

Inside Artist/Teacher Burnout:

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved April 2012 by the
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May 2012

ABSTRACT

Stress and burnout in the educational field primarily in teaching is not a new phenomenon. A great deal of research and analysis to the contributing factors of causation to teacher burnout has been executed and analyzed. The struggle of the artist/teacher, hybrid professionals that maintain two concurrent roles, offers a perspective to burnout that has gone unnoticed. The conflict of roles for the artist/teacher does not infer that the teacher role is incapable of reconciling with the artist role but because of this unique scenario the stories of art teachers and burnout often go unheard. Today's public educator is contending with established stress factors as well as emerging and evolving stress factors. How does this phenomenon impact the artist/teacher's ability or inability to be creative? What are the implications of burnout and its impact on artist/teacher's personal and professional work? This qualitative study was conducted using Narrative/Autoethnography, Narrative/Ethnography and A/r/tography. The stories of four artist/teachers provide in-depth accounts of their experiences as teachers and how that profession has affected their art making process and well being.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

I Am an Artist/Teacher

I did not go to college to become a teacher but attended college to become a painter. My skill as an artist is what landed me a job in education. The decision to choose teaching as a long-term profession occurred only after I had been teaching in a private non-secular school for four years. Then a friend working in a private school on Chicago's South Side mentioned that there was no art program at the school. A firm believer that the arts are critical to a child's development, he suggested I apply for the position of art teacher. In the summer of 1991 I interviewed at St. Joseph Carondelet. Two weeks later I was working as a teacher.

Half of the students were wards of the state and lived on the premises, the rest arrived by school bus or guardians dropped them off. St. Joe's was classified as a private, residential, day school for children diagnosed as profoundly disturbed or LD/BD (Learning Disabled/ Behavioral Disordered). The last year I taught, the school had added a program for adjudicated sex offenders, providing self-contained residence and schooling to a group of males ranging in ages from seven to twenty-one. I found this additional programming troubling because many of the current residents were victims of sexual abuse.

The decision to take on the group of sex offenders was two-fold. The state of Illinois had difficulty placing them in state facilities and the money offered to

house and educate them was enticing to a struggling residential day school operated by the Archdiocese of Chicago. Looking back I believe it was an error to house young people, many of whom were victims of sexual abuse with other young people that had been victims of abuse but also committed sexual abuses on others. Thus for many of the students what was intended to be a place of healing had become a conflicted space, perhaps a dangerous space. For the board of directors it was an opportunity for new revenue streams and the belief that compromise was better than the cuts that would be required without it.



Figure 1. St. Joseph Carondelet Residential Day School, 2010

St. Joe's had a history. A former hospital built to house civil war wounded was constructed on land owned by Senator Stephen Douglas. Located on 35th Street and Lake Park Avenue, it sat alongside the railways that fed Chicago's famous stockyards. A bridge next to the school allowed one to cross over the great railways and placed you in Daniel Burnham's great parks that he designed for the city to hem Lake Michigan's waterfront. St. Joe's was a magnificent nineteenth-century relic, situated in a once opulent neighborhood built after the

“Great Chicago Fire” of 1871. A few doors down from the school were the remains of early twentieth-century mansions which once housed the families of Midwestern industrialists but became partitioned tenements competing with mid to late twentieth century public housing. The ominous, drab, Robert Taylor homes built by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) two miles west along the Dan Ryan Expressway were a reminder of the limited choices one had if you were “po.”

My commute to St. Joe’s afforded opportunities to imagine long-ago days of great wealth and lived comforts as well as grinding poverty. The porches of the three story homes on 35th street were constructed of large blocks of Indiana Limestone imported from quarries 30 miles east of the Illinois state line. Now cluttered with discarded furniture, grimy plastic lawn chairs and boarded up windows, it wasn’t hard to imagine the families of Chicago civic leaders and powerful industrialists sitting on Rattan wicker furniture enjoying the cool breeze from Lake Michigan on a hot summer night. The trip to school was similar to visiting a rundown movie set, a reminder of the temporality of things and a confirmation that the job would not last.

St. Joe’s maintained its four-story, wood frame integrity, thanks to the nuns of Carondelet who maintained the building from very early on. Building maintenance was makeshift yet it felt solid due to the integrity and conviction of the staff. To say the building was held together by a prayer would be pushing it, but at times I wondered.

In the mid nineteenth-century the mansion had been converted to a hospital to attend to civil war wounded and dying, convalesced by the Roman Catholic order of the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet. Over time the hospital was converted to an orphanage still run by the Sisters. Eventually it became a residential day school no longer run by the Sisters but by a director with a secular board. Eventually maintenance of the building was no longer the provenance of women of faith but overseen by a board of directors and funded by federal and state monies, secular and non-secular charities, and numerous charitable lunches and dinners in swank hotels hosted by wives of board members. The building's physicality, maintenance and neighborhood reflected the people it housed, uncertain and always tenuous.

Free children and wards of the state lived and attended school in the same building. One floor above their classrooms was the residence hall. Single-framed beds with donated blankets lined the north wall and metal lockers next to the beds were filled with clothing and cast-off toys from someone else's childhood. Generous benefactors that the children never met donated all personal needs the resident children of St. Joe's came into contact with, their clothes, school supplies and even food. Cakes and cookies from Nieman Marcus arrived in boxes and pink striped shopping bags on Wednesday and were stored in the basement guarded by a former orphan who was now in his late sixties and was also responsible for sweeping the floors and watering the plants. The fourth floor housed and educated the adjudicated sex offenders. It was only accessible by staff through three locked

doors. Non-resident children would arrive each day by bus or van; parent or guardian or other residential agencies housed the unwanted or uncontrollable child. Children that had suffered and somehow endured the most deplorable circumstances were arranged and cared for; weed flowers in a donated vase, ghost children wandering the floors of the old mansion near the lake.

The children of St. Joe's were relevant beneficiaries of a civil society but had little personal and social capital outside of the former civil war hospital on 35th and Lake. I often felt that the only power these children held was to trouble those that provided for them. Their capital and mobility, which took the form of profound (mis)behavior, severe outbursts and utter resistance, affected the minds and bodies of the teachers and caregivers that were able to leave Saint Joe's. Their stories could only escape the mansion through the adults that were able to leave. The children made sure they were heard through their acting out.

The teaching staff at St Joe's was as diverse as the city of Chicago. None of the teachers had teaching certification in special education and many, like myself, lacked state teacher certification. It was a low-paying position that failed to provide many of the benefits that would be taken for granted if teaching in the Chicago Public School System. Because I was a painting and drawing major I had never taken an education class; therefore my salary was commensurate with that of an artist attempting to subsidize his work by waiting tables or driving a cab.

The art program began on a dilapidated cart of donated art supplies and the most challenging children I had ever encountered. For the four years that I

taught at St. Joe's I also worked in a wealthy Chicago suburb as a bartender and jazz act-booking agent. The additional income from these jobs subsidized the purchase of art supplies for my students and provided additional income to pay rent and buy groceries. To live solely on my teacher's salary was for all intents and purposes, impossible. Through it all my skill in teaching art to children with extreme challenges developed and expanded. These were not children that suffered from natural mental deficiencies but children that had been neglected and abused to the point where they became social outcasts. They had the faces of angels and minds and behaviors of deviants. Adults, parents, guardians, brothers, and sisters had already robbed their agency and for the most part the children had adopted similar strategies as a means to survive. They attempted to rob someone else's agency to make up for what had been taken from them.



Figure 1.1. “I Approach You Unmasked” 1993
Art show at the Chicago’s Children’s Museum.

By the end of my four years the children that once had no art program produced exhibits at The Chicago Children’s Museum, a gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and numerous public exhibitions and installations in the city of Chicago. What took place from the first day I entered the school as an artist and the last day I left as an artist/teacher contributed to my understanding of the teaching profession. The students at St. Joe’s informed and shaped a career in education still emergent that has moved in unpredictable directions. The stories and

experiences of the children of St. Joe's, now adults, to this day remain cerebral and somatic. Their tragedies and successes had become mine.



Figure 1.2. 365 Origami Pinwheels, St Joseph Carondelet Art Installation Along Lake Michigan.



Figure 1.3. Student artworks in the halls of St. Joseph Carondelet.

After four years I was let go due to budget cuts and a new administration. The entire art program was dismantled. When I returned to St. Joe's seven years later to pick up documents verifying my employment, I was delighted to see the student art that I had displayed throughout the school was still on the walls. Unfortunately, I also understood that the pictures had been left up to give the appearance that the arts were a vital part of the school.

I Am an Artist /Teacher: Part 2

Leaving St Joe's allowed me to pursue new opportunities that being a full-time teacher would have precluded. I worked for Northeastern University developing arts based programming and taught studio drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I also produced a large body of artwork. However, as

I got older, the benefits of full-time employment, especially health care, a pension and a steady revenue stream became more attractive. I decided to go back to school and get a graduate degree in Art Education. I sold my home. With the profits, I rented an apartment and went back to school.

It took two and a half years to complete a Masters in Art and Art Education Degree at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. During this time, I paid thirty-five thousand dollars a year to learn something I had been successfully doing for a decade. As if that weren't frustrating enough, the educational system also demanded I jump through a series of humiliating hoops on my way to my degree.

To obtain teacher certification I was required to student teach. Since I had already been teaching privately for ten years, this obligation seemed redundant and foolish. However, I was told that there was no way of getting around it. It is important to note that I was not being paid, but was rather paying the School of the Art Institute fifteen thousand dollars a semester for the privilege of student teaching. The academic fieldwork advisor that placed student teachers was aware of my teaching experience and had arranged for me to student teach at a grade school with a first year teacher who required mentorship. This reconfiguration of roles was not of ethical concern to either school; I later discovered that the field work advisor and the principal of the school where I student taught had worked out a deal. The principal got me to mentor the first year teacher; the fieldwork advisor got connections to place other student teachers. I spent thousands of

dollars, twelve weeks, five days a week, showing a novice teacher how to teach art to inner city youth. After graduating and taking the required tests for certification I was qualified to enter the Chicago Public School system.

My first job was a four-month appointment replacing a high school art teacher on maternity leave. It was in a neighborhood of Chicago known as Pilsen. Pilsen is a primarily blue collar, intergenerational immigrant Mexican American community. Colorful murals celebrating Mexican American heritage can be found on every street. Diverse tags and graffiti testify to Pilsen's status as the epicenter of the Hispanic gang community.

Substituting for any well-regarded teacher is not easy. Attempting, as a white male, to substitute for a female Hispanic teacher in an inner city, Hispanic, high school was punishing. However, I was determined to use my experience as a contemporary artist to provide students with a relevant curriculum focused on Mexican American culture. For example, I had the students examine and recreate the posters inspired by migrant union solidarity and the resistance movement led by Caesar Chavez. We also looked at shoes and clothing made in California sweat shops by underage Mexican migrants. We correlated these with discussions of child labor laws in the early twentieth century, and connected those to the current obfuscation of labor laws for child migrant workers.

Juarez High School was located on overlapping gang territories. Students would walk three miles out of their way to get to school to avoid gang intimidation and harassment. Juarez was on constant lock down. Six weeks into

my teaching assignment, outside gang members were entering the school and intimidating the students.

The principal issued a memo stating that no student was allowed to enter a classroom unless they wore a school ID. Teachers were to stand at their doors at the beginning of each period and monitor for IDs. No student was to enter a classroom without one. I noticed many of the teachers didn't bother with this mandate.

On April 15th, 10:20 AM, the third period bell rang. I stood at the art room door reminding the students that they could not enter unless they wore their ID. The last student to enter the classroom, a sixteen-year-old Hispanic male had no ID. I blocked the doorway with my body and told him he could not enter the room. The student placed his hands on my chest and shoved me into a corner and said, "Fuck you." The scuffle resulted in a physical restraint. A physical restraint was a technique that I was required to learn at St. Joe's to protect oneself when assaulted by a student. The teacher gets behind the student, grabs both of his wrists from behind and pulls them back. It is intended to act as a physical straight jacket. You then place your body weight on top of the student and bring him to the floor. This technique not only tires the perpetrator but also allows time for the student to calm down and assistance if available to arrive. While lying on the student at Juarez in a dark hallway leading to the art room I yelled, "get security." Students from my class jumped over the struggle and returned with two Chicago Police Officers. They took the student away.

I've used this technique three times, twice at St. Joseph Carondelet School and once at Juarez. Every time was traumatic. After I physically restrain a student, my body is pumped with adrenaline. I start to physically shake. Even nine years later, as I write this I am perspiring under my arms, my jaw is clenched and I feel vulnerable.

After the third period class I filled out an incident report that was barely legible. As I was leaving the classroom to deliver the report to the administration the same two police officers returned:

"You are being charged with assaulting a student," they told me.

"You're kidding," I said. "He attacked me."

"Normally we would cuff you. We're not going to have to do that are we?"

I was police escorted through the school at passing hour. It was evident by the faces of the Juarez students that I was going to be the center of conversation during lunch period.

Once in the principal's office, the piles of paper work, phone calls, and triplicate police reports that needed completion took what seemed like hours. I recall sitting in that office putting the pieces together. Hispanic school, Hispanic teachers, Hispanic student, Hispanic secretaries, Hispanic cops, white male substitute teacher with no ties to the school. I was the "other" and possibly experiencing a symbolic lynching. At that point I realized how serious this was and demanded a lawyer. Allowed to call the teacher's union, they immediately connected me with a lawyer. His advice: "Don't say anything, don't sign

anything, this happens all the time in schools like Juarez. Call me as soon as you get home.” He then told me to pass the phone to the principal. After their conversation ended the principal dismissed the police officers and told me I was banned from the classroom. My assignment for the remainder of my contracted work at Juarez was to report to the school each morning and check in with Consuelo, the principal’s secretary, for my office assignments each day. I walked out of the principal’s office and looked at the secretaries. They stopped what they were doing and looked at me. I then walked out of Juarez and never returned. My public school career had just begun and abruptly ended.

Fortunately the union lawyer had managed to have all charges dropped. A female Hispanic janitor, who witnessed the scuffle provided a sworn testimony stating she witnessed the student assaulting me. The janitor later claimed to have been coerced into writing her original statement. But when the lawyer asked her who coerced her, she had no answer. Another factor that the school overlooked was that the student involved in the incident had a prior record of assault and battery. Three weeks after the ID incident I learned from a Juarez teacher that the student who assaulted me was arrested for breaking the nose of a female biology teacher.

That spring was shattering. I had just spent two and half years in grad school, accrued thirty-five thousand dollars in school loans, and sold my house. And now it seemed like all of that would be wasted because of a single incident. Did I still want to teach art?

I Am an Artist/Teacher, Part 3

I told myself over and over, “If I don’t do it now I will never do it again.” Within a month of the dropped charges at Juarez I was applying for teaching jobs at CPS (Chicago Public Schools). I had two interviews. One was a K-8 school on Chicago’s North Side, the other was a high school on Chicago’s South East side. I was offered the job at the high school in mid June and took it. This gave me two months to make personal art and prepare for the next round of teaching.

Located in one of Chicago’s toughest neighborhoods, Chicago Discovery Academy (CDA) was a small school that specialized in the arts. It was several hours commute by car, much of it along Lake Shore Drive. From Lake Shore Drive I could see the top of St Joe’s.

My classroom was on the fourth floor of a school built in 1912. Much to my surprise a former grad school classmate, Bert Stabler, was teaching art in the same building on the first floor. Though we taught in the same building, we were assigned to different schools.

CDA served a population of 50% Hispanic and 50% African American students. The Hispanic students were first generation and the African American students and their families had moved into the neighborhood known as South Shore in the late seventies and early eighties.



Figure 1.4. Student Self Portrait, Chicago Discovery Academy.

The South Shore community had formerly been Eastern European. However, the South Shore steel mills that employed most of the residents had closed, resulting in a decline in home values. At the same time, public housing in the city was being slowly dismantled. As the white community moved to the suburbs in South Shore, immigrants had the opportunity to buy cheap housing. Once the community began to change, turnover was hastened by white flight.

Teaching art at CDA had its ups and downs. I was fortunate to have colleagues that had worked at the high school since the early seventies. Their presence and survival in such a volatile community was a daily reminder that dedicated teaching requires a thick skin and the ability to leave your work at work. Unfortunately, my skin was never that thick.

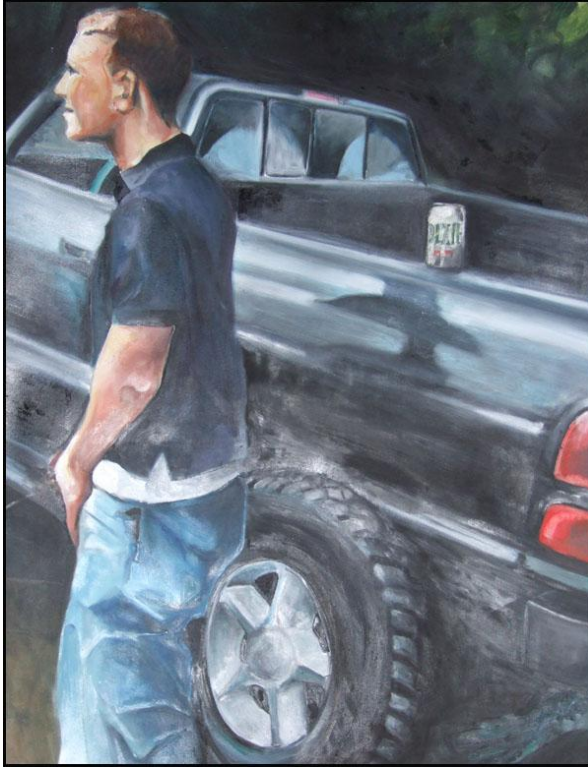


Figure 1.5. Brown River 1. 2007, Oil painting, Paul Mack

Surprisingly I was producing a great deal of personal art at this time. In retrospect, the paintings I produced were not an escape from CDA but a reconfiguration of it. A body of artwork I was making centered on a story that I was told on a trip to Slidell, Louisiana. Post-Katrina construction workers would stop along Highway Ten before going over Lake Pontchartrain to urinate. While relieving themselves, crocodiles would come from behind and drag them into the swamps. The workers would disappear forever, leaving behind a shoe, an empty can of beer, and a car with the keys in the ignition. The relationship of the urinating construction workers to my role as art teacher at CDA seemed metaphorically poetic. I too was being dragged through the mud and swallowed by something unexpected.

CDA had four principals in four years. In a school of only one hundred and ninety, nine students died in gang related incidents, making the mandate for improved test scores seem ridiculous. One afternoon, during Advanced Placement art class, we heard bullets being fired in front of the school, and my students and I had to “hit the floor.” Afterwards, a student and I found a hole in the classroom wall, painted a bull’s eye, and wrote, "missed".

The violence in and out of the school took a toll on me. One event that vividly sticks in my mind involved a young African American girl. She had gone over her fingernails with a file until they were sharp enough to cut flesh. She then went to get revenge on another girl who was interested in her “boy.” While the “boy” stealer was at her locker getting books, the girl with the razor fingernails came behind her and clamped her filed nails into her face and pulled back. The victim ended up with eight perpendicular incisions from her nose to her jaw. The relationship of this incident to my alligator attack paintings did not occur to me until much later.

The last straw for me at CDA occurred when a beloved student was killed in gang crossfire while walking home from school. I had had enough. The bullets, the violence and the death were no longer something I could work out in my art or in my head. When I shared these stories with loved ones, their inevitable response was, “You have to get out of there.” My brother, a school counselor in Gilbert, Arizona, told me that Gilbert High School had an opening in the art department. I decided to apply.

I Am An Artist/Teacher: Part 4

Moving to Gilbert, Arizona in the summer of 2007 displaced any trace of teacher burnout I had been experiencing. The excitement of relocating, a new job and all the imagined possibilities that come with starting over had made the previous four years of teaching at CDA seem distant. I was ready for a new start.

In 2007 Gilbert, Arizona was one of the fastest growing communities in the United States. Primarily a middle to upper middle class community, it was an Arnold Palmer wet dream on steroids. There were waterfalls, shiny cars, and migrant landscapers tending to the plants. The people wore pink polo shirts, the grocery check-out clerks always smiled, and I felt I was very far indeed from Chicago.

Once I settled in and started teaching at Gilbert High I noticed my paychecks were significantly lower than what I was accustomed to in Chicago. At first I thought it was an error and contacted the school district. But there was no error. My brother failed to mention that Arizona is ranked 49th in the U.S. for public school teacher's salaries. Though I was taking a substantial pay cut from my previous teaching job in Chicago (40%), I kept reminding myself that I hadn't made the move for the money. Still, I couldn't help but notice that after taxes, pension, and health care benefits were removed, my take home pay was equivalent to what I made bartending on the weekends in Chicago.

My colleagues at Gilbert High greeted me warmly for the most part. The one exception was the twenty-five year veteran art teacher with whom I shared a room. This teacher quickly made it clear that I was unwelcome. The teacher was

apparently also worried about the state of my soul, or so I gathered from the prayer pamphlets I would occasionally find on my desk. I took the tension in stride, though, made artwork out of the prayer pamphlets and proceeded to teach as best I could.

Within the first two months of teaching I was called into the principal's office. Parents were particularly concerned about a photo project I was teaching that explored food waste and the "Freegan" movement. The "Freegan" movement is a global movement that addresses the excessive amount of good food disposed of by grocery stores. I had had students photograph dumpsters. Parents were apparently worried that this might cause their children to develop AIDS.

I had come from a school in which I was lucky if a single parent showed up to parent-teacher conferences. In Chicago, students were being shot in front of the school. Now I was in a place where parents crowded around in fears that their children might acquire a deadly disease by pointing a camera at some salvageable food.



Figure 1.6. Installing student work at Gilbert High, After The Flood: Post Katrina, 2007

The day school ended that first year I headed back to Chicago for summer break. Driving solo across country provides opportunities to reflect. I decided that if I was going to be in Gilbert for a couple of years, I might as well get my Ph.D. Arizona State University was inexpensive, at least compared to The School of the Art Institute. It seemed financially plausible, and the degree could be a ticket out of Arizona and teaching K-12.

Over that summer I took the necessary steps to enter grad school and was accepted in the Ph.D. Program at ASU in the spring of 2009. Things had calmed down at Gilbert High. I realized that, unless I wanted to be tarred and feathered, a critical, social-justice, art curriculum at Gilbert required a more subtle approach.

By the end of the spring semester at Gilbert the economic downturn was well under way. Extensive staff cuts were being made, and as a new hire, I was, inevitably, one of those pink slipped. I had just started my graduate program and I was out of a job.

On the last day of school as I turned in my keys I was informed by an administrator that there was a possibility that I might be retained. I was told not to go anywhere, since if the job came through I would need to be available to sign a contract. I sat on ice for three days waiting and wondering.

The school did hire me back. However, the same thing happened at the end of each of the following two years. I received a pink slip, and was later hired back. For three years I did not know if I had a job at the end of the year. In

addition, the school district froze teacher pay starting in 2008. The financial stress led me to adopt the tactics of the Freegan movement. One day I recovered ten organic watermelons out of a “Safeway” dumpster. But you can’t live on watermelon alone. My take home pay was getting less, my health care was costing more and my tuition at ASU had nearly doubled by 2011.

I am nearing the end of my Ph.D. Program at ASU, working full time at Gilbert High and am flat broke. To say I am burnt out would be an understatement. I keep reminding myself that I am an artist first, and that being an artist informs my teaching. And, despite the distractions and the stress, I am still making art. In fact, I am currently preparing for two shows in Chicago. Scheduled for the summer of 2012.

Chapter 2

PARTICIPANTS

Artist/Teacher: Bert Stabler

They're operating without any sense that the authority structure is obliged to disclose their decision making process. It's like being objectified not in the sense of a woman being made into a body but being made into an idea rather than an agent or like a source of moral irrelevance. You can just do stuff to teachers. Bert Stabler, 2011

Bert Stabler is a 37-year-old Caucasian male, artist, teacher and writer. He graduated high honors with a degree in Economics and English from Oberlin College. Later he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Masters in Art Education from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Bert has had numerous art exhibitions, student art exhibitions and publishing and speaking engagements focusing primarily on the arts and education.

For the past seven years his primary occupation and income derives from teaching art at Bowen High School located on Chicago's South East side. Bert took the job at Bowen mid-term after the former art teacher (in Bert's words) "had a nervous breakdown and quit." According to Bert, "the kids were high on victory when I walked in."

Bowen High School was built in 1876 and is the oldest school in the South Chicago area. Originally built to serve an enrollment of 1,400 students, by the mid 1930s the school's enrollment had increased to 4,000. This rapid increase in student enrollment was due to an influx of predominantly Eastern European immigrants that found work in the great steel mills of South Chicago.

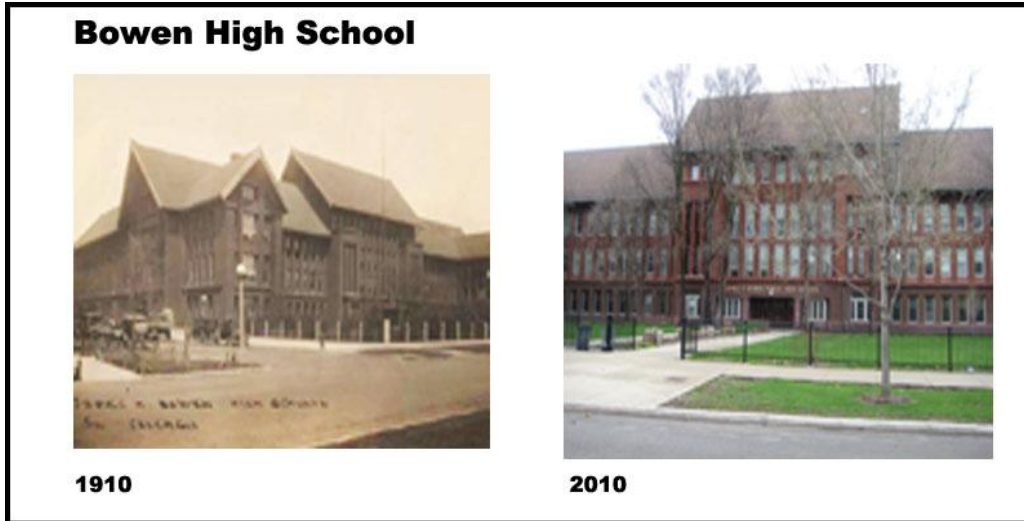


Figure 2.1. Bowen High School 1910, 2010

Bowen had a tradition of academic excellence. This was affirmed in the late 1960s when approximately 75% of the senior class went on to higher education. By the late 1970's and early 80s, however, the neighborhood and the school had witnessed a dramatic shift in its economic and cultural population. The closing of the steel mills and the loss of jobs caused property values to drop. African-American and Hispanic families moved in. This in turn caused "white flight," a racially motivated move to the suburbs, which caused property values to decline even more.

By the early 1990s, South Chicago was a primarily low-income Hispanic and African-American community. It had serious problems with racial and ethnic gang activity, high crime and urban deterioration.

Bert was hired at Bowen High School in 2004. At this time, the school was undergoing an educational transformation known as "Renaissance 2010."

This initiative was inaugurated by Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley, whose goal was to increase the number of quality education options in communities across Chicago.

The Daley administration decided to divide the school into four smaller schools. Each small school had its own name and administration, but was contained in the Bowen facility. Bert's school "B.E.S.T." was on the first floor. After six years the "small school reform" was considered a failure and the four schools collapsed back to Bowen High School.

The neighborhood around Bowen High is considered to be one of Chicago's most volatile. The major intersections are monitored 24 hours by police surveillance cameras. Gang activity is prevalent, as witnessed by the tags and graffiti that demarcate territories. A September 9, 2010 article from the *Chicago Tribune* gives a recent example of such activity:



Figure 2.2. Chicago Police Surveillance 89th and Commercial.

Dad of Slain 16-year old: I don't know what it's going to take.

Dary Jackson has worked with community groups to stop the violence in his South Chicago Neighborhood. On Wednesday, his own son was gunned down in an alley on his way home from Bowen High School.

"You shouldn't have to shelter your child to walk two blocks home from school," Jackson said, shaking his head. "It's tragic, not just for me and my family, but for the community because I work with different people on trying to stop the violence. I don't know what it's going to take "

Deantonio Goss and an 18-year-old friend were headed home from Bowen around 3 p.m. when someone opened fire in an alley in the 8600 block of South Saginaw Avenue. Just blocks from Deantonio's home, according to police. Deantonio was pronounced dead at 3:52 p.m. at Stroger Hospital, according to a spokesperson for the Cook County medical examiner's office. The 18-year-old was also wounded and was taken to Northwestern Hospital. "He was innocently walking home from school," Jackson said. A neighbor, Erick Sheppard, said he heard four or five gunshots, then a bang against his house as if someone had fallen against it. "I peeked out the window and a teen was grunting in pain," he said. Sheppard said he called 911 and, when he checked the window again, officers were already on the scene. Police said they were trying to determine if any recent altercation at the school had anything to do with the shooting.

Bert's commute to work is especially lengthy due to an eye condition that prevents him from obtaining an Illinois driver's license. Most teachers at Bowen drive into the school parking lot and walk fifty feet to the school entrance, but Bert relies on public and personal transportation. The distance from his North Side home to the school (based on his route) is approximately 35 miles. For Bert, this means on average the commute takes an hour and a half to two and a half hours one way. Bert leaves his house at about 5 a.m. and rides his bike 5 miles to downtown Chicago. He then catches the South Shore train to 89th street and walks two miles to Bowen High School. The commute in the winter or when it's raining requires alternative planning because the bike ride downtown is not possible. In all, Bert's day from the moment he leaves his house to returning home is usually

thirteen-hours long. It is also worth noting that Bert's two-mile walk to and from Bowen and the 89th street train station, particularly in the winter months, is a walk in the dark through a neighborhood known for its gang violence.

The considerable sacrifices and risks that Bert makes by being a public school teacher at Bowen would lead one to believe that he is a "glutton for punishment," who has accepted a job or task that most people would try to get out of. Bert, however, says that his job at Bowen is simply a reflection of the limited opportunities for art teachers in the Chicago Public School system. Every year he has worked at Bowen he has actively sought teaching opportunities closer to home and in less volatile communities. Rarely, if ever, has he even been offered an interview.

Having worked in the Chicago school system myself, I can attest to the fact that art teaching positions in the school system are highly coveted, particularly in schools on the North Side of Chicago. The North Side schools tend to be less challenging and considerably less dangerous than those in other parts of the city. Obtaining such positions is often political. Getting an interview, much less a job, often requires that you know the right people.

On a Wednesday in mid-June of 2011, two days after the Chicago Public School year ended, I met Bert at his studio in an attic in a late, nineteenth century mansion on Logan Boulevard. The studio was a block west of Bert's residence in a Chicago neighborhood known as Logan Square. He was preparing for a solo art exhibition that was scheduled to open that Friday.

The small attic space Bert was working in was partitioned by studded drywall and had one window. On the other side of Bert's studio was the residence of (according to Bert) anonymous young people that were always coming and going. At the time of my visit a young tattooed woman was playing loud music and exercising. She was very polite and mentioned to Bert that she was preparing for an aerobics class and would be leaving shortly. An oscillating fan barely moved the stifling hot attic air. Every time the fan made a pass little scraps of multi-colored art paper from Bert's work would dance across the floor, stop and resume. It was fun to watch.

Bert's art was constructed of vibrant colored paper that was cut and configured into various objects and shapes. A completed piece hanging in his studio was constructed as a camera with a flourish of bright yellow paper foliage cascading from the lens. Underneath the camera was a cutout text of a Bible quote. As he worked, Bert mentioned that he was concerned that he might be laid off from Bowen the following year. He had heard "through the grape vine I heard they may be closing the small schools." I didn't push the subject and laid on the floor marveling at the intensity with which Bert worked and remembering what it was like to be in the same position as him, uncertain about a job.

Friday afternoon, before the opening of Bert's art show. A summer storm with west winds of 90 miles per hour moved through Chicago. Upon arriving at the gallery, bright green maple leaves stripped from tree branches by the storm's power clung to the exterior of the white wood siding of the third floor gallery. Beautiful and sad, the leaves had just arrived in May.

In the gallery Bert's paper cutouts lined the white walls. The simplicity of the cut paper and the shadows they cast gave the work a vitality that didn't register two days ago in the attic. After viewing the show I approached Bert to congratulate him on the work; he informed me that he had been fired that afternoon.

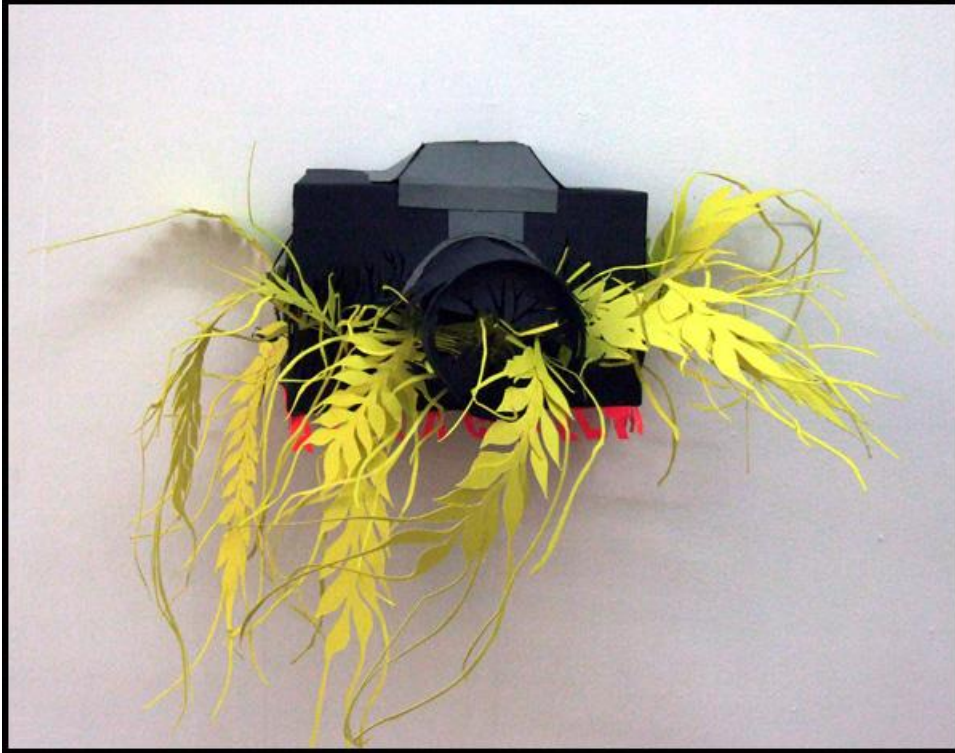


Figure 2.3. Camera, Paper, 2011 Bert Stabler.

Conversations With Bert and Katie (Bert's Partner)

After the news of Bert's termination from Bowen I met him and his partner Katie for the first of four interviews. The first interview took place on July 2011 at Bowen High School. I was able to borrow a van and help Bert clean out his former classroom. Interviews 2,3, and 4 took place in their home, the final interview on December 27th, 2011.

Retrieving Bert's Supplies at Bowen High School

Bert, Katie and I arrived at Bowen on a perfect Chicago summer day. We pulled the van in the back of the school close to Bert's classroom. I asked Bert, "Well this may be the last time you arrive at Bowen. What do you think?"

I met a lot of cool and interesting young people. A lot of mystical and unspoken good things happened, a lot of conflict, a lot of working against things, a lot of regret and inability to make connections. I worked really hard and the kids did everything they could do in this space.

I reminded Bert that he had been robbed every year he worked at Bowen. He replied, "It's weird, having stuff stolen is completely normal." This year his digital camera was stolen. After posting reward posters for the camera a girl returned it claiming she had found it. Bert later looked at the files of the camera and found digital files of the girl and her friends posing by their lockers.

Bert had also told me about an incident at Bowen in which a student, unbeknownst to him, went into the art storage closet and defecated. Bert cleaned the mess up himself out of fear that his classroom management would be called into question if he reported the incident. This event happened the first year he arrived, the year the previous teacher had had a "nervous breakdown."

We began the packing of hundreds of books, art catalogs and expensive supplies that Bert had paid for out of pocket. It was evident by the student artworks that remained on the walls, and even on the dry erase board, that Bert did and tried everything to make his curriculum for his students relevant, engaging, and pertinent to their lives. Looking around, I was saddened not

because of Bert's firing, but because the classroom was a hundred years old and, with the exception of the addition of dry erase boards, nothing about it seemed to have changed in all that time. It told a story of neglect, and it would never have been if it was in a neighborhood that had more political and economic capital. The student that defecated in Bert's storage closet said it all.

Three Weeks Later, Second Interview at Bert and Katie's Home



Figure 2.4. Bert and Katie at Home.

Three weeks after moving all of Bert's supplies out of Bowen High School, Chicago Public schools notified him that he was rehired. I asked Bert and Katie if this was good news. Katie responded,

I started crying when I heard Bert was rehired. Being his partner and the amount of hours and seeing the way he is treated the suffering is... It's not happening to me, but it is in a way. I know all we have is this condo and I have a job that doesn't pay much, but we can figure it out.

Clearly, at least for Katie, Bert's rehiring was not good news. I then asked Bert if the other jobs he applied for have any potential. His response,

Those two jobs are filled. I never even got a response, an email, or an interview. Basically as a subject it's more like ceasing to exist as a subject and coming to exist as an idea, that potential of nothingness. The only way I kind of have or know that I am three-dimensional or not a reflection in the mirror is by the people I associate with outside of my job. That's where people listen to me, I sort of exist to other people that kind of recognize themselves as teachers but not as or deal with it in the job sense but in the idea sense. Artists that are interested in education [are] people that occupy some area of following their moral climbing or ethical bliss through self-expression in service.

I feel like a drone cast I feel like disposable that's different from a sweatshop worker that's disposable. I am disposable in a far more bio-political way, in a way that has much less to do with my survival, which is almost guaranteed, and more to do with my community relevance, my sense of belonging or form of identity. That's what's so exasperating about this. Without having any narrative or story I am part of for anybody else besides myself it's kind of hard to feel excited or oppressed, depressed. The anger is just frustration, there are people like us that matter because we're people but it's not a crisis of survival. It's a crisis of mattering, of meaning.

Fourth Interview, December 27, 2011, At Bert and Katie's Home

Bert had resumed teaching at Bowen and had made the decision to apply for graduate school at Berkley. He also proposed marriage to Katie on Christmas day. The sadness that was so evident in the last interview, which took place in late July, was no longer present. We were giddy and often times silly. I asked Bert if the happiness was related to his plans to leave Bowen.

Yeah, I am moving on. The not wanting to do it anymore is for sure, but [also] I'm not that good at it. I think there are teaching situations in which I can shine and it's not the one I am in. Saying good-bye to Bowen is really good riddance at both ends. They should get rid of me. I hope things go better with whoever they get. They might not. There are worse art

teachers, white or not white, male or not male. But somebody who is not white and not male would have something to offer to start with because the kids would have less sadness and conflict immediately present in the situation before anything occurs. Yeah I am not good at dealing with that. There are other people not just based on their identity or genitals, that they actually have a cultural history of oppression and conflict and resistance... deal with that stuff differently. They are not passive-aggressive or naggy or pushy and brutal in the ways that I am. So I would like it to end I would like to do something better for people with my life. I think it's a good thing to hope for because it's not just for me, it is for me. I am a part of that and so is the rest of the world. I feel perfectly ok that it's possible that I end up some place that I am more useful and valued. The one thing that the engagement thing brings up is that I am more committed to Katie then I am to any job. I am more committed to Katie then any situation in my life. This is my paradigm for making decisions now.

Artist/Teacher: Paul Nudd

When you're the art teacher nobody really understands or cares for what you are trying to achieve. Most of the other teachers have no art education. They don't understand even things like modernism. They don't understand modern art at all. They don't know anything. They don't have appreciation for what you do. They don't understand you really are invested in the creative lives of these children. They don't understand that you are trying to make them understand that the world is a visual place and that world can be deconstructed and that you can understand that things you experience are not just an accident. That people are making things for you to consume, and just teaching kids to be critical of that. (Paul Nudd, Chicago, 2011)

Paul Nudd is a 36-year-old Caucasian, artist/teacher living and working in Berwyn, Illinois, a western suburb of Chicago. He is married and has two children under the age of ten. Paul works full time as a middle school art teacher and maintains a prolific and successful art career. He exhibits and sells his art internationally, and is currently represented by Western Exhibitions Art Gallery located in Chicago.



Figure 2.5. Paul Nudd Book Signing, Chicago, 2011

Our first meeting was at Quimby's, a Wicker Park bookstore that sells art books, zines and comics. Paul and four other artists were promoting, signing and selling a volume of drawings that had been recently published. It was evident that these artists had a following. The line to have books signed went out the door. Many of the waiting customers were local artists. The event felt more like an art opening than a book signing. I was hoping to get a chance to speak with Paul but the event had gone longer than planned so we arranged to meet the following

Saturday at Western Exhibitions Gallery after the gallery closed.

Western Exhibitions is a top tier Chicago art gallery located on the near West Side. It is on the second floor of a former meat packing plant. Upon entering the gallery, I was taken with the body and scale of Paul's work. Large 8-foot works on paper erupted and oozed in front of me with a vivid, vibrant, palette. The following review by James Yood (2011) aptly describes Paul's work. This is a description of "The Elephantionysus Man" (Yood, 2011):



Figure 2.6. The Elephantionysus Man, Paul Nudd, Mixed Media, 2011
Courtesy of Paul Nudd

This must be Nudd's idiosyncratic way of referring to elephantiasis, a rare condition causing inordinate swelling, which in the male body can cause the scrotum to become the size of a basketball. That kind of stuff is Nudd's meat, the

body as bizarre and capable of nearly unimaginable corporeal difference, and our organic nature manifesting itself in stupefying variety. His nearly eight foot tall figure almost seems to explode in a cellular kind of profusion, a maze of living matter, like some Arcimboldo run amok, all pedal to the metal in greenish-chlorophyllic display. Life is messy and so are its processes, and Nudd's immersive fantasy is a surprisingly apt heir to something like Albright's "Picture of Dorian Gray (1943-44)", but much funnier. While often Nudd pursues more scatological and grisly possibilities, his work here is more enthralled with the inexorable dictates of nature, with the fascinating repulsive/attractive universe you find when you turn over a rock, all ratched up here a few notches in scale and color. If the body is a temple, Nudd offers it as crumbling and collapsing, as an amazing remnant soon to be food for the worms.

Paul decided to teach and create art simultaneously in college. While working on his Bachelors of Fine Art, he also took the necessary courses to get his teaching certification in K-12 art. Reflecting on his undergrad and grad school education, Paul said that there was a pervasive "weird taboo" against teaching in public school and making art. When he graduated grad school his advisors told him "it is too bad you're going to teach. You would have made a great artist."

Paul's decision to teach was based in part on his desire not to work at a corporate job. Teaching was also attractive because of a schedule that allowed "huge swatches of time" for art making. And, of course, teaching also provides valuable benefits in the form of a pension and health insurance.

For Paul, balancing home life, teaching and an art career is a constant negotiation. His day during the school year starts at 6 a.m. He teaches, spends time with the family, puts the kids to bed, and then makes art. The style of his artwork has adapted to this schedule. By working fast and training his hand to be more "gestural," he prevents himself from fussing or deliberating over a mark.

Paul suggests that his artwork looks so feverish in part because “I have very limited amount of fixed time where I can work on my art.”



Figure 2.7. Paul Nudd at Western Exhibitions, Chicago, 2011

His intense schedule seems to work, even though it contributes to occasional meltdowns. The cues that he is under a great deal of stress can occur at odd times. For example, he may become frustrated when he has to “scoop up the kid’s macaroni and cheese off the kitchen floor” and take time away from painting green slime on the canvas.

Major shows are also a time of high stress. On average Paul has two large-scale shows a year. The weeks leading up to the shows he finds himself in an “agitated state,” questioning his commitment to, and the purpose of, his art.

Nonetheless, Paul doubts he would get more work done without a wife and family. The rigorous schedule keeps him in check.

Those enormous amounts of idle time would really work against me, I kind of feel like if it wasn't this regimented I wouldn't be a very structured person. I am teacher and I am still on that school day since Kindergarten, I never lost that. The bell is going to ring at 2:45 everyday. I am going to be in my car at 3:10 everyday. I am going to be home at 3:17 everyday... so when I get allotted time I kind of know what I am doing.

You Can Contradict Yourself In The Summer

For many teachers the summer break allows for a re-evaluation of one's disposition toward teaching. For myself, the summer months can contribute to a distortion of the previous school year. By the second week of summer break, I can convince myself that the hell I went through wasn't so bad. Paul brings this up in our conversation. He suggests that with all probability if the interview were taking place this past March the narrative would be very different.

It's nice to do this over the summer where I have this distance. Because when I am at that point when I don't want to do it (referring to teaching) I get really nihilistic, just very shitty. I'll be like, I hate these kids, they're mean, they don't do anything, they're disrespectful, all they want to do is this and I'll be in a real, real agitated state. So it's really nice to have this distance over the summer because most of the time it chugs along. It's a well-oiled machine. It doesn't sputter too much but when it does I get pretty agitated and depressed. Yeah it's nice to have this distance.

Temporal distance from the school can often mean forgetting about the school. From my perspective, the end of the school year was just that, a finality, not to be thought of until Labor Day weekend. Observing Paul's posture throughout the interview he appears relaxed slouched in a metal folding chair, legs splayed, punctuating his story with large gesturing hand movements. When asked

to talk about the depression that occurs when the well-oiled machine begins to sputter, his body immediately becomes upright and folds in on itself. His arms and legs cross and he pushes his chair away from me.

This fall I experienced a really deep depression. It was really kind of startling. I think it was mainly due to being deprived of sleep. Not that I am blaming my family but it had a lot to do with my daughter. My son you put him to bed at 6:00 he wakes up at 6:00 he sleeps twelve hours. He was the first-born and we thought, "This is easy." My daughter, the first night she slept a full night she was four years old. I went through four years of getting up at 1, getting up at 3, getting up at 4. I was majorly deprived of sleep. My day job was really weird because we had a complete rollover in administration and totally new philosophy. New principal, new assistant principal, new superintendent, new school board, new discipline, a complete overhaul of the school. That was a lot getting used to. And then I was teaching two classes at Columbia College as well. I was doing drawing and design. The design class ran like clockwork but the drawing class spiraled out of control. I almost had a mutiny. I had the most lethargic group of students. The attendance was really horrible. It was one of those really nasty classes [and] I kind of dealt with it in the complete wrong way. You know I would show up and just lambasted them. That was the first time in my life that I understood what people were talking about when they experienced an all-crippling, pervasive, depression. When you can't really do anything. I experienced that.

When I asked Paul if he made any artwork at that time he sighed, took off his baseball cap and ran his fingers through his hair, "Ahhhh, not really at the time. My wife was saying, 'Paul you've got to start thinking about doing something else.'"

Partners and Support

Paul's experiences are not solely about himself; they also affect his students and his family. He is well aware of the importance that his wife plays in his choice to pursue multiple roles simultaneously. It is clear that what he is doing wouldn't be possible without her support. He told me,

The situation with my wife is really like one in a million. I am really fortunate. To have someone who is very understanding. She'll keep me in check. She's not really wild on art but she'll just say you might not want to do that zine or that little side project you been trying to put together, why don't you just put that to the side. You know you need other people to kind of edit and channel what you're doing. That's a huge benefit. Yeah so my wife will say I'll take the kids for 3 hours and then you have them for 3 or 2 hours or an hour and a half and switch on and off. We have the whole summer with the family and that can get really taxing. It's a cumulative thing, It's not just this day, it seems to build and build and finally you get to the point that you have to say look you know I am really having a difficult time with a couple of co-workers at school, my daughter is in this phase where she does nothing but whine, I am having some sleep issues and you just have to know when you're kind of stretching yourself too thin. Then on some level too you just have to not give a shit.

Artist/Teacher: Nicole Richardson

Nicole Richardson was raised in Stafford, a small mining town located in southeastern, Arizona. She received a Bachelors Degree in Fine Art with a minor in education at Arizona State University. While working toward her art major she pursued a degree in art education.

It was pretty simple to acquire. I just threw in education credits just for the heck of it. Back then it was cheaper to go to school. And you can do that. You never know, I am just going to grab these credits before I get out of here. But I never wanted to be a teacher. It didn't appeal to me.

Upon graduating college Nicole moved to Long Island, New York and worked as a graphic designer for ten years. After a failed marriage and two infant children she decided to move back to Arizona where her family could provide support. As a single mother she started a home based, freelance design business. Some of the projects that Nicole worked on were illustrating books, murals, t-shirt design and commercial design. Personal art-making was impossible: the demands

of her business wouldn't allow it. Nonetheless, Nicole did see her business commissions as a form of art making.



Figure 2.8. Nicole Richardson in her office with painting of “Joe”, 2011
Painting Courtesy of Nicole Richardson

After four years of freelancing, Nicole became exhausted not only physically but also emotionally:

It was always 24/7. The great fear of economic insecurity because you might not have a client. You might not have a gig in two weeks. So everything that came in I took it. I didn't take any time off and I did it out of my home and my children were small. I hired someone to come in and watch them during the day. I wanted to be a mother. It was important to me not to give them to somebody in daycare. I figured this was a happy medium. I was around them all day and when they both went to school I was fried from the heavy workload. I would work till 2 in the morning, then get up at 6 and work to meet all my deadlines. I don't have a head for business but if there was money in the checking account I was good... I had no benefits; there was no health insurance, no nothing. So I thought maybe I should teach because then I could relax a little bit.

The decision for Nicole to enter the teaching profession made sense to her. It aligned with her children's school schedules and provided the added perk of benefits. It made sense for a single mom raising two boys. But the assumption that teaching would be easier and provide time to make personal art was false. Nicole started teaching in the Gilbert School District, located in Gilbert, Arizona. At the time a small predominately white, Mormon, agricultural community, the Gilbert School District paid their teachers relatively low salaries. Nicole's gross income her first year teaching elementary art was eighteen thousand dollars plus benefits — half of what she was making as a freelance artist. Raising two children and maintaining a household required a supplemental income so Nicole decided to continue freelance work at night.

As the community of Gilbert grew so did the school district. But the district had trouble hiring teachers because as Nicole put it, “no teacher in their right mind would work for that salary.” After the district made an adjustment to the pay scale, so one could (barely) make a living wage, Nicole decided to teach at a high school in order to work more closely with her students. The move also

allowed her to access the school's art studios on the weekend and make personal art. Working primarily with clay Nicole began to show her work at galleries in downtown Scottsdale. The brisk sales of her art encouraged and motivated her to make more. Nicole described her schedule to me:

I devoted the summers to making art or I would teach and I would get out at 3:30 and just go home and paint. My kids were in grade school and beginning high school; at that age they don't need you constantly. In fact they kind of prefer that you weren't there. So I just turned my home into a giant studio. I moved everything out of the kitchen. I had easels in there because I don't have a very big place. There was always oil paint and turpentine on the kitchen table and I did that for years. I used students for models exclusively. I paint figuratively. I don't like to paint landscapes or anything else. It has to be a figure based concept or idea. People are the only thing that really interested me: the skin, wrinkles and curves, drapery and clothing as well, so I wouldn't want to paint a tree.

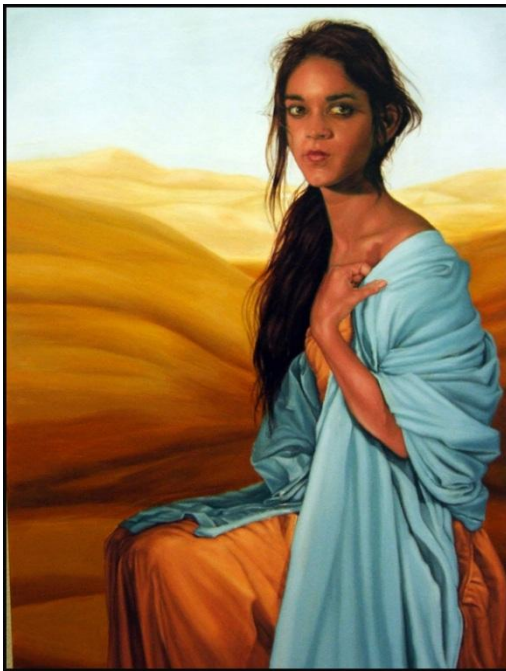


Figure 2.9. "Tension" Nicole Richardson, Oil, 48" x 30"
Courtesy of the Artist

Giving It Away

Nicole suggested that her burnout was related directly to the fact that she was an artist and not just a teacher. She said she approached teaching from the perspective of an artist desiring excellence from herself, and from her student's art making as well. The conflict between the teacher's passion and student disinterest was a major contributor to Nicole's exhaustion and burnout.

I said to Nicole, "Often you feel like you're giving it away. All your ideas that should be going into your work are being spent on students that really don't care. The humiliation that comes with one's passion being relegated to uninterested young people is not only defeating but depressing". She responded:

I will say this, teaching was the most exhausting thing I have ever done. It's mentally exhausting because it uses a part that you don't use when making art. You have to be really creative because you're not dealing with this problem you're having on this piece that you're making or this thing that you're trying to improve or figure out in your own work. You have thirty people with thirty different problems they're working on. Whether they are just not interested in doing it or they have a bad attitude or is there a problem in the class or is there a gifted artist and what can you give them to help in their own journey. How can I get this group to want to go on this journey with me? To get them. For me that was primary. If I could get that then all the other things are cake...as soon as I got that then you always have the problem of thinking, you know, you look at the piece and what's going to improve it. How can I give them the words to improve it? Why is this better than that. I am honestly an intuitive artist. I don't always have, I mean I learned that through teaching art, why is this better than that but what is the sentence that explains what I know intuitively, how do I explain what's in my gut that this is better. Teaching helped me find some of those words just because you had to explain it... that kind of energy to get that group of people to go with you is just, oh man it kicks your butt. And once you got them, to look at all of those thirty pieces and calculate quickly and move on the next one and calculate this, and what can make this better and what is this capable of and what is this kid not capable of or how much... I find joyful. But here is what it is you're giving away. You

are taking all your juices your life's passion and handing it to people that sometimes don't care.

In 2006 Nicole was voted Gilbert High School, "Teacher of the Year." In 2008 she quit Gilbert High to take a job at the Gilbert School District. She was hired as a filmmaker and web designer. The majority of her work time is spent making creative educational films and maintaining and designing Gilbert School District's award winning web site. I asked her what was the impetus to quit teaching. Her blunt response, "I was burnt out. I thought by taking this job at the district that I would have more time to make art."

Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Who is the Artist/Teacher?

Paul Nudd said that the artist/teacher is under a “weird taboo.” Thus, his mentors in grad school told him, “It’s too bad you’re going to teach. You would of made a great artist.” Nudd's mentors, and many others, see the role of artist and the role of teacher as being in conflict; being a teacher is seen as compromising artistic production. It is important to keep the “weird taboo” in mind when researching the artist/teacher. In particular, one must make distinctions between artist/teachers and artists who are exclusively artists.

Art teachers in public education can be divided into two groups: working artists and non-working artists. A working artist who is also a teacher negotiates or supplements his or her artistic life through teaching. An artist's work may benefit from teaching or it may suffer from it, but the twin roles of artist and teacher are always, to some extent, in a constantly fluctuating tension.

Bayles and Orland (1993) argued that “ the artist who would teach is often doomed before ever setting foot in the classroom” (p. 80). This opinion seems rather dire. Nonetheless, it raises the question of what “doom” looks like, and how the classroom affects the lives, mental dispositions and art production of artist/teachers.

Throughout the long history of artist-student or master-apprentice relationships, there has always been negotiation of intent. Negotiation of intent

serves both parties. The artist offers to transfer knowledge and technique, and to divulge creative processes. The student acquires skills, gains the prestige of working with a successful artist, and discovers the mental mechanisms that go into making art. In return, the student offers the artist financial support and perhaps, new ideas and a fresh perspective. Ideally, this artist-student relationship is a mutually agreed upon and beneficial arrangement.

However, this is not necessarily the case for artists teaching in public education. The working artist becomes a public servant and the role of artist and teacher unite. The artist brings to the school artistic expertise, technique, and ideas that contribute to the curriculum. In exchange, artists typically adopt teaching jobs for a steady revenue stream, health and pension benefits, and a work schedule that allows time for making art.

Whether the role of artist or teacher takes precedence in the school space is inevitably constricted. Role conflicts and how they are delineated by institutional space can often result in a confusion of identity. Most frequently, the role of the artist may be overshadowed by the role of teacher. Though the wider school community rarely perceives this as a conflict, it can result in serious cognitive and logistical problems for artist/teachers.

One reason for the lack of collegial recognition of this struggle is because of the art's "marginal place in school" (Cohen-Everon, 2002, p. 38). Paul Nudd, an artist /teacher describes his colleagues at a school he has taught at for ten years in this way.

Most of the teachers have no art education. They don't even understand the progression of modern art. They don't know anything. They have no appreciation for what you do. They don't understand that you are invested in the creative lives of these children.

This may explain why it is difficult for an artist/teacher to establish community with other teachers. Connelly and Clandinin (1996) offer this perspective.

Art teacher's beliefs are constructed by themselves as well as by ideals and expectations from art and art teaching. They are also partially constructed by the art communities during their studies of art and art education. In these art communities, art and artists are regarded highly. But art teachers' roles in the schools are defined mainly by an educational system that has discourses and agendas in which art and art teachers are marginalized. The art teachers' ideal of good art teaching make accepting the formal expectations of their role difficult (p. 75).

The conflict of roles for the artist/teacher does not mean that the artist role and the teacher role cannot be integrated. It may, however, suggest one reason for artist/teacher burnout. Because of their background, art teachers may feel especially isolated as teachers, and may find their own conception of their calling in conflict with institutional role expectations. In turn, schools may be institutionally incapable of recognizing the value of, or supporting, artistic practice as part of teaching.

Burnout:

The term burnout in the context of work or labor is defined as somatic or mental dispositions. Froeschle and Crews (2010) describe burnout as such:

A feeling of physical exhaustion (emotional exhaustion), negative feelings and reactions (depersonalization), and poor self evaluations (personal accomplishment) develops gradually through three consecutive stages. An

imbalance between needs and resources (stage one) is followed by low energy, tension, exhaustion, and physical ailments during stage two. The third stage becomes evident when attitudes and behavior become negative and cynical. (p. 1)

Generally it is the result of overwork or stress related to working conditions and is associated particularly with work that involves social interaction. Sherman (1994) argues that burnout is “neither a physical ailment nor a neurosis, even though it has both physical and psychological effects” (p. 21).

The effects of burnout are unpredictable and vary relative to one’s susceptibility to stress. Sherman found it ironic that burnout “which supposedly comes from intense interaction with other people, can get worse when a person is alone and has nobody around to provide support” (p. 22). Thus, burnout is paradoxically a condition brought on by social contact which may be exacerbated by a lack of social contact.

If Sherman is correct, it follows that untreated burnout can have a significant and cumulative effect, resulting in “psychological strain caused by chronic daily stressors” (Westman, Etzion, & Danon, 2001, p. 468). The person experiencing burnout is generally “suffering from excessive stimulation where they have insufficient means of regulating its existence”(Hobfoll and Freedy, 1993, p. 36).

These definitions are clearly applicable to artist/teachers. The artist/teacher is constantly negotiating multiple tasks, balancing classroom projects and discipline with administrative demands that have little to do with teaching. Unregulated and often unpredictable events such as school violence,

student drug abuse, and student/personal/family issues may also contribute to a high level of stress. The greater the number of unpredictable events, and the less control over them the artist/teacher has, the greater may be the stress and the subsequent burnout. This perspective offers insight into the complexity of burnout as a “multi-dimensional construct” (Brennkimejier & Van Yperen, 2003, p. 116).

Historically differentiating the dimensions of burnout derived from “multiple conceptualizations” (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). This resulted in a list of definitions.

(a) To fail, wear out, become exhausted; (b) a loss of creativity; (c) a loss of commitment for work; (d) an estrangement from clients, co-workers, job, and agency; (e) a response to the chronic stress of making it to the top; (f) a syndrome of inappropriate attitudes toward clients and towards self, often associated with uncomfortable physical and emotional symptoms. (p. 623)

Burnout in Context With the Data:

The narratives in this research suggest that all of the artist/teachers had experienced burnout. Their burnout can be directly correlated to aspects of being an artist/teacher. Because burnout is multi-dimensional, measuring it can be difficult, even, or perhaps especially, for those experiencing it. Paul Nudd made some effort to express the different degrees of his burnout, noting that at times he experienced “a really agitated state” and at other times an “all crippling, pervasive, depression.” Nicole Richardson on the other hand, simply described her teaching as “the most exhausting thing I have ever done.” In explaining why she quit the teaching profession, she said, “I was burnt out.” For Nicole, then,

burnout is not so much a matter of degree as a word that covers the entirety of her teaching experience. A similar pattern can be found in Bert Stabler's narrative.

There have been various efforts to provide a more nuanced description of levels of burnout. Spaniol and Caputo (1978), for example, have classified degrees of burnout (p. 15):

First-Degree burn (mild): Short-lived bouts of irritability, fatigue, worry, and frustration.

Second-degree burn (moderate): Same as mild but lasts for two weeks or more.

Third-degree burn (severe): Physical ailments occur such as ulcers, chronic back pain, and migraine headaches.

The current and "most widely used burnout instrument" (Densten, 2001, p. 833) is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The MBI is intended to distinguish burnout from "related concepts such as depression, dissatisfaction, tension, conflict, pressure and particularly stress" (Densten, 2001, p. 834).

Such factors are often contributors and symptoms of burnout, but are not exclusive to burnout. Thus, researchers or diagnosticians have to make a distinction between them. Densten insists that it is necessary to make these distinctions because of their "inter-relationship, particularly to stress" (2001). Maslach and Jackson (1981) earlier proposed three categories of measurement for the MBI, specifically "emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feeling of reduced personal accomplishment."

Despite these efforts at categorization, research associated with burnout remains problematic. The distinctions and classifications the MBI makes when

measuring burnout have been debated. Moreover, the narratives in this research indicate how difficult it is to classify degrees of burnout. As a result “it is sometimes more convenient to treat burnout as a uni-dimensional variable” (Brenninkimejier & Van Yperen, 2003, p. i16).

Along those lines, Nicole’s, Bert’s and my own personal narrative all tend to present burnout as a uni-dimensional variable. In these narratives, it is not always clear that specific degrees or conceptualizations of burnout were correlated with specific events. This in turn contributed to a sense that burnout was an all or nothing phenomena. From this perspective, there were no actions which could mitigate or reduce burnout by degree to reduce burnout, one had to eliminate it all together. Thus in my case, after the death of a student to gang violence in the school, I determined I was burnt out and quit my job.

The all or nothing approach to burnout is problematic precisely because it offers so few options. Thinking of burnout in this way means that the only solutions are to suffer through it or to quit. On the other hand, if burnout has degrees, it may be possible to reduce it rather than simply to escape from it. For example, if Nicole had identified degrees of burnout and addressed the factors causing them, could she have stayed in the teaching profession? For Paul Nudd, identifying degrees of burnout allowed him to make specific changes to address them. For instance, he reduced his art production and established stronger support mechanisms with his wife. As a result, he has been able to continue both teaching and art-making.

Teachers, School, and Burnout

When I taught art at Chicago Discovery Academy I was amazed at the emphasis placed on testing. In such a turbulent atmosphere, the administrative bureaucracy often seemed intent on increasing teacher stress rather than ameliorating it. For example, the administration demanded daily lesson plans aligning with the state standards, constantly reminded teachers to teach toward test quotas, and mandated excessive paper work that no one ever seemed to read. For myself and many of my colleagues the constant assessment created more confusion. Peter Taubman posed the following question that many of my colleagues were asking:

Many of us are bewildered as to how we arrived at a point where our teaching has been reduced to numbers- the numbers on test scores, the numbers of dollars attached to merit pay or to be made by profit hungry corporations, or the number of outcomes met. We wonder how we came to allow CEOs and politicians to determine what and how we teach, and how prescribed performance outcomes and scripted curricula rose to such importance. How did it happen that teachers and teacher educators came to talk about teaching and learning in ways that mimic accountants, bankers, and salespeople talk about business? (2009, p. ix)

The regulation and monitoring of teacher tasks appeared to be designed to maintain the symbolic appearance of the school's authority. As such, it epitomized a system that seemed to have little concern for the personal well being of the student body and staff.

During an interview with Bert Stabler we discussed his experience of "being pink slipped." He said "You would think that working at Bowen for seven years someone would at least call and say you're out of a job; instead they notify

you by mail. It's like being objectified, not in the sense of a woman being made into a body but being made into an idea rather than an agent or like a source of moral irrelevance."

Interestingly, "teachers represent the largest homogeneous occupational group investigated in burnout research, comprising 22% of all samples" (McCarthy, 2009, p. 283). With all this attention to teaching, one would think that researchers would have arrived at a means of mitigating or alleviating burnout in the teaching profession. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Researchers have posited various reasons for this failure. McCarthy (2009) for example, speculated, "This may be because job-burnout studies over the past 30 years have focused on work place conditions" (p. 283). Research that addressed empirical and interpersonal causation and the alleviation of burnout is minimal. Along these lines, Zellars noted, "the role of individual differences has been largely ignored in favor of exploration into the systemic issues that occur at an organizational level" (cited in McCarthy, p. 283). Of the thirty-three articles reviewed and read for this paper regarding burnout, only four addressed intrapersonal investigations.

The research as well as much of the "burnout literature in general" reflects an "audit culture." "Audit culture" is a term British Anthropologists use to describe "discourses and practices that have accelerated the standardization and quantification of the educational experience"(Taubman, 2009, p. 13). Valli and Buese (2007) warned,

When teachers' work becomes excessively regulated, a host of unintended and negative consequences can result such as job dissatisfaction, reduced

commitment, burnout, loss of self-esteem, and early departure from the profession. (p. 521)

The first step to alleviating burnout is increased understanding, first from the general public but also from the educational community, and particularly from teachers. It must be understood that burnout's debilitating dimensions have implications beyond the general label of a "state of exhaustion" (Freudenberger, 1974, p.89). In order to address and mitigate burnout for teachers, Eklund suggests that the conversation begin with an acknowledgement of the internal school culture. Specifically, Eklund (2009) says, "some schools have cultures in which working beyond one's personal limits is a norm, breeding competition among staff, and that the more you care about the work the greater your burning out" (p. 26). This resonates with Paul Nudd's comment, "On some level too you just have to not give a shit."

Eklund's acknowledgement of school spaces as inherently competitive may come as no surprise; public schools in the United States are competitive. "Schools with a strong drive toward measurable academic goals tend to have more burned out teachers" (Friedman quoted in Berryhill, Linney and Fromewick, 2009, p. 1). No matter how collegial teachers may wish to be, they are all compelled into a general competitiveness. Nor is this competitiveness always linked solely to demands placed on teachers in regard to their students' academic success. Teachers in schools that serve difficult populations may, for example, become accountable for violent and aggressive behaviors on the part of their students. The demand that teachers control situations that are largely

uncontrollable results in high rates of burnout. In Valli and Buese's (2007) research, a principal from a high-poverty school told them "the teacher turnover rate at her school was 60% to 70% a year" (p. 550).

Bert Stabler's account of his first year at Bowen demonstrates this paradigm:

My first year at Bowen a number of students in the class commented "someone took a duggie (defecated) in the closet." I went back to investigate and a kid took a shit in the middle of the floor. I picked it up with newspaper. I didn't want to tell anyone because I felt like an idiot. It was not an impressive reflection on my classroom management. It exemplified what was going to be my attitude to teach, to hunker down and shovel. Just pick up shit was going to exemplify the way I was going to teach.

The teaching environment had driven the teacher prior to Bert "to a nervous breakdown and her quitting the teaching profession." Bert's description gives a sense of the stress that results when teachers are called upon to manage the unmanageable. It also vividly presents how isolated teachers can feel. The high stakes accountability culture in the public schools has left little time or space for teachers to even identify that they are under duress. When teachers do manage to recognize that they are in an intolerably abusive situation, they tend to leave the profession.

This pervasive culture of accountability in teaching lessens the school as a community. If burnout is to be reduced, teachers and administrative supervisors need to move from punitive evaluation and competitiveness to a system that emphasizes collegial and administrative support systems. McCarthy's study of coping resources for burnout symptoms, for example, argued that, "School

administrators should consider teacher stress as an important contextual variable” (p. 297) in the maintenance of the school.

Research contributing to the mitigation of teacher burnout has involved “stress management programs synthesizing artistic modalities and imagery.” Froeschele and Crews (2010) discovered a method for alleviating burnout through a combination of sessions guided by community counselors utilizing “relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises, muscle relaxation and creative visualization” (p. 290). A male teacher in Froeschele and Crews (2010) study stated “ We (teachers) walk around all day with our stomachs in knots not knowing what to expect next. I had no idea how doing something so simple (treatment) could affect me” (p. 298). But Froeschele and Crews research also revealed that “high stress and burnout levels were based on lack of administrative support, excessive demands, and a sense of powerlessness” (p. 297).

From the research it is clear that mitigating burnout requires schools to commit resources to helping teachers. However, the current political climate will make the commitment of such resources a difficult task. Addressing teacher burnout is politically a very low priority. In the meantime, school policies that have been established since “No Child Left Behind” are trending increasingly toward systemization and away from treating teachers as individuals. Instead of trying to help teachers, the schools are increasingly committed to policies which intensify teacher stress. As the role of the teacher changes, Valli and Buese (2007) note “even the literature on the expansion or intensification of teachers’ work

underestimates the impact of change across teachers' responsibilities" (p. 521).

Valli and Buese's research focused on discovering ways to help teachers who were confronting role change and high stress levels due to high stakes accountability. They concluded, "mediation is likely to be complex and varied" (p. 554). When public schools have guidelines for dealing with teacher burnout, those guidelines tend to be localized and based on local available resources. A coherent, national set of guidelines for addressing teacher burnout is non-existent.

Research in teacher burnout often neglects to address the subject's internal discourse. Personal narratives are therefore not assigned much significance and burnout is therefore more generally quantified. However, generalizations about teachers derived from data collection dismiss the individual. An example comes from a study conducted by Friedman (1991) which attempted to identify school factors associated with teacher burnout:

The good teacher in high-burnout schools was perceived as a person with extensive knowledge, dedicated to the job, and able to teach interesting and intriguing lessons. (p. 326)

In contrast, the following example comes from Katy Farber's (2010) book "Why Great Teachers Quit And How Might We Stop The Exodus." The quote here is from a forty-eight year old, female former educator who spent years in the educational system. It provides very specific indicators and causes of burnout:

I am overworked, stressed out, and have gained five to eight pounds a year from overeating, chronic sleep deprivation, and lack of exercise. Over the summer, I realized that this is going to kill me (literally) if I don't figure out how to balance. I am considering taking a leave next year and

investigating my options if I can live in balance and also feel good about the quality of my work. (p. 48)

In her voice the locus of burnout is entirely situated within the individual. The subject identified how burnout affected her and is forced to act in an effort to alleviate the burnout she was experiencing. In this case, the subject's decision was to quit the field of education and choose an alternative career. This narrative provided the reader with distinct characteristics of burnout and allowed the reader to empathize and identify with the burnout victim. Weiss, (1994) says that this kind of personal narrative allows for the rescuing of "events that would otherwise be lost"(p. 23).

In a study conducted by Friedman and Farber (1992) utilizing a "modified MBI" one of the primary conclusions was that "the job of educating students is made far more difficult by the failure of others to understand the complexity, responsibilities and stresses that are inherent in teaching" (p. 336). Teaching in public schools is hard. From the highly competitive College Prep School to the low-income inner city, school burnout is prevalent. According to a study by Lau Man Tak Yuen and Chan (2005) that utilized the MBI to uncover the correlation between demographic characteristics and burnout among Hong Kong secondary school teachers "the effect of demographic characteristics of teachers on burnout is not that salient" (p. 491).

Artist/Teachers, Art Production, Burnout, and Coping:

It may not come as a surprise that for the artist/teacher the role of teaching takes precedence over the role of artist. "Art has the dubious distinction of being

one profession in which you routinely earn more by teaching it than by doing it” (Bayles and Orland, 1993, p. 81). This may be why Paul Nudd’s professors inferred that his career as an artist would be terminated when he told him he was going to teach. Similarly, Bert Stabler's art production was primarily relegated to the summer, scheduled around the school calendar. All of Nicole’s art making occurred after school and in the summer. For all of the participants in this research, art production takes a back seat to the job of teaching. Nonetheless, the artist/teacher never quits making art. Whenever there is an opportunity, their art making is their first consideration. Bayles and Orland (1993) offer insight as to the tenacity of the artist/teacher.

Those who would make art might well begin by reflecting on the fate of those who preceded them: most who began, and quit. It’s a genuine tragedy. Worse yet. It’s an unnecessary tragedy. After all, artists who continue and artists who quit share an immense field of common emotional ground. (Viewed from the outside, in fact, they’re indistinguishable.) We’re all subjects to a familiar and universal progression of human troubles-troubles we routinely survive, but which are (oddly enough) routinely fatal to the art-making process. To survive as an artist requires confronting these troubles. Basically, those who continue to make art are those who have learned how to continue-or more precisely, have learned how not to quit. (p. 9)

For all of the participants in this research, Art making is configured around school life. Art making is strongly affected by burnout. As Paul Nudd stated, “we are invested in the creative lives of our students”, but for the artist/teachers is this done at the risk of forfeiting their our own creative lives? The three participants in this research have each demonstrated aspects of this peril. Art making “is a resistant practice and requires us to work against... boundaries”

(Greene, quoted in Sullivan, 2010, p. 152). The problem is teaching is not making art. The two roles are fundamentally different and they can conflict. In that conflict the potential to negate one or the other is a risk that the artist /teacher assumes.

The tacit agreement with the school, at least from the artist/teachers perspectives, can be summarized as follows: "I provide you with a service (teaching); you provide me with financial stability to survive and make art." What often is left out of this unstated arrangement is that conditions in which artist/teachers provide their services may impede not only their well being but their art making. As a result, for many artist/teachers, the agreement eventually becomes untenable. Nicole quit teaching. Bert is ending his teaching career at the end of the 2012 school year. I am currently seeking employment outside of Public K-12 education.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

To live the life of an artist who is also a researcher and teacher is to live a life of awareness, a life that permits openness to the complexity around us, a life that intentionally sets out to perceive things differently. Rita Irwin, 2004.

For this study, I chose to center my research on artist/teachers, hybrid professionals that maintain two concurrent roles. I looked specifically at the impact teacher burnout has on their art making and quality of life. The first chapter was an autoethnography describing my own experience as a teacher, artist and victim of burnout. I then presented data on three interviewees.

The participants in the interviews in my study were three artist/teachers: two male, one female. I conducted the interviews which were focused conversations in which I shared my own experiences while asking about theirs. Each artist/teacher told individual narratives centering on their experiences with burnout. One artist/teacher, Bert Stabler, asked that his partner, Katie, sit in on the interview process. Bert, Katie, and I all agreed that her experiences with the themes of this study were vital, and should be included.

My dissertation is itself an exercise in art, in creative non-fiction and in narrative analysis. In constructing and interpreting these narratives I adopted and applied my autobiographical narrative as a tool of reflexivity. Leavy (2009) suggested that an ethnographer's personal experience interwoven with his participants allows for broad depictions

Informed not by the researchers neutral rendering of events, but rather by his or her subjective experience in that reality, and in the best cases, by his or systematic reflexivity about the experience. (p. 36)

The participants for this research were selected through professional and personal connections. Two of the artist/teachers were former colleagues. The third had exhibited artwork in group shows with me in the Chicago area. One former colleague worked with me in Chicago, Illinois in a low income, 50% Hispanic, 50% African American school. The other worked with me in Gilbert, Arizona in a low to high income school which was 90% Caucasian and 10% mixed ethnicity.

My dissertation explores the participants' ideas, experiences and notions about the artist/teacher and burnout. Interviews were conversations grounded in open-ended questions. I conducted follow-up questions based on the participants' answers to the following open-ended questions:

- (1.) Can teaching and or burnout affect your art making process?
- (2.) Has burnout influenced your art making process?
- (3.) To what degree have you experienced burnout?
- (4.) At the time of experiencing burnout did you identify it as such?
- (5.) The simultaneous roles of teacher and artist can conflict. While operating in those two roles has burnout played a factor?

Many of the interviews were videotaped following the guidelines of The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects at Arizona State University. All of the participants' quotes in my dissertation have been transcribed directly from the videotapes. Events that the participants were involved in and which I observed-for example, art exhibitions and book signings that were not videotaped-nonetheless provided additional resources.

Documentation of those events consisted of field notes and photography. Coding included environmental and emotional climate based on my observation of the general behaviors of public participants not directly affiliated with the research. Relying on “post affect memos” notes taken after events and interviews allowed me to introduce nuance and detail to support the constructed narratives.

Narrative Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a method of self-discovery in which the researcher is a viable data source. This kind of writing creates “me too” moments for readers (Pelis cited in Leavy, 2009, p. 38) The purpose of using narrative autoethnography for my research, is to link personal experience with the experiences of the participants included in this research, as well as the reader, thereby discovering a consensus. Tom Barone referred to this as hermeneutical activity.

Human beings do not view time as a series of isolated moments, each one disconnected from the other. Instead we make sense of the moments of our lives by placing them within the context of all previous instants of awareness. Similarly, each action taken by ourselves or by those with whom we come into contact is not an independent happening. Rather, it is what may be called a life assertion, dependent on accumulated memory of prior activity for its meaning, and contributing to the meaning against which future actions will be regarded. In order to make sense of each action, we must interpret it in a manner which assumes the presence of an agent, a unified being who is performing the action in the light of the previous history of activities and because of a personal involvement with the world. (2000, p. 123)

This method of incorporation of multiple narratives may suggest to the reader that the identity of the self is non-static: “Identity is an achievement, gained and modified through a process of moving upon and experiencing a world in which

others are simultaneously achieving their own identities” (Barone, 2000, p. 124). When participating in this reflexive activity or participating in “life assertion,” internalized agents such as personal memories play an active role. But they are not the only factors. In addition, unpredictable external agents contribute to ways of knowing both the self and others.

Narrative Ethnographies

The goal of narrative based research is to create through personal stories insights that are not possible in other formats. Pauline Sameshima (2008) claimed, “The sharing of stories encourages reflexive inquiries in ethical self-consciousness, enlarges paradigms of the normative, and develops pedagogical practices of liberation and acceptance of diversity”(p. 52). To understand one’s experience as an artist/teacher requires a story. For the artist/teacher, art and teaching praxis are an inter-weaving a negotiation of multiple roles. These roles simultaneously hinder and benefit one another.

Artwork

It was important for me to incorporate artwork and the process of making art into the research. Through the participants’ art production or lack thereof, a great deal can be learned. When looking at the effect of burnout on artists/teachers, my participants and I “fashion representations that illustrate such conditions in their full context”(Trend, 1998, p. 173).

Photography

Photographs can operate as ethnography of signs and symbols. The insertion of photographs within the narrative both augments engagement and

provides context. In my quest to produce complex narratives, photographs offered opportunities for new insights that may be overlooked in a traditional text. The photographs in my research are not intended to tell one truth but are offered as interpretative operatives to tell many truths. It is intended to be a tool that illuminates aspects of the research that may be hidden. Photographs also function by means of visual social codes, the discovery of threads of contrast that may be overlooked.

As one example during this research, I took two photographs of a couple being interviewed at two different times. Differences in their physical proximity suggested a shift in their attitudes toward the topic being discussed (see Fig. 5.1). This observation redirected my attention to the importance of what had taken place in the couple's lives between the two interviews.

The multiple research perspectives discussed here may not fit into a scientific paradigm, but they do function within an artistic one. This research is legitimized through an iterative process (not a linear one). "Meaning emerges through labeling, identifying, and classifying emerging concepts; interrelating concepts and testing hypothesis; finding patterns; and generating theory" (Leavy, 2009, p. 10). Arts-based research has often been compared to a weave. As the threads crisscross the pattern emerges. The entwined whole is coherent and realized.

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS/THREE POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Reflectivity arises when the different elements or levels are played against each other. It is these relations and in the interfaces that reflexivity occurs. This approach is based upon the assumption and implies that no element is totalized: that is, they are all taken with a degree of seriousness, but there is no suggestion that any one of them is the bearer of the right or most important insight. (Sullivan, 2010, p.111)

When constructing narratives Tom Barone proposes the question, "About whose selves does the storyteller write and the reader read?" (Barone, 2005, p. 252). In an attempt to answer that question and the questions that arose from my research, I considered various interpretations of the artist/teacher. Nelson Glenn wrote, "As researchers, we must willingly step outside the safety of authorized knowing into the groundlessness of not knowing, in order to open up other possibilities" (cited in, Four Arrows, 2008, p. 100). I offer three discussions that may expand the conversation about the artist/teacher.

Discussion One

For many people, relationships with teachers have given their lives meaning and purpose. And yet, there are few nuanced, in-depth narratives which confront the factors that allow teachers to teach or which force them from the profession. Teachers have so often contributed to our own understanding "of what gives life meaning" (hooks, 2009, p. 23), but the experiences of those teachers is often absent from current educational narratives.

In attempting to understand artist/teacher burnout, it is important to ask teachers a number of questions. These questions include, “Why did you choose the teaching profession?” “Why do you continue to teach?” The answers to these rarely asked questions are important for teachers themselves and for the public.

As bell hooks says:

In the larger society, the world beyond academic settings, everyday folk are concerned with the issue of purpose. They want to have a clearer understanding of life, of what gives life meaning. In professional settings, teachers, especially those of us who work at the college and university level, rarely discuss our sense of purpose. We rarely talk about how we see our role as teachers. (2009, p. 33)

The absence of narratives about why teachers choose teaching and continue to teach impoverish discussions about education. They also make it harder for teachers themselves to do and remain in their jobs. This is illustrated by a quote from Nicole Richardson:

It’s as if we just keep teaching, going through the daily routine year after year. Teachers become “lifers”, institutionalized by a system that demands accountability leaving little room for opportunities of self-actualization.

A survey by Dan C. Lortie (1975) and adopted by the National Education Association attempted to categorize the reasons that people teach. Lortie classified five occupational themes that “attract people to a given line of work”, (p. 26) and adapts them to the teaching profession.

Five Attractors to Teaching:

The Interpersonal Theme. The desire to work with young people.

The Service Theme. The Idea that teaching is a valuable service of special moral worth.

The Continuation Theme. One can find in teaching a medium for expressing her interests.

Material Benefits. Benefits such as money, prestige and employment security that attract one to teaching.

Time Compatibility. Schedule features with convenient gaps, which play a part in attracting people to the occupation. (pp. 26-32)

Of course, teachers are not limited to a single reason; many may be drawn to the profession for a number of these reasons. For example, at the time I made the decision to enter the teaching profession a host of temporal and external factors contributed to my decision. It was a unique opportunity that presented itself at a time when I was eager to try something different, and the school's schedule didn't require sacrificing other projects that I was involved in. But beyond that, threads of all the themes that Lortie provided, and then some, contributed to my initial impetus to enter the profession. Some were perhaps more salient than others, but nonetheless they all contributed to the fabric of choosing teaching as a profession.

For the participants in my research, similar accounts of multiple rationales surfaced. When the question was posed, "Why did you initially choose the profession of teaching?" responders often mentioned job security or health benefits that were difficult to obtain as free-lance artists. However, responders also cited additional reasons that were often rooted in a collection of internalized beliefs and life experiences. These beliefs, and how individuals saw themselves in the role of teacher, were not fixed. Instead, events, influences, and social desires often affected the purpose and role of becoming and remaining an

artist/teacher. To better understand my point the “Assemblage” theory of Deleuze and Guattari is helpful.

Discussion Two

“Assemblage” as it is used in Deleuze and Guattari’s work is a concept dealing with the “play of contingency and structure, organization and change” (Wise, cited in Stivale 2005, p. 77). Wise paraphrases Deleuze and Guattari:

We do not know what an assemblage is until we find out what it can do, that is, how it functions. Assemblages select elements from milieus, the surroundings, the context, the medium in which the assemblages work and bring them together in a particular way. (Wise, cited in Stivale 2005, p.78)

For example, the choice of teaching involves claiming a territory which results in the construction of a territorial assemblage of the artist/teacher.

“Territories are more than just spaces: they have a stake, a claim, they express” (Wise, cited in Stivale, 2005, p. 78). In the case of this research the assemblage may offer clues as to the unpredictable affects the artist/teacher experiences in the profession of teaching.

To elucidate these concepts, I focused specifically on constructing an assemblage of Bert Stabler's reasons for teaching. I found this to be a difficult task because his perspective on the artist-teacher changed over the course of numerous interviews. This is consistent with the theory of assemblages, which acknowledge that the assemblage is constantly in flux, always arranging and rearranging itself in a continual attempt to “create a space of comfort for oneself” (Wise, cited in Stivale, 2005, p. 79). However, the variability can make it difficult to ground or create a firm framework for an assemblage.

I recently asked Bert, post interviews, to describe his assemblage. He said, “The choice to become a teacher was one of pragmatics, I needed a job.” I pushed the issue further, knowing Bert had a prior history of service, working for “Americorps” a U.S. federal government program that focuses on public service, and knowing also the great sacrifices he had made on behalf of his students. I was certain some aspect of service figured into his assemblage of artist/teacher. Reminding him of this he cut me off. “I know what you’re suggesting but I assure you it was about a paycheck.” This did not seem to fit with prior conversations I had with Bert. I listened to the transcripts and a comment Bert made regarding the school institution, “there are people like us that matter because we’re people but it’s not a crisis of survival. It’s a crisis of mattering.” That suggested to me that at that time, his assemblage of artist/teacher was more than just a paycheck.

I had to wonder if Bert’s prior assemblage/territory of artist teacher had been ruptured and reterritorialized. Sullivan contends that “Deterritorialisation always ends in reterritorialisation and in fact needs a territory from which to operate” (cited in Parr, 2010, p. 276). Bert’s firing and rehiring at Bowen had a profound impact on him, contributing to a new assemblage. The following is Bert’s commentary on his experience of being fired and rehired.

I think a lot of my ethics regarding power relationships have to do with expectations and it makes a big difference to me, yeah, people would behave completely differently given the exact same set of circumstances when expectations are different. It’s just emblematic of what happens in schools. I feel like I have passed through some sacred right of inclusion to the fraternity of crapped upon teachers where you’re just on hold for a year. Something will happen and will eventually get around to telling you.

We really want your input. Oh this is the proposal. And we don't have any information for you. We still don't have any information for you but you will probably be retained. School ends, I am fired. I know in 2001 they fired people and made them reapply for their jobs but they didn't tell me that you would be able to reapply for your job. Or there is some chance we will run the numbers and we will rehire you. The only thing I had to make a context of it my fellow teachers had gone through the same experience of just operating without any sense that the authority structure isn't obliged to disclose their decision making process.

Another example of how fluid assemblages can be is suggested by my last interview with Bert and Katie. When asked if he would continue teaching, "all my decisions are now based on Katie, she comes first."



Figure 5.1. Bert & Katie, June 2011, (left) Bert & Katie January, 2012 (right)

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblage is not only a collection of beliefs and experiences, but it is also of signs and language. In viewing figure 5.1, one can actually observe a difference in Bert and Katie's bodies that coincide with Bert's shifting assemblages of school. The photo on the left was taken in June of 2011; the photo on the right was taken in December of 2011. The difference in the two photos may point to Wise's comment that an assemblage "is the continual

attempt to create a space of comfort for one-self, through the arrangement of objects, practices, feelings and affects (cited in Stivale, 2005, p. 79).

Bert's deterritorializing of the artist/teacher was precipitated by forces he encountered within the school context. He configured into his new assemblage of artist/teacher a partner, someone who contributed to his "mattering." This relationship was outside of the school space but was nonetheless relevant to his teaching.

Bert's assemblage of artist/teacher may also have changed in part because his construction of identity was unacknowledged or not reified by his school. When Bert refers to being perceived as an "abstraction" by the school institution his assemblage ruptured. The alteration of his assemblage may also indicate why Bert now argues that his commitment to the school is simply a "paycheck." He has reconfigured his prior assemblage to align with how he is perceived by the school.

bell hooks has discussed why she chose the teaching profession. Her account suggests that her choice was not based in a fixed intent or desire, but was instead an emerging imperative that was intrinsic to her way of being in the world. One can easily pick out the territorial assemblage of teacher in hooks' narrative. It also is evident by the narrative that it is in flux and evolving:

I went to college to become a teacher. Yet I had no desire to teach. I wanted to be a writer. I soon learned that working menial jobs for long hours did not a writer make and came to accept that teaching was the best profession a writer could have. By the time I finished graduate school I had encountered all types of teachers. Even though progressive teachers who educated for the practice of freedom were the exception, their presence inspired me. I knew that I wanted to follow their example and

become a teacher who would help students become self-directed learners. That is the kind of teacher I became, influenced by the progressive women and men (black and white) who had shown me again and again, from grade school on into college the power of knowledge. These teachers showed me that one could choose to educate for the practice of freedom. Nurturing the self-development and self-actualization of students in the classroom, I soon learned to love teaching. I loved the students. I loved the classroom. I also found it profoundly disturbing that many of the abuses of power that I had experienced during my education were still commonplace, and I wanted to write about it. (hooks, 2009, p. 3)

hooks' account conveys a common occurrence for artist/teachers, one in which the profession allows for or informs one's art making — in this case, writing. For hooks, the artist/teacher is a synthesis of distinct roles that complement each other. Her embrace of the artist/teacher role was facilitated in part by her realization that "educating for the practice of freedom" could be served through the concurrent roles of pedagogy and writing. For hooks, teaching, which began as a means to write, became also an inspiration to write.

Many artists may initially choose to be teachers for financial reasons. Art is an uncertain career; teaching provides a steady salary and the stability necessary to continue to produce art. However, maintaining one role (artist) by sustaining it with another (teacher) poses problems if the roles are maintained as exclusive projects. This is especially the case when teaching actually begins to interfere with art-making. The struggle to keep the artist and teacher roles apart, as opposed to viewing them as mutually contributing to each other's maintenance, may contribute to burnout.

Discussion Three: Embodying the Subject

Going home is a paradox. What you long for at home is often tied to all the reasons you left. When making that journey, I become subsumed in personal events and experiences that build upon one another, informing the past and configuring the projected future. This “in-between space” of past events and projected future outcomes is one that contains a multitude of emotions, ideas and projections.

I returned to Chicago, my home, to conduct research pertaining to the complexity of being an artist and a public school teacher concurrently. I did not, and could not, approach this research from a detached perspective. It was not a subject that was unfamiliar or distant. In fact it was a subject that was and is still very close to my core. What I was not prepared for was the impact of other artist/teachers’ stories and the effect and affect they would have on me. My point of perception, “in itself a way of becoming” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 51) was not stable. Instead, it felt like shifting plates of stone advancing and retracting, reconfiguring and rupturing knowing and unknowing. My research was not just an outside investigation of other artist/teachers, but a reexamining of my own experiences and my self.

To better understand the artist/teacher and my own reawakening of burnout, I choose to construct artworks of two of the participants in my research, a process that Rita Irwin refers to as a/r/tography:

A/r/tography is a form of representation that privileges both text and

image as they meet within moments of Metissage. But most of all, a/r/tography is about each us living a life of deep meaning enhanced through perceptual practices that reveal what was once hidden, create what has never been known, and imagine what we hope to achieve. (Irwin & deCosson, 2005, p. 35)

“A/r/tography is considered an arts and education practice based research method dedicated to acts of inquiry through the arts and writing. The name itself exemplifies these features by setting art and graphy, and the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher (a/r/t), in contiguous relations” (Irwin, 2006, p. 3). These relationships that share a common border often times overlap creating a pastiche or collage of their functions. The borders are fluid ever changing, which impacts the functionality of the roles. These overlaps of borders are informed, influenced and attracted and reconfigured by resisting the organization that is placed upon them by external forces. Upon theoretical reflection of interstitial spaces and relationships, Britzman sees a fluid, ontological, project. “Theory is no longer an abstract concept but rather an embodied living inquiry, an interstitial relational space for creating, teaching, learning, and researching in a constant state of becoming” (2003, found in Irwin, 2006, p. 5).

By making the art-works, I discovered pieces of my participants’ narratives that unknowingly resonated deep within me. At the time of the interviews they had no more prominence than other parts of their narratives. The surfacing of these pieces and why they affected me reminded me of a quote by Sullivan, “The importance of thoughts becomes apparent when they are enacted in some form” (2010, p. 133). The following are descriptions of the making of portraits of Paul Nudd and Bert Stabler.

Portrait of Paul Nudd



Figure 5.2. Portrait of Paul Nudd, Paul Mack, 2012, Mixed Media, 4”x6”

The first time I saw Paul Nudd’s art was at “Art Chicago”, 2003, an annual event where artists and dealers set up booths to display and sell art. One section of the event was designated for local artists to display and sell work. Paul Nudd had purchased a booth and was selling prints and small colorful drawings of ameba-like forms. What impressed me about his work was its simplicity in contour but complexity of composition. The work looked effortless, playful and beautiful. Introducing myself I was surprised to discover that Paul was also a public school art teacher.

When years later I interviewed Paul for my research at the gallery that represents him, Western Exhibitions, I was surrounded by his large-scale artworks. I was envious and hopeful. Not of the art work or Paul’s success, but

that he appeared to achieve the perfect balance of teaching, maintaining a successful art career and participating in the raising of two children with a supportive wife.

When considering how to construct his portrait it seemed natural for me to adopt his visual language. Replicating the drippy, colorful, organisms was a relief from the toll that this research was having on me. Though Paul had experienced burnout, of all the participants, including myself, he seemed to be the least affected by it. He had not quit his teaching job. There had been no major shifts in his personal life — or to quote Paul, “It all runs like a pretty well oiled machine.”

I wondered could drawing weird, organic forms be a possible means to mitigate burnout? Paul’s portrait began with a sketch of his face from a photo I had taken of him at the gallery. I then began to draw small “turd” like shapes and filled them in with colors that matched the values of the sketch. While selecting playful colors to fill in my organic shapes I thought about our conversation over the summer and the struggles of being an artist/teacher. He mentioned that he did not have an art room but taught off of a cart at an elementary school and would see a group of students once a week. Though this may seem difficult I wondered if in fact if this is easier then having an art room and seeing the same students five days a week, in the same space for an entire school year. I wondered if coming into a classroom as an artist/teacher, a guest, as opposed to being the host of a classroom, had any relevance to teacher burnout.

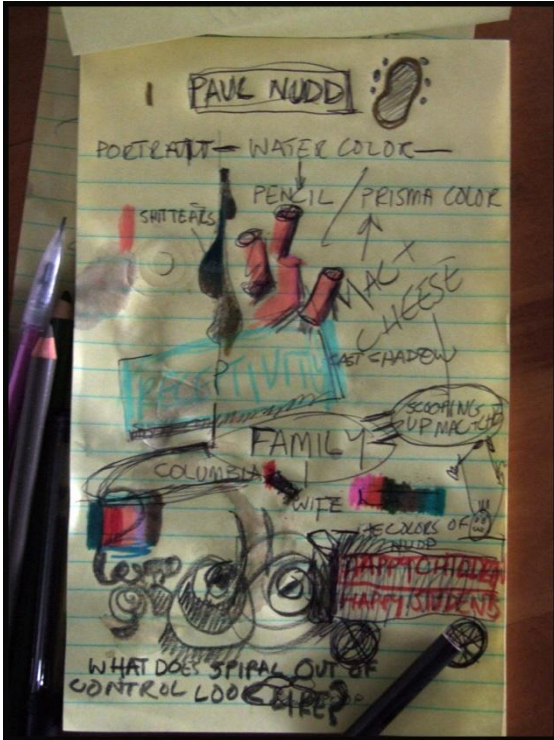


Figure 5.3. Notes taken while constructing Paul Nudd's portrait.

The pleasure of coloring strange, funky, forms reminded me of childhood. Is there a connection between Paul's art and his teaching praxis? There is something to be said about moving from room to room with a cart of colors and paper. Especially if the students you are working with see you once a week. They anticipate the artist/teacher's arrival. It's a break from the monotony of the school day. The "Art Santa Claus" comes to mind. Receptivity of your curriculum by your students is critical for the artist/teacher. My best days are when the students are engaged.

Looking at the progress I am making on Paul's portrait it seems stark to me. I continue to add more colors and shapes filling in the chest. Trying to ground his face. While doing this it occurred to me that Paul's major burnout experience

was brought on not only by a heavy workload but also from a class he was teaching at Columbia College. I went back to review the transcript of Paul and thought about receptive students and the artist/teacher. Paul stated:

I was teaching two classes at Columbia College as well. I was doing drawing and design. The design class ran like clockwork but the drawing class spiraled out of control. I almost had a mutiny. I had the most lethargic group of students. The attendance was really horrible. It was one of those really nasty classes [and] I kind of dealt with it in the complete wrong way. You know I would show up and just lambasted them. That was the first time in my life I experienced an all-crippling, pervasive, depression.

I know this feeling, spiraling out of control, deep depression, a fire in the hole. The portrait of Paul is completed but the white space, the negative space, needs something. What is it? Paul mentioned the importance of his family, his wife. How do I hold the portrait together and ground it? What sticks in my mind is something Paul said about teaching school, making artwork and helping take care of the kids. “The choice between having to clean up macaroni and cheese off the floor and going downstairs to make work can be irritating” I decided in the spirit of Paul Nudd’s art to overlay his portrait on a pile of macaroni and cheese. The tension of his work and representation of his family life makes sense. This is what holds him together and keeps him sane: his family.

Portrait of Bert Stabler



Figure 5.4. Portrait of Bert Stabler 2 (Grit), Paul Mack, 2012, Mixed Media 14"x20".

Observing Bert preparing for his solo art show in June I was taken with the multi-colored scraps of construction paper that fell to the floor from his worktable. I lay on my back in his studio thinking of confetti events like Mardi Gras or a football game. For myself construction paper is associated with school. I personally refuse to use it because of that. I was surprised to see Bert working with it. Was this somehow related to his school experience? Cheap materials that are often discarded. When considering what medium to use in making Bert's portrait my usual materials would be paint, but somehow I felt it would not convey the depth of my colleague's struggles. I decided to use construction paper, a material which I despise. I hate the smell of it, its brittle texture and its

pervasive association with schools. But why would I do this? Was it a symbolic gesture to take on some of Bert's burden?

I had a cabinet full of old construction paper at school. I selected the oldest sheets I could find. The edges of the paper were sun faded and seemed to have been around for God knows how many years. I put them in a bag and brought them home with me. I was reluctant to start; it took about a week before I started working on Bert's portrait. Forcing myself, early on a Sunday morning I began cutting the paper. I referenced a photograph I had taken of Bert at the opening of his show in Chicago, right after he told me he had been fired. The expression on his face was one of stoicism but resignation. I knew this look. I had seen it in my mirror.

I matched the colored paper to the tones of Bert's skin, first cutting then layering, and gluing. Bert's face, in construction paper, began to emerge, but it was too clean. Teaching at Bowen was raw and unpredictable. It wore you out. Took the life out of you. The edges of the paper needed to be torn. I started tearing the paper instead of cutting it. It was becoming an aggressive process of making art. The more I tore the angrier I got. How much of this is me? How much of this is Bert? It took two days to complete the paper assemblage of Bert. I was dissatisfied with the results. It did not convey the story, the grit of working at Bowen.

Considering the layers of cut and torn paper I started to pull pieces up. They would tear and leave fragments on the surface. It reminded me of peeling skin, a digging to see what was underneath. It reminded me of something Bert had

told me when we went to clean out his classroom after his firing. He recounted the story of how a student had defecated in his art closet, and of how he had realized that his work at Bowen was going to be “hunkering down and shoveling shit.” This somehow seemed to be significant.

I made cutout stencils of a man hunkering down and shoveling. I spray painted one in pink and one in black framing the left and right side of Bert’s face and then painted one over his hair as a symbolic gesture of what may have been on his mind everyday he went to work. Spray-painted stencils also reminded me of an art project Bert did with his students. He had them make stenciled resistance posters addressing the inequities they faced in a low-income school. The black figure opposite the pink figure were intended to convey the complexity of working in a predominately Black school and being a Caucasian male and recognizing the inequities this reflects and perpetuates. Bert’s comment in regards to being fired at Bowen:

They should get rid of me. I hope things go better with whomever they get. They might not. There are worse teachers, white or not white, male or not male. But somebody who is not white and not male would have something to offer to start with because the kids would have less sadness and conflict...

After spray-painting the “shit shovelers” on my patio I stood up and looked at the portrait. I was on top of it and needed a perspective. I was drinking a cup of coffee thinking, is this it? Did I capture Bert? Without even thinking I poured my coffee over three days of work. I was disgusted not with the work but what it conveyed. I wanted to erase the “shit shovelers”. I wanted it all to go

away.

The work sat on my porch overnight. Just knowing it was outside in the cold prevented me from getting a sound sleep. The impulse to bring it in the house was countered by my desire to leave it alone. Stay away from it. It's too close. The next day after I had come home from teaching I went to the patio and noticed the glued paper cutouts had begun to peel up. Bert was falling apart. I brought the portrait in the house and applied pieces of masking tape to hold the paper pieces down.

The portrait sat on my desk for two days. Every time I walked through my apartment I looked at it. Once again it was a mirror of my past and present. To destroy a piece of art is an act I rarely participate in. This portrait of Bert was also a portrait of myself and all those that have worked in similar school spaces. I had decided to burn the work. I did not want it lingering around. This wasn't Bert. This wasn't me, and if it was, we had moved on. At some point in our future, if we see ourselves as such, I hope it is fleeting. I hosed down the ashes of the portrait into my garden. It won't be shit I'll be shoveling, but soil that yields something beautiful.



Figure 5.5. Bert Brunning, 2012

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Eric Margolis
ED

From: Mark Roosa, Chair 
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 05/27/2011

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 05/27/2011

IRB Protocol #: 1105006410

Study Title: Artist/Teacher Burnout

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

