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Space for Drawing: Women, Art, Love, and Fear

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SPACE FOR DRAWING: WOMEN, ART, LOVE, AND FEAR

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Abstract

This article describes an arts-based research project for which my purpose was to investigate how older women develop their skills as visual artists through the medium of drawing in a small group setting. The social construction of artist identities among the group and my teaching of drawing formed the basis of my study in this informal, community-based learning environment. I assessed how learning new creative skills later in life affects the quality of an individual's sense of self and their perceived value and contribution in relation to society, and how apprehension about learning a new skill touches others in the group. My interest extended to investigating how the skill of drawing influences other areas of life like aesthetic awareness and to the role of digital media in rendering the research. Arts-based research as a method of inquiry allowed the use of alternative representation of results and findings.

Résumé

Cet article décrit un projet de recherche basée sur les arts (arts-based research), projet qui vise à examiner comment les femmes âgées développent leurs compétences en tant qu'artistes visuelles à travers la pratique du dessin dans un petit groupe. La construction sociale des identités des artistes au sein d'un groupe et mon enseignement du dessin jettent les bases de mon étude dans cet environnement informel et communautaire d'apprentissage. J'examine comment l'acquisition de nouvelles compétences créatives à un âge avancé influence la qualité du sens du soi ainsi que la valeur et la contribution perçues par rapport à la société. J'étudie comment l'apprehension de l'acquisition de nouvelles compétences d'un individu atteint les autres dans un groupe. Ce travail s'intéresse aussi à la manière dont les compétences en dessin influencent d'autres domaines de la vie tels que la sensibilité esthétique. Il met en lumière le rôle des médias numériques dans l'interprétation des recherches. La recherche basée sur les arts (arts-based research) en tant que méthode d'enquête permet la mise en œuvre de nouvelles représentations des résultats des recherches.

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Introduction



There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. (1 John 4:18, New International Version)

Figure 1: Petra Zantingh, Hands, 2013, graphite on vellum, 30 x 23 cm

We gathered for the first time on a beautiful Friday morning in the fall of September 2011—the month in which sharp new pencils and crisp white paper wait with expectation. When I walked into the space, I saw that the dining room had been transformed into a working classroom (see Figure 1). I asked myself again, could this really work? Antique furniture and oriental rugs had been moved aside to make room for two long industrial, collapsible tables. Sunlight from the long wall of windows filled the room, shedding rich light on the dining room table that had been tucked away in the corner and covered with a crisp white linen tablecloth. On it was a collection of fine china coffee cups, delicate

silver spoons, and cake plates all ready and waiting. Waiting for what? How was I going to maintain a sense of professionalism of practice in this organized and fastidious space? Who



were these women and why did they want to learn how to draw? What kinds of judgments, attitudes, fears, hopes, and anticipations had I packed with me in my portfolio (see Figure 2)? What was going to remain packed away and what was going to assist me in my teaching?

Figure 2: Petra Zantingh, *Dining Room Table*, 2013

Six women were invited to attend the private drawing classes that took place in the home of one of the women whom I had agreed to teach. Apart from taking the drawing classes, these women had also generously agreed to participate in my research study, called *Space for Drawing* (SFD), which sought to discover the relations between women, art, love, and fear. All of the women in my study gave their consent for their names and ages to be included in this work. The group from various socio-economic backgrounds comprised Dinii (age 76), a retired professor; Linda (age 67), a retired social worker with international experience; Sylvie (age 50), a stay-at-home mom; Monique (age 79), a retired bank employee; Hilke (age 78), a stay-at-home wife; and Trudi (age 75), a retired restaurant owner and cook. Three of these women received their education in Quebec and three in Europe (Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland). In various degrees, their amateur art practices, spanning over many years, continues today. For this drawing class that became a research study, we met at Dinii's home every Friday morning for two 12-week semesters, for a total of 24 classes from the fall of 2012 to the winter of 2013. I had taught drawing to this group the year before, and this was when I recognized and identified the critical role that love, care, and fear played in this group. Some of the women were still afraid to draw, and their feelings of inadequacies hindered their abilities.

The life stages of the women provide a unique opportunity to consider more fully feminist perspectives in art education, as well as a topic that has limited study in art education—aging and art—not in a therapeutic sense, but from a perspective of life-long learning. With four women over 70 (elderly), one woman over 60 (senior), and two of us in our 50s (mature), the profile of this class adds insights about teaching and learning to existing literature about aging and art. Consequently, my research interest was to investigate how older women develop their skills, personal language, and confidence as visual artists through the medium of drawing in an informal small group setting. Working with this group, I examined the kinds of potential problems faced when women as life-long learners

pursue a creative skill. Relationships with other learners are an essential factor for adults when they learn, because it is these relationships that contribute to a sense of belonging—producing positive, safe environments (MacKeracher, 2004).

I was guided by the following series of inquiry questions for this study: Why is it important to create a flourishing community of love and care when teaching something difficult that requires risk taking? Is it possible to teach someone to confront their fears in a space that is a safe group setting? Can experience and skill change perceptions of fear among women adult learners? Does apprehension about learning a new skill affect others in a group setting? Can the skill of learning to see and draw influence other areas of life—like the ability to develop an aesthetic sense, consequently improving an individual's perspective on her quality of life? Did new understandings relevant to community art education and life-long learning emerge?

Unexpectedly, these questions extended my interest to investigating the role of digital media in rendering the research. Because of my background in digital arts and graphic design, using digital media is a natural way for me to relevantly integrate findings, drawings, text, video, and images to discover meaning and direction. I used digital applications on my iPad to show motivating examples of artwork and to record notes, conversations, and drawings. As an extension of my research, the iPad became an invaluable tool because I used it for a myriad of tasks during the weekly classes.

Spaces for Lived Experiences

Over the course of an academic year, I taught the group drawing techniques, observed them as student artists, listened to their conversations and histories, developed teaching methods in response to their work in progress, and participated in art making with them. All of this was viewed through various lenses and documented through diverse methods. Adopting Lather's (2006) position on paradigm proliferation, I drew upon several lenses suitable for this study and I addressed two key approaches of action research and arts-based research to demonstrate how lived experiences and arts-based research attend to oral, visual, and textual expressions that helped to bring forward insights to how we mediate our worlds and our knowledges within the social organization of a space for drawing.

Action Research

According to Berg & Lune (2008) action research is a decidedly concerted and group inquiry, assumed in this case by the women to improve a condition through deliberate self-reflective contribution to the study. In this way, action research shares its Marxist roots with the premise of feminist standpoint theory, which informed my perspectives, and provides a mode of learning in which we can all become both co-learners and co-teachers (Freire Institute, 2013). Having the intentional support of the women in the group allowed us to develop consensual and democratic strategies to overcome the issues of fear in art, making action research an important aspect of this inquiry. I recognized that it was equally important to be transparent with the group, and I unveiled layers of my personal story as it pertained to teaching drawing and to my own experiences of aging (Creswell, 2013). Visual research tells an accompanying story of our shared journey. As a form of expression, artwork can be considered a site of knowledge and meaning making that functions as a way to help understand contexts (Sullivan, 2010). Action research provided a method to ensure

the group's artworks became central to the research as an integral component and a rich, significant site for knowledge creation (Leavy, 2009).

Arts-based Research

In designing my research study, I realized that a combination of approaches was the most effective way to access lived experiences with oral, textual, and visual dimensions. Using the artwork from the women and my weekly digital journal/sketchbook, which included sketches, drawings, and text and any accompanying artwork completed while writing, gave me insight into the process of teaching drawing and into teaching methods in an effort to account for the role of love and care and the power to overcome fear. Key concepts of arts-based research include using visual art practices like drawing to address research questions in a holistic way, as well as visual mapping (Sullivan, 2010) so that theory and practice become interwoven (Leavy, 2009). Using the language of art, which extends beyond the academy, was natural and appropriate for me as a teaching artist, and using arts-based research as a method of inquiry allowed for alternative representation of interpretations rather than relying only on traditional methods to determine results and findings. Viewing the women's artwork while it was being made was another consideration in the data collection that required me to take notes in the sketchbook while the work was being produced. So my sketchbook consisted of notes and drawings produced by me during the class (see Figure 3). In addition to the sketchbook entries, I devoted myself to drawing on a regular basis while analyzing and writing up the data in a heuristic manner to better grasp what the women went through in the drawing classes and compare this to what actually happens during the drawing process. Becoming part of the research by embodying the act of drawing myself allowed me to generate greater insight to how love and fear operate when I am teaching and learning. Our collective drawings serve as indicators and markers of specific moments and insights that extend beyond expertise and technique. The drawings serve as a reminder that drawing practice is a journey that evolves through time by assembling, adjusting, deconstructing, and reconstructing the marks to become a two-dimensional image (Maslen & Southern, 2011).

Informed by feminist standpoint theory, I sought to avoid control and strove to develop a sense of connectedness in which the women embraced their knowledge, differences, and experiences and built on existing art skills. Being rooted in feminist understandings helped me understand that even women with assumed privilege are sometimes marginalized and in some cases oppressed due to age. As a teacher, I remained conscious of my role and the importance of empowering each woman through art as a way to mediate the challenges they were facing as older women in their private and public lives. From our conversations and art making, we came to share a socially constructed space where new perspectives on how values and beliefs we hold in the world change due to how we take up aging. Our lived and living experiences shaped our seeing and drawing week to week.

In this environment of a teaching artist guiding mature women in drawing, we formed a community of practice in which our situated knowledges became the basis for meaning making in art and in life (Haraway, 1988). I committed extensive time to my inquiry questions by examining the rapport between the women and the evolving relationships between us all in the physical and psychological space we filled every week. This research included conversations and lived experiences of the teaching and art making that happened

Figure 3: Petra Zantingh, *Journal/Sketchbook*, 2012–13, mixed media, scanned pages taken from the weekly entries, 14 x 20 cm



from week to week. It also included documented journal entries and artworks from the women as well as my collection of drawings. We began each class with my explaining what we would be drawing, showing motivating examples from other artists as well as my own drawing, and then demonstrating as needed. Observational drawing activities built on the skills we developed from week to week, beginning with a simple grey scale and scribbling, then moving toward various still-life arrangements (see Figures 4 and 5). My predominant goal was to teach them to see shadows, lights, and darks, and to this end I mostly set up objects that were white, grey, and black. As a form of expression, these artworks can be considered a site of knowledge, and they function as a way to understand contexts and spaces formed by the research.

Figure 4: Linda, Untitled, 2013, graphite on paper, 46 x 61 cm

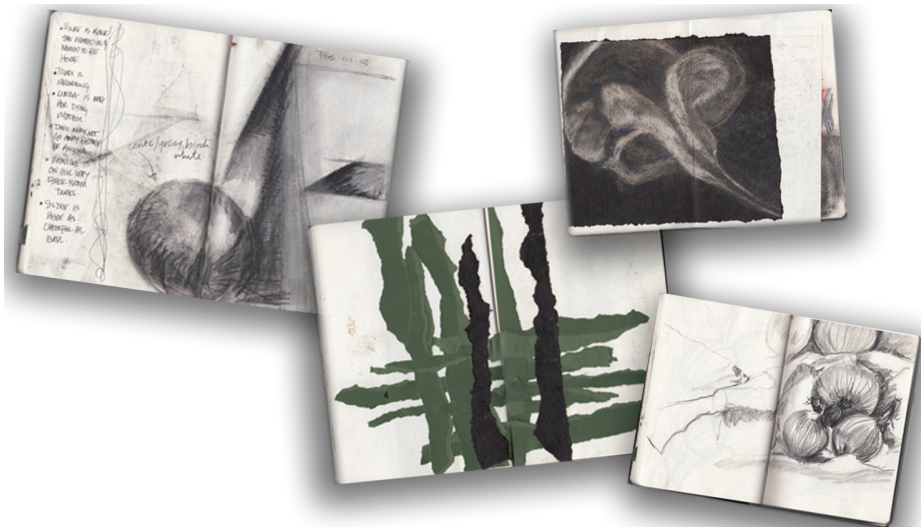


Figure 5: Petra Zantingh, Upside-down Still Life, 2012, photograph



Merging and using both text and images became a significant component in this art-based research, because images speak to me in ways that text cannot (Irwin, 2005; Leavy, 2009; Sullivan, 2010). For example, my journal sketchbook entries, which were inspired by our weekly lessons, conversations, and lived experiences as individuals during our drawing sessions, became an integral component in the work illustratively and as a “visual phenomenological” response to the teaching (Leavy). Through my own drawing practice, I remained connected and embodied in the work portrayed in conversation, interviews, and artworks we created, giving me insight into the art-making process (Creswell, 2013; Leavy; Irwin & Springgay, 2005). Visual research through layered images and texts shows and tells an accompanying story of our shared journey as artist teacher and adult learners. In Figure 6, for example, pages from left to right record a white cone and circle still-life drawing, a torn paper collage warm-up exercise, a flower drawing on tarpaper, and a still life with onions.

Figure 6: Petra Zantingh, *Journal/Sketchbook, 2012–13, mixed media*



Exploring Spaces: Scholarly Reviews on Topics of Women, Art, Love, and Fear

In relation to the literature concerning adult education, I assessed how (1) developing an art practice in later life is related to rejuvenation, renewal, and overcoming fear as an older adult; (2) whether the ability to “draw well” is related to an increased emotional awareness and empathy toward others; (3) whether new media tools such as digital applications can be used to teach an observational drawing class; and (4) how creating a community of inquiry contributed to overcoming fear in developing new art-practice skills through friendship as a form of love in teaching and learning.

The women, who are living diverse personal and professional lives, have formed powerful friendships and bonds, but it is their relational connections as artists that form the basis of my study. I worked with two core definitions: *love and fear*. For my study, *love* is defined as care, compassion, empathy, friendship, and unconditional support for others in the group.

Fear is commonly defined as paralyzing apprehension about developing, exploring, and taking risks with art making, but it can also be a creative tension. In my study, I detected a more nuanced understanding of fear as a subtle emotion that manifested itself as insecurity and a sighing when a task became difficult. The duality of love–fear is both challenging and beneficial in the teaching and learning experience and is seldom discussed in art education. Love and fear were often demonstrated in these rich relationships as the women learned to draw and, in the process, created a culture of caring. As a group, we shared many emotional ingredients to make up complex relationships, some of which are shallow, others deep; some expand, some contract. It is in this ebb and flow that growth occurs, not in a linear way but in an organic fashion.

And so a group of women with individual histories, quirks, and attitudes gathered in a beautiful, sunlit space to simply see, learn, and draw, and I looked forward to uncovering many unpredictable but significant insights from this seemingly simple yet complex and ever-shifting work as artist, researcher, and teacher.

Why Space?

Physical space is as important as psychological, spiritual, and emotional spaces are, and arguably, in the case of my research, space is a primary element for what took place in a tangible way. Psychologically, it was the place where some would grow and excel in drawing and communication. Physically, it was the place where we spent time exploring the dimensions of drawing and getting to know each other in sophisticated comfort. It is with this understanding that I enter scholarly conversations and spaces in relation to my research study. Specifically, I will examine concepts of teaching drawing and learning how to draw and the tensions of creative expression that manifest in an array of emotions.

Space for Care

Our ability to care and the ethics of care begin with a realization that we ourselves have been cared for, producing in us a responsibility to consider others and/or freely support those around us. Caring raises questions of competence, sacrifice, and inclusion (Noddings, 2012). And I wonder, is the ethic of care an ethic of principle? As women, do we act in a caring manner to enhance and maintain relationships? Are there cultural or historical versions of caring? For example, in my group, the women are primarily older, and their principles and ethics may vary from those of a younger generation, particularly in relation to feminist perspectives. Noddings suggested that some feminists have raised the concern that an ethic of care might be a contributing factor in the ongoing manipulation of women, and that the constant pressure of care might cause the caregiver to neglect herself. I think about care from several angles: the women in the group give care to each other as a form of love, and the women care for themselves by attending the class. Many of them are full-time caregivers to members of their families and see our drawing group as a reprieve or a time that is carved out exclusively for them to avoid neglecting themselves. They also receive care from me as I teach them, and I accept care from them. All of these forms of care have been advantageous in helping this group of friends and artists. Care became a foundation for building a safe, pleasant, and comfortable space where art could be produced without judgment.

Space for Drawing

Drawing is the most basic of art-making skills, not only historically in Western civilization, but also for individuals (Maslen & Southern, 2011). Making marks in childhood is a fundamental activity and usually precedes writing (Betti & Sale, 1997; Maslen & Southern). As children get older, visual, tactile, and spatial components merge and form a conceptual knowledge base that begins to control how they draw (Maslen & Southern). As children increase their awareness of what the world looks like, they attempt to re-create and make adjustments to produce a true-to-life replica of what they see. When this fails or becomes difficult, they may become insecure and embarrassed by what they think is a visual lack of ability. According to Lowenfeld and Brittain (1982), this stage marks the end of artistic development unless the child receives further training, and it is at this juncture that many adults find themselves in terms of skill level, including our SFD group. Although not entirely conclusive, there appears to be enough evidence to suggest that as a child develops, her sense perceptions become corrupted by the surpassing development of the intellect (Maslen & Southern). So instead of seeing what is presented, they begin to see through the lenses of what knowledge and logic dictate. Observational drawing is often perceived as a talent and not an acquired skill, so when the resulting effort is not photographic in likeness, the value of the work decreases. Educational systems assume that drawing skills naturally develop along with a student's intellect, and this results in many adults who either draw like adolescents (Maslen & Southern) or feel ashamed and become afraid to draw. Remediation and unlearning patterns are always part of the teaching process, and drawing is a good place to practise this reversal if it takes place in a caring environment when fear of drawing can be addressed in new ways.

Berger (2011) articulated the significance of sensory experiences when drawing, describing the impulse to draw as an intuitive task that is dependent on the consciousness that precedes analytical reasoning. Drawing places and objects occurs in a space that the viewer determines or imagines. Drawing is a way of seeing through fresh eyes and with a new perspective, engaging us by offering more than one way to look at the world. Even one drawing has multiple meanings involving semantics and aesthetics—like a marriage between what we know and what we see (Maslen & Southern, 2011). Observational drawing can help bring this about, and it is one of the reasons teaching drawing is important: it transcends the physical documentation of an object onto paper by the uniqueness of the person who draws it. A beginning approach to learning how to see and draw is with gesture (Nicolaidis, 1969), a mark that records the movement of the artist's implement, time response, and what the object is doing. Gesture is a quick way to capture the essence of a drawing and is a metaphor for energy and spontaneity and for communicating an idea quickly with long and short, thick and thin, and fast and slow marks made by the artist. In contrast and as a complement to gesture drawing, contour drawing is a slower, more concentrated investigation. A contour line is a single and incisive line that describes the object spatially by separating negative and positive space and defining the edges of value, shadow, or texture (Betti & Sale, 1997). Both of these introductions into drawing became important because of the visual connection producing knowledge and empathy between the object and the artist.

Space for Fear

Why are some learners afraid of exploring ways to express themselves in art, and specifically through drawing? In my teaching I have experienced extreme, paralyzing fear in some students to the degree that it has caused them to quit producing or even dissolve into tears. Bayles and Orland (1993) asked basic but important questions that get to the heart of this fear, and I extend this understanding to my study. What is fear in learning, and can I, as a teacher of drawing, bring qualities of care as love to overcome fear? These questions are relevant at every stage of any art practice, and although written for practising artists, this theory also has implications for beginners. Many expert and novice artists link practising art to who they are, and this identity development quickly becomes an integral part of their life and self-esteem, for as Bayles and Orland stated, “overcoming apprehension and uncertainty in any new endeavour boosts confidence as mastery is achieved” (p. 15). Thus, fear plays a powerful role in raising swarms of doubt and uncertainty. Although this will never change, said the authors, uncertainty can become an asset by altering this discovery by facing the self-doubt. Based on the SFD group, I came to question whether fear becomes a greater issue as we age and how this impacts teaching adults drawing.

The role of the teacher takes a different approach when teaching adults, becoming more of a guide and mentor rather than an authority figure. Adult students’ life experiences are equally important to the teacher’s knowledge (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). Presumably, an aging population has more life experience than an adult college student, making this experience even richer. Teaching adult women was a humbling experience for me filled with many emotions including fear, hope, uncertainty, and realizing limitations (Brookfield, 1990).

Space for Aging

One of the more significant points substantiated in a research study conducted by Patterson & Perlstein (2011) is the notion of self-mastery. Becoming skilled in creative activities “go[es] farther and engage[s] the mind, body, and emotions, sparking curiosity, problem solving, and artistic accomplishment” (p. 28). Self-mastery as a skill increases self-confidence and deepens exploration and experimentation in the arts, which the authors also claimed boosted the immune system of the elderly group studied. In the SFD group, self-mastery manifested itself when the women learned how to master specific drawing techniques, as demonstrated in their drawings. Although this study is concerned with positive health outcomes and is focused on a quantitative method of research, it is encouraging to have this particular data to substantiate and contribute to my project in terms of developing drawing skills. Bringing this work from the realm of health sciences will enrich our knowledge in the field of art education by introducing a scope of interdisciplinary perspectives concerned with creativity and aging. By far one of the most compelling articles I have encountered thus far is the critique by Patterson and Perlstein, because they discovered a transformative link between creative work and health in the elderly. In this research they presented evidence that participation in creative work improves cognitive performance and quality of life.

White canvases and blank pads of paper are full of creative expectations and can be alluring, seductive, and frightening. There is risk taking and experimentation involved in beginning an art project and imagination required to maintain and carry out the visual ideas. This perspective builds on Maxine Greene’s (1995) argument for the importance of

using imagination in art education, aesthetics, literature, and social contexts. Imagination in these realms needs to be revisited as a space where art practice is a means of expressing ideas, advocating the use of unconventional, arts-based approaches. One of Greene's seminal essays explored how recalling childhood pedagogies is a means to identify patterns in individualized learning by providing insight into how we perceive or learn from our particular situated locations, past and present. The realization that, in multiplicity, our different experiences make way for understanding, seeing, and fostering empathy, from which my conceptual approach to caring as love emerged. Love and friendship teach us how we respond to others in a learning environment, fostering a safe space where we can be vulnerable and where our strengths and weaknesses are shared. I believe love is truthful, is tender, and asks for total disarmament, and as a teacher, I strive to foster the conditions for such love in my classrooms. When a person is open to it, good things may be born from a state of vulnerability in learning because it makes room for self-awareness, openness, and risk taking (Nouwen, 1969), and that is how I entered the drawing sessions with the SFD group.

Over time, some of the women began to solve drawing or compositional problems on their own and began to clearly identify these problems in others' drawing. Doing this together with others raises the success of the experience exponentially. Successful aging is often attributed to being vitally involved and fully engaged in new activities, which can encompass creative expression. Increased self-awareness and a deeper understanding of others, as well as the permission to experiment and explore new things, all contribute to creative growth.

Cohen (2006) also investigated the positive influences of the arts on health in the "second half of life" instead of looking at aging as a series of negative changes (p. 8). Mounting evidence shows that as we age we become more in touch with our inner psychological lives (Lindauer, 2003). This increased knowledge can be a benefit in developing creativity. In fact, a sense-of-control mechanism is an important tool to successful aging. Self-mastery that leads to successful drawing technique mixed with social engagement is an important factor when creative and artistic activities are conducted in groups (Cohen).

Art production, in this case drawing within a comfortable group environment, accounts for two important elements in my research: the role of community and learning a skill. Working with my group brought me to Meadowcroft's narrative inquiry about the lives of a group of women artists who collectively formed *Beaver Hall Women Painters*. Meadowcroft (1999) recalled the stories of their lives as women artists, friends, and art educators in the early 1900s in Montreal. The inquiry described how they not only sketched and painted together but also supported each other through illness, domestic crisis, and depression. This research is inspiring and provides an important guide to my own study in a contemporary context because of the depicted camaraderie and the aspects of fear and love that were woven through their lives.

Like Meadowcroft, Grumet, in her book *Bitter Milk* (1988), provided an important analysis of women's studies, education, psychology, and philosophy. It focused on the lived experiences of women teachers by examining and identifying a wide range of theoretical perspectives. Patriarchal patterns in our education systems that promote nurturing were an important notion in this book and are of deep concern regarding my research, because half of the women in the SFD group were educated in the Catholic school system in Quebec. I anticipated that specific issues regarding methods of teaching would surface, and they did.

Similar historical research by Pearse (2006) investigated art education in Quebec through first-person accounts and helped generate insight into the fearfulness around engaging in the arts by looking at the motivations, objectives, and styles of teaching visual art in relation to religion. In turn, today the SFD group's sustained and extended drawing in a space that encompasses and respects the whole person within the confines of an inner circle of friends has produced an atmosphere in which fear of learning a new skill is obliterated.

My Process of Information Gathering

My diverse research data was produced from doing, observing, and interviewing rather than from interviewing alone. Breaking through the void of teacher–student and researcher–participant, which is often shaped by observational methods, I entered the space of the community of practice that formed among the women to gain access to their inner thoughts, feelings, and insights as information for this study. This approach involved assuming a relationship that was as close as possible, while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to interpret situations by stepping back and reflecting on the meaning. Establishing relationships was not difficult to do with this group, because we collectively reflected on incidents, teaching methods, and art making, working together as teachers–students and, most importantly, friends. For example, when women were drawing, I began to draw things around me that had the theme of vulnerability like flowers and my aging foot (see Figures 7, 8, and 9). Thus, the boundaries between observer and subject became blurred and, as a result, new understandings were gained through our ongoing exchanges as they observed me, and I them. Using methods of observation, open-ended interviews, and visual data to investigate my questions concerning women, art, love, and fear, I sought to broaden and cultivate the area of study concerning adult women learners.

Like many practices, these weekly classes produced a steady progression in the skill of drawing. We sometimes planned the next lessons in the moment, especially after sessions were evaluated by analyzing works in progress. When we encountered problems, like specific viewing of a still-life arrangement, we improvised using white objects placed onto a dark background with a strong spotlight. This helped everyone understand the importance of shadow and contrast in observational drawing. We worked collaboratively through each stage of drawing in ways consistent with action research. Lessons were designed using a set of plans that were discussed and revised in consultation with the group to meet the needs and objectives of the drawing class. When an approach did not produce desired results, the methods were changed and adapted. For example, when I introduced a post-modern project that involved abstract, personal expression, one of the women objected and we returned to observational drawing, which is what they had initially requested. Our dialogue often included a comparison of the individuals' past work, the progression achieved, and areas that required further work. A conversation about the individual's ability and self-mastery helped the women further their own work and was evidence that advancing skill increased their self-confidence.

Individual artworks chosen by the women were entered into the data collection because they contained the most important indicators of growth as artists and insights into their emerging development. Fragments of knowledge about their former education and their approach to learning were exhibited in how they approached a drawing. For example, the intentional need to use a ruler to mark points on a drawing or to use an eraser to remove

Figures 7, 8, and 9: Petra Zantingh, April 24, April 25, and April 27, 2013, graphite on paper, 43 x 36 cm, 43 x 36 cm, 36 x 43 cm

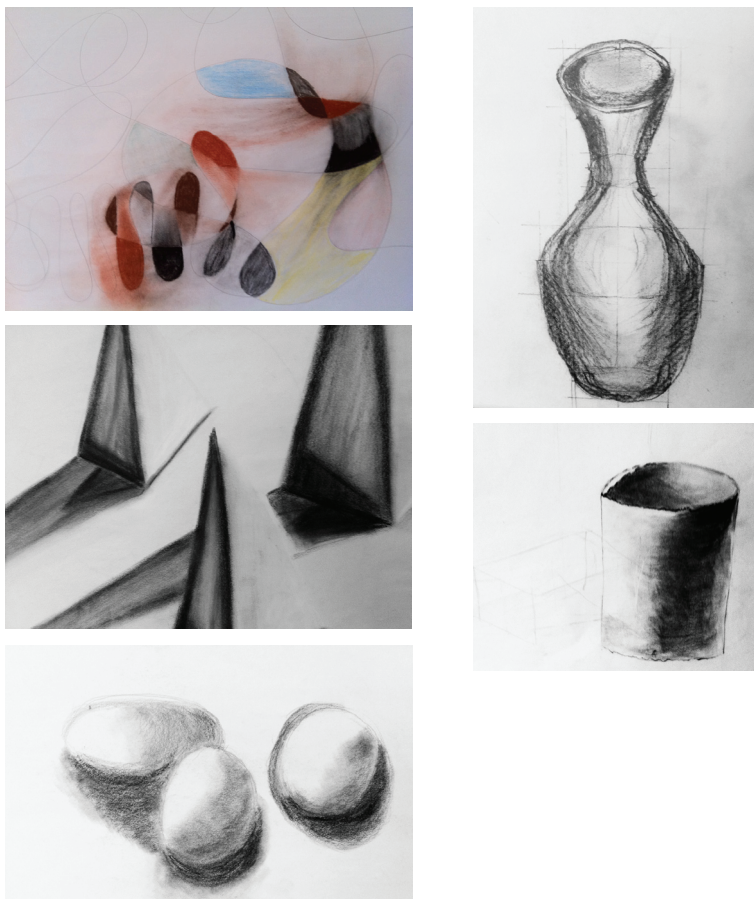


unwanted areas are quite clear in the work and reference a time in art education in which these tools were mandatory:

We learned to draw with a ruler and small paper with a teacher who was not an artist. We measured six inches here and six inches there. I don't recall any art in the class. I hated taking out the little pad and ruler, and everything was done with the ruler, and so it becomes a very negative experience. (*Monique*)

Fear that surrounded and inhibited their abilities could be seen in the tentative markings of some of the drawings, but especially in the unfinished and abandoned drawings. In some ways the drawings that did not find their way into the collection tell a greater story of fear and self-consciousness. Skill, confidence, and development as artists were evident in the progression of the boldness and scale of the drawings. As they worked sequentially through the lessons, some of the women became very bold in their approach to the drawing, producing large, striking drawings with strong contrast (see Figure 10). Encouragement to

Figure 10: Sample of some of the drawings produced by the SFD group, 2012–13, graphite and conté on paper, 36 x 43 cm



show the drawings suggested that a level of trust, care, and love had developed among the group.

Particular artwork that stood out as being more successful by the women was not necessarily the work that reduced anxiety or fear, nor was it the most aesthetically pleasing. It was, however, the work that they felt was more challenging to execute and required a greater degree of looking and concentration that brought about the greatest satisfaction and fulfilment. This reinforced the notion that successfully achieving a difficult project brought a greater amount of satisfaction:

For me, the hardest activity in this class was to draw the crumpled paper or the cloth still-life arrangements; by far the hardest and I hadn't done this before—the light and shades are like the shades of grey in the grey scales. Art was like my overseas job. I always took new jobs—no point in doing the same job again. Some people don't want to keep learning but if you want to move, don't sit in a rocking chair. (*Linda*)

Spaces for Interpretations and Understandings

Many of the women came from a time in education when things were either right or wrong, and this attitude quickly came to the fore, causing anxiety and fear. After several weeks, however, this began to dissipate as most of the women started to understand that observational drawing is a practice that one can learn.

You want it to look decent but I don't want to perform so it takes the pressure off and that is why a group like this is so good because it is not large. I could go on for hours; we're happy to get together because there is no expectation to learn, but we want to learn—in a Zen way. (*Dinii*)

Describing the space as encouraging, sharing, Zen-like, safe, and validating, the women named several essential ingredients that resonate with feminist perspectives and are vital to designing a favourable climate for successful learning.

Love: Discoveries and Reflections in the Conversations, Relationships, and Art

Beginning to recognize each other's work as individualized expression in line, tone, and colour, they encouraged and even demanded growth in each other.

I like the materials we work with, the pencils, paper, ink, and quite frankly I like the company. It's a safe learning environment. That negative is not here. You have better days, but it's not a failure and I don't feel pressure. It's loose and becomes a joy. (*Dinii*)

As a result, some of the women were able to let go of their self-imposed, societal, and educational bonds of adhering to strict rights and wrongs and move toward a more generous and unimpeded approach to making art. By viewing and organizing the work during our last session together, I began to see the depth of the relationships between these friends and the subsequent development and growth in their characters and capacities both individually and as a group. Chronological viewing of the work from the beginning to end of our sessions gave renewed energy and even hope to the commitment to drawing on the part of the women: "I was so uptight before and now we all have experience and we're all

trying and I look forward to coming back” (Linda). However, fear is a complicated emotion that is closely linked to how insecure one may feel. Although confidence gained in pursuing a creative practice may help an individual gain assurance, it may not be enough to overcome fear, especially if the individual does not work at it:

I like it better now than before. Drawing is the basis for painting and I really enjoy the drawing. Maybe I’m more confident, but I’m not as scared of the paper like last year. There are some good days and there are some bad days and some things are very hard, but the main thing is that I’m not scared. I have begun to do it on my own. I want to make this a goal like my yoga—a time for me. (*Sylvie*)

Art is about beginning again and again, and the work required in becoming accomplished involves loving it enough to keep going:

I want to learn how to draw like a child in kindergarten. I would be so comfortable there at that level. I think it would be simple because I wouldn’t be playing with shadows. If only I could draw like a child does! Well it’s because they don’t give a crap. I don’t know a child who says they can’t draw. They don’t hesitate. Their baggage is limited and you are not being judged, and we are always being judged. Is it going to look good? (*Monique*)

I find drawing and painting relaxing. As long as you have fun. I don’t keep drawings, because they just lie around and take up space. My daughter is OCD, and that’s why it’s very good for me to be here—it’s therapeutic. Whether you are good or not—that’s secondary. I enjoy it. (*Hilke*)

As an art educator, I want them to develop a love for the visual arts, an understanding that it takes commitment, and an increased joy in seeing the world around them. A hospitable teacher is a good, empathic host who helps their guests see their talents and gifts while continuing to grow in their process with renewed confidence (Nouwen, 1969).

When teaching older women, the experience of learning becomes an adventure and the students’ life experience is equally important to the teacher’s knowledge (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). Good teaching, especially of adults, is a risky business that requires what Palmer (1990) described as a triangulated autobiographical. The women’s stories had been triangulated from many standpoints, enriching their learning experiences between subject and self. It also requires courage as a teacher to admit to certain variances like a lack of knowledge instead of insight, or equipping the group instead of being in control. Teaching this way asks learners and teachers to enter a space that allows both their respective life experiences to intertwine. Openness, conversation, and collaborative forms of learning are characteristics of the life-long learning model, but how easy is it for the adult learner to let go of their own earlier models of learning? In some ways, the new Net generation of learners reflects this template of life-long learners, where a teacher steps off the stage and converses rather than lectures, where students are encouraged to discover for themselves and use their own experiences, and where collaboration and individual learning styles are the norm (Tapscott, 2009). As our population ages, there will be more demands on our educational systems, and some of the research being conducted on young students learning

in a digital age has implications for older adults, too. Working with an older population is not without challenges. Limited mobility, forgetfulness, depression, loss, and absences due to illness or travel are just a few of the issues. Health was a big topic of conversation, and over the course of our time together, we were often reminded of the fragility of life. There are significant parallels here worth exploring; informal learning experiences like this one are the future, rather than classrooms only.

Spaces for More Questions

This study has left me with more questions than answers: Are the confidence and ability gained from learning a skill like drawing related to increased emotional awareness and empathy toward others, allowing all learners to move toward greater understanding of love and care in teaching and learning? Is learning to see in observational drawing a transferrable skill? Can aesthetic awareness achieved by “developing an eye” be nurtured anytime in life? Does this create an appreciation for not only art but also beauty and light?

Creating a community of inquiry and developing art practice skills in drawing became an avenue for friendship, and this learning experience did indeed help some of the women overcome their fears, regardless of age. They also developed empathy for the women in the group who struggled and were afraid to try. Did their confidence in learning a new skill help them overcome fear, or was it the practice that gave them confidence? Or is it that they were part of a community of learners who were all engaged in doing the same work? The women grew tremendously in their skill as artists and in their appreciation for the arts and aesthetics. Art was the common denominator in the group, and the reason the women came together in the first place. However, the friendships that developed in the group became the reason to continue, often prompting several of the women to coin the phrase “time for soup!” when the art making proved difficult at times.

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

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