Narrative Education:

Arts-Based Curricula for Identity and Empathy Development

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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This thesis establishes a case for educational reform with specific emphasis on the power of arts-based educational efforts to develop identity and empathy in American undergraduates. It argues the necessity of empathy in an increasingly connected yet divisive world and outlines ways educators can better accommodate for and accelerate its development. Asserting the importance of cohesive identity narratives in dialogical interaction, it draws upon the pedagogical power of art, which is defined as *creative narration*, to help students develop and express their stories of self. This kind of preparation, it argues, equips students to forge connections within themselves and to others. To apply and test this argument, these topics were translated into a five-week identity-based art curriculum and taught to Emory University undergraduates. Through both theoretical claim and experimental application, this thesis outlines ways for educators to foster creativity, narrativity, vulnerability, and empathy within – and outside – the classroom.

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Table of Contents

Manifesto: A Note to the Reader

Dear reader,

The power of art is dramatically emphasized in this thesis, and although some will

interpret this as overstatement, I could not in good conscience downplay these claims. I focus

on art not because of my belief in its inherent worth but because I have witnessed the effects

of its implementation. In the same vein, I focus on empathy not because of its standalone

power but because of the consequences of its absence. I do not intend to present empathy as

a cure-all, nor do I mean to employ it as what rhetorician Richard Weaver calls a *god term*

(1995).[1] It is however, especially pertinent in this era. I view empathy as directly related to the

prevalence of relationships across lines of social division – and the success of efforts against

patterns of social stratification. The essence of this argument is human desire for connection,

and this project operates because of, strengthens, and stands testament to such desire. It

draws notably upon the pedagogical potential of vulnerability, and it seeks to create

educational environments wherein vulnerability is born and can survive. In my vision of ideal

society, every human has access to belonging and understanding. While I do not expect utopia,

I do believe the place to start is education.

This thesis results from an undergraduate education that focused on the translation of

knowledge into application. In part thanks to the freedom interdisciplinary studies grants, I

was able to approach the last four years as a venue by which to learn about life, actively

drawing connections between my academic and lived experiences. I intentionally enrolled in

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[1] Weaver defines *god terms* as words that are particular to certain time periods or movements which, though effective, can often be vague or propagandistic – i.e. *freedom*, *progress*, or *value*.

(and on occasion created) courses that allowed engagement with my personal, academic, and geographic communities. Along the way, I critically evaluated pedagogical choices made around higher education – and by extension education as a whole. Drawing conclusions about what was lacking, I then crafted a curriculum for a course which targeted the gaps I noticed and embodied solutions for filling them. In lieu of (or in wait for) radical educational policy change, this endeavor serves as a small step towards comprehensive 21st-century education.

Educators wield immense power to change the way we encounter the 'other.' Every American adult was once a student, and an effective step in countering close-mindedness and prejudice can be taking advantage of students' willingness to learn. Rather than ignoring their yearning for connection, I argue for fostering their gravitation towards tolerance, curiosity, and understanding. Rather than setting students up to compete with each other, I assert that educators equip them to learn from one another. It is in that spirit that this thesis is written: as an academic paper, but equally as a call to action. As much as this thesis is about students, it is about educators, and it explores methods of teaching to launch the conversation. Theodore Murray, a fellow educator, reflected once to me: "The world is, but we also make our world. So many people don't. Why? Because we don't teach them to" (2018).

Let's teach them to.

Introduction: Structural, Semantic, Historical, and Cultural Context

Overview of Thesis

This thesis argues for arts-based curricula with the goal of helping students understand, articulate for themselves, and then express to others their changing identities. Development of identity narratives can lead to more effective sharing and, by extension, increased empathy. To build a case for educational reform, topics of identity, empathy, and arts education are explored via theoretical claim and experimental application. The academic paper comprises theoretical argument, and the accompanying curriculum demonstrates such reform in action.

The introduction succeeding this overview defines art for the purposes of this thesis, situates the argument within a broader historical context of systematic defunding and devaluing of humanities, challenges hegemonic preferencing of STEM-based methods of inquiry, and asserts the necessity of identity development in the modern world. It then links identity narratives to empathy, presents storytelling as a way of developing empathy, and provides evidence of pre-existing efforts of empathy programming and arts-based education.

Three main chapters compose this paper. Chapter 1 is centered around well-being, connection, and identity. It begins with a discussion of student mental health and the importance of cohesive identity narratives for connection, beginning to answer questions about the purpose of education by presenting college as an opportunity for relationship and identity fortification. It discusses the nature of identity narratives and outlines several approaches for understanding identity, concluding with an argument for identity development via narrative.

Chapter 2 discusses the importance of empathy in a disparate but increasingly connected world, acknowledges vulnerability's role in cultivating empathy, promotes stories as facilitators of empathy, and then presents the work and philosophies of Carlton Mackey to exemplify art being used to develop identity narratives, put them on display, and evoke empathy. Both chapters connect the pursuit of well-being, the development of identity narratives, and the strengthening of empathy to the American educational system – both as it is now and as it could be – and argue for the adoption of narrative-arts-based curricula in schools.

Chapter 3 diverges from philosophical discourse into practicality, endeavoring to apply the theory in Chapters 1 and 2 into serviceable curriculum. It explores methods of teaching, outlining ways that educators can encourage empathy, promote vulnerability, and both normalize and facilitate identity exploration and change. It engages with the curriculum directly and reflects upon the pedagogical and investigative influences that shaped it, the procedural manifestation of these ideas in the classroom, and the intentions behind it. The curriculum itself is located in the Appendix and the course is explained in the Methodology section immediately following the Introduction. The conclusion, finally, broaches barriers to change while prescribing ways forward that accommodate for them.

Operational Definition of Art

This thesis centers around the narrative nature of identity. Art, therefore, is operationally defined as *creative narration*. Existing definitions are valuable and employable in other contexts, but none fully embody art's potential to be leveraged as narrative exploration in the context of education. Naturalized theories of art accepted by Friedrich Nietzsche and

Sigmund Freud, for example, value representational art and the aesthetic rendering of reality (Anderson, 2017). Formalists like Immanuel Kant, on the other hand, assert that art's value lies in its ontological nature (Crawford, 1974, p.100). Neither the form or subject of art is particularly pertinent for this argument. Walter Benjamin, heavily influenced by Marxist theories and in opposition to *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake) philosophy, focused on art's *aura*: its deeply unique and indescribable affect (Benjamin, 2006; Rochlitz, 1996). Similarly, Morris Weitz and Ludwig Wittgenstein fought definitions of art altogether, claiming that art taps into collective phenomena that clarify the human spirit in inarticulable ways (Cohen, 2002). These definitions are helpful in expanding conversations around art's effects, but applying a narrative component to definition-based foundations enables more nuanced discussion of creative engagement in education. With the 'Death of the Author' movement in 1967 after Roland Barthes' essay by the same name, artist intention fell secondary to audience interpretation (Barthes, 2001). For the sake of this argument, both artist intention and audience interpretation are relevant. Institutional theories of art only consider art that which an institution (denoted as *the artworld*) deems worthy, a principle which in application can become elitist and exclusionary (Yanal, 1998). The operational definition of *creative narration* leans towards 'art of the everyday' approaches, such as John Dewey's argument that nearly everything, including experience, can be considered art (Leddy, 2016). It also aligns with the decidedly political approach to art that the ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) organization's efforts to bring attention to the AIDS epidemic inspired in the late 1980s (Haldi, 1999). It further draws influence from Mike Kelley, who believed art inspires confrontation of otherwise sequestered issues (Davis, 2019).

Defining art as *creative narration* negotiates these approaches to provide a more inclusive and less hierarchical resolution, equalizing all forms of art and encompassing less conventional forms of narration (i.e. ones non-aural or rhythmic in nature). Artist and activist Carlton Mackey, whose ideas are explored in-depth throughout this thesis, illustrates the narrative effects of seemingly non-narrative art forms by discussing how he hears African music as an extension of his identity narrative because the drums evoke emotional remnants of his African roots (2018b).[2] *Creative narration* also expands parameters around who 'qualifies' as an artist. Though other definitions can be used to argue art being ostensibly granted to a select few, Anna Louise Söderquist, whose reflections on Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard permeate this thesis, insists in her book on dialogical education and child identity development that "Narrativity is everywhere, as storytelling is native to human beings" (2016, p.22). By weaving personal narratives, students are creative storytellers. In that way, every student is an artist, which is essential for arguing the links between art and empathy-directed education.

Systematic Sequestering of Humanities

To provide context for what is often termed the 'crisis in the humanities,' historical evidence of the systematic sequestering of humanitarian disciplines must be provided. This so-called 'crisis' is not a new one; John H. Plumb wrote a book coining the phrase over forty years ago (Arndt, 2007, p.3). Importance and resources have been siphoned from the arts in America since that funding was first provided. The National Endowment for the Arts ceased being

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[2] Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory supports this by asserting that the interpretation of media depends on the recipient's cultural and economic background (Hall, 1973).

funded a mere fifteen years after its birth in 1965 (Lewis, 2016). After conservative control of

Congress was gained in 1994, it was then cut in half. State spending in the arts has dropped by

a third since 2001 (Lewis, 2016). Schools nationwide are "disproportionately trimming arts

supply budgets and eliminating part-time arts educators" (Hernandez, 2009). With increased

focus on pre-professional preparation, curricula are being streamlined to promote

specialization instead of general aptitude (Blackburn, 1976). With such a focus, many students

fail to provide the emotional and relational preparation students need to operate creatively

and empathetically in the modern world. Three exceedingly powerful educational tools – art,

narrativity, and empathy – are largely ignored in the pursuit of effective teaching techniques.

Arts and humanities are regarded "less useful to society than other disciplines, notably in

science, technology, engineering, and mathematics" (Olmos, 2015). Humanities are

"systematically or catastrophically defunded by nations, states, and universities" for disciplines

"deemed valuable by the public and its leaders" despite their integral role in addressing and

understanding societal challenges (Liu, 2011).

In an effort to contextualize and condense scope, this thesis focuses primarily on arts in

education, but these patterns pervade American culture as a whole.[3] Anti-art movements in

education are just a small part of what Audrey Gámez, Education Manager of the arts

nonprofit C4 Atlanta, calls an "attack on culture" (2017). She says the issues goes beyond

allocation of resources or tax policy issues, though it is tied to them, and have more to do with

overarching patterns of anti-art policies – implicit and explicit (Gámez, 2017). At Emory

University, a leading liberal arts college, these patterns manifest themselves as departmental

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[3] Similarly, although this thesis focuses on American undergraduates, it has both national and global implications.

shutdowns and reductions. Emory University's Department of Visual Arts began being phased

out in 2012 for, as former Emory University President Jim Wagner put it, "the greater, long-

term good," equating the decision with the termination of the Dentistry and Geology

departments in 1990 and 1986 respectively (Seideman, 2012). Its Department of Educational

Studies, Department of Physical Education, and Department of Journalism were also

eliminated in this departmental reallocation of resources (Lampe, 2013). Serious imputations

can be made against these cuts; these are some of the very disciplines that get to the heart of

human life and interaction, and their diminution can lead to significant gaps in student

preparedness.

It can be argued that these kinds of cuts do not necessarily equate to decreased

humanitarian exploration. Princeton University, for example, offers certificate programs in the

arts instead of majors to allow students to "supplement their understanding of other

disciplines" with the arts (Lampe, 2013). Emory University's Integrated Visual Arts Co-Major

does the same. Universities bring artists and art programs to campus, and student-based art

clubs and organizations still thrive – even at Emory. Decentralized efforts, however, demote

art to outlet and accessory status, which "explicitly subordinates the visual arts to a

functionalized role in relation to the other degree-granting programs" (Lampe, 2013). When

art is sidelined, creativity cannot assume as central a role in education as its crucial role in

today's world.

These trends are not Emory- or Atlanta- specific, and although this thesis returns often

to Emory, its intention is not to target it specifically. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza

Rice is quoted as saying that education disparity is the biggest threat to United States security,

and she points to both the scale and cruciality of this conversation (Lefler, 2014). "This idea ...

that school should prepare you for participation in that very rare thing in human history,

collective self-government," says William Deresiewicz in his book *Excellent Sheep: The Mis-*

Education of the American Elite & the Way to a Meaningful Life, "is fundamental to our system

of education" (2015, p.170). Global citizenship, but democratic participation in particular, as

philosopher Martha Nussbaum says, calls for "be[ing] an equal among equals" and a grasp of

"interdependence" (2016, p.*x*). To increase American knowledge of and involvement in both

national and international affairs, students may well be instilled with better appreciation of

others' perspectives. Exposure to the stories of others humanizes and facilitates empathy; this

explains why, so the Southern adage goes, many 'hate the group but love the individual.'

Developing empathy prepares students to hear, seek out, and absorb others' stories. Exploring

narrativity prepares them to tell their own, and art can be a particularly effective method of

doing so. Systematic defunding of art-based educational efforts accomplishes the opposite and

is dangerous and counterproductive in an increasingly connected yet divisive world.

Hegemonic Preferencing of STEM-based Inquiry

While scientific exploration is not to be discouraged, it is beneficial in establishing a

history of arts-defunding to both examine the reasons behind and argue against prioritization

of STEM-based fields of inquiry. Some, like Peter W. Fettner of Johns Hopkins University, link

prioritization of STEM fields to corporatization of higher education and argue against schools

running under business models (Fettner, 2011; Sinek 2009). Author and international arts

education advisor Ken Robinson reflects that disciplinary hierarchy mirrors industrialism in his

TED Talk entitled "Do Schools Kill Creativity:"

> At the top are mathematics and languages. Then the humanities. And the bottom are the arts. And in pretty much every system, there's a hierarchy within the arts. ... What happens is: when children go to school, we start to educate them progressively from the waist up. And then we focus on their heads, and slightly to one side. ... So you were probably steered benignly away as a kid from things you liked on the grounds that you would never get a job doing that. ... Benign advice – now, profoundly mistaken. (2006)

This thesis proposes that "debates about public research value should recognize that humanities have different (but equally valid) kinds of societal value" (Olmos, 2015). Such value is descriptively articulated by Deresiewicz:

> It takes tremendous concentration just to start to see what's actually in front of you, let alone to get it down on canvas: to perceive a cup of water, say, not simply as an instrument but in the full particularity of its material existence – the liquid color of the glass, the fingerprints around the middle … As with painting, so with every art. … The poet looks at what she really feels … not what she's supposed to feel. The novelist reports upon the way we really treat each other ... not the way we say we do. Those conventional modes of thought and emotion from which you need to free yourself … are exactly what art does its work by breaking through. (2015, p.157-158)

To provide well-rounded education, educators would do well to equally utilize all forms of meaning-making – including artistic ones. In so doing, educators can employ diverse approaches to help students look deeper into, question, and revise deep-seated beliefs.

The debate around how to incorporate life's big questions into education has perpetuated for centuries. Aristotle, though he admitted the inevitability of distinctions (categories of organization which later grew into disciplines), believed that "there is a kind of education in which parents should have their sons trained not because it is necessary, or because it is useful, but simply because it is … something good in itself" (Moran, 2010, p.4). Such broad questions are often lost, social historian Joe Moran argues in his book on interdisciplinarity, when knowledge is boxed into disciplines. Aristotle raised a similar complaint (later adopted most notably by Immanuel Kant), opting to pedestal philosophy as

"the universal field of inquiry" to explore questions of weight that did not fall into any self-contained discipline (Moran, 2010, p.4). The Enlightenment, with its focus on "reason and rationality," endangered such universality. From it stemmed a belief that "clearly defined methods and procedures" were needed, a process which began in the sciences but quickly spread to non-scientific disciplines (Moran, 2010, p.5). Moran, summarizing Nietzsche, recognizes the adverse effects of this: "the specialized scholar was concerned less with knowledge for its own sake than with climbing up the career ladder within an increasingly bureaucratized and professionalized society" (2010, p.11). Education became a way to gain skills and expertise for – not wisdom about – the world.

The prioritization of STEM can also be tied to cultural superiorization of objectivity and credibility, which, although it has its place, can be flawed and limit exploration of massive areas of human experience. Many, like Emory University professor of pedagogy Dr. Arri Eisen and author Jonah Lehrer, both of whom come from STEM backgrounds, argue that credibility is a construct that reflects not objective truth but rather the values of the culture that gave rise to it. Scientists and humanitarian scholars alike are affected by bias and memory fluctuation (Lehrer, 2010). The claim that STEM-based disciplines are more objective ignores the possibility that every discipline is in essence a belief system. While some belief systems allow for more tangible inquiry than others, the discretization of less empirical forms of meaning-making such as the arts should be met with hesitation. Assumptions of objectivity, moreover, can have dangerous consequences. The subjective application of medicine, for example, can and often does negatively affect minorities (Williams, 2000). In academia, standards of credibility and authority are often limiting, elitist, and exclusionary, rendering cultural lexicons

of knowledge both inaccessible and incomplete. As globalization increases, relevant and representative academic lexicons become especially important. This is discussed in the following section.

Acceptance and utilization of art in the classroom can open the door for variations of perspective and increased understanding by facilitating enhanced and multimodal expression. Narrative art is particularly alluring and effective as an educational method because of its historical prevalence. Storytelling is utilized all over the world and has been since the dawn of time; human beings are storytelling creatures. Twentieth-century anthropologist Laurens van der Post is said to have proclaimed that "ninety percent of everything we know about being human we have learned through story" (Baldwin, 2010). Because of the historical role of oral storytelling, humans are accustomed to and receptive to storytelling. Söderquist argues fiercely for the use of stories in education under this premise. Pulling substantially from Søren Kierkegaard, who is widely renowned as the Danish father of existentialism and whose approach to education "hinges upon the narrativity of human experience," she says that "No human being is immune to the seductive force of stories. We recognize, even when they begin as utterly foreign to us, that stories narrate the human drama that belongs to us" (2016, p.22). In this way, as Dutch/American biologist, primatologist, and author Frans De Waal agrees, "human empathy has the backing of a long evolutionary history" (2010). Stories, thus, can be used by educators to help students connect even when there seems to be little commonality.

Modern Necessity of Identity Development

While the arguments made in this thesis have previously been and will continue to be relevant, they are particularly so now. Seeking out the perspectives of others and finding

commonalities is especially important in the 21st century. This investigation is rooted in a

generation defined by globalization and reconciling with the social challenges connectivity has

given rise to (Edmunds, 2005). Increased exposure to and attention towards narratives

(through the internet, improved communication systems, expanded transportation systems

and the like) has allowed for unprecedented confrontations of the self and the other. Social

media has drastically altered the discernable size of the perceivable world – as well as the

interpretation of it. Now more than ever, individuals of different races, economic statuses, and

religions are in close proximity to one another (Lee, 2019). In the words of Ed Lee III, Senior

Director of the Alben W. Barkley Forum at Emory University: "We will either figure out how to

deal with this, to rewire our conceptual maps of society, or we will fracture into Balkenesque

society" (2019). Although some, like Canadian-American psychologist Paul Bloom in his book

Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion, argue that empathy is dangerous on the

premise that it enforces prejudice by being capriciously linked to emotional responses, this

thesis asserts that such emotions are the precursor to Bloom's alternative, *rational*

compassion (2017). While it does not fully side with Bloom that "we should use our heads

rather than our hearts," it does employ the term *empathy* to signify not only the mere ability

to relate to and understand others but also the desire to help and recognize the humanity in

others.[4]

The 21st century is also marked by heightened attention towards social justice and

increased feelings of isolation (Fox, 2012; Deresiewicz, 2015, p.8; Jean, 2009). With increased

exposure to others' narratives, students experience intensified pressure to develop their own

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[4] A similar delineation is made by the Dalai Lama in "Education and the Human Heart" (1999).

– for themselves, their social media presence, their families, their employers – and a desire, should the threat of marginalization arise, to be authentically heard. Students wrestle daily with questions like: 'Who am I?' and 'What is my story?' Although easily dismissed as narcissism, the quest for identity discovery should not be trivialized: it is an undertaking of dire weight and importance. Kierkegaard says in *The Sickness Unto Death* that losing the self is the "greatest hazard of all" – greater than losing "an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc." and acknowledges that "there are hardly any tasks ... that cause such anguish, that demand so much from a person, nor that are so easily forgone" as finding this personal 'I' (2004, p.31). This thesis presents Kierkegaard's personal 'I' as cohesive narrative identity and argues that, due to its gravity, educators help students find it.

Identity as a Precursor for Empathy

Development of identity narratives can not only impact students' independent well-being, but it is also presented in this thesis as a precursor for connection with and relation to others. This is explored further in Chapter 1. In helping students strengthen their narratives, educators better prepare them to express those narratives to others. As exemplified in Chapter 2, gaps of understanding between cultures can be bridged through exposure to individual narratives; hearing others' stories can lead to deeper understandings of cultural differences and motivations. During the third session of the course associated with this thesis (which is explained in the Methodology), Isabella Alexander reflected that in telling stories, "you see a piece of yourself in the other, and there's transformative power in that. On both sides." Recognizing similarities despite differences in this way can evoke bonds of empathy.

This thesis argues that such bonds can serve as stepping stones to large-scale change, and it suggests that ways for educators to facilitate connection. One such way is to help students develop their stories of self. Strong individual narratives can serve as the foundation for recognizing connections in the narratives of others. American education often falls short in providing students with this kind of narrative identity development – particularly given decreased attention towards the humanities. One of the students in the course associated with this thesis reflected during class that: "Within life, there's not a lot of understanding. That is something we can give each other, and it's something I need." In recognizing this cultural shortcoming, she vocalized a need that her education could fill. Empathetic development via arts-based educational efforts can compensate for (and, with enough effort, potentially eradicate) cultural gaps of understanding.

Pre-Existing Efforts

Efforts towards empathy education and narrative-arts-based initiatives in America, however small their scale, have been established (Shaheen, 2010). Private schools have historically been the first to adopt unconventional methods of teaching. The Reggio Emilia approach, adapted from Italian preschools, "builds on the premise that each child has the desire to connect with others, to engage in learning, and to enter into a relationship with their environment" (Edwards, 1993). Steiner schools, established first in England and then in New York City, "integrate the arts in all academic disciplines for children from preschool through twelfth grade to enhance and enrich learning" (Waldorf, 2015). Montessori schools, conceptualized by Italian educator Maria Montessori, allow children creative and autonomous choice in their educations (American, 2019). The STEAM approach adds art to STEM. Paideia

schools focus on "intellectual dialogue facilitated by open-ended questions" and teaches via the Socratic method to "empower the whole-person – body, mind, heart, spirit" (Paideia, 2017). Prospect Sierra in San Francisco emphasizes their 21st-century learning approach for K-8 students with four value pillars: compassion, service, technology, diversity, and inclusion (Prospect, n.d.). The Imagining America consortium was developed in 1999 in response to the recognition that, although conversations about education's civic purpose in the 1980s and 1990s had resulted in increased commitment to service and community partnerships, "values of reciprocity and mutual benefit sometimes went unrealized, and humanities, arts, and design were underrepresented" (Imagining, 2019). It seeks to equip students "to shift culture and transform inequitable institutional and societal structures" by bringing scholars, artists, designers, and humanists together in fellowships across schools in America (Imagining, 2019).

Empathy is also becoming progressively accepted as a teachable skill, and recent discoveries of empathetic behaviors in non-humans such as elephants and mice suggest that empathy may be a naturally-occurring trait developable over time much like speed or strength (Niezink, 2016; Pierce, 2008). Empathy meditation and perspective-building are being incorporated into some curricula; empathy scholar Lidewij W. Niezink developed a five-phase empathy practice program called Empathy Circles that informs this movement (Niezink, 2016).[5] Higher education institutions, like Emory University, are attempting to reframe general education requirements to reflect diverse methods of inquiry and perspective-building as opposed to mere disciplinary requirements (Brzinski, 2019).

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[5] A non-national example of this is empathy training offered in Icelandic elementary schools. The documentary *InnSaei: The Power of Intuition* explore the Icelandic cultural notion that all humans are connected via intuitive empathetic bonds (Ólafsdóttir, 2016).

Furthermore, stories are being adopted as tools to lend cohesion to educational journeys. Emory University recently piloted a course to provide framework for periodic reflection in response to demonstrated student difficulty articulating their stories to professors and employers (Obrentz, 2019). Tuning into a pattern Deresiewicz also noted, that "questions of purpose and passion were not on the syllabus," this course provides a curricular alternative to co-curricular and opt-in opportunities, which students lack the time to utilize (2015, p.11; Obrentz, 2019). Although collaborators behind this initiative varied in their ideas about the purpose of narrativity – some focusing on employment and marketability, some questioning the purpose of education itself, some proposing it for character development and confidence – they agreed intentional narrative mapping in education was needed (Obrentz, 2019). Small as they are, such changes should not be overlooked or underwritten; like any social change movement, educational reform starts with and consists of minor changes. This thesis contributes to existing efforts with a primary focus on empathy and identity development via creative narration.

Methodology

Research methodologies for this project included critical analysis, historical research, interviews (unstructured and semi-structured), case studies, and observational research. Both primary and secondary literature were consulted. I spoke at length with individuals who promote and enact the kind of education I argue for, as well as some who do not,[6] combining the expertise of educational professionals with my own teaching and learning experiences to craft the curriculum. The resulting identity-based art course enabled exploration of the effects of arts-based educational efforts in a classroom setting. While conducting this classroom study, anthropological traditions of participant observation, field notes, direct and indirect examination, and analysis of human interaction were used (Repko, 2008, p.107). Sociological methods, especially qualitative reporting, were also employed (Repko, 2008, p.108). The curriculum was tested via narrative and performative analysis in line with H. Russell Bernard's *Research Methods in Anthropology* (2017, p.451).

This thesis contains not only academic exploration but also applicable demonstration. The above methodologies were combined because they balanced analytical research grounded in academia with primary research grounded in community while providing educators a tangible way forward. The combination of paper and project allowed for both tangible and academic impact. Further efforts were made to combat gaps in the academic lexicon by elevating individual voices of all educational levels next to conventionally 'credible' sources

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[6] Some of my peers in the sciences, for example, propose that lecture-based courses and rote memorization are not only necessary but can be more effective for knowledge-acquisition-based fields. While this may be true, I argue that such methods of teaching be combined with others – such as those argued for in this thesis – rather than be assumed as default to the exclusion of more narrative-based efforts.

with academic distinction. This thesis implements a diverse set of academic lenses as well; it is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing from Philosophy, Sociology, Art, Film, Music, Religion, Education, Science, Anthropology, English, African American Studies, Women and Gender Studies, and Interdisciplinary Studies.

The accompanying curriculum was taught to Emory University undergraduates via a sidecar course organized through the Institute for the Liberal Arts with funding from the IDEAS Fellowship. Traditionally, sidecar courses are voluntary, one-credit courses that "bring together a subset of students from two courses that overlap in methodologies, topics, etc., to create a short interdisciplinary course that runs simultaneously with its two sponsoring courses" (Emory, 2019). The course was initially intended to pull from ARTVIS 105: Intro Painting, taught by Dana Haugaard, Studio Artist and Lecturer in the Department of Visual Arts, and FILM 107: Intro to Digital Video, taught by Isabella Alexander, Visiting Assistant Professor in the Departments of Anthropology and Film & Media Studies. Due to the small size of each course, however, enrollment was opened to Emory College as a whole. Eight students officially enrolled and one audited. The final distribution was six underclassmen and three upperclassmen. One dropped the course after the first session due to "struggl[es] with depression and a full course load."[7]

This curriculum was self-selective in nature, which plausibly led to its success. The title of the course was *The Value of Art,* which likely attracted a cohort that was more engaged than a random sample population would have been. Students were not handpicked, however,

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[7] This is significant in that it exemplifies two challenges that can pose issues for the implementation of such curricula (mental/emotional difficulties and resource/time allocation). Further research could be dedicated to moving past such blockages and pitfalls – both on the systematic and individual level.

and I did not know them personally. They represented a broad range of the Emory University

undergraduate population; there was a mix of students with and without arts backgrounds

(five with and four without) and they varied in disciplines and majors (Sociology, Media

Studies, Biology, Economics, Psychology, Philosophy, Undecided, and Interdisciplinary Studies).

That said, they were all Emory University undergraduates, lived in similar places, chose the

same school, and likely had similar values. Furthermore, they each elected to take the course.

These factors may have contributed to the results, and thus additional piloting and testing is

not only recommended but encouraged in order to test the generalizability of these findings.

There were five instructional class sessions along with weekly studio sessions for

students to work on their final project, the instructions of which were to answer the question:

'Who am I?' via art. The class met in the Emory University Visual Arts Building and Gallery.

Data was collected during class sessions as well as through an anonymous feedback website to

assess curriculum efficacy and provide students with a venue for reflection. Students were

informed they would be quoted. Findings are not intended to be generalized to other

universities and results were not analyzed to draw conclusions beyond this case study. Rather,

results are presented to illustrate arguments made in this thesis and supply vignettes of

student experience. Outcomes could not be tracked over many years, and thus claims are not

made about students' futures. The effects on their present, however, were reported on to

demonstrate the efficacy of arts-based educational efforts on identity and empathy

development. The data represented in this thesis encompasses the full breadth of that which

was received; little was left out, although some points were shortened for brevity's sake.

Chapter 1: Well-Being, Connection, and Identity

Centered around identity and connection, this chapter begins with a discussion of student mental health and the factors that influence it, presents college as an opportunity for relationship and narrative identity development, discusses the nature of and approaches to understanding identity, and finally argues for identity development via stories.

Undergraduate Mental Health

The appeal for increased empathy and identity development stems largely from observations of declining mental health in American undergraduates, especially at top-tier universities like Emory University: "Look beneath the facade of affable confidence and seamless well-adjustment that today's elite students have learned to project, and what you often find are toxic levels of fear, anxiety, and depression, of emptiness and aimlessness and isolation," says Deresiewicz (2015, p.8). Feelings of isolation and disconnection can lead to and exacerbate mental health challenges (Harrington, 2008). In what is considered the most comprehensive annual survey of American college freshmen, "The American Freshman: National Norms," published by the University of Los Angeles' Higher Education Research Institute, emotional well-being in the past few years was reported lower than it has been for decades (Higher, 2019; Lewin, 2011). Students are reaching out to college counseling centers with such volume that it has become increasingly difficult for non-crisis patients to attain appointments (Eiser, 2011). The sidecar students discussed mental health challenges at length and without prompting, complaining of "suffocation" by the university system and its lack of mental health support. They also alluded to a lack of vulnerability within everyday interaction, reflecting that "no one ever talks about how bad they're feeling," and divulging that typical conversations with their peers made them feel increasingly alone.

Progressive de-stigmatization of mental health issues in American popular culture has led to increased research, openness, and utilization of services, but as a whole mental illness rests in the shadow of physical illness and "implementing an effective, patient-centered care system remains a formidable challenge" (Lamers, 2011; Mechanic, 2007). Corey Keyes, professor of Sociology at Emory University, asserts that there are two major threats to mortality: depression and cancer (2015). Western medicine pours its energy and funds into physical illness but neglects mental illness (Corrigan, 2004). Keyes says that the presence of mental illness can be caused by the absence of mental health and suggests promoting health to prevent illness (2015, 2007). During Emory University Parents Weekend, he told freshmen families that the purpose of education is to leave with elevated interest in the world, to learn balanced living, and not to "just get a job." He suggested that, instead of pre-professional tracks, students pursue a "pre-happiness track" (2015). Students should, he suggests, focus on their mental and emotional well-being while in college to develop skills and strategies for coping with mental health challenges in the future.

Modern university students overwhelmingly place career preparedness over emotional well-being and development. In a 2015 survey conducted by Cengage Learning, 73% of 3,257 college students reported that 'getting a good job' was their primary reason for attending college (Strang, 2015a). A similar study also conducted by Cengage Learning in 2015 found that 80% of students focused on finding good or better jobs, 62% strove for high pay, and 56% planned to pursue additional degrees. A mere 10% of responses fell into the *other* category, which included goals like personal satisfaction, happiness, greater and broader experience, travel, work/life balance, pride, more knowledge, personal completeness/wholeness, finding

an enjoyable job, attaining a career that fosters growth, retiring, resting on the "satisfaction of

going to school at an elderly age," and serving and supporting others (Strang, 2015b).

Especially striking is that this survey was open-ended and multi-answerable, which means that

the *other* goals did not warrant mentioning. Student realities reflect these goals. Increasingly

busy and isolated, students feel disconnected from their peers and have little time for

meaningful connection, a pattern relievable by placing value and emphasis on connection and

empathy in the classroom (Taylor, 2013). Development of social knowledge alongside

academic knowledge can be structured into curricula with initiatives like that of this thesis.

Furthermore, encouraging and allowing open communication about mental health in the

classroom can make students feel less alone in their difficulties and strengthen their ties to

one another.

Connection and Well-Being

One student in the sidecar course, contrary to these statistics, reflected that she was

actively striving to "care less about school" – instead choosing to invest time and energy into

her relationships. My sophomore year of college, I made the same choice (and rationalized it in

an academic context before giving myself permission to do so). This rationalization took the

form of an interview-based research study that sought to determine what leads to well-being.

It was conducted by interviewing undergraduates and professors from diverse disciplines and

majors – pre-professional tracks and otherwise – to get a pulse of a college campus. Academic

literature that informed the issue was compared alongside voices of students and teachers. In

the end, connection and purpose were determined to be better predictors of satisfaction than

career or academic success. While success and high income can improve *evaluation* of life,

stronger predictors of overall contentment and emotional well-being have been demonstrated to be loneliness, connection, and marital status (Kahneman, 2010).

Dr. Andy Kazama, professor of neuroscience at Emory University, discusses the importance of connection by highlighting the dangers of loneliness: "It hurts our immune system, our cognitive abilities, and our attention. Loneliness is devastating. We're social animals, and we operate best when we form these deep connections with other people" (2015). For college students undergoing academic stress and living in unfamiliar environments without the support of familial networks, community becomes particularly vital. Connections radically shift students' approaches to their responsibilities, academics, and relationships; Megan Jiang, Emory University student pursuing a Biology and Classical Civilizations double-major on a pre-medical track, said that despite stress, fatigue, and lack of time, maintaining friendships was a priority for her: "I have so many people who I love here and who love me too, and I feel like those two things alone kind of negate all this bad stuff" (2016). One of the sidecar students even reflected that she sees herself as a "collective being" rather than an individual, revealing just how much of a role others play in her sense of identity. Given student desire for connection and its influence on well-being, educators would do well to foster its development, and engaging the arts through narrative storytelling is one way of doing so.

College as an Opportunity for Relationship and Identity Development

Arguments around the purpose of education must also be considered alongside the above discussion of mental health and connection. The School of Life, an emotional-intelligence-based institution headquartered in London with locations around the globe, argues that education should help students in two principal ways: working and sustaining good

relationships. "The aim of education should be to prepare us for the challenges of adult life,"

they say, "yet from this perspective, it is clear that schools fail all but a tiny portion of their

students. Whether in highly academic private schools or in deprived government-run ones,

trouble dealing with life's challenges remains very widespread indeed" (2015c). The School of

Life has also commented extensively on how the purpose of modern universities differs from

academia's original intent. They explain that many modern universities were established in the

mid-19th century as places for "meaning, consolation, wisdom, and a sense of community" in

response to religion decline (2015b). They recognize that such intentions are now all but

absent in modern universities: "Big questions like 'How can I learn about relationships? What

should I do with my life? How can I reconcile my demand for money with my requirement for

meaning? How does power work in the world? … aren't necessarily very well addressed or

answered" (2015c). Deresiewicz agrees:

> when kids get to college, they hear a speech or two that urges them to ask the big
> questions. And when they graduate, they hear another speech or two that urges them
> to ask the big questions. And in between, they spend four years taking courses that
> train them to answer the little questions … . (2015, p.64)

To better prepare students for life, larger life questions could be incorporated into

curricula. The School of Life imagines curriculum reform to include the following subjects:

capitalism and de-mystifying the global economy (cash-flow, HR, leadership, marketing,

competition, and money-based math), human beings (self-misunderstanding, neuroses, fears,

personality, career self-knowledge), relationships (unhealthy relationships, living with one

another, kindness, trust, anxiety-reduction) (School of Life, 2015c). They quickly suggest that

"the media and arts would be utilized to maximize [students'] full potential" as well (School of

Life, 2015c). Ideal universities, argues The School of Life, would replace departments such as

History, Literature, and Philosophy with Relationships, Death, and Anxiety (2015b). Other

theorists throughout history have argued for similar reform. German academic Friedrich

Schiller criticized the then-modern university's focus, arguing in *On the Aesthetic Education of*

Man, published in 1795 after Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) for, in Söderquist's

words: "a remaking of civilization through an education that develops moral character by way

of the instrument of art" (2016, xiii). This thesis argues, likewise, for 'a remaking of civilization

through an education that develops empathy by way of the instrument of art.'

During the first day of the sidecar course, students were asked to define the purpose of

education. Their responses aligned remarkably with the sentiments above: "to become a

better member of society," "not to be ignorant," and "to make you think." They said that

preparation for the future went "beyond getting a job" and was more about determining

personal and societal needs. They further reflected that "self-growth is hard to develop for

yourself as a person if you're not educated" and that education "opens your mind to different

perspectives so that you can figure out what you want to do with who you are as a person."

Their critiques of modern educational institutions came from their observations that it is

largely "just a status thing" and that most undergraduates go "for the purpose of being

educated" rather than to actually learn. They lamented that college no longer "expands

people's minds like we intend." One student even said that she thought the idea of education

was "a separate part of what we're doing here [in college]. Education is the process of

learning. College feels like it's just instilling ideas within you." This conversation occurred

during the course introductory session, which lends further weight to their responses; they

were minimally influenced by any divulging of purpose on my end. Columbia professor Edward

Tayler is famed for telling his students on their first day of class: "You're here to build a self" (Denby, 2013). The sidecar students said it before I could. If education is to prepare students for life, it is the responsibility of educators to assist students with what may be their most demanding task: determining who they are.

Approaches to The Self: As Narration and a Dialogical Process

Narrative identity formation is a particularly effective approach to identity development. Dr. Walter Reed and Dr. Marshall Duke, Emory University professors who teach Comparative Literature and Psychology respectively, propose a rather unconventional approach in their essay "Personalities as Dramatis Personae: An Interdisciplinary Examination of the Self as Author:" the self as a fictional character (2005). Duke and Reed argue that individuals fabricate their identities just as storytellers do literary characters, presenting themselves and constructing their life narratives using agency, subjectivity, and imagination (2005). Söderquist employs an analogous metaphor: "We tell stories about who we are, and our actions play out on a narrative stage" (2016, p.116). In not properly equipping students to present their identities clearly and coherently, educators pitch them onstage without preparation or a script. Such a performance requires a great deal of vulnerability, and while some students may innately improvise better, others may need training to do well in front of an audience.

In encouraging and normalizing personality exploration and change, educators have the power to save students from great mental and even physical suffering – temporary and lifelong. "There is a great deal of anxiety in becoming," says Kierkegaard, and it is a lifelong undertaking (2004, p.81-82). These stakes rise as the world becomes increasingly dialogical;

students are not the only authors of their narratives. Söderquist reflects that "we depend on

one another for who we become" (2016, p.31). Individual narratives can be shaped and

influenced by conversations, interactions, and social challenges. When the sidecar students

were asked if their identities were more their own or something that had been created for

them, they said in complete consensus that it was "absolutely something that has been shaped

by others." American philosopher and psychologist William James once said: "a man has as

many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in

their head," which speaks to the weight of others' perceptions in identity development

(Henriques, 2014). Granted, dialogical identity has its benefits; students can collect positive

influences from peer interactions. But identities can also be limited when identities are

assigned to students externally. Söderquist warns how comments such as 'You're so athletic'

or 'I didn't think you'd do that' can prevent growth when internalized (2018). Education must

therefore strive to assist students in formulating cohesive and flexible stories of self so they

can mediate external influence and define their own identities.

Carlton Mackey agrees with this, recognizing that there "is a level of autonomy and a

level to choose identity, but part of it is being decided for [us]" (2016). He believes that, to

understand identity, three questions must be asked: 1) *Who am I?* Mackey says this "might be

in the skin that you embody, the way you love, who you love, your culture, the particularities

of your face, the things that give you being" (2016). 2) *Who are they?* This is "anyone outside

of the identity that you have established for yourself." Part of identity, he says, comes from

recognizing: "I am not them" (2017). 3) *Who do they say I am?* Mackey argues that this is the

most influential of the three factors, and that he is "both really hopeful and really challenged"

by the weight assigned to the 'they' (2016). Without strong identity, "there is great danger in

entering dialogue, which requires ... that we muster enough individuality to say 'I,' while also

being humble enough to receive 'You'" (Kierkegaard, 2004, p.43). In other words, individuals

must develop a story of self that can accommodate the voice of others while maintaining its

own integrity. Educators can help students form strong identities, combat the voices of others,

and at the same time be open to their council by encouraging open and vulnerable expression

and communication while helping students develop strong yet flexible narratives for

themselves. This can also be achieved by cultivating within students an appreciation for their

peers' perspectives.[8] Students can use narrative art to engage with themselves – and then

engage with the other in productive, open, and empathetic ways.

Identity Rigidity and its Dangers

In the spirit of teaching through stories, the work of Czech-born French writer Milan

Kundera is used in this thesis as a touchstone through which to further explore dialogical

identity. While a short summary of the story is presented in this section, it is returned to as a

lens through which to view multifaceted identity throughout the remaining sections. "The

Hitchhiking Game," one of seven tragically comedic short stories in Kundera's collection

Laughable Loves, tells the story of a young girl traveling with her lover on a road trip. The

unnamed heroine stops to relieve herself in the woods and, upon returning to the car, the

couple decides to role play. The man, pretending to see the girl on the side of the road

proffering a hitchhiking thumb, becomes a "tough guy who treats women to the coarser

aspects of his masculinity" (Kundera, 1974, p. 87). Meanwhile, the girl, who is repeatedly

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[8] Discussed further in Chapter 3.

described as modest, takes on "a role out of trashy literature … stopp[ing] the car not to get a

ride, but to seduce the man" (Kundera, 1974, p. 88).

Unforeseeably, the game escalates from innocent jest to irritation. The young man is

dismayed "to see how well his girlfriend *knew* how to behave like a loose woman" and

questions whether the game merely allowed the girl to let her true 'self' – here he conflates

self (the underlying whole) with personality (the assumed way of being) – "out of its cage"

(Kundera, 1974, p.93). When they inevitably find themselves in a motel bedroom, the girl, who

until that point had relished in the "light-heartedness, shamelessness, and dissoluteness" that

came with her newfound personality, undresses with confidence but then shifts suddenly back

to reality. Realizing – and becoming uncomfortable with – her vulnerability, she melts into sobs

when the young man continues to treat her in a "vulgar and lascivious" way (Kundera, 1974,

p.92, 103-104). When it is all over, the girl tries once more to re-assert their original

personalities, "calling him by his name and saying, 'I'm me, I'm me,'" but Kundera writes that

there was a "sad emptiness of the girl's assertion" (1974, p.105-106). She is broken and

confused after assuming a personality so antithetical to the restrictive narrative she had

internalized. What's more, in opening herself up, she put herself not only at the mercy of her

partner but also at the mercy of her own emotions. Thus, her partner's unexpected rejection

and the confusion that ensued inflicted a particularly disorienting and painful sting.

Kundera is notorious for his moral ambiguity, credited for the aphorism, "Irony doesn't

give a damn about messages" (Söderquist, 2018). Interpreting his story through the lens of

identity narration, however, can illuminate the threat identity rigidity can pose. When students

fear exploration or are unequipped to deal with vulnerability, they may become frozen in a

single personality, shut themselves off to integral parts of themselves, or even become

shameful of harboring atypical personalities. Like Kundera's heroine, they may attach

themselves to a singular narrative and become restricted by it. Undergraduates, experiencing

so many new situations in such a short period of time, are particularly at risk of this restriction

– especially because of their susceptibility to peers' opinions. Narrative art provides venues for

active engagement with the many facets of identity, helping students reconcile emotional

friction and create a coherent story of self out of disparate social personalities.

Kundera's story is also an especially appropriate example because it demonstrates the

potential for interpersonal harm. The interaction between the young woman and her partner

escalates to what could, by definition, be rape. Distraught and no longer consenting to the

game, the woman does not explicitly revoke consent but is clearly traumatized by the end.

While a discussion of sexual violence and culpability is beyond the scope of this thesis, bringing

it up is relevant in demonstrating that both vulnerability and personality exploration can and

do have unintended consequences. If left unprepared for those consequences, students may

wind up seriously hurt – physically and emotionally, by others and by themselves. They may

also (unintentionally or intentionally) injure others. A comprehensive education, thus, would

not only invite students to explore identity and embrace vulnerability, but it would also urge

students to be accountable to the ramifications of their actions and prepare them to address

repercussions of openness in healthy and mature ways. Pre-emptive emotional development

work in the classroom that negotiates these risks can, harkening back to Keyes' ideas on health

and illness, decrease the likelihood that students will shut themselves off to further

exploration as a response to challenges or trauma. Providing front-end preparation and

equipping students with emotional tools to facilitate healthy coping can also decrease the

necessity of subsequent treatment counseling. Stories – like Kundera's – can serve as

exemplary preparation; when exposed to the stories of others, students learn about potential

consequences and solutions. They can garner preparedness through vicarious experiential

learning and may even avoid experiential predicaments of their own. Classrooms provide a

setting for safe exploration anchored with guidance and encouragement. If extensive and

thorough, education can prepare students for flexible identity development, sensible risk-

taking, confident vulnerability, and productive recovery from tragedy, mishap, and physical

and emotional harm.

Identity Congruence vs. Coherence

Comprehensive identity development would also include a delineation between

identity congruence and identity coherence, and this distinction is also an effective way for

educators to shepherd students through the trappings of identity rigidity. Dialogical society

tends to demand identity congruence from its members; constant vacillation between radically

different selves can cause confusion during interaction (Söderquist, 2018). Students may

conflate societal desire for coherency with the expectation of identity congruence. Lack of an

underlying narrative to lend cohesion to the whole, in the same way that it causes

disorientation within the self, is what leads to societal confusion – not the lack of identity

congruence. By misinterpreting the expectations of society, students may restrict the

perceivable aspects of their identity to a single personality and undermine efforts of self-

realization, limiting their potential. With a cohesive identity narrative, multiple personalities

can coexist and thrive.

An exemplary modern manifestation of the attempt to achieve identity congruence rather than coherence can be found in the *Insta-aesthetic*. Students carefully cultivate their online identities, posting only those photos that 'fit the aesthetic.' Some try to circumnavigate the perceived need for identity consistency by creating separate Instagram accounts: one for food, another for fashion, perhaps a *Finsta* (Fake Instagram). In this way, personalities that otherwise threaten the singular narrative may exist without being in dialogue with the greater whole. Educators must be aware of these tendencies and push students to question such restrictive thinking. How much absolute truth, educators may pry, can one narrative hold?

The idea of a single personality as a consistent identity is directly at odds with students' desire for improvement, growth, and change. Kundera's heroine experienced great freedom in opening herself up to a potential, albeit foreign, personality: "she who was always uneasy in advance about her every next step, suddenly felt completely relaxed … without shame, without biographical specifications, without past or future, without obligations" (1974, p. 96). She was notably left "spellbound" by the ease at which she slipped into the role (Kundera, 1974, p. 88). From this, it is clear that she had no anxieties about stepping outside her default personality. Her tears, rather, are more reasonably interpreted as a symptom of confinement. She merely needed permission to cultivate a personality gestalt and assimilate her new role into an overarching story of self – as did her partner. Modern students need the same permission to hold multiple personalities. Teaching through creative narration can help them fashion cohesive stories of selves while providing room for exploration.

The Multi-Identity Thesis

One way of teaching such narrative cohesion is through what Söderquist terms the

Multi-Identity Thesis: identity as a collective whole of multiple personalities. Within this

theory, conditional personalities are viewed as adaptations to situational variability.

Exceedingly disparate though these personalities may be, they are nonetheless considered

parts of a collective whole (Söderquist, 2018). Sociologist, communication scholar, and cultural

critic Stuart Hall approaches identity in this way, rooting it in a discussion of African diasporic

identity in his 1996 essay, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," and terming the collective whole

the *true self* (2014). Collective identity theories can be especially effective when

operationalized by undergraduates as they grow and change. Kundera's heroine is presumably

in her liminal early twenties, so she aptly illustrates the desire to try out different personalities

(Söderquist, 2018).

Walter Reed echoes how vital sifting through the possibilities and assembling a unique

"cast of characters" is during young adulthood (Reed, 2005, p.506). Reed, together with

Marshall Duke, suggests viewing identity narration as a process and the self, likewise, as

becoming. This philosophy pulls from formal theorists like Silvan Tomkins, who proposed the

self as a set of characters, and Mikhail Epstein, who used the term *multividuals* rather than

individuals. Following birth, they argue, multiple "births of personalities" occur, wherein the

"the self as author becomes the progenitor of various roles and characters – personalities –

through which the self interacts with the outside (and inside) world" (Reed, 2005, p.506-507).

In becoming comfortable adding characters to the list, students grow closer to accepting that

they, in the spirit of Walt Whitman, really do "contain multitudes." Educators are in the

perfect position to help students develop what Duke and Reed describe as "a new character …

who proves capable of regrouping one's dramatis personae and leading them" (2005, p.512-513). This 'new character' is not the educator, although educators play a key role in helping students develop it. Rather, it is an internal narrator of sorts within each student that helps to assimilate personalities into larger stories of self. Art-based efforts can help students explore and articulate their different selves, form more nuanced narratives, and adopt "a playful relation with [their] narrative telling of the world and [their] place in it" (Söderquist, 2016, p.15).

Stories as Windows to Potential Selves

Narrative art can also allow students to imagine otherwise un-encounterable realities. Söderquist reflects that students can imagine themselves in the place of narrators, and that such imaginative exploration can provide students an avenue "for exploring and possibly resolving an issue" and teach "communion, cooperative problem-solving, sympathetic reasoning, and the joy or doing something creative together with others" (Söderquist, 2016, p.9). Deresiewicz echoes this idea: "You build [a self], in part, by encountering the ways that others have done so themselves" (2015, p.155). Interactions test, challenge, and strengthen individual identity, and encountering the perspectives of others allows for nuanced perspective-building and diversification as much as it does the crystallization of identity narratives.

Benefits of personality exploration are demonstrated by Kundera's heroine. In playing the role of a 'loose' woman, she unearths newfound confidence in herself and, for the first time, feels "joy caused by her body" (1974, p.96). Whether or not she decides to abandon that particular personality, its influence remains. Fortunately, students need not put themselves into such real-world predicaments to achieve similar results. Söderquist reflects that "other

human beings, namely artists … provide us with the opportunity to appropriate realities that were previously unknown to us" (2016, p.113). Marco Caracciolo agrees, explaining in "On the Experientiality of Stories," that, when stories are digested, "our own, narratively constructed self slips into the background of our consciousness and we make room for another narratively constructed self – the character's." Students can identify with most – if not all – people through such enactment of consciousness (Duke). Söderquist echoes: "By coming to identify absolutely with a story, a person admits to herself that the imagined possibility could just as well be her own" (2016, p.116). It is through this kind of identification that empathy can grow.

Chapter 2: Empathy, Art, and Social Change

Asserting the importance of empathy in a disparate but increasingly connected world, this chapter promotes stories as facilitators of empathy and presents the work and philosophies of Carlton Mackey to exemplify art being used to form and display identity narratives, develop vulnerability, and evoke empathy.

A Disparate but Increasingly Connected World

Increasing interest has been directed towards empathy in the past decade: "Where our economies and ethical systems are failing us, a call for empathy and compassion as a way to reconnect becomes stronger" (Niezink, 2013). It is receiving increased attention as "the grand theme of our time, as reflected in the speeches of Barack Obama, such as when he told graduates at Northwestern University, in Chicago: 'I think we should talk more about our empathy deficit" (De Waal, 2010). Drastically different individuals are now in close physical and intellectual proximity, humans are united in ways that were previously impossible, and educators must prepare students for productive and cooperative interaction. The rise of technology and social media has led humans to encounter each other with dizzying frequency.

Whether positive or negative, in the words of Carlton Mackey, "Something happens when human beings encounter each other. Period" (Mackey, 2018). Empathy can result in understanding and connection. Without it, humanity can be denied and morale worn down. International author and business executive Seth Godin speaks to how outcomes of interactions can be altered by biases and close-minded approaches:

> "Connection begins with dignity. We're surrounded by servants. Flight attendants, waiters, car valets, street sweepers, the guy behind the counter at the post office. ... It's easy to treat people as invisible, as long as we get what we want. ... The alternative is an interaction that creates a connection instead of destroying it. Where is the eye contact? Where is the dignity that comes from recognizing another? When we humanize the person at the other end of the counter or the phone or the Internet, we

grant them something precious—personhood. … we create an entirely different platform" (2012)

Small moments hold intense potential for connection – for 'servants' and students alike. Small though these bonds may be, they facilitate large-scale change; social change movements start at the individual level and hinge upon bonds of empathy between vastly different people.

Stories as Facilitators of Empathy

Stories can teach empathy in three salient ways. First, as mentioned in Chapter 1, stories can lead students to develop deeper understandings of those around them, take on new perspectives, and put themselves in the shoes of others. In her TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story," Chimamanda Adichie discusses (and illustrates through stories of her own) that seeking out multiple stories of the other can combat incomplete narratives (2009). Because the young man in Kundera's story could not understand his girlfriend as both modest and confident, he began to respect her less (1974, p. 101). Had he understood her as a multidimensional being, he could have accepted her with more compassion. The sidecar students reflected that "the second story [encountered about others] is so much harder to accept," and Dana Haugaard noted during the fourth session that seeking new stories becomes harder with age. "The older you get," he said, "the more context you have about life and people, so naturally, you make even more assumptions. ... you look less for the second story." Educators can help students avoid the same mistake, encouraging them to challenge internally-held beliefs and prejudices. By teaching students to relate to, understand, and interpret stories, educators can help them delve into the intricacies of human lives and connect through shared peculiarities. One of the sidecar students mentioned how she uses a similar technique when nervous: "I start imagining people doing the most human things –

eating, laughing with other people – and then they feel less scary." When the foreign is made familiar, it becomes less of a threat.

Second, stories can help students put their identities on display in fruitful ways. Ed Lee says that "to create durable and sustainable communities, we need to uncover our true selves and learn to be comfortable sharing more of that with others" (2019). Through narrative-art activities in classroom settings, educators can facilitate student sharing. The sidecar students witnessed first-hand how effective story sharing can be in facilitating connection: "I love the encouraging environment that is fostered by sharing in th[is] class." Ed Lee acknowledges that "Facts prompt verification. By contrast, stories prompt listening and patience. Stories reveal our overlapping values, slow down the pace of conversation, and facilitate deliberation. They invite people to listen to us instead of interrogating us" (2019). When stories conflict, Lee reasons that it's not about truth but understanding: "Fact-checkers have a role, but storytelling will do the heavy lifting in creating more just and humble communities" (2019). With the right guidance, students can become storytellers within communities of their own.

Third, stories serve as a way to ease into vulnerability. They accomplish this first by providing a safe space for openness. Through vicarious exploration of narratives, students can go through the motions of vulnerability and strengthen their own abilities to open up. Söderquist reflects that, during the digestion of stories, "Learners may ... be prodded to incorporate details from their own lives" (2016, p.9) when hearing and reading stories. Storytelling – in whatever form it manifests itself – also provides students a structure through which to open up. Diversifying avenues of creative narration broadens student vocabulary for expression and thus increases their ability to encounter vulnerability with confidence.

Whether received or produced, creative narration can be utilized to aid both the development of identity narratives and the process of personality expression.

Art Changing Identity Narratives

One particularly salient example of identity-based art is the work of Carlton Mackey. Through his endeavors, Mackey targets incomplete cultural narratives that influence personal identity narratives. Seeking to help individuals evaluate, overcome, and combat incomplete stories, his work intends to inspire more cohesive and accurate portrayals of identity. *Black Men Smile®*, one of Mackey's grassroots empowerment movements, attempts to help Black men expand their personality gestalts and embrace parts of their identity that are otherwise absent from American media (2016). Mackey created *Black Men Smile®* in response to the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson. After hundreds of images of Brown's dead body surfaced on Mackey's social media accounts, and after "a flurry of other painful and oppressive images of Black men [surfaced] in the weeks to follow," Mackey searched under the hashtag *#blackmensmile* for positive images of Black men. His query returned zero results (2017a). In response, he began photographing Black men – particularly young Black men, as he says they are especially affected by negative stereotypes – and spreading the images online. Advocating for "radical expressions of self love" and resistance to damaging external voices, his work encourages Black men to *resist* incorrect narratives, *affirm* individual worth, and *proclaim* the worth of others (Mackey, 2016; BLACK, 2016). There are now over 48.8 thousand photos redefining Black masculinity under the Instagram hashtag *#blackmensmile*.[9]

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[9] As of April 8, 2019.

Mackey also offers professional portraiture for black men through *Black Men Smile®*.

Often, says Mackey, young Black men do not have the luxury of professional photography, and

he seeks to provide beautiful, strong, and positive images for individuals and families (2017a).

He also intentionally posts photos of Black men in paternal and familial roles to combat the

hypermasculine portrayal and sexual objectification of Black men in America (2016); "There

are categories of masculinity in general," Mackey says, "but some are more systematically

projected onto the Black community" (2017b). Mackey wants words such as *caring* and

nurturing to be added to the lexicon, and he recognizes the importance of proliferating images

that are "truly reflective of the way Black men see themselves" (Katyal, 2016; Mackey, 2017a).

His work deals with "the art of seeing:"

> … both helping me see, through the practice of creating art, how I can discover those
> things inside of me that are constantly being unlocked, and helping me see how it is
> that I can help other people see themselves as who they are, or who I'd like to have a
> hand in helping them think that they can be. (2017a)

Narrative art initiatives in the classroom can do the same, helping students overcome internal

conflicts and, where necessary, formulate resistance narratives to combat misunderstanding.

Mackey is convinced art can change the world because of the way art has changed him

(2016). Art, he says, gave him the power, the tools, and the resources to ask questions he was

otherwise afraid to. It helped him develop the confidence to vocalize his perspective and the

assurance that he was worthy of being heard. As a Black male, he says that worth was rarely

offered to him by the outside world (Mackey, 2017b). Like him, students can find agency

through arts-based educational efforts. Narrative art can help students articulate themselves,

claim their worth, and develop confidence in their perspectives. Mackey often says that the

artist's role is to "translate the longings of the people" (2016). This thesis argues that art can

help students both translate their own longings and relate to the longings of others.

Art Evoking Understanding

Art can also pave the way to a more empathetic world by allowing students to identify

themselves within the other, and Mackey's goals reflect this:

> There is an ocean between me and you. How can I get closer? What can I do to narrow the distance between who I am and who you are, to a point where the longings of my heart are understood by you even if they aren't your own? … How can I get close enough to understand what your longings might be even if they aren't mine? (2017b)

Tim Eastman, director of the Imagining America cohort at Rutgers University in New Jersey,

says that "the best way to do that is to develop a culture of listening to each other, hearing

each other's stories, and seeing the power of imagination and ideas" (Eastman, 2019).[10] When

students imaginatively identify with the stories of others, they learn to truly see the other. In

The Concept of Anxiety, Kierkegaard said that "sympathy is true only when it is admitted, deep

down, that what has happened to one person can happen to all" (Söderquist, 2016, p.116).

Söderquist responds: "By coming to identify absolutely with a story, a person admits to herself

that the imagined possibility could just as well be her own actuality" (2016, p.116). The

pedagogical power of stories is further explored in Chapter 3, but Mackey's approach to

audience particularly highlights the power of such identification; he recently added a subtitle

to Black Men Smile® that reads, *Celebrating the Way We See Ourselves.* This reflects that,

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[10] A description of Imagining America can be found in *Pre-Existing Efforts* section.

although his projects do inform outsiders, his main goal is convincing Black men of their

internal worth. Such a targeted approach does not decrease the breadth of his audience;

people learn, he says, to find the universal in the specific (Mackey, 2016). This further supports

the assertion that stories can establish empathy via bonds of connection between vastly

different people.

This thesis also argues that empathy can serve as the foundation for engaged student

participation outside the classroom – communally and politically.[11] Mackey agrees, asserting

that awareness leads to activism (2017b). With increased exposure to narratives, complexity

can be acknowledged. In that, says Mackey, individuals can be seen as more than the issues

they face or the beliefs they hold, and "the beauty of the fabric that makes up a human being

is revealed" (2016). When and where individuals are viewed one-dimensionally, open-minded

conversations can be challenging. Without empathy, it becomes difficult to respect others

enough to truly hear their stories. In advocating for storytelling inside the classroom,

educators can help students recognize that their peers may be worth learning from.

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[11] This extension is explored further in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Translating to the Classroom

Divulging from philosophical discourse and into practicality, this chapter endeavors to apply the learning produced in Chapters 1 and 2 into serviceable curriculum that can be used by educators to encourage empathy, promote vulnerability, and both normalize and facilitate identity exploration and change. It engages with the curriculum itself directly and reflects upon the pedagogical and investigative influences that shaped it, the procedural manifestations of these ideas in the classroom, and the intentions behind them.

Curriculum Overview

Educators seeking to promote empathy and identity development have several strategies by which to do so, and such strategies are explored in this chapter. The accompanying curriculum can serve as a roadmap for educators as it demonstrates particular approaches to education and specific ways of dealing with curricula that result from the claims made in this thesis. Bearing in mind the definition of art as *creative narration*, methods of incorporating storytelling into curricula are provided and narrative art is promoted as an avenue for students to explore their identities in new and productive ways. The curriculum also establishes a precedent of active listening, sharing, and acceptance that students can extend outside the classroom. Structured around a final project, which encouraged students to answer the question 'Who am I?' via art, it required active articulation of identity through a media that was shareable with others.

The sidecar course through which the curriculum was taught included five instructional class sessions along with weekly studio sessions for students to work on their final project. Each instructional session was designed to spark creativity, provide inspiration, and lend intentionality to the final projects. The sessions were driven mainly by activities and discussions with occasional references to relevant texts, videos, and other media. Three artists – Dana Haugaard, Carlton Mackey, and Isabella Alexander – were brought in to mitigate

prevailing cultural notions of art's inferiority and inspire students to consider art as a

discipline, career, and hobby. Each class began with an inspirational quote relating to that

day's topic, which students responded to creatively, and ended with reflection,

decompression, and feedback.

The first session defined course structure and pushed students to think critically about

what their education lacked. It included discussions of the value of art, identity development,

vulnerability, and empathy. Students entertained broader definitions of art and confronted

fears and misconceptions about being artists. Through narrative, they then delved into

examples of art's impact. The second session focused on identity articulation and innovative

methods of creative narration. Students presented personal statements and pushed

themselves to translate art across media lines. The third session centered around the power of

narrative. Students used stories to answer critical identity questions and then compared

internal and external narratives. The fourth session encouraged empathy. Students discussed

others' influences on their identities and acknowledged misjudging others. They engaged with

critical questions that drew attention to how little connection occurs within daily interaction.

They then held intentional eye contact and discussed how it felt. The final session was

dedicated to project presentations, after which they affirmed each other through an

appreciation activity.

Selecting Student Age Group

While this curriculum can be productively extended to other educational levels,

undergraduates were chosen for a number of reasons. First, the cultural and intellectual

diversity present on college campuses creates both a perfect environment and dire need for

empathy development. Second, an integral part of college for many is developing a strong

sense of self and finding others who relate; Dana Haugaard reflected during class that "college

is a place to fly your flag and see who salutes." In undergraduate spaces, students can form,

articulate, and explore their identities in previously impossible ways. Third, compared to

younger students, undergraduates also have more maturity and experiential knowledge to

determine who they aren't, and more drive to seek new experiences. It is for this reason that

underclassmen were particularly sought after; having just begun to establish themselves in a

new environment, they tend to be especially open to (and more in need of) narrative identity

formation. The sidecar initially drew from two introductory courses, which did not guarantee

but did increase the likelihood of underclassmen enrollment. The final distribution, as

mentioned in the Methodology, was six underclassmen and three upperclassmen.

Fourth, by opening students' minds to the struggles of others, empathy development

encourages civic engagement post-graduation: "differences of social status as well as conflict

and the stereotypes that perpetuate conflict and social stratification block empathy and

restrict the scope of moral and political concern" (Willett, 2019). Students may be more

inclined to engage politically and socially with the issues they are made aware of. Fifth, many

college students have high stress levels and limited time, which can limit how much energy can

be devoted to identity development. The sidecar students reflected: "This [class] seems like a

really good way for stressed college students to de-stress and just create and collaborate with

others," and "I feel like I'm at a point in my life where I have a bunch of different things to

juggle like classes, social life, finding a job, etc. and I have been avoiding self-reflection even

though it's going to be beneficial. I'm glad I have academic time to dedicate to this!" This curriculum sought to fill the gaps in their educational experiences.

Student Agency and Input

Several steps were taken to provide students with the power to direct and respond to the course with independence. For the sake of transparency, the goals of the project were disclosed at the offset. Although this may have set up particular expectations and opened results up to bias, students were given the option, should they ever disagree with my thesis statement, to be open, honest, and specific in their feedback.[12] Furthermore, this disclaimer doubled as inspiration; The School of Life says in its video, "The Good Office," that people are more inclined to dive fully in if provided purpose and contextualization (2015a). Students also defined for themselves what they believed education should do and acknowledged how their own educations had fallen short in the beginning of the course. This was intended to lend meaning to class time, inspiring students to take ownership of the material.

To further this goal, I asked students to define what they needed in hopes of helping them apply course discussions to the problems they were facing. The responses aligned well with the focuses of the class: "meaning," "collaboration," "lack of restraint, "meeting myself outside of what I know," "genuine connection and figuring out why I haven't been able to find that," "friendship," "affection," "people over academics," "to just be," "understanding in my personal life because the professional world doesn't allow for it," "happiness," "not to think about what others think of me," "change," "to hear mores stories," and "more spaces like this."

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[12] This was also set up as a participatory alternative to accommodate for different learning styles.

Such clear articulation helped target and direct learning, facilitating the integration of academic knowledge into students' personal lives.

Flattening Artistic Hierarchy

Every attempt was made to establish equality with this course. Interdisciplinary classes are uniquely suited for flattening hierarchy, both by combining classes across departments and by bringing teachers and students together in outside-of-class endeavors. A further step was taken with classroom setup; teachers, guest artists, and students sat in a circle as equals. Given the nature of voluntary human study, selection bias was an unavoidable confounding variable to be acknowledged. Fortunately, as mentioned in the Methodology, this course ended up attracting a rather even split between students with and without arts backgrounds: five with and four without. Students defined the terms *art* and *artist* for themselves to combat conventional and restrictive definitions. Several course sessions included an instigation wherein students were introduced to different, often unusual forms of art-making. Dana Haugaard, for example, explores the sonic and spatial presence of human bodies. Carlton Mackey's work centers around branding and social movements. Isabella Alexander travels to and with refugees for her documentaries, embodying her research and demonstrating an application of art as activism that attempts to mitigate the risks of being an artist in outsider communities.

The results were encouraging. Students, first, began to rethink art and consider themselves artists. One student reflected: "I'm glad that we were all taken out of our comfort zones in some way to define how we feel about art and the fact that it can be anything that

you make it to be." Regarding the guest artists, they said: "Hearing from other people who either create art professionally or incorporate art into their professional lives is always extremely inspiring to me, and I loved having the opportunity to do that." One student introduced herself with a disclaimer on the first day, saying: "I don't really do art." Later, she reflected: "I never considered myself a legit enough artist to buy a canvas, but I did, and now it's mine and I can do whatever I want with it." Another brought up during project presentations that it was the first time she had signed her work. They also reflected that the curriculum effectively supplemented their education: "I think what we did is honestly what is missing from a lot of college courses – just the chance to share your story and have people understand." When students were asked how they felt at the end of the course the two responses were: "happy" and "inspired." Although potentially biased in nature due to the goals of the course and my presence in the room, their feedback nonetheless demonstrates the need for and the efficacy of such curricula.

Employing Interdisciplinarity

To help students break from normative patterns of thinking, this class was centered around interdisciplinarity. As mentioned in the Methodology, students came from diverse disciplines across the college: Sociology, Media Studies, Biology, Economics, Psychology, Philosophy, and Interdisciplinary Studies. Three were undecided. They were brought together via the interdisciplinary nature of the course and were encouraged to continue questioning modes of thinking over the five weeks. Nick Sousanis' *Unflattening,* a doctoral dissertation written in the form of graphic text that argues for unconventional expression, was used to introduce students to the idea of a *flatlander*: Sousanis' term (which references Edwin A.

Abbott's novella *Flatland*) for people who have fallen into the trap of a single way of seeing

(2015). They were then encouraged to recognize the pitfalls of 'flatness' and step into more

multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary, and multi-modal forms of creation and thought.

Students were also encouraged to traverse genre barriers through both in-class

activities and their final projects. They were given permission to complete their projects using

any media, including (preferably) ones they had never worked with before and hybrid media.

The introductory activity each day was to "do something (anything) with the quote provided."

Students were not allowed to pick the same medium twice, which pushed them to find

different ways of expressing their thoughts. They drew, painted, wrote, pulled up pictures on

their phones, made popsicle stick structures, and colored on pieces of wood. One reflected in

the beginning that she was "looking forward to the opportunity to explore different forms of

expression." Another said at the end: "Using different ways of expression has been so

powerful both for improving self-understanding and for providing new perspectives to the way

we exist." One reflected upon the new perspectives gained: "I enjoyed the translation of the

quote into different mediums. The way that each person portrayed the same words differently

influenced by personal interpretation gave a static sentence a lot of depth." This exemplifies

the power of diverse approaches in education and the importance of making space for

multimodal response.

Chaos Theory, Reservoir Elusion, and Socratic Discussion

The curriculum was influenced by three main pedagogical methods: chaos theory,

creative freedom, and Socratic-style learning. It was often non-linear and jumped from activity

to activity, sometimes without explanation. Such structure reflected a method of teaching that

a host of scholars, including Amy K. Kilgard, Jerry Gollub, and Thomas Solomon argue for: chaos

theory (Kilgard, 2011; Gollub, 1996). With roots in the similarly-named branch of mathematics,

this theory proposes that students are in themselves dynamic and complex systems who, when

presented with a set of educational conditions, process information radically different ways.

Chaos theory is generally applied to argue that structured classrooms are at best futile and at

worst constraining, and it urges for student freedom and agency. Structure can be effective if

well-balanced with freedom, which is what this curriculum sought to achieve. There were,

however, no lectures; students were encouraged to draw their own conclusions and guide

discussion accordingly. There were also few expectations, and students were urged to follow

their inspiration wherever it took them and vocalize interpretations – however unrelated or

odd.

Care was also taken in discussing pre-established theories of identity, empathy, and art

in hopes of not boxing students in. Theodore Murray, mentioned in the manifesto, summarized

this approach to teaching with the notion: "Today we're going into the reservoir, today we're

going out" (2018). In this course, students were occasionally shown the 'reservoir' with

instigations, videos, and texts, but they were also asked to create their own reservoirs. As much

as they were guided, they taught themselves and their peers. Much of this was done through

the layering of narratives, discussed by artist and pedagogical scholar Charles Garoian below:

> … a contiguous positioning of differential narratives within the space of art research and practice constitutes prosthetic pedagogy, enabling learners to explore, experiment, and improvise multiple correspondences between and among their own lived experiences and understandings, and those of others. Such robust relationality of cultural differences and peculiarities brings about interminable newness to learners' understanding of the other, which challenges the intellectual closure, reductionism, and immutability of academic, institutional, and corporate power. (2013)

Socratic-style teaching, wherein more questions are asked than answers given, was also adopted to allow for non-prescriptive dialogue and student-led discussion. This allowed students to apply and integrate knowledge, drawing connections between their personal lives and course materials. It also mitigated risks of being extractive or exploitative; students decided how much to open up. That said, they were also told that the more vulnerable they allowed themselves to be, the more they would learn. Söderquist reflects that "essential learning is always personal" (2016, p.8) and uses the Socratic approach to facilitate learning through stories:

> Socratic dialogue as an educational method functions by tapping into human narrativity through directed phenomena. … [it] leads a person onto a personal path of questioning and narratively constructing and revising his or her own existential interpretations, decisions, and perspectives. ... it uses narrative critically to lure out a person's capacities for imagination, sensory attentiveness, and emotional engagement, as well as self-reflection and critical judgment. (2016, p.2)

Socratic-style learning was also used to enforce the notion within students that their peers had knowledge to provide. This was done with the *Rosenthal effect* in mind. Named after Robert Rosenthal, whose 1964 experiment demonstrated that students performed better on tests if teachers were told that they were more intelligent regardless of their starting IQ (Tauber 2007), this effect implies that student performance follows expectations (Spiegel, 2012). Applied to student expectations of classmates, the thinking was that students would learn to see each other as educators and increased receptivity would result.

Working Through Anxiety and Unpredictability

The curriculum was also unpredictable to train students to confidently face discomfort. Flexibility is critical for adaptation, and curricula structured around strengthening student flexibility can lead to more effective reconciliation of the discomfort that can come with

growth and the tension that can result from conflicting aspects of identity. No schedule was

provided, and each class was slightly different. Final project guidelines were intentionally

loose:

> By the end of this class, you will have articulated your identity via art in a way that can be shared with others. To do this, you are to answer the question: 'Who am I?' with art. You have the freedom to create whatever you wish. The only requirement is that it be in some presentable form and finished by February 22.

Such lack of instruction was initially met with hesitation, and several students asked for further

clarification. Students tend not to be trained to productively cope with uncertainty; decision-

making can be difficult, and structure is comfortable. If students are uncomfortable with lack

of direction, educators may naturally wish to provide it, but in doing so they pass up an

opportunity for development. To avoid perpetuating this feedback loop, educators may do

well to hesitate before capitulating to student cravings. Paralysis in the face of the unknown

can be dangerous to student well-being down the line, especially given the unpredictability of

life.

With this in mind, students were pushed to continue despite resistance. When asked, I

did not provide suggestions. Instead, I asked what they wanted to express. I then suggested

Louis Sullivan's axiom *form follows function,* encouraging them to construct their end product

in whatever way best conveyed the underlying idea (Yanow, 2010). What resulted was an

exciting variety of final projects: a multi-genre song, a framed Polaroid photo collage, a colored

pencil and ink drawing, a canvas painting, a clay sculpture shadow box, a shattered glass orb

and mirror sculpture, a film compilation, a wire and branch assemblage, a drawing, and a

mixed-media collage. This also allowed for different interpretations of what the narration of

identity itself entailed. Some students reflected upon the full span of their lives, others

focused on capturing the essence of who they were, and still others focused on a single moment in time. One student even left her project intentionally unfinished, saying: "five weeks didn't really teach me who I was, so I left this box empty. I can add words in later."

Eventually, students warmed up to the idea of uncertainty. They reflected that it was "thought-provoking" and, by the end, many reflected upon how much they appreciated the unpredictability: "Today's class was interesting because it was less 'predictable' than others" and "I enjoy the fact that every class is different and I don't really know what to expect." Some were comfortable with it from the beginning. One said: "I adore this class and how open-ended it is" after the very first class. Another: "Today was different than what I expected in a very good way." And another: "I am looking forward to the opportunity to explore different forms of expression." In the final feedback, one said: "It was so cool to get to share it with a group of people / a teacher that was so open to experimentation and open dialogue." This feedback alludes to the power of flexibility in the classroom; if given the space, permission, resources, and encouragement to do so, students can engage with material in innovative and creative ways that benefit their long-term development.

Embracing Complexity and Vulnerability

Because of the integral role vulnerability plays in empathy development, this curriculum centered around vulnerability in two salient ways – the first being the intentional engagement of large questions via narrativity. It hoped to instill within students the importance of vulnerable questioning "at such things as the meaning of friendship, the possibility of pure love, the significance of eternity or the infinite, and what it means that something is'" (Söderquist, 2018, p.4). These are impossibly large questions of endless

possibility and, if given continued consideration over a lifetime, increasing intricacy. They do not fit neatly into the boxes of everyday education, but they are nonetheless vital for students to engage with. As Deresiewicz puts it, these are not questions "that you want to wake up asking when you're forty" (2015, p.90). Vulnerability can be daunting and admitting incomprehension in the face of mystery unsettling. Asking students to open up and repeatedly shake their world view is a large request. Difficult as it is, however, it is only when students open up and relinquish self-preservation that they can fully empathize. Avoiding vulnerability can constrain growth.

Stories were used as another way to help students embrace vulnerability. In Söderquist's words: "Stories invite a person to … gain the courage to become vulnerable. Simply by making the movements of opening oneself and throwing oneself wholeheartedly into new situations imaginatively, a person becomes familiar with crucial motions needed for actual transformation in life" (2016, p.19-20). Students were asked to share personal stories and engage with the stories of others to this end. During the fourth session, students were also instructed to hold eye contact for a minute straight, a vulnerability exercise that was met with equal amounts of discomfort and appreciation. One student said: "I was more worried about being seen than seeing my partner," alluding to how unaccustomed she was of being fully seen. Some even played mental games to distance themselves; one said that she pretended her partner's eyes were "glowing bulbs" unattached to a face. But there was a consensus that it did make them feel closer, and one student summarized: "The eye staring thing was very uncomfortable in a way but also opened you up to vulnerability so it was

actually pretty fun!"[13] At the end of the course, another reflected: "I really enjoyed this class and how it kind of forced everyone to be really vulnerable and share things about themselves that they usually wouldn't." Uncomfortable as vulnerability may have been, students recognized and were appreciative of its effects.

Storytelling and Art for Identity and Empathy Development

Storytelling and art were used as primary pedagogical tools throughout the course. A precedent for creative narration was established during the first class with a *story circle*. Developed by the Roadside Theater of central Appalachia to "continue conversation and relate to each other in new ways," story circles are a method of accelerating bonding, encouraging sharing, and achieving a level of vulnerability past everyday interaction and conversation (Roadside, 2014). From there, students crafted and presented personal statements (see Appendix) and even spent an entire session communicating exclusively through stories. Their final projects were narrative art pieces. The third week was focused around the power of storytelling and the fourth week highlighted the dangers of incomplete narratives.

Students were encouraged to use creative narration in the same way Carlton Mackey uses photography: as an opportunity "to be intimately aware of themselves and to share that moment with another human being" (2016). Mackey says that art can be a window, a lens, or a mirror, and it was used in each of these ways during the course: to help students see themselves clearly, differently, and fully (2016). Narrative expressions of identity functioned for students as an exercise in acceptance, requiring full exploration – of 'flaws' and all – while

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[13] I have used the New York Times' *36 Questions That Lead to Love* in similar group contexts where the goal was to quickly establish empathy and would have in this class had we met for more time (Jones, 2015).

also recognizing beauty where they might have trained themselves to deny it.[14] In no way was

this an easy task; Mackey recognizes that "the things that we see back [in the mirror] can be

things that we love and can be things that we're challenged by" (2016). When he visited the

class, Mackey challenged students "to make room for becoming and be courageous enough to

make space for the person you want to be," telling them: "The most you will experience is

when you are honest with the world."

Students also heard their peers' stories – through classroom activities, their final

project, and particularly through personal statements. Arri Eisen, professor of pedagogy and

biology at Emory University's Institute for the Liberal Arts from whom I adapted the personal

statement exercise, discusses the benefits of personal statements in his book *The Enlightened*

Gene: Biology, Buddhism, and the Convergence That Explains the World, which was born out of

an initiative between members of the Emory University community and Tibetan Buddhist

monks and nuns in India as a way to better understand the world through the eyes of others:

> … students introduced themselves through a brief personal statement telling the story of their beliefs and from where those beliefs came … . We used these personal stories and the discussion of them that followed as a social and intellectual starting point from which to explore … . What is the purpose of learning institutions if not the integration of knowledge, the creation of new ideas, and the development of better citizens with rich personal stories? Anxieties about attempting such approaches are reasonable, but … Accessing and understanding these stories helps us learn and develop as individuals and as a society. The more the process of learning engages and changes our own stories, the more powerful that process becomes. (2017, p.124-129).

In line with Eisen's findings, the sidecar students expressed strong appreciation for personal

statements in their feedback: "I got to learn a lot about my peers and their endeavors to

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[14] Self-portraits are another effective strategy for achieving this and may have been included in a longer curriculum.

become who they are now," "getting to know my classmates and teachers at the beginning of

a course is extremely important to me because it makes it so much easier to interact with

them. I appreciate your attempts to help us do this," and "Personal statements were

awesome, and I loved hearing about the different things people identify the majority of their

life with. Sometimes we all have our own clichés and just never realize that it is one." One

student even began her personal statement by situating her identity narrative between two

peers' stories; she referenced their personal statements in her introduction ("I was never the

loudest or the nosiest child") and then set herself apart by delving into her struggle with

acculturation ("but that was the problem. I've always been right in the middle"). Such

connection demonstrated exactly the kind of identity articulation and understanding I hoped

for; she brought three individuals together with just a couple sentences while highlighting

what made her unique.

Further, the personal statements accelerated connection and allowed for a level of

vulnerability beyond what students were accustomed to. Students opened up about mental

health challenges, which brought them together in notable ways that they vocalized both in

class and in the feedback. One reflected:

> … this class really impacted me in a positive way and it made me open to talk about
> things like mental health and my life in the past again. I'm also pretty sure it impacted
> everyone else in the same way, so thank you for creating a course that allowed us to do
> that. I'm not one to really talk about my feelings and myself in general, so making
> myself do it in class and forcing myself to share to people I really didn't know was
> therapeutic.

Another expressed the efficacy of these efforts and the rarity of them in other courses: "I

thought it was pretty cool that we were strangers who met and right off the bat we were able

to be honest with each other and share things that we wouldn't share in other classes."[15]

Exciting as they may be, I refuse to consider these results unusual. Given that empathy was able to be established within five course sessions that only lasted an hour each, it follows that similar initiatives in longer courses would lead to even deeper and stronger connections.

Appreciation and Affirmation Exercises

Finally, the course ended with an appreciation exercise to solidify student bonds, inspire peer affirmation, and demonstrate of the power of narrative. A live audience participation poll was set up for students to type words of affirmation during final project presentations. As each student presented, their peers wrote phrases that came to mind. Carlton Mackey uses a similar activity in his empowerment workshops; to help students recognize their worth, he guides them through a *Resist, Affirm, Proclaim* exercise which drives them to vocalize others' strengths. Inviting students into a circle, Mackey demonstrates what affirmation looks like by vocalizing a particular student's strengths, i.e. "you possess strong, deep confidence" (BLACK, 2017). Then, he lets students do the same for one another. The sidecar course was concluded in this way with hopes that students would first garner strength within themselves and then, in recognizing the power of affirmation, spread it outside the classroom.

Synthesis

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[15] Small class size, I would reason, also improved my success. Small class sizes mean more intimate connections, increased trust, and more time and attention devoted to individual students. To quote Deresiewicz, "lectures are usually an inferior form of instruction. That is why a significant portion of classes, at least, should be small enough to run as seminars" (175).

Through the aforementioned approaches to education, educators can create classroom environments that allow for and encourage creative expression, identity development, empathy, connection, and vulnerability. Through the arts-based educational efforts explored with this curriculum, students were able to articulate their identities first to themselves and then to others via presentable forms of creative narration. Their feedback demonstrated the positive effects of such an endeavor, both for their personal development and for their abilities to connect with others. Students strengthened their narrative and creative abilities by articulating their identities and displaying their stories to others. They expressed increased empathy for one another, linked their narratives with their peers' stories, and expanded their own understandings of self while achieving nuanced understandings of the other. Throughout the course, they demonstrated bravery and vulnerability in working through (and with) anxiety, uncertainty, and unpredictability. Several began to rethink art and consider themselves artists, and they also reflected that this kind of curriculum effectively supplemented their education and filled the gaps they vocalized in the beginning of the course.

With further research, the efficacy of such a curriculum in other educational environments and levels could be studied. Much of the curriculum content would remain the same; it was not designed with an age group in mind. Its reach need not be limited to schools; organizations and communities can benefit from it as well. It can serve as a launchpad for educators and can be modified, improved, and expanded at their discretion. Methods of pairing curricula like this with risk management and emotional resilience training could also be explored to develop comprehensive curricula. Further research could also work to redefine

and reinvent success metrics to evaluate the efficacy of art in the classroom. Challenges that

hinder large-scale application of these efforts – namely those presented by established

mindsets and structures – will inevitably slow the progression of these ideas, but ways forward

addressing such limitations are presented in the conclusion. Finally, as mentioned in the

seventh footnote, methods of developing empathy where it is blocked – by fear, depression,

anger, stress, shame, mere lack of time, etc. – could be explored (Hooks, 2014).

Conclusion: Ways Forward

Challenging Convention

As demonstrated in this thesis, there is significant power in the arts to advance student development, and there is significant room for growth in the way arts-based efforts are approached and utilized. For growth to materialize, educators and students alike need to be immensely critical of the administrative structures governing educational approaches and funding. Ways forward for both educators and students are outlined in this conclusion. For language to discuss administrative reform via the arts, its requirements, and its likelihood, I turn to Audrey Gámez, Educational Director, and Jessyca Holland, Executive Director, of the arts nonprofit C4 Atlanta (mentioned in the Introduction). Gámez and Holland suggest several key questions to begin reform conversation (2018): Is the focus in the right place? Are the right questions being asked? More importantly, are students being encouraged to ask the right questions? To the right people? Where are conversations occurring and what groups are involved? Are those conversations sustainable and genuine? Do existing change efforts merely look like progression or do programs back that up?

Public education was intended to be "the great equalizer in America: regardless of where children live, their race or economic status" (Albisa, n.d.). By law, every American citizen has the right to K-12 education, but in the words of Cathy Albisa, Executive Director of the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, "both within and across states there are significant disparities in the quality of schools, stemming in large part from the way schools are funded." Change requires a willingness to fail, and government-funded schools often cannot afford such a risk. For every private school that adopts alternative education approaches,

hundreds of public schools will lack the resources to do so. Unless (or until) that changes, racial

and economic gaps will persist and schools will continue to pursue short-term revenue at the

cost of students' comprehensive development (Washburn, 2008). This may mean, practically,

that only schools that can afford to challenge precedent will do so until enough faith in arts-

based efforts is amassed, enough evidence to prove their worth is accepted, and enough

incentive to warrant their funding is gained. So long as this remains the case, however,

America will fall short of its goals; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights requires that

every human be offered education "directed to full development of the human personality"

(United, 1948). Education as it stands edges closer and closer to failing in this realm.

Changing Cultural Perception and Redefining Success Metrics

Underlying every economic barrier is a cultural one. In Carlton Mackey's words: "We

need to stop saying the system is broken. It's not. It's functioning very well. It's doing exactly

what it was meant to do exactly the way it was meant to do it. We should break the system"

(2016). Precedent has established a hesitancy to see art as an investment worth making, which

means that these conversations have a high potential to revert to traditional understandings

of worth. Gámez and Holland acknowledge that change will begin when worth is found in a

variety of processes and strategies – not just familiar ones (2018). Art is a process that begets

product, and its strength is not only in its tangible results but in the way it trains students to

think. Instincts must be fought to avoid limiting development; in Deresiewicz's words, society

must find "the will – and yes, the money – to reverse the long-term trends" (2015, p.188).

Part of the charge applied to educational professionals, reformists, and artists is

evaluating, clearly defining, and potentially redesigning success metrics. Art has not

traditionally been measured like empirical subjects, but such ways exist – although they may not present as tangible evidence or easily digestible codification. That said, additional methods of establishing trust, demonstrating results, and tracking progress may need to be constructed. Americans for the Arts propose a new set of metrics to measure art's efficacy in *Aesthetic Perspectives: Attributes of Excellence in Arts for Change,* seeking to "foster more illuminating communication about outcomes, fuller comprehension by critics and funders, and broader appreciation of the rigor required for such work" (Borstal, 2017, p.5). They measure the success of artistic efforts by the capacity to which eleven key attributes are achieved: disruption, commitment, communal meaning, cultural integrity, risk-taking, emotional experience, sensory experience, openness, coherence, resourcefulness, and stickiness (Borstal, 2017). Educators can use a similar approach in their evaluation of educational initiatives to argue for change.

Students' Call to Action

Until change is realized, even with the help of (and especially failing) action from educators, the responsibility will fall heavily upon students to approach and engage with their education in independent and strategic ways. To achieve empathy and identity development within existing systems, students will need to take ownership of their education by seeking out courses that help them explore and develop their identities and foster their connections with peers – both inside and outside the classroom. They will also need to capitalize on avenues of creative expression, pushing their institutions to continue (or start) providing such avenues when and where necessary. Mark Edmundson, professor at the University of Virginia, says that: "To get an education, you're probably going to have to fight against the institution that

you find yourself in" (Edmundson, 2001). The absurdity of this is articulated by Deresiewicz:

"You can get it, but only if you insist on it. Imagine a hospital that operated on such a basis"

(2015, p.70). Responsibility falls especially heavily on arts students, who, as it stands, must

actively fight against a system which makes it difficult for them to pursue their passions.

Whether the arguments fall upon monetary or utilitarian lines, creative students are

questioned about their educational and career choices pre- and post-graduation. These

students will also likely need to pave their own professional paths where Career Centers lack

adequate support:

> [Colleges] do nothing … to challenge the values of a society that equates virtue, dignity, and happiness with material success. Nor do they do much to help kids find their way to alternative careers. On the contrary … career service offices have little or nothing to say to student who are interested in something other than the big four of law, medicine, finance, and consulting. (Deresiewicz, 2015, p.71)

Universities promote creativity before admission to demonstrate well-roundedness, but then

"suggest that creative or intellectual work is invariably dreamy, solipsistic, irrelevant, useless …

as well as insisting, of course, that it isn't really work at all" (Deresiewicz, 2015, p.96). Victoria

Roux, an undergraduate at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette studying Industrial Design,

said once to me: "I have this weird internal conflict about pursuing art having grown up as a

'smart kid.' Part of me feels like I'm not using all my potential but part of me thinks that's

bullshit." Students are taught to think that 'smart' looks – or rather doesn't look – a certain

way, and thus are left to battle ensuing guilt and inferiority complexes. But those very students

should be treasured; the more polarized our world becomes, the more important they will be.

In his book *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed*

Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students, American philosopher Allan Bloom

said that the soul is a mirror of what is around it (2008, p.61). How students are taught can

shape their interpretation of the world. Strategies learned in the classroom can affect how

students operate post-graduation. Student values can be influenced by educators, and art can

be leveraged to create more self-aware, vulnerable, and empathetic individuals. Students must

be given "simple permission to think about these things and a vocabulary with which to do so"

(Deresiewicz, 2015, p.73). My attempt at providing such a vocabulary lies below in the

Appendix. With proper resource allocation and incentives, other effective endeavors and

initiatives will continue to be made. With enough insistence, the combined effort of educators

and administrators can catalyze progress despite barriers to change. When narrative is utilized

in the classroom, students are guided in the kinds of thinking that lead to connection and

empathy down the line. And if students take ownership of their own development, they can

pave the way for a more interconnected and empathetic world.

Appendix: Curriculum

DAY 1 (1/25/2019): Introduction to the Course and The Value of Art
OBJECTIVES - STUDENTS WILL:
- articulate the importance of identity development
- understand the relationship between identity and empathy
- evaluate how well their education has taught them to articulate themselves
- understand what makes this curriculum distinct
- be introduced to class structure and the final project
- confront fears and misconceptions about art and being artists
- share through stories how art has affected them

INTRO ACTIVITY:
- Instructions: Do something (anything!) with the following quote. The one rule: We'll do this each class, and you can't do the same thing twice. So pick your 'thing' wisely.
- Quote: Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, widely regarded as the father of existentialism, says in *The Sickness Unto Death* that losing the self is the "greatest hazard of all" – greater than losing "an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc." He acknowledges that "there are hardly any tasks above these that cause such anguish, that demand so much from a person, nor that are so easily forgone" as finding this personal 'I' (31)

DISCUSSION - IDENTITY, EMPATHY, AND EDUCATION:
- Why focus on developing identity?
- What is identity's relationship to empathy?
- What is the purpose of education?

INTRODUCTION TO COURSE:
- Explanation of purpose and plan
- Explanation of final project
- Determination of studio time

ACTIVITY - WHAT IS ART:
- Students partner up and create two definitions: art and artist
- Students share these definitions with the class

DISCUSSION - "BUT I'M NOT ARTIST:"
- Quelling of fears around qualifications and challenging what a 'good' artist is

ACTIVITY - STORY CIRCLE:
- Background of story circles: A method for sharing (via narrative strategies such as plot, characters, etc.) developed by a central Appalachian theater company called Roadside Theater with the purpose of continuing conversation and relate to each other in new ways.
- Rules of the Story Circle:
  - 1. Listening deeply is the most important part of the Story Circle experience. Be nonjudgmental—no negative facial expressions, body language, etc.
  - 2. What is said in the circle stays in the circle unless you have permission to share.

- ○ 3. Let each person talk until they are finished presenting their story. Participants speak only when it is their turn; there is no cross-talk.
- ○ 4. Silence Is OK. If someone is struggling with what to say, don't rush them.
- ○ 5. Anyone may decide to pass, knowing their turn will come around again.
- ○ 6. After everyone in the circle has had the opportunity to speak or pass, the rotation begins again for those who have passed.
- ○ 7. Participants should not distract themselves by thinking ahead about their story.
- Prompt: Tell a story where a piece of art changed your view of the world.
- DISCUSSION: What common themes stood out in the stories?

ASSIGNMENT - PERSONAL STATEMENTS (CREDIT: DR. ARRI EISEN):
- Instructions: For next class, we will each be presenting a personal statement. It will be one to two minutes long and should be a story about who you are. A life story, or just a single story that encompasses a large part of your personality. This can be written or not, whichever you would prefer. You can record it ahead of time and play it aloud if you don't like presenting. Prepare in whatever way you need.

END SURVEY AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

DAY 2 (2/1/2019): Identity Articulation and New Methods of Creative Narration

OBJECTIVES - STUDENTS WILL:
- hear from guest artists
- be introduced to unconventional methods of creative narration
- understand the power of narrative
- share their own narratives via oral storytelling
- broaden their views of others
- appreciate the importance of others' stories

INSTIGATION:
- Presentation by Dana Haugaard about his life and work

INTRO ACTIVITY:
- Quote: "I am not the same person I was at 6pm today." -James Roland

PRESENTATIONS - PERSONAL STATEMENTS:
- Students share and listen to each other's personal statements

TEXT - "WHAT IS A *FLATLANDER*?":
- Introduction to *Unflattening* by Nick Sousanis

ACTIVITY - UNFLATTENING:
- Students take art they have done in the past and convert it into a different medium, pushing themselves to think innovatively and convey meaning to diverse audiences.
- Students share these definitions with the class

END SURVEY AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Day 3 (2/8/2019): The Power of Narrative

OBJECTIVES - STUDENTS WILL:
- understand the power of storytelling
- push themselves to communicate via stories

- think critically about their identities and the stories they wish to tell
- compare the stories they tell of themselves to the stories told about them

RULE FOR TODAY:
- Communicate in only stories all day

INTRO ACTIVITY:
- Quote: "In such imaginative activity, a person does not remain indifferent to the real world fact of her orientation in moral space, but inhabits it as her own experience. This exercise can open the individual to a greater realm of possibility, including her ownmost possibility, with the potential of transformation implied in the very exercise. Stories, then, in all forms of art, have great potential as formative experiences. In brief, art can be transformative." – Anna Louise Söderquist

INSTIGATION:
- Presentation by Carlton Mackey about his life and work
- Presentation by Isabella Alexander about her life and work

DISCUSSION - LIFE NARRATIVES:
- Students will answer the following questions together (out loud and with stories):
    Who are you?
    What is home?
    What do you need?
    What are you most afraid of?
    What life struggle was your favorite?

ACTIVITY - NARRATIVE COMPARISON:
- Students will be given two popsicle sticks. On the first, they will draw an image representing the stories others tell about them. On the second, they will draw an image representing what they consider a story they want to tell of themselves. Students will then carry the two side-by-side with them after class so that they continue to think about the interplay between the two.

END SURVEY AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

DAY 4 (2/1/2019): Empathy and the Stories of Others
OBJECTIVES - STUDENTS WILL:
- articulate the value of connection
- think critically about their interactions with others and how to deepen them
- learn to empathize with those around them

INTRO ACTIVITY:
- Quote: "Connection begins with dignity. We're surrounded by servants. Flight attendants, waiters, car valets, street sweepers, the guy behind the counter at the post office. Each of these people is serving us in exchange for pay. And the world moves so fast and we're so spoiled and the airline seats cost so much and we're so busy and we're having such a bad day and . . . it's easy to ignore them. It's easy to treat people as invisible, as long as we get what we want. If the line is long or the prices are high or the clerk just doesn't know where to put us since the hotel is sold out, it's easy to have a tantrum and to push ourselves away from the interaction and, worse, away from the person who just sought to serve us. The alternative is an interaction that creates a

connection instead of destroying it. Where is the eye contact? Where is the dignity that comes from recognizing another? When we humanize the person at the other end of the counter or the phone or the Internet, we grant them something precious—personhood. When we treat the people around us with dignity, we create an entirely different platform for the words we utter and the plans we make. It's impossible to connect with a device or an automaton. It's worthwhile to connect with a person, to someone we have granted the dignity that she deserves." -Seth Godin

VIDEO - OTHERS' INFLUENCES ON OUR IDENTITIES:
- Shots of Awe, "Are We Who We Think We Are?" (2006)
- DISCUSSION: Do you believe your identity is more your own or something that has been created for you?

DISCUSSION - CRITICAL QUESTIONS:
- Students will answer the following questions together aloud:
  o What is a question you've always wanted to be asked?
  o What is a question that would warrant a surprising answer from you?
  o What is a question that you would be surprised if someone asked?
  o What is a question you've never been asked?
  o What is a question you're tired of being asked?

ACTIVITY - DANGER OF A SINGLE STORY:
- Watch Chimamanda Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story" (2009)
- DISCUSSION: What group do you have a single story about? How you would go about finding a more nuanced story of them?

ACTIVITY - EYE CONTACT:
- Students will hold eye contact with a partner for a full minute in silence
- DISCUSSION: How did that feel?

END SURVEY AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Day 5 - 2/22/2019: Presentations

OBJECTIVES - STUDENTS WILL:
- creatively present their identities to others
- draw connections between others' stories and their own
- leave each other with words of affirmation and appreciation

INTRO ACTIVITY:
- Quote: "Do everything. Do it all. Even what seems impossible or irrational. Close some doors at the very least -- you probably weren't meant to go through them anyway. And stop when it isn't fun anymore." – Alexander Robins

PRESENTATIONS - FINAL PROJECT:
- Students present their work
- DISCUSSION:
  o How can you relate the presenter's project to your own life?
  o What is one thing you learned about the person through their project?
  o What is one thing you learned about yourself through their project?

ACTIVITY - AFFIRMATION AND APPRECIATION:

- Via a real-time online polling software, students will type words that come to mind with each person's name. Those words will show up on-screen in real time.
- DISCUSSION: Did anything surprise you? How did that feel?

END SURVEY AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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