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CHAPTER 6

AT THE CROSSROADS OF PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION, NAEA, AND TERRY BARRETT

Exploring Metaphors of Meaning, Narratives of Hope

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between preservice teachers and art, as well as art's role in accessing the learners' knowledge communities. These preservice teacher experiences take place in an Art for the Elementary classroom within a university setting. Three preservice teachers explored to several pieces of art and constructed new meanings that challenged their preconceived notions of art as part of their daily lives.

It is misleading to speak of a world as it is, or even a single world. It makes more sense to think of various versions of the world that individuals may entertain, various characterizations of reality that might be presented in words, pictures, diagrams ... each of these symbol systems captures different kinds of information and hence presents different versions of reality. All we

have ... are such versions ... through them do we gain access to what we casually term "our world."

(Gardner, 1980, pp. 92–95)

What does it really mean to be a preservice teacher in an Art for the Elementary classroom at today's university? As a preservice teacher educator, I find myself asking this question on more than one occasion. Preservice teachers often come into my classroom with preconceived notions of what art is and how it is to be "used." One such preservice teacher recently requested an advising session to let me know that what I planned to teach in my course over the semester was not going to be of value to her, as she was teaching first grade and did not understand how art could possibly be important to children learning to read and write. This encounter was after the first class meeting in which I had simply handed out the syllabus and given a course overview. In our advising appointment, I asked her if she had ever taught first grade. She promptly replied with, "No, but I have observed a first grade class ... twice." I assured her, based on my experience as a preservice teacher educator for the past 6 years and having taught in the public school system for more than 12 years, that she would indeed learn something about art that would help her teach in her first grade classroom. She did not appear convinced when she left my office.

Art and art-making are defined as special forms of experience (Dewey, 1980), and these experiences are viewed in multiple contexts. The central role of this narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Olson & Craig, 2001) is to explore the relationship between the preservice teacher and art, as well as art's role in accessing the learners' knowledge communities (Craig, 1995) based on the experiences of preservice teachers, all of which are occurring in an art for the elementary classroom within a university setting. The earlier encounter is one example of the misconceptions preservice teachers have about art, and the types of notions that have prompted this narrative inquiry and brought me to a crossroads when it comes to leading students in experiences with art. The crossroads are neither the art for the elementary content nor the variety of learning experiences given to preservice teachers in the art for the elementary classroom.

These crossroads involve dealing with the preconceived notions of preservice teachers about what art is, and the "knowledge communities" (Craig, 1995) they access to understand and explore art. These knowledge communities refer to any personal, practical, professional, internal or external resource that an individual accesses to make sense of their world; that is, how they come to know, or in this case, how they come to know art. These crossroads that are encountered lead to many forks in the road where decisions are made in attempt to disrupt what was previously

understood as an art curriculum in an art for the elementary classroom. Instead, these crossroads make art practice for the elementary preservice teacher reflective, personal, and powerful, changing assumptions and adding to the ever-changing knowledge communities that individuals draw from to make sense of their world.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Most preservice teachers are preconditioned by prior education experiences to try to construct the "right" fixed answer, while others, who are more open, will begin to take risks in creating, looking at, talking about, and writing about art without regard for a "right" answer. The processes initiated in this art for the elementary classroom were intended to provoke thought and encourage voice while making meaningful art. As a result, the preservice teacher's experiences became the framework for developing and presenting course content (Wasson, Stuhr, & Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1990). This type of learning environment strives to cultivate preservice teacher exploration in the notions about how they believe things are and present new ways of knowing beyond their own conceptions, which at times creates certain tensions—the crossroads.

I had been consciously aware for some time of the tensions related to art that preservice teachers face in the classroom, such as not feeling creative or artistic, notions of one-way solutions, a desire for, what I call, "boxed content," which requires little or no critical thinking, and the everyday things that surround not only being in the art for the elementary classroom, but the dilemmas that surround the students' everyday lives. These tensions are underlying aspects of art education that need to be brought to the forefront in order to cultivate more meaningful art experiences in the preservice teacher classroom. These tensions involve the curricula of life (Dewey, 1985; van Manen, 1991); curricula which define experiences both in and beyond the classroom. These are curricula that make us who we are and guide us in navigating how we know what we know, and in turn how we respond, learn, and act as human beings.

NAEA AND TERRY BARRETT

This past year (2006) as I was attending the National Art Education Association (NAEA) Conference in Chicago, I was still grappling with my efforts to disrupt preservice teacher notions of art. I attended a session led by Terry Barrett on art and metaphors of life and critically looking at art. I must clarify that I do not know Dr. Barrett personally, though I am

very familiar with his literature. Although I am familiar with the literature discussed by Barrett and other art educators regarding the vast rainbow of art-looking experiences available for both students at the K–12 level and in higher education, bringing theory and pedagogy together in the preservice teacher classroom gives rise to challenges to art instruction where there are often no ready-made solutions. In my case, these challenges arise in a preservice teacher educational setting and the ideas about art they bring with them. Although I feel well-versed in the theoretical and practical aspects of art-looking and art-talking, I often feel uncertain about the perceived “meaningful-ness” of these experiences to preservice teachers.

I expose my preservice teachers to multiple methods of criticism, including the Feldman model (1970) of criticizing art (description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation) and Terry Barrett’s (1994) method of criticizing art, which is similar to the Feldman model, only a more interpretive approach is used to create more personal meanings. However, as a result of experiencing the session at NAEA with Terry Barrett, I began to “see” interpretation in a new light. Maybe it was the simplicity in which he dealt with the topic or simply the demonstration itself, but as Dr. Barrett asked the participants to engage in looking at art through the use of metaphor, my teaching pedagogy began to be reshaped, a reshaping that I wanted to take back to my students and explore with them.

In Dr. Barrett’s session, he used the photographic works of Stephen Althouse, a professor of photography at Barry University in Florida. Althouse holds a MFA in sculpture and photography and his philosophy of education reflects many of my own notions, including the idea that “[my] goal in teaching is to encourage students to discover more about themselves, to allow my students the freedom to search for something meaningful, and to ultimately help them find a truly satisfying form of creative visual expression” (Althouse, 2006, para. 2). After returning from the conference, I had already planned on exploring the “looking at art process” in a more in-depth way (I refrain from using the term “art criticism” because it holds its own set of preconceived formulas that would constrain this paper). This idea fits directly into the curriculum pattern for this semester.

As I personally explored the works of Althouse and considered both his philosophy and the session with Terry Barrett at NAEA in Chicago, I decided how I could best use his works in my course to cultivate student experiences with art to create meaning and displace preconceived ideas about art. I wanted to not only explore Barrett’s methods of art and metaphor as he explained them at the conference, but also add in my own notions of metaphor. I chose to incorporate Dr. Barrett’s more interpretive notion of metaphor and Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) notion of lived

metaphor. When merging these two notions together, looking at a work of art morphed into living knowledge of what art is about.

I had my students, like Dr. Barrett had done at the conference, explore the works of Stephen Althouse. One thing to address here is how my own knowledge communities (e.g., my background, education, and practical and professional knowledge, and the sessions at NAEA) of curriculum-making involves engaging my students and their ability to come to know art and art-making in new ways. This curriculum involved my own understandings of Terry Barrett’s workshop and how I chose to put it into practice. If I “understand what makes up the curriculum of the person most important to [you], namely, [my]self, [my] own narrative, [and as a result, I] will better understand the difficulties, whys, and wherefores of the curriculum of [my] students” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, p. 31).

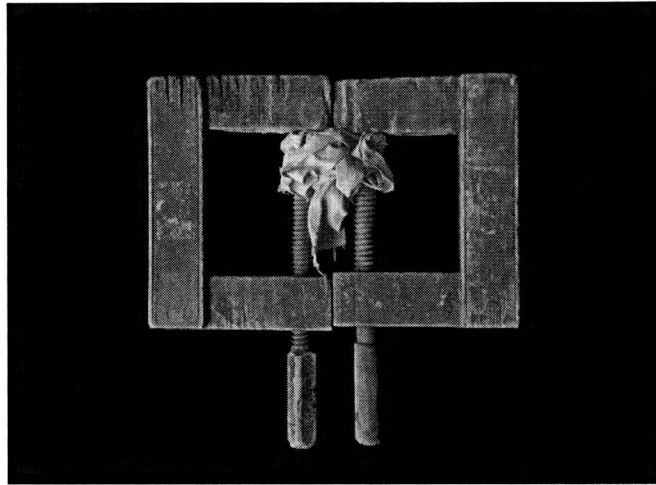
THE LOOKING: METAPHORS OF MEANING

The two works I chose to use in my preservice teacher classroom from the many that Dr. Barrett had provided in his NAEA session were *Clamps* and *Clamps With Shroud* (Figures 6.1. and 6.2, respectively). I began with my students by giving a brief introduction about Althouse and his work and then turned the conversation to interpretive metaphor (which is more literary) and life metaphor. Students were asked to work together in groups to define metaphor, and also to give examples of how they use metaphor in their everyday thinking. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) articulate that metaphor is,

pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If ... our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do everyday is a matter of metaphor. (p. 3)

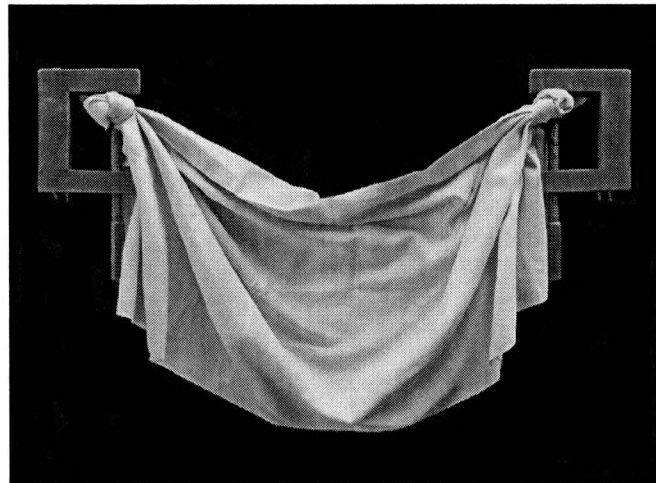
As we began to explore the meaning of metaphor, different groups defined metaphor differently. Here are three groups’ one-line explanations of metaphor:

1. Metaphor means comparing something to something else without using like or as.



Source: Stephen Althouse, copyright 2003. Reprinted with permission (Appendix A).

Figure 6.1. Althouse's *Clamp*. 42 x 60 inches, pigmented inkjet print.



Note: Stephen Althouse, copyright 2003. Reprinted with permission (Appendix A).

Figure 6.2. Althouse's *Clamps and Shroud*. 42 x 60 inches, pigmented inkjet print.

2. Metaphor is like saying something that is something else but using other words, like, "she's all that" or "she's a star."
3. Metaphor is a way of seeing characteristics of one thing in another like "she's a diamond." That means she is precious and is important.

In this preservice teacher classroom, metaphor emerged as a way of thinking narratively, which began here and continued to grow over time. This idea is embedded in the presuppositions, the nonverbal aspects, and even the way I use my voice to disclose what I am asking of my students—in this case, exploring metaphor as an act of meaning. There is a direct link between metaphor and symbolism that needs explanation. First, metaphor is present in all language and works by translating a more abstract experience into an experience that is more concrete; secondly, metaphor allows people to understand, think about, and explain abstract concepts through the human body and its experiences where it operates as an organizing tool to create a whole piece of knowledge; and last, metaphor is embedded in the very nature of human thinking, using symbols as identifying signs that create meaning (Lawley & Thompkins, 2000). The students demonstrate this in their definitions of metaphor by revealing metaphor's symbolic nature and abstract ideas rooted in experience.

Metaphor then becomes a mode of thinking narratively, where we translate and transfer knowledge from one domain to another, adding to our personal, practical, and professional knowledge communities. This translating and transferring process progresses to forms of narrative knowing. This type of knowing is situated in the temporal where the use of interpretation comes to the forefront of understanding and explanations are exhibited (Polkinghorne, 1987). This is what I came to discover as I participated in Terry Barrett's session at NAEA.

Explaining metaphor in terms of life was harder for the students. They had a more difficult time relating metaphor to their lives. As I observed and watched the students, I realized that, like them, I am not conscious of thinking narratively through metaphor. I was not as aware as I thought I was of "the little things we do every day ... [where what we] think and act [are] more or less automatic along certain lines" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3). I, like my students, took metaphoric thinking for granted.

According to van Manen (1990), "Nietzsche once observed that all language, and therefore all truth and error is metaphoric in origin" and "virtually every word we utter ultimately derives from some image, thereby betraying its metaphoric genesis" (p. 49). He goes on to say that, "our most prized certainties, our best proven ideas, our most neglected commonplaces must admit to their metaphoric genealogy" (p. 49). Exploring and looking at art with preservice teachers became an experi-

depends on the preconceptions and acceptance of, or resistance to certain ideas or ideologies that the work reveals” (Yokley, 1999, p. 20). The following sections explain how these same three preservice teachers began to redefine the very nature of what art means to them by engaging with metaphors of life, which are built on “knowledge communities” (Craig, 1995), thereby creating new relationships with art.

GINA’S RESPONSE TO ALTHOUSE

Gina’s response to Althouse’s work, titled *Clamps*, reveals much about how Gina invites art to interact with her knowledge communities and how her world as a curriculum of life interacts with the artwork. Gina’s dominant preconceived notion about art was that it held no potential for personal value beyond being “ugly” or “pretty” and that art could not be personally relevant; it “really only means something to the artist.” Here is Gina’s interpretation and response to Althouse, where she discovers a life connection to the work:

The strips of cloth represent me as complicated, unorganized, and stuck between two important people, my son and husband who are represented by the clamps. As unorganized as I am, I need the clamps to hold me together to avoid falling into pieces. The old and worn out clamps represent my desire to grow old surrounded by my family. The black background represents my fears, which with the help and support of my family, I fight to conquer. (Journal Entry, March 2006)

Gina integrates her interpretation with her life and her family—her husband and son whom she talks about regularly in class. This expresses an experience for Gina in making personally meaningful connections with the visual, an experience which reveals the daily conflicts that Gina experiences in her life. *Clamps* represents a place of conflict and mediation as part of Gina’s world where “thought and feeling are irrevocably intertwined” (Barrett, 1994, p. 11). For Gina, these personal life circumstances are revealed in her interpretation as “guided by human intelligence, that makes unique forms of meaning possible” (Eisner, 1986, p. 57). It is a language, where the private and personal lives of individual students have a public presence (Eisner, 2002). It is where reflection begins, a place that pushes the boundaries of the preconceived notions of art for the preservice teacher. Gina was initially not even aware that she had made a personal connection with the artwork until she shared her experience with the class.

ELLA’S RESPONSE TO ALTHOUSE

Ella’s dominant preconceived notion about art was that art only expresses the perspective of the artist and in order to connect with art, you have to know artist’s intentions. She quickly abandoned that notion with this experience. Ella chose Althouse’s *Clamps and Shroud*, and her response dealt with the spiritual. She internalized her conceptions as equal to her belief system, revealing her moral conceptions of self. Ella’s response:

The shroud represents my life, and the freedom I have to be loose as long as I’m being held by the principles and values of God. The white color of the shroud represents purity, because it requires that I have a pure and transparent life in order to be secure. All the wrinkles made by the clamps represent the process of maturity that I go through in my life, which include struggles and suffering. At the same time, the shroud becomes more flexible and loose with time because the pressure at the beginning created a new texture that can be bent. This is like God shaping our hearts and making them more flexible to hear his voice. That’s how I see my heart. (Journal Entry, March 2006)

Ella reveals the existential ideas in her curricula of life that she has internalized, built around cultural tradition and beliefs as part of her knowledge communities. In Ella’s view, *Clamps and Shroud* marks a way of living rather than the everyday struggles with life. Ella’s interpretation leads us to ideas of the communal involvement in her life world. These are voices and influences of her indigenous knowledge communities at work. Ella’s indigenous knowledge communities are culturally, individually, and socially embedded in a place where individual meaning-making ascribes symbolic and narrative knowing. This resides within a cyclical awareness of the multiple pieces that make up the whole of her life, to what has been known and experienced to create new understandings in the visual. She is drawing on all of her experience and knowledge as a repertoire for what she will see. She has displaced preconceived notions of art through the personal, no longer believing that she must understand what the artist means to understand or experience the artwork.

CHRISTI’S RESPONSE TO ALTHOUSE

Christi’s response to Althouse’s *Clamps* revealed a deeper and more personal meaning, a meaning that when shared with the class carried art’s power, a transformation not only for Christi, but also for the other preservice teachers who engaged with her metaphor. At the beginning of the semester, Christi looked at art as objects that held no personal connection

to herself or her world; Christi saw art only in the light of fixed content. She saw the experiences in this class as means for making sure she got the “right” answer, controlling what she could in her education experience, such as her grades.

The transformation in Christi with art came as a result of a bigger transformation in her life—a tragedy. Christi’s house burned down during spring vacation, causing her to lose everything except a few things she salvaged out of the fire. Coincidentally, this was during the time of the NAEA conference. She discussed the incident briefly in class during the first week back from vacation. Before breaking down in tears as she apologized for being late, she said that she had to take her husband to work and then casually added, “our house burned down this week.” Everyone looked in her direction as she continued to speak. She said, “Everything I owned was in the house except my husband and daughter and our car. My daughter was at a friend’s house” She began crying but we casually moved on to discuss Althouse’s work. Christi’s interpretation of Althouse was her first written response to her tragedy, a tragedy of which she was still in the midst. She described how she felt about her life at that moment:

I sit here and stare at this picture and I have no connection with it. I see my life squished up in those rags, being pushed to the limit, being torn and shattered. My life right now is out of control. I know I should slow down but I am of afraid of failing. I am the white dirty rag being held up by two screws. The shredded cloths are my feelings being squished and torn. I should let my feelings out and unscrew. Then I could balance my life out so I can fall gracefully and allow both screws to unscrew evenly. I think I should stop running and slow down and think. The wooden blocks represent the world around me that I have to overcome. I sit here and stare at this picture and I know exactly what it means. *Clamps* is a metaphor for my life. My whole college career has had one disaster after another, the most recent being the fire. (Journal Entry, March 2006)

Christi provided a forum for interpreting *Clamps*, allowing for the “individual freedom to meander” (Barrett, 1994, p. 13) through her thoughts and feelings, helping her engage in conversations about the tragedy that had recently happened in her life. Art for Christi became a place of power for her to address the personal issues in her life. In fact, two days after that class, she stopped by my office and proudly declared that it was “really great that art can say so many things.” What she understood was that there is more than one way to understand something, and that getting it “right” does not mean there is only one right answer. Art gave Christi a voice.

DISCUSSION

For all three students this experience provided opportunities for making intrinsic choices that involved a language of possibilities. The students took the opportunity to draw on their knowledge communities, exercising individual choice where identity and the relationships and interactions with others helped students “to semiotically discern relationships among sign, symbol, and metaphor ... [to] insinuate concepts” (Yokley, 1999, p. 21). This sequence of classroom events helped to provide a foundation for understanding the influences that impact how preservice teachers understand and see the multiple layers of meanings present in art. In turn, each preservice teacher renegotiated and moved beyond their pre-conceived notions of art. Students began to recognize that “visual works of art don’t become art just in the physical act ... [of making], and in the physical act of observing them; they have to be associated with an understanding, a rationale—an aesthetic [and a knowledge community]” (Chaplin, 1998, p. 293). Art, in all of its forms, is imbued with meaning, and helping my preservice teachers find the meaning for art in their personal and professional lives through metaphor has helped me navigate the crossroads of preservice teacher notions about art. So, thank you Terry Barrett, Stephen Althouse, and the multitude of coordinators, speakers, and participants at NAEA. You make a difference and are adding to the knowledge communities that are changing what we know regarding how we teach and experience art!

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