2 hours each) and at least one interview. In all, the time commitment will be approximately 9-15 hours, spread out over about two months. There will be no monetary cost to participate, and as a portion of the research, selected participants will be provided with professional instruction in the artistic medium of their choosing through four sessions at the VanCo School of Art located in the Downtown Artery in Old Town, Fort Collins (a $100 value).

Eligible participants must be 18+ years old, and must have participated in a service learning experience of one week duration or longer within the past 12 months.

If you know of any students who meet the above-mentioned criteria and might be interested in participating, please have them contact me at lindsay.beddes@unco.edu.

Regards,

Lindsay A. Beddes, M.Ed.
970-889-6060
University of Northern Colorado
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Psychology
For Distribution through Community Businesses

I am seeking research participants who have participated in a service experience of one week or longer within the past 12 months for a study about learning through service. If selected to participate, you will receive four art classes in the medium of your choosing at the VanCo School of Art, free of charge with all supplies provided (a $90 value!). Classes will last approximately 2 hours each and will run once a week for four weeks. You will also be asked to participate in at least one interview.

Eligible participants:
• Are 18+ years old
• Are now students (or were a student at the time of the service)
• Are interested in exploring their service experience through art

Classes will begin when enough participants have been recruited.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Lindsay at lindsay.beddes@unco.edu
APPENDIX D

PRELIMINARY INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE
First Name:
Gender:
Age:
Major/Minor:
Current Year in School:
Race:

When did the service-learning experience take place (approximate dates are ok):

Where did you serve?

How many other students participated in the service learning?

Was there one theme/project or multiple? Please describe.

Take some time to think about the service experience. Think about the people you met, times you felt uncomfortable, positive and negative moments.
Describe the times you felt ‘in balance,’ ‘out of balance,’ or comfortable being ‘out of balance.’
What still stands out to you now that some time has passed?

If you wish to watch the clip by Janine Antoni, see:
The portions relevant to our project are at 36:30 – 39:00 and 46:30 to the end.

Using the ‘journal’ provided, record your thoughts and impressions. You can draw, doodle, write a list, create a poem, include photographs – the sky is the limit!

Please bring this journal with you to the art sessions and interviews.
APPENDIX E

ART SESSION LESSON PLANS
The emphasis of these classes will be on the process of self-discovery, not on the final product. The goal is to create a metaphor of the service and to avoid codifying the experience.

**Session One**
- Discuss goal of classes
- Participant introductions (first names only)
- Participants select medium; Instructor gives intro to selected mediums.
- Instructor leads discussion on how light and color convey meaning and emotion
- Activity: 10 - 15 minutes warmup of expression drawing during which the Instructor will ask students a variety of questions and have them draw their answer.
  - Example: Draw things that float. Draw things that roll. Draw something that you are good at doing or playing.
  - If I could be a color, I'd be _______ because….
- Direction: Write Your Answer in Words then draw a picture. You have made a startling discovery while skin diving. Draw what it is.
  - Example: How you viewed yourself before service vs how you view yourself now.
  - Discuss process and outcomes of activity
- Self Portrait: To express their transformation during /after their time of service, or just to help make sense of their past vs present self:
  - Option 1: Trace your hands and fill them with images that represent your past self before service (left hand) and what they view themselves changed after service (right hand).
  - Option 2: Fill in two pre-drawn outline faces following the same format as described in Option 1: How you viewed yourself before service vs how you view yourself now. (We could also trace faces using transparencies and collage these activities).
  - Prompt: What memories and emotions arise during this activity?
- Begin to plan project: The essence of the service experience
  - Sketch or draw ideas in art journal
  - Assign journaling assignment to be reviewed / shared in Session Two.
- Clean up

**Session Two**
- Set up
- Review art journals. Add additional information for map inspiration.
- Review the different mediums available for the maps: painting, collage, and paper mache
- Activity: Make a map of your service experience.
- Intentionally vague instructions left up to interpretation of participants
- Move toward work on projects
- Instructor circulates around the room and supports the creation of the artistic representations.
● Researcher circulates room and engages in conversations about representation, the process, and meaning making
● Clean up

**Sessions Three and Four**

● Set up
● Activity: Create postcard you wish you had sent during your time of service
  ○ Include memory or feeling you wish you had shared
  ○ Personalize it with art work
● Work on projects
  ○ Map of service
  ○ Essence of the service experience
● Instructor circulates around the room and supports the creation of the artistic representations.
● Researcher circulates room and engages in conversations about representation, the process, and meaning making
APPENDIX F

INFORMATION REGARDING THE OFF-CAMPUS DISSERTATION DEFENSE
The methodology that I created for this research required participants to represent their service through visual media. Additionally, as a major component of data analysis, I created a visual representation of each participant and two works representing the findings. Many of these pieces were quite large, ranging in size from 18” X 20” up to 3’5” X 4’5”. Owing in large part to the size of the work, it was not possible accurately represent the art through photographs or Powerpoint. This, combined with my research philosophy that findings must be accessible to the community in which the research was conducted, I secured a public gallery in the Old Town Community of Fort Collins. The installation was available to the public for one week, including the First Friday Art Walk in June of 2017. I then petitioned the UNC Graduate School for permission to hold the defense of my dissertation at that gallery.

Trustworthiness and authenticity of arts based research is measured by the audience viewing the work. Authentic, trustworthy arts based research resonates with the audience and is perceived as ‘truthful.’ Thus, the only way to know how the research is perceived is by asking the audience for feedback. I accomplished this by creating a short survey in Qualtrics, and then providing the URL and a QR code at the gallery showing.

The remainder of this appendix contains:
- The memo addressed to the Graduate School with my formal request.
- The gallery and presentation announcement distributed to community agencies.
- The brochure explaining the research and artwork that was available at the gallery.
- An example of the QR code/URL requesting community feedback.
- The questions from the community feedback survey.
MEMORANDUM

TO: THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
FROM: LINDSAY A. BEDDES, DOCTORAL CANDIDATE
SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR OFF-CAMPUS DISSERTATION DEFENSE
DATE: APRIL 17, 2017
CC: DR. KATHRYN COCHRAN

I am writing to request approval for my dissertation defense to take place off campus at the Community Creative Center in Fort Collins, Colorado. My dissertation has a strong community engagement focus, looking at the service experiences of participants. All participants represented their service through visual media, and as part of the results and discussion of my findings, I created a visual representation of each participant. These pieces will be on display at the Community Creative Center, open to the public, during the last week of May. These are sizable pieces of gallery art that are not easily or accurately portrayed through PowerPoint.

Because my research framework is established on making the research accessible to the community in which the research was conducted, and because the artwork is inextricable from the written findings, I wish to hold the defense of my dissertation at the gallery. All members of my committee agree with and are excited by this opportunity, if approved by the Graduate School.

The manuscript will adhere to all guidelines required by the Graduate School for dissertation manuscripts.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lindsay A. Beddes
**Increasing Reflexivity in Service Learning through Arts Based Research**

**Gallery Talk and Research Presentation by**
Lindsay A. Beddes
Thursday, June 1st
3:00 - 4:30 pm

**On Exhibit:**
May 31 - June 3, 2017

Community Creative Center
200 Matthews St., Gallery B
Fort Collins, CO

**Gallery Hours:**
Wed - Sat: Noon - 6:00 pm
Friday: Noon - 9:00 pm
EMILY
• Born in Australia, raised in Fort Collins.
• 21 y.o.
• Senior at CU, majoring in Art Education.
• Service involved teaching art classes at a local elementary school as a component of her degree.
Metaphor: “Chaos, but hopefully purposeful chaos.”

This piece is intended to be a technical manual. I went out of my way to ensure that every element makes sense, with subtle humor hidden below the surface. This piece represents a disconnection from the low and the why of making art.

COMMUNITY

INCREASING REFLEXIVITY IN SERVICE LEARNING THROUGH ARTS BASED RESEARCH

This piece is a layering of sketches and caricatures taken from my research journal. With three sets of ABRI, we never met as a full group in the same time and place. However, through reflexive, intentioned research, each participant had an influence on the others’ work.

REFERENCES

For more information, contact
Lindsey A. Boston, lindsey.boston@ucolorado.edu

BERNA

THE PROCESS
Participants took part in at least four, two-hour sessions of Arts Based Reflexive Inquiry (ABRI), and one semi-structured interview. Participants were encouraged to keep a visual journal, including written and visual memories or impressions of their service experience. Art sessions took place at the Van’s School of Art. As an artist-researcher, I immersed myself in the data as all stages of this highly emergent research. I observed during art instruction, conversing with participants and making field notes and sketches in my research journal. Sessions were audio recorded and transcribed.

I used Permaculture as a frame for data collection, and created an art to frame the analysis of the data set. For each participant, I engaged in a comparative process of drawing or painting to discover the aesthetic meaning present for me in the context of the data. I then used the aesthetic information to interpret the data.

JESS
• Born in Namibia, raised in South Africa.
• Approx. 30 y.o.
• Postdoctoral Scholar in Biodiversity at CU.
• Service involved 5 months of fieldwork in Nepal in 2013, gathering data on land use and offering farming workshops.
Metaphor for Learning through Service: “People are part of nature.”

The strong edge of the storm represents high intensity cognitive dissonance, with two perspectives from which to observe the same experience. With great self-awareness Jess is able to draw to reinterpretation her experience, and her commitment to identify and remember the difficult lessons she learned during her service.

ADDY
• Born in Sacramento, CA.
• 18 y.o.
• Freshman at CSU.
• Service involved 2 years of work with single assisted therapy programs in California.
Metaphor: “Magic and Transformation”

This piece is about connection and transition; the things we held onto and the things we hope to attain. The three body positions show the introverted and adventurous side of Addy’s personality with her current state merging the two. This represents an awareness of her introverted nature and active commitment to growing away from these limitations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS
Finding One: The Common Elements of Learning through Service
1) Authentic service creates a positive feedback loop. Service stimulates interest which leads to positive views of community engagement, which leads to increased future service engagement, and so on.
2) Authentic service results in a deepened understanding of a social problem.

Finding Two: Personal Transformations through Arts Based Research
Reflexivity is transformative because it results in a cognitive shift which then influences self-awareness and personal identity. Focusing on the difficult aspects of a service experience necessitates that participants formulate ways to talk about them. This can be difficult to describe learning, but putting learning into concrete statements further the connection to service.

Finding Three: Methodological Considerations
ABRI offers an opportunity for aesthetic narrative reconstruction, the act of visual storytelling wherein an individual expresses her version of reality. This expression reveals how the narrator organizes and understands her experiences prior to expressing what understanding verbally. Adult mosaic. Participants select their preferred medium. This seemed to put participants at ease, but most chose a medium they were curious about rather than one they were comfortable with or that would best help them communicate their idea.

It is difficult for an individual who does not identify as an artist to play a composition because they are not familiar with the constraints of their ability with the chosen medium. For those who have never picked up a paint brush, the first ABRI session would be best used in practical instruction and technical assistance.

STEPH
• Born in Mexico, raised in Greeley.
• 18 y.o.
• Freshman at CSU.
• Service involved working to bring back after school programs in middle schools in Fort Collins where funding had been cut.
Metaphor: “Hope and Community”

In this piece, I focused on the elements of hope and community that Steph sought to represent through her painting. I combined her declarative symbol of hope and connection to home, the sunflower, with what she’s always had that meaning for me, the hummingbird. Sharing our context and experiences creates new community.
Please take a moment to answer a few questions about this research.

https://unco.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8AHouoSHGtiOE4d
Survey Questions:

Increasing Reflexivity in Service Learning through Arts Based Research

This brief survey contains questions about the research installation, "Increasing Reflexivity in Service Learning through Arts Based Research." Below are the images included in the gallery installation. Please review the images and then answer the questions that follow.

[All gallery images included in order of presentation]

Q1 What date did you attend the gallery?
- Wednesday, May 31 (1)
- Thursday, June 1 (2)
- Friday, June 2 (3)
- Saturday, June 3 (4)

Q2 What parts of this installation resonated with you?

Q3 Do you have questions about service learning because of having attended this gallery?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q4 Please enter your service learning questions:

Q5 Do you have questions about Arts Based Research?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q6 Please enter your Arts Based Research questions:

Q7 Do you have any additional questions or comments you would like to share?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q8 Comments: