

SKETCHING TO LEARN

Using graphic narratives for
self-study into the educational
and creative implications
of a personal sketching process.

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MSVU • 2013

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Kathy Kaulbach / September 2013

Abstract

This **design research** examines my personal process of sketching and image-making as an aid to learning. The goal is to show—both within the process and the narrative that is created— how I used image-making as a learning tool during graduate school.

The professional and academic world is demanding more of us all and topping that list of demands is innovation and creativity. At the same time, the educational system is being criticized for actually doing the opposite—killing creativity. Having been a recipient of killed creativity, the question “how does one find one’s creative self?” is of great importance to me, particularly since I am a creative professional. My entering graduate school was initiated by my search for the answer to this question.

Upon entering graduate school, I came to believe that my training and experience as a graphic designer and illustrator positively influenced my approach to learning. I believed that my sketching process was the root of this influence.

I began this thesis with the question “How does one find their creative self?” During my initial research I found that the **dialectic process of sketching** was playing an

integral role in finding my creative voice and had become an important learning tool for me during graduate school. This realization therefore shifted my research towards a self-study of my personal use of sketching, looking at the questions: why do I sketch? what does it provide me? and how does it assist my creative thinking and problem solving?

My background as a designer influenced my decision to use a design methodology which is an interdisciplinary paradigm that reflects elements of arts-informed, heuristic, phenomenology, and action research.

The graphic narrative provides a medium that combines the power of both verbal and visual. The word/picture interdependent combination “where words and pictures go hand in hand ... convey an idea that neither could convey alone” (McCloud, 1993, p.155). My method for self-inquiry and dialogue was to create five **graphic narratives**, each about the creation of an image that I did during my time in graduate school or influenced my thinking during graduate school. Following each of these five stories is a “back story” which documents the process of creating the graphic narrative.

I found that the process of sketching offered a number of benefits

- an expansion of my problem space, a place to think, expand my thoughts and find new ideas;
- a place to put my ideas and consider them as communication, to evaluate the message and contemplate the audience and their reactions to the message;
- a place to self-reflect where I could re-vision and re-evaluate past memories;
- an aid for memory but more importantly a place to create memories;
- a place to create that provided intrinsic motivation and ultimately made me happy;
- a place where I could dress ideas in different clothes and look again with different eyes.

Sketching was my tool for thinking and understanding but also enabled a place for me to be creative. I am not an anomaly, therefore the question that then follows is “how can others learn about and use this tool?”

Acknowledgments

My thesis thinking expanded over a long period of time and slowly evolved into what is in these pages. It moved through stages and I wish to acknowledge those that gently pushed and sometimes dragged me through those stages as without them I may never have completed the journey.

First and foremost I want to thank **Dr. Lorri Neilsen Glenn** for her ability to open doors that had never been opened and to guide me to the places I needed to go. Her writing, writing classes, and conversations began the process and without her I might never have found what I was looking for. She made it through all of my shifts and changes and still stood at the end. Thank you, so much.

I also thank **Dr. Allan Neilsen**, another graphic medium enthusiast, who provided much conversation on the medium and its diversity. Thanks also for the statement “write it using I” which led to large shifts and made me braver.

Lorri and Allan also provided me, through their own teaching, with examples of how classes could be creative and engage students. Within those classes I saw the possibilities for change and how students can learn while holding on to their diverse perspectives and self-identities.

My first encounter with arts-based research was in a news item on *The National* on November 27, 2010 entitled “Painted PhD thesis,” describing Spencer Harrison’s PhD dissertation entitled “The Freak Show.” It was visual, accessible, authentic, powerful arts-based research. As **Dr. Ardra Cole**, Harrison’s advisor, states, the goals of arts-based research are based in a belief “related to integrity, relevance, accessibility, and engagement. We wanted research to reach audiences beyond the academy and to make a difference.” (Cole, 2007, p.57) Thank you Ardra, this was an epiphany.

During my years at MSVU Dr. Ardra Cole also initiated the **Centre for Arts-informed Research and Teaching: A Scholartistry Connective**. This group provides a community of like-minded scholars and a place to discuss ideas about arts-informed research. I continue to be a part of this group and enjoy and thank them for their energy and conversations which continues to stimulate my thinking.

Also, I wish to thank **Etta Moffatt**, who at a moment when I really needed it, offered a positive voice outside the academy and from within my professional peer group.

And last but not least, thank you to **Jane Greening**, who stood by me and listened through to the bitter end and onward.

Dedication

This is dedicated to all of those people
who are not sure what they are looking for
but begin the search anyways,
knowing that they will find both answers
and questions along the way.

Contents

Abstract.....	v
Acknowledgments	vii

PART 1: THE STORIES

Part 1: Introduction.....	2
The Painting	4
Sketching as an expansion of the problem space	7
Crackin’ the Code	12
Sketching as visual communication.....	15
The Pronoun I	20
Sketching as an aid to self reflection.....	23
I know it Begins With “D”	27
Sketching for memory and motivation	30
What if	33
Sketching to make the familiar strange	36

PART 2: SKETCHING TO LEARN

Part 2: Introduction.....	42
Background of Researcher	43
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.....	43
Nova Scotia Museum	44
Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU).....	46
What is sketching?.....	47
What is creativity?.....	49
What has creativity got to do with education?	50
Methodology	52
Process and methods	54
Insights.....	56
References.....	60

Part 1: The Stories

Part 1: Introduction

“The reader’s enjoyment begins when he [sic] himself becomes productive, i.e., when the text makes things too clear or, on the other hand, too obscure: boredom and overstrain represent the two poles of tolerance, and in either case the reader is likely to opt out of the game.” (Iser, 1978, p.108)

At a conference centered around the theme of image and text, I encountered Michael Chaney who talked of graphic narratives and the images within them. These were complex, game-like images that forced the reader to stop and break away from the text so as to reflect on the message presented. This shifted some of my most steadfast ideas about communications and forced me to re-evaluate the roles of simplicity and complexity. I had always believed in simplicity as a function of clarity. Both Iser and Chaney offered arguments that made me consider the role of complexity in image-making and how it might act as a catalyst for reflection.

My stories do not tell one story from beginning to end but instead build upon each other. The purpose for some are as examples and others tell of how an image was created.

The following five graphic narratives were created as a place to put into action, view and analyze my sketching process. I initially began my process with an analysis of all of my images that I did during graduate school or images that I had created that had influenced me during that time. This analysis identified six key areas where sketching had influenced my learning. Since my inquiry was about visualization I decided that the graphic narratives that I created must be the *stories of the images* that had influenced my thinking. Therefore from the initial group of images I then selected the individual images who’s story best portrayed those six influences. I proceeded to develop those stories into graphic narratives while at the same time documenting my sketches through this process.

I saw these stories as long horizontal fold-outs (25.25” x 6”) in an 8.5” x 6” book with what I called a “back story” on the back of each fold-out. These back stories would be standard text format, documenting what I discovered within my sketching and creative process for each individual narrative. This would allow the reader to read the book from the front (accessing the graphic narratives) or from the back (accessing the traditional text format)

and with each reading the reader would access different kinds of information. Production costs and web access shifted the format for the time being.

Following is a brief outline of what each story covers.

The Painting

The first story is about creating an image that was not done in graduate school but became significant to me during graduate school. The question posed, “what happens when we lose our creative self and how do we get it back?,” was the catalyst for my return to school. I realize that this is not the overall theme of this thesis but between the layers of this thesis this problem is exposed, becomes visible, and a solution is found.

Crackin’ the Code

This is the story of how an image came to be and the realization of the importance of sketching and visualizing to me. Images are the medium I best communicate with, to both others and myself. Prior to this I had not made use of sketching or visuals as a medium to respond at graduate school. This was the first of many.

Pronoun I

This is a story of many images and how sketching gave me a place for reflection to better understand who I was and why this understanding was necessary to continue my studies. The search that I entered took place both verbally and visually but was certainly initiated and first encountered within a sketch. This is about reflexivity and inference and how one makes use of an image for these purposes.

I know it starts with a D

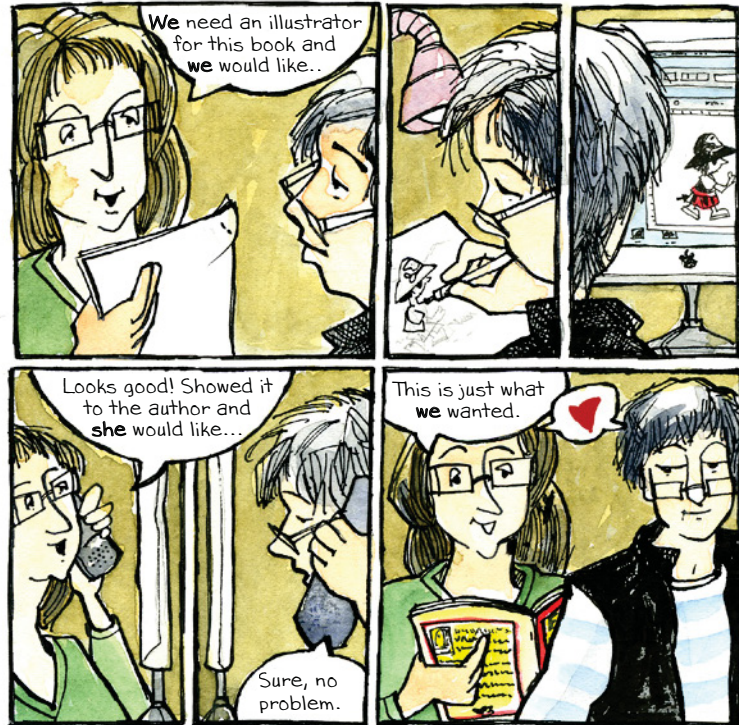
This is the story of my encounter with sketchnotes at a conference and how these notes assisted my memory and also created memories. It also demonstrates the many uses and positive functions of sketchnotes compared to writing notes.

What if...

This is a story, a fantasy, that I created to help me find an answer to a troubling problem—that of how to rediscover creative self. It is an example of how I use sketching and storytelling as a place to make the familiar strange in hopes of giving myself distance from the problem and seeing it with a new perspective in hopes of bringing an answer to light.

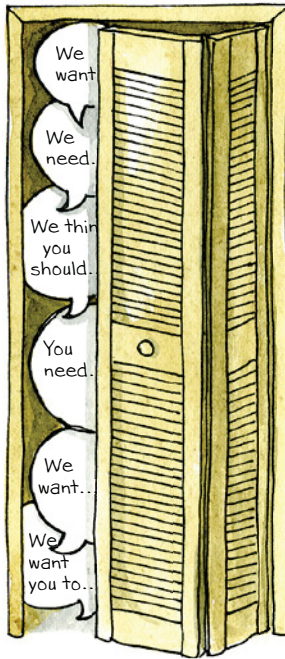
The Painting

This story does not begin on any specific day, instead it emerged out of the day-to-day repetition of life. Some repetition comforting, other repetition wrapped tight and then tighter.





The result was a large stack of books in the closet. They were Jill's book, Catherine's book, Deannie's book, Sheree's book, Susan's book, and Lori's book. None was **my** book.



So, I put in the closet what needed to be put in the closet and I began to draw...



with no expectations other than to create something for myself.



This ended with a small painting, but it sat boldly in front of me. Only long sessions of professional therapy could have brought to light and stated my problem so clearly and quickly.

"Here lies the body of work I never did, murdered by monsters I never met".

I was determined to understand and resolve that war with those unknown monsters, to resurrect my body of work that I had yet to do. And so, I entered graduate school.

Sketching as an expansion of the problem space

This story is an example of how I use sketching for problem solving or finding answers to a question that is foremost in my mind. First, what the reader needs to understand, is that I sketch because I don't know what something looks like and I use sketching to find out what it looks like. I do not often use it to reproduce something that is in front of me—this I define as “drawing”. This is similar to what Goldschmidt defines as a “study sketch,” “scribbled...usually made very fast and are sometimes so idiosyncratic that they are only comprehensible to their maker” (Goldschmidt, 1991, p.123). Sketching has become the activity that I do when I cannot “see” something. It can be an object, place or person, action, concept, or an emotion. Rudolf Arnheim states “sketching does not consist simply of representing on paper the images held in the designer’s mind; it consists rather in a dialectic process” (Arnheim, 1993, p.15). In my process I begin with a question and sketch to visualize it. As I work other questions (and answers) arrive, simulating the back and forth of conversation—“the dialectics of sketching” (Goldschmidt, 1991). Sketching is a conversation with myself and hopefully ends with a satisfactory conclusion that answers or enlightens my original question.

This is the same approach that creative professionals and designers use in the design thinking process. “Typically, visual design starts with a number of vague, half-formed ideas. Sketching is conducted both to clarify existing ideas and to develop new ones” (Fish, 1990, p.117). “Sketching, (in the design process) if effective, is a cyclical, dialectic process that results in the continuous emergence of new knowledge and reinterpretations of a potential design. It is often envisaged as ‘visual thinking’.” (Locher, 2010, p. 139) In the graphic design profession we call these beginning sketches “thumbnails.”

“The Painting” tells of how I lost my creative self, even while working in a creative profession. While this seems a sidebar to the actual point I am making in this thesis, it is the driving force behind it. I often hear complaints from people that they no longer do any creative activity for themselves. These activities have become activities of childhood and are no longer practices of an adult. Sketching and drawing are often the actions referenced in their complaints.

In my work as an illustrator of children’s books I am often asked “when will you write one of your own?” This question has always pressured me into believing that I should do exactly that—write and illustrate my own children’s book. Once having attempted this—several times, if not many—and failed, I then questioned my

ability to create something of “my own.” This questioning was the catalyst for me to sit down at my drawing table and sketch, to place aside all those exterior voices and see what happens when I create for myself alone. This story tells what happened when I did exactly that.

When I began to sketch for the initial painting spoken of in this story, my only goal was to visualize and communicate on the page what I was feeling. Starting with the questions “what is important to me? how do I feel about it?”, I hoped to find within the sketching process a solution that might show me a direction to follow. I was not interested in the beauty of the image but instead was determined to use sketching to help me find this creative voice that I believed I had lost. This I defined as my “problem” and I was determined to find a “solution” through the action of sketching and visualization.

My questions quickly shifted to “what happens if I create an image that is for myself with no client criteria? what would I draw?” The image transformed as I lightly placed pencil to paper. As I contemplated my problem I began drawing a character with pencil raised above paper, about to begin—reflecting my current situation. “Designing entails generating, transforming, and refining images of different aspects of that still non-existent artifact and making representations of it which enable communication and examination of the ideas involved”

(Goldschmidt, 1991, p.125). Goldschmidt talks of “design reasoning” and breaks it into two aspects—“moves” and “arguments” (Goldschmidt, 1991, p.125). These are similar to the moves in a chess game where the “moves” are the decision to move and actual moving of the chess piece and the “argument” is the rationale behind the move. In sketching, the “move” is not the actual decision to make a particular mark but more the decision to follow the path a mark laid out for you. An argument is the reasoning supporting that move, more than often done while viewing the sketch. In my experience this viewing of the sketch can sometimes be done extremely quickly or it can take much time. For example, the rationalization to start with the drawing of a face with pen above paper was my first “move.” The rationalization, because it was the exact moment when the problem begins, was my first “argument.”

At times decisions are not clear and precise but instead require the sketcher to doodle using unclear, unformed marks—trying out possibilities and variables—to find an appropriate move. The ambiguity of this kind of sketching plays a role in the reasoning process as “visual displays are particularly helpful in certain kinds of reasoning. In addition to providing direct access to explicit information contained in them, we may also see in them things which are not explicitly there” (Goldschmidt, 1991, p.127).

This is also similar to Dr. Lorri Neilsen's concept of liminality in lyric inquiry:

Liminality is a "space that invites anomaly, and relishes ambiguity" (Neilsen, 1998a, p.273), a place where we "perceive patterns in new ways, find sensuous openings into new understanding, fresh concepts, wild possibilities," a place where we "subvert the ordinary and see the extraordinary." (Neilsen,2008, p.93)

"Sketches however are relatively unconstrained and ambiguous (although they can be more or less ambiguous) and consequently allow for new ways of interpreting the sketch of an image to emerge" (Purcell, 1998t, p.392). Therefore I need to allow lines to flow without the tension that arises with constant evaluation. Nothing is "wrong" at this stage, I am thinking, I am searching for my next move. I often use light, soft pencil strokes as I sketch and slowly build them up getting darker and darker as I confirm my decisions.

In the creation of the painting, having sketched the sketcher on the page, I then wanted to communicate my anxiety that came from the expectations of others (or at least my perception of those expectations). I visualized this with multiple images of faces with large eyes staring at me, some pointing at me to emphasize the pressure. As I built the image I looked around me and considered adding items to the sketch that aligned with the way I

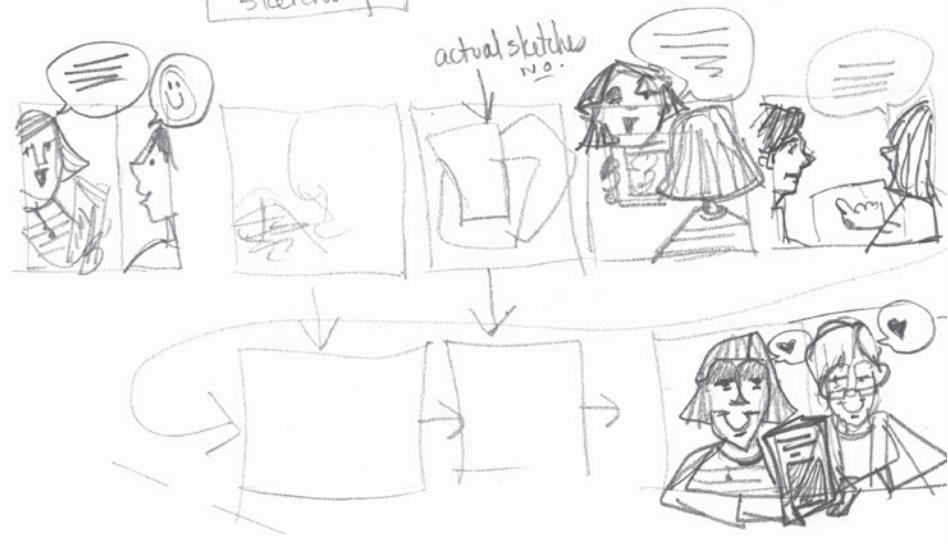
felt. On my window sill sat a small gravestone, a souvenir from a trip to Boston, proclaiming "Heres lyes Y body of Mary Goose wife of Isaac Goose." It struck me as symbolic of what I had lost and I added a gravestone image to the sketch. As an afterthought, when I paused and looked at the sketch, I thought the situation a little pathetic and included two angels blowing their horns as a sarcastic voice.

Initial sketch for final painting.





Often I fall into a state of concentration where nothing enters my mind or interferes with the reasoning taking place in sketch form on the page. This state as defined by Csikszentmihalyi is called "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Or—as he also defines—happiness. What I find interesting is that because sketching and drawing are an integral part of my learning process, I now directly correlate education with happiness.



Once I was satisfied with having communicated what I felt, I decided to take this sketch to a “final” image. “...two types of transformations can be identified in the drawings. There are lateral transformations where there is movement from one idea to a different idea and vertical transformations where one idea is transformed into a more detailed form. Predominantly lateral transformations occur in the preliminary design phases and are associated with unstructured sketches while vertical transformations occur during the refinement and detailed design phases and are associated with more detailed and precise drawings” (Purcell, 1998, p.394). The move to take the sketch to a final image was a vertical move to refine the image.

When I feel that an image is successfully communicating my goal, I stop and take a final look. Often, at this point, I find myself seeing the image with a new perspective, and a verbal summary will come to mind. This can be a new realization, a new way of seeing the situation, or a new interpretation that I had not considered prior to the image. “The ability to infer information from the self-generated sketch and to use it in order to enhance the sketcher’s ability to deal with a task or problem at hand may be seen as an expansion of the problem space with which the individual is working.” (Goldschmidt, 2003, p.79)

What I saw in this image came as an epitaph that I placed on the gravestone — “Here lies the body of work I never did, Killed by monsters I never met.”

Years later in graduate school this image became a touchstone for me, a driving force to keep going because what I was finding in graduate school was my creative self. The problem might not have been solved by the creation of the image but it certainly made the problem visible on the page in front of me. And sometimes clarifying the problem is a large portion of the solution.

Cracking the Code

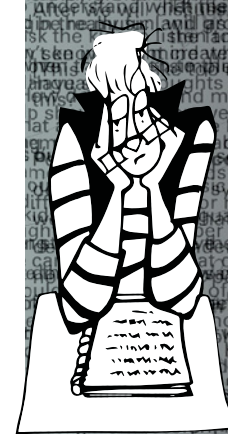
Seemingly random occurrences sometimes fall appropriately in time and place to support one another. A class project and an invitation to present at a literary festival both occurred simultaneously solving each other's problems with a combined solution. Planning out my presentation became a class project.



Sifting through an abundance of ideas began with words and paper. An alphabet of options until I reached Z and before me were too many places to go with no one place to stop and stay. Like a page of type it all became grey with nothing bold enough to distinguish itself from another.



My capabilities to make decisions fizzled out like the last sputters of the New Year's fireworks. I could no longer see what would or would not work—in fact I could no longer "see".



I shoved the pages of words aside, cleared my desk, and began afresh. If I was going to talk **about** images then what would happen if I used images to talk with? I picked up my pencil and began to sketch out my presentation.



Me—what will I wear, what do I need to take, what will I need for my presentation?

I conversed with my pencil, asked questions, and answered with an image. I began with myself and then my unknown audience. Who are those kids? I defined them. Sandra who liked ballet, Alex who played hockey, and Cole who liked to read books.

Who is my audience?
What will they look like? How will they respond?



In front of me was me and them—far more distinct than before. What would I do first? "Hello!" What if I did not talk? What if I only drew to introduce myself? What would that look like? So I attempted it—on paper first.

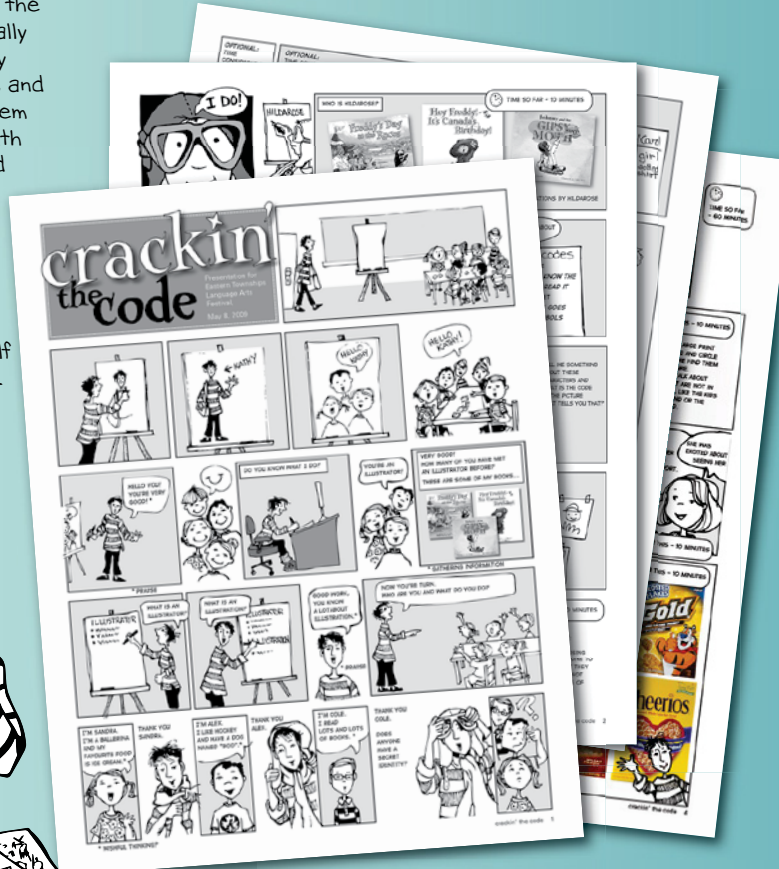


What will the room look like?
Where will the kids sit?
What will I do first?

What would they say? What would I say? It began with scribbles but gradually became clearer as I worked. My presentation appeared before me. I could now see it.

It was as if I was there, in the room with those kids. Initially they were just simple happy faces created from circles and dots but as I developed them they became individuals, with their own personalities and responses.

I could communicate back and forth with them through my drawings. It became a imaginary conversation between myself and my sketched audience. Together we created this presentation.



On presentation day I was excited to share my experience. Initially I thought it was just the presentation that I was excited about but as I talked about my experience in developing it, my voice cracked, the emotion ran through me. It was not the presentation I developed that was important, it was the visualizing method I used to develop it. The sketches helped me to ask questions and find answers. They helped me to see what I was doing.

At that point I realized that I **needed** to draw to think. It was not a single incident but would become my way to learn.



Sketching as visual communication

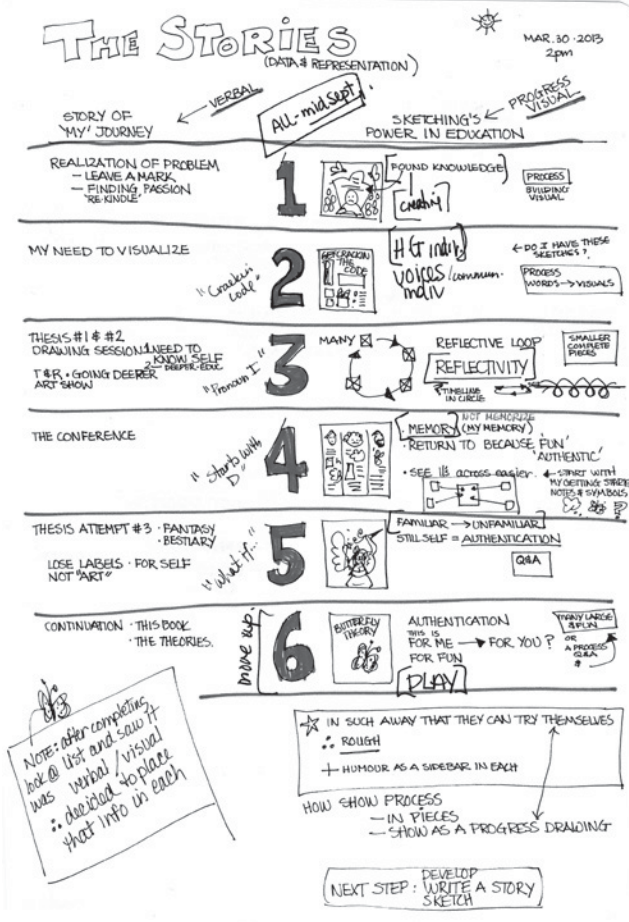
This story took place at the end of my first year in graduate school. The graphic narrative, *Crackin' the Code*, that is discussed in the story was a response to a class project on a literacy subject of personal interest. My initial goal for this project was to develop an outline plan for a presentation, on the communication value of images, for a literacy festival that I was attending. The end-product became a graphic narrative describing this presentation. The decision to create a graphic narrative was not my original intention. The shift from verbal presentation to a visual one happened because the visual was a better communicator for my message—both to me and to my peers.

Communication is about transmitting a message. The medium of transfer is almost as important as the message itself. My message for both presentations—the festival and the academic—was about the importance of visuals as communicators and I soon discovered that it was important to communicate this not only in what I said but also in the selection of the medium that I used for communication.

As I developed the message and ideas for presentation I encountered difficulty in communicating the presentation with my words alone. I had pages of ideas but they were disorganized and I felt lost because I could not “see” my ideas. I needed a method to place those ideas in front of me in an organized manner so that I could get them eventually into a flowing presentation. Words were no longer working so I picked up my pencil and began to sketch. What is most significant is that during this exercise I became aware of my need for visuals, I realized that sketching out my ideas is necessary for me to think. This was my first encounter with a problem that I realized I could not solve or develop without the aid of my visuals.

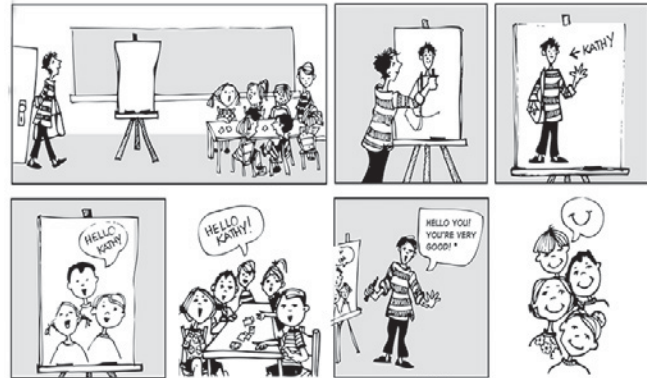
Instantly—as I and the participants appeared on the paper in front of me—I became clearly aware of finally being able to see the presentation. As I confronted the characters that I created, I easily came up with ideas and responses for both myself and my audience. It gave me an imaginative but at the same time more life-like place to evaluate my plan for the presentation.

Different thoughts and ideas are best communicated in different ways—sometimes verbally, sometimes visually. When communicating to myself, my initial notes and outline ideas usually come as words with a proliferation of arrows, question marks, and exclamation points—more diagrammatic than prose.



Sometimes I re-visualize the same idea over and over until it looks right. What is right? When all of my questions are answered. For me this process is about communicating a message, not aesthetics and pretty pictures. My purpose is to create an image that clearly states what I want to say to my intended audience. In my rough sketches, that audience is myself.

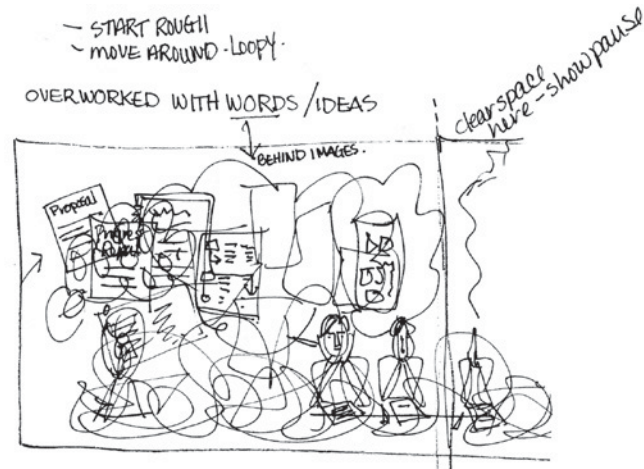
At one point within the creation of "Crackin' the Code," as I was looking at a rough sketch of things that I needed for the presentation I saw an easel in the classroom I had drawn. At the same time, I was considering how to introduce my talk to the kids. This was one of those moments when an image became a catalyst for an idea. On seeing the easel, I considered making use of it to introduce myself by drawing me. Since I was taking



about the communication power of images then it was logical to attempt this with only images and it emphasized the communication value of images by using them as a means for communication within my talk.

In every presentation I have done since, this works brilliantly, even when the room is partially filled with French-speaking children. They all sit enthusiastically watching, asking questions of each other, and giggling, especially when I begin drawing them. Initially I was reluctant to try this but as I finished my paper presentation I felt confident enough in my drawing skills to spontaneously attempt it for my young audience. It was not “art” I was producing but instead I was having a conversation with my audience through my drawn pictures. It was not important that the people I drew looked exactly like the ones sitting in front of me, they just needed to resemble them—gender, hair, clothes, body position were sufficient symbols for communication. The images were a language, similar to the images drawn in the Pictionary game that we played following the introduction. Their beauty and aesthetic quality was inconsequential. What was important was the communication of the message—this is me, this is you, and then this is your response.

Beauty does not play a role in my sketches. The message and the audience rule. Below is a scribbled page of my notes, both visual and verbal, for the story on the reverse side of this page. It is significant and readable to me. Most likely it is unintelligible to anyone else. I don’t expect others to be able to read it as it was a conversation with myself. Within it I see ideas, possibilities, and questions still unanswered—a page of thinking. I have many more pages similar to this one in my journals and on scraps of paper. The ideas and sketches start disorganized, but as I clarify my ideas, my images also become cleaner and clearer.

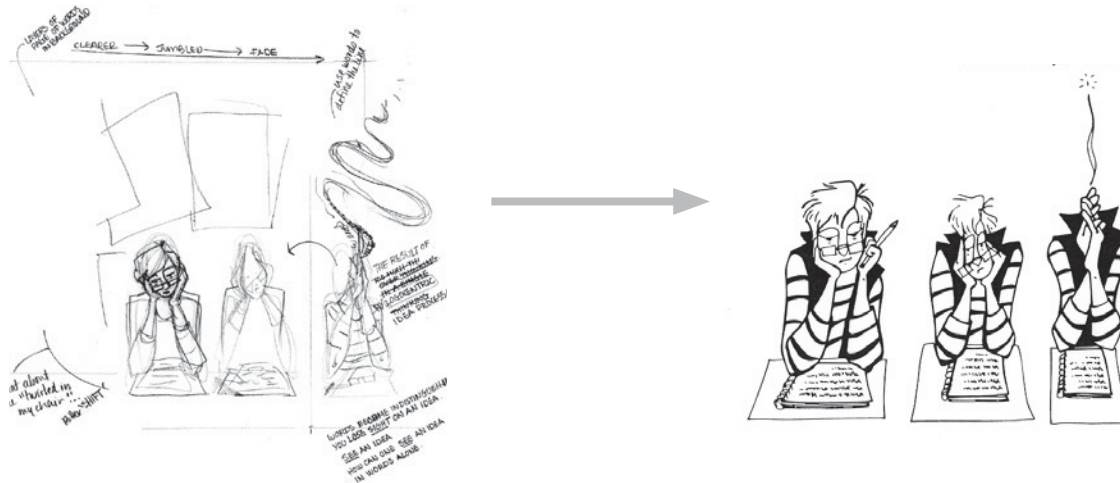


This happens because of the conversation that I have with myself as I visualize my thoughts—initially sketching, then looking at the sketch and evaluating it by asking and answering questions. I reflect on the image to see if it is saying what I want it to say—does it succeed in stating my message? can something be improved? is some part of it communicating something other than the intended message? does it need to be simplified? made more complex? or does an emotion need to be expressed?

To use sketching in this way one needs “to create a drawing on paper that depicts something in an informal way, where decisions are to some extent provisional and

details approximate” (Eckert, 2004, p.2). It is not a place to simply draw what one sees or what is fully formed in one’s head. The ambiguity of the sketch helps as one reinterprets the sketch in different ways or infers ideas from both “mistakes” or ambiguous marks.

The end result was a four page comic style presentation. My decision to submit this as my final class project was for a number of reasons. It clearly communicated my presentation to my colleagues in a fun and inviting manner and it communicated my message not only in the verbal message but also in the choice of a visual medium. I was not just telling but I was showing how images communicate.



When I presented the work it was received enthusiastically by my colleagues, when I completed the work I felt proud to have accomplished it, and the final piece was helpful as a self-reference and reminder for my talk.

During my class presentation of the project I realized the personal significance of this work. As I explained to my classmates about my shift from verbal to visual and how the thinking process then became easier for me, I realized that visualizing was a vital part of my learning process. This was the beginning of my use of images in graduate school.

This raises the question, what percentage of students/ teachers in any educational system have the same need to think and communicate visually?

IN a recent poll about creativity done by *Time* magazine in conjunction with Microsoft and the Motion Picture Association of America it was found that 50% of the people polled thought in pictures when thinking creatively compared to 34% who thought in words (Kluger, 2013, p.58).

The Pronoun I

"Shhh...go to your room, your father will be home soon." The chant came every afternoon near five and with it the realization that he was more important than we or she or, god forbid, I. I gained the realization that keeping quiet was the one state that would keep me safe, safe and sound. Everyday at five in the afternoon.

I became an architect of sorts, specializing in fort making. Blankets draped over bed and dresser, pillows stacked underneath. The blue dog with a pajama pocket as guest. Under the basement steps between the studs I erected a shelf for my books. A library with a single patron.

Then there was my favourite, at night, behind a closed door while other kids still shouted outside in the dusk, I tucked up against the window and read by the flush of the still humming streetlight.

I became a side order of silence. A side order where they and them were on the main plate, I on the side. Not just everyday at five, it became a six, a seven, an eleven o'clock thing which spread to one and two and three with no me.

And then I built my final tightest structure, a box surrounding and enclosing myself and the single pronoun I.

30 years I spent daily doing what was to be done from within my tiny box.



Blend and bend, fold up tight. Tuck away, tuck away, tuck out of sight.

Sometimes it is the smallest things that differentiate between here and there—the last particle of sand that moves the pile to shift, the final flake of snow that begins the avalanche, and yes, that proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. In this case it was within the process of thesis, the process of finding a question, a question that was relevant to "me."

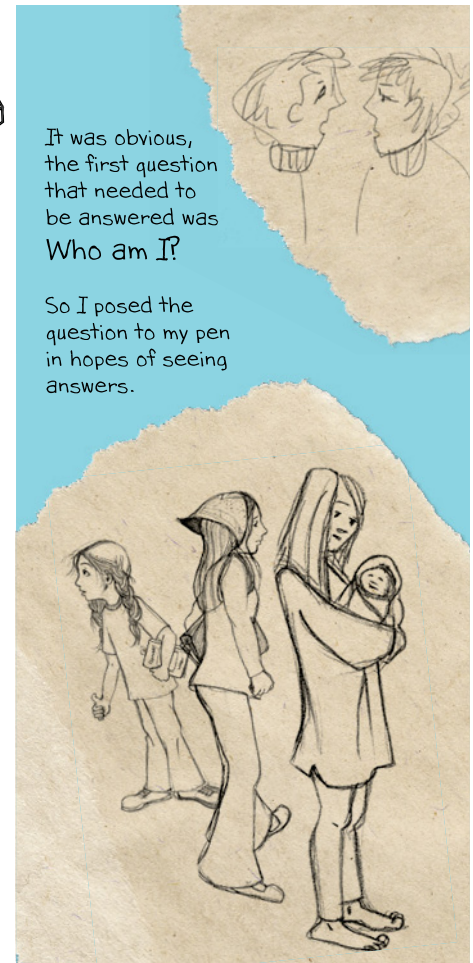
Me? I?
Who is that?

Impossible questions to answer from within a box.

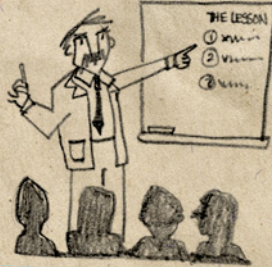


It was obvious, the first question that needed to be answered was Who am I?

So I posed the question to my pen in hopes of seeing answers.



40 years ago...



30 years ago...



conforming to the non-conforming just to fit in.

20 years ago...



following a pre-defined path of "must dos."

10 years ago...



conforming and following made this part easy, if not uncreative.

returning to school...



Can I do it?
Am I too old?

Reflecting on my sketches I saw that I had drawn my way into thesis. A voice had appeared on my page.



Sketching as an aid to self reflection

This story tells of my need to find my voice and how sketching enabled reflective thought to fulfill that need.

Ken Robinson defines three aspects that define us as human beings: diversity, curiosity, and creativity (Robinson, 2013). I speak here of diversity. We are all different, each one of us. Each of us acts and reacts in personal and specific ways in our roles as both learners and/or educators. As professionals we need to understand our own personal beliefs for any decision making that we encounter. "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further the conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought" (Dewey, 2007, p.7).

A problem arises when "...practitioners, locked into a view of themselves as technical experts, find nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection...for them uncertainty is a threat; its admission is a sign of weakness" (Schon, 1983, p.69). These practitioners no longer evaluate or consider the diverse aspects of the situation, which includes both student and teacher. Instead they use what was used before, what is

recommended, what has been proven to work under the assumption that it will work again. But those are generic solutions and teaching is not a generic process. As Schon states, "...a teacher) must be ready to invent new methods and must endeavour to develop in himself [sic] the ability of discovering them" (Schon, 1983, p.66). To be able to discover new methods one must first reflect on the methods that one is using, analyze them, evaluate them, and create new solutions. "All occupations engaged in converting actual to preferred situations are concerned with design" (Schon, 1983, p.77). To enable one to shift to the preferred situation one must have a "conversation with the materials of the situation" (Schon, 1983, p.78). "In a good process of design, this conversation with the situation is reflective" (Schon, 1983, p.79).

Sketching is a skill that aids reflection, not only as you do it but after it is completed, supporting Schon's two types of reflection—reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. While sketching—as one makes marks on the paper—the sketcher makes "in action" decisions, sometimes without thinking or as intuitive responses. Once completing the sketch, the sketcher then steps back and reflects on the action. At this time questions like "why did I include that?" and "why did I portray it in that way?" can be posed and considered. While reflecting in action sometimes one encounters actions that are out of the

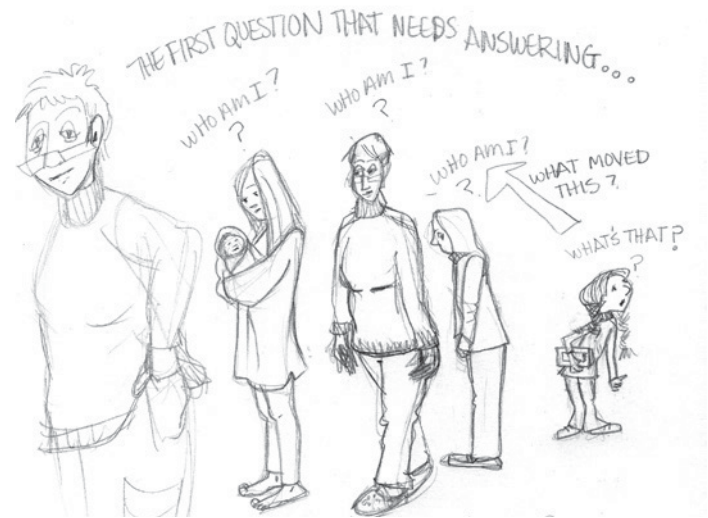
ordinary or shock the sketcher, just as a writer sometimes find themselves wondering “where did that come from?.” One then needs to stop and reflect on those questions, out of the action, to find insight and purpose for the reasons behind the action.

When I began formulating ideas for my thesis I did four sessions of what I called “sketch sessions”, where I sat down with a large piece of paper or my journal, asked a question, began to sketch, and followed through to where my sketches took me as I asked and answered the questions that arose from my sketching. I did this because I knew about those “surprises” that happen when one reflects-in-action and that new paths and insights can be discovered while lost in that sketch flow. I was looking for answers but more importantly I was looking for questions.

Before returning to school, reflection was an intuitive action, it was a part of what I did, a portion of my visualizing process. It was natural to sketch and then to reflect upon the sketch, ask questions and then sketch again. In art college our class would gather, place sketches on the wall and discuss—why did you do that? did it solve the presented problem? Our process of developing visuals was one of reflection—asking questions and shifting with the answers to a new vision. On returning to school it became automatic to continue this practice.

In my first sketch session (image below) I asked the question, “what does a thesis look like?.” When I ended that session I realized that before I began my thesis I needed to better understand myself and the beliefs that drove me. I needed to bring those beliefs to the surface so that they were visible to me so I could understand where I wanted to go for thesis and beyond.

I both write and draw, making use of different areas of my brain. For a period of time during graduate school I kept a journal where I spoke to myself with words but at times



I felt that I could not express myself well enough with words and felt the need for images. Over time I shifted to a sketchbook where I incorporated both visuals and words.

Now and then in my journals there are notes to myself saying “moved to sketchbook.” At one of these points I was contemplating “...looking at illustrating characters and sequential events as a learning medium. Developing characters as a process to learn empathy. On drawing a character I link with that individual, I understand it, and I understand how it feels. On drawing myself, do I also gain a certain amount of self understanding. On drawing events sequentially, developing how an incident will work out creates a understanding of the event” (personal journal Dec. 15, 2011). I then moved to my sketchbook.

I considered drawing my life as a sequential graphic narrative and began my sketching with my first class in graduate school. There were many questions marks on the page as I recalled my fear and anxiety with my return to school after over thirty years away from it. After responding to the questions of “can I do this? am I too old?” I moved to “what was familiar, unfamiliar?” Some of the familiar aspects were artifacts such as desks, the unfamiliar included the technology and the people. I recalled the first question in class, after the welcome, “why are you here? what do you want?” and drew myself looking at self. That question was certainly unfamiliar territory.

I moved then to the next page in my sketchbook and thought back to previous educational experiences— elementary school, art college, then family life and professional life. Each time I drew I asked myself the question, “what does this look like?”. I reflected in the action of my sketching on my past experiences and what came to mind. Once complete I stopped for a moment and upon reflecting-on-action I added words to the images. I noted the time periods—ten year spreads. Under the family life I added “following a pre-defined path of must do’s” and this flowed to then considering the other images as merely following a path not creating a path of one’s own. Then I wrote the words “...and now?” and added, once again, an image of myself looking at myself. Again I had encountered myself in self-reflection. Below it I wrote “...this is problematic.”



My purpose for returning to graduate school was to find my body of work. If I wanted to change my work, find my personal voice and message then I needed to understand all of me. In a writing class of Dr. Lorri Neilsen's, I discovered large portions of myself within the words of story and realized the importance of telling my own story, out loud, and in my own voice. So I continued to sketch and write memoir pieces for several months, beginning with the stronger memories, moving to the barely there, and then in and out of the uncomfortable ones. My sketchbooks became numerous and thick with well inked pages. They allowed me to reflect in the same method as the writing and gave me another voice when I was lost for words. In the writing class I was not the only recipient of the power of reflective writing for self-knowing, as each member of Lorri's class shared their personal stories and found aspects of themselves that strengthened and shaped their learning. It was in this reflective, authentic, and creative atmosphere that I first saw graduate students enthusiastically reacting to education in a personal and meaningful way.

My encounters on the page with image-making consistently pushed me towards looking at self. It was important for me and it was important to my praxis. "... good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher...good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self" (Lyle, 2009, p.295). Ultimately this self-understanding was a large part of the solution in my search for creative self—I needed to understand what I believed and what was important enough to me to hold my passion, feed my motivation, and find my voice.

"...the fuzzy, incomplete, and inaccurate rapid sketch works in a manner similar to Rorschach test inkblot...The self-generated sketch talks back, and its backtalk reflects some of the sketcher's inner most, tacit, otherwise untapped knowledge, biases, concerns, and preferences."
(Goldschmidt, 2003, p.87)



I know
it starts
with a 'D'

I am notorious
in my family for
having a bad
memory...

Don't forget,
Cyndie's mother is
coming for dinner.

Hmmm,
Cyndie's mother?
Donna? Diane? Debbie?
I know it starts with a D.

Well hello,
Kathy.
So nice to
see you
again.

Nice to see
you again too.

How was
the trip?

We had a great
trip and saw...

Mom...

Could someone
please
just
say her name!

Yes, and then
Pat...

Good for you
Pat!

so when I decided
to attend a
conference in
Montreal, all I
could think about
were those
many unknown
attendees with
those many
unknown names.

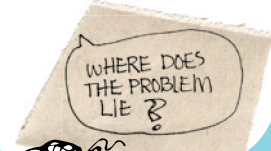
The lectures became images in my mind enabling easy retrieval.



That was great Johnny, it really opened my eyes. I had read the book prior to your talk but had looked at it in a totally different way...



Where do you think the problem starts, Sara? Do you think that visuals are a language we should learn to read and write?



I gave you "best in show", Kalervo, great job!

Do you think this is a new way of being an author, this character confronting author idea?



My sketchbook became more than simply notes from a conference, it became a place to contemplate and reconsider and... it was just plain ol' fun. I returned to it often.

And here I am, once again returning to these sketches.

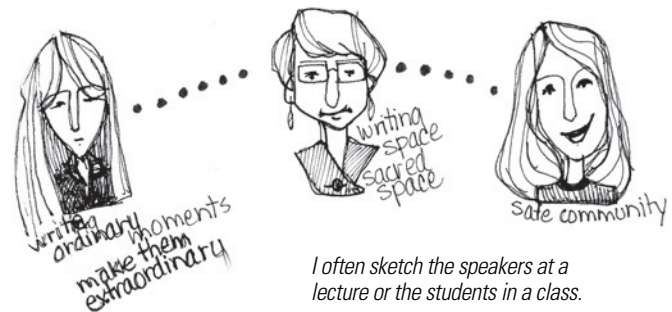
Sketching for memory and motivation

Sketchnotes are visual notes using both words and images presented in an illustrative manner on the page. They are most frequently used for conferences or lectures but I have used them also for readings. They are spontaneous but can include some pre-planning such as set-up and symbols to be used.

My decision to sketchnote a conference was made after I had done some on-line browsing on sketchnoting. The notes I saw on-line resembled my sketchbook notes and I thought I would give it a try. I pre-planned, as was suggested in the on-line posts, but once in action it became spontaneous, with symbols and organizational order appearing intuitively.

In “I know it starts with a D”, I show the memory value of those sketches in my increased recall of names of speakers and their topics. The cartoon style caricature of each speaker that I did at the beginning of each presentation enabled me to visualize each speaker and recall at a later time. The images and graphic visualizations of text in my notes aided in reminding me of each speaker’s topic.

The *Memory Palace of Mateo Ricci* tells the story of Matteo Ricci who, in 1594, taught the Chinese how to increase their memory. He made use of what is sometimes today called method of loci or the memory palace which is a technique that employs the use of visualizing a self-created house (palace), its rooms, and placement of objects within as mnemonic devices to aid information retention. With today’s Google culture we no longer require such extensive memory skills but scholars, in that day and age, needed their memories to hold in place all of their learning as they lacked quantities of books and libraries to look up the latest knowledge. Today, at memory championships, this technique is still used by participants and winners alike. My sketchnotes—self-created images placed in an orderly manner on the page—gave me a mental image for each presentation and work in the same way as Ricci’s memory palace. But my sketches assisted more than the act of ‘remembering’.



After returning from the convention with my sketchnotes, I immediately went on holiday. During relaxing holidays, those that permit afternoon downtime, I often take a sketchbook and sketch the events of the day. These later end up in a treasure box on a shelf in my studio with all the other vacation sketches that I have done in previous years. This was one of those relaxing holidays and while I sat with my sketchbook on my lap by the lake, I asked myself “why do I do these? what are their purpose? and why are they of such great value to me?” In retrospect I see these sketches, like photographs—they are a documentation of my life. These are not just images to jog my memory but they are my memories.

Since these are memories, I return to them, again and again, which is exactly what I did with those conference sketchnotes. Unlike the usual written linear notes on a page, which are usually never re-read, these notes compelled me to return to them. I did return to them and in the process I re-considered the concepts on the page. In the design process “sketches serve as external memories of design ideas for later inspection” (Locher, 2010, p.138). “Designers need to record their ideas in order to develop them” (Eckert, 2004, p.8). Not just as a designer, but also as a student, I have the need to record my ideas so as to inspect them. These notes grew after the conference, I extended them to include my thoughts

and opinions and I often return to them to re-think and re-consider ideas. So why do these notes hold so much pull for me to return to them again and again?

Sketchnoting was a challenge at the conference and forced me to stay in a state of high concentration because I needed to understand what the speaker was attempting to communicate not merely to listen to their words. The need to understand was imperative for me to visualize because my notes were a form of communication, with meanings and messages, and to translate these meanings and messages to the page required understanding. As I sketched at the conference I fell into Csikszentmihalyi’s famous ‘flow’ state. I had gone to the conference in hopes of experimenting with this technique, and I had used my skills to their maximum for a task that was of high challenge. I had stood at that “boundary between boredom and anxiety, when the challenges are just balanced with the person’s capacity to act” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p.107).

The state of flow is also, according to Csikszentmihalyi, a state of happiness. Why do I continually return to these visual notes? My spontaneous, unacademic response is that they made me happy and they still make me happy. But happiness is not a scholarly word. So I will say that I was highly intrinsically motivated both while in the act of sketching and re-reading.

Why was I motivated? Sketching is a creative act, it is also a personal act. What appears on the page is owned by the sketcher, it is their voice, they are creating their own memories, they are creating their own learning. There is a certain joy that one feels when they have successfully accomplished a creative act. I felt that joy once completing these sketches. I was engaged in the activity of sketchnoting for its own sake as well as to accomplish my goal to take notes. I was motivated by "...my positive reaction to qualities of the task itself, this reaction can be experienced as interest, involvement, curiosity, satisfaction, or positive challenge" (Amabile, 1996, location 2626). "Persons who engage in an activity for its own sake are intrinsically motivated" (Amabile, 1996, location 2493). The act of creating increases intrinsic motivation but at the same time the intrinsic motivation increases creativity. It becomes a circle with each supporting another. Sketching is itself a creative activity and motivates me to ask more questions about the concept that I am considering. It also makes my learning authentic, personal, and meaningful to me—the aspect we spent so much time in first year graduate school talking about. It creates learning into memories.

My activity of sketchnoting accomplished three things: first it increased my memory retention, second it assisted in my concentration and therefore understanding, and the activity itself actually motivated me to learn.

This interest in sketchnoting is part of a larger shift in the business world where the recently new profession of graphic facilitation now exists. Graphic facilitators act as interpretators for meetings, conferences, and planning sessions to create visual notes while the meeting is in action. They stand up-front and visible to all, sketching out the topics and responses of the participants for both memory, confirmation, and reaction. It is visual communication in action.

What if...

you had a problem to solve?

What if you were too close to the problem to see the solution?

What if you created a story using your problem as the plot?

What if you wrote that story?

Would it solve the problem?

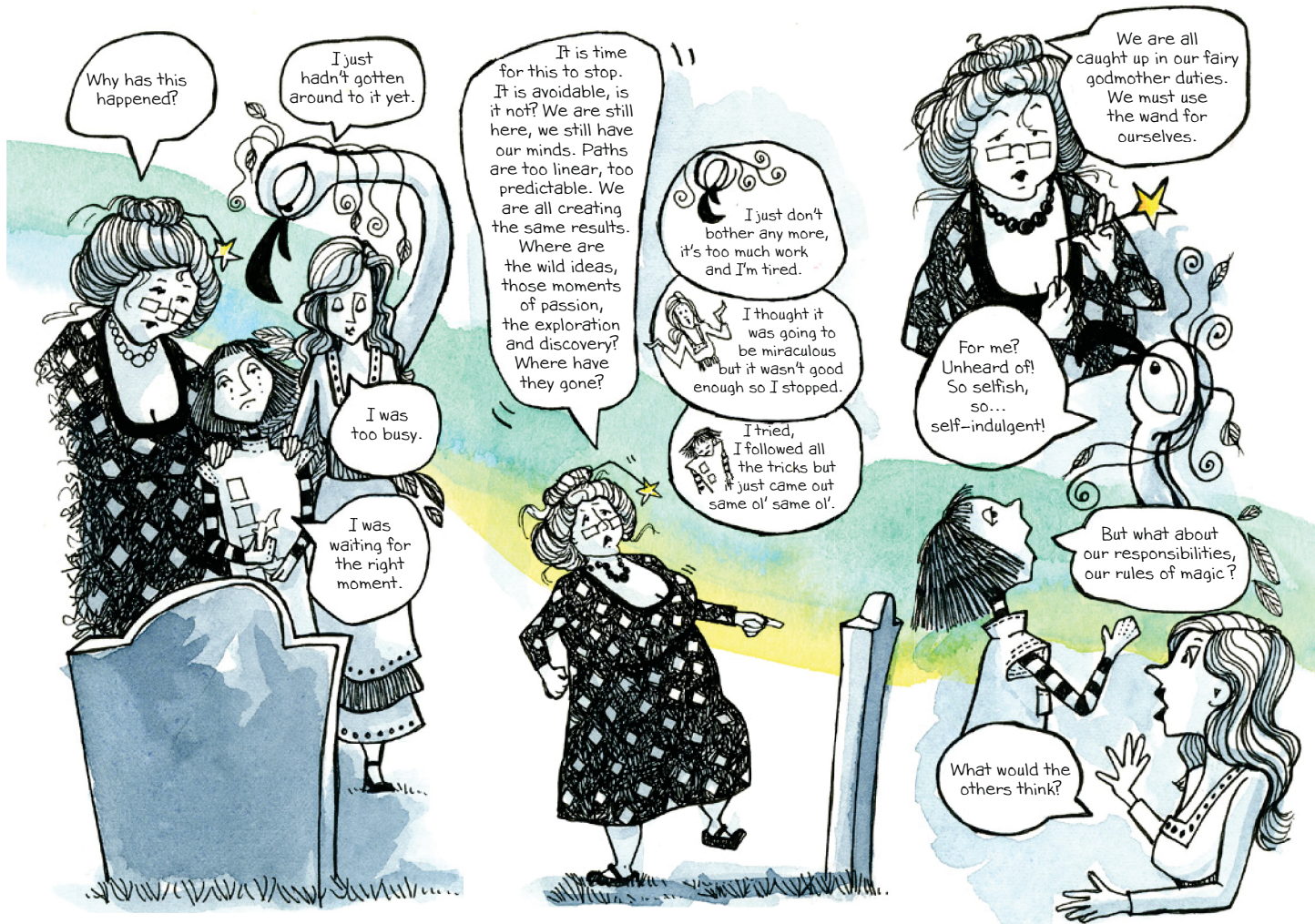


Three funerals this month.

They are just now noticing the regularity. It has become an anticipated gathering in a circle facing stone.

They are dried up from sobbing and have lost the ability to shed tears. One day will they stop noticing each passing and disregard this ceremony of sadness?

Is that day already here?



Why has this happened?

I just hadn't gotten around to it yet.

I was too busy.

I was waiting for the right moment.

It is time for this to stop. It is avoidable, is it not? We are still here, we still have our minds. Paths are too linear, too predictable. We are all creating the same results. Where are the wild ideas, those moments of passion, the exploration and discovery? Where have they gone?

I just don't bother any more, it's too much work and I'm tired.

I thought it was going to be miraculous but it wasn't good enough so I stopped.

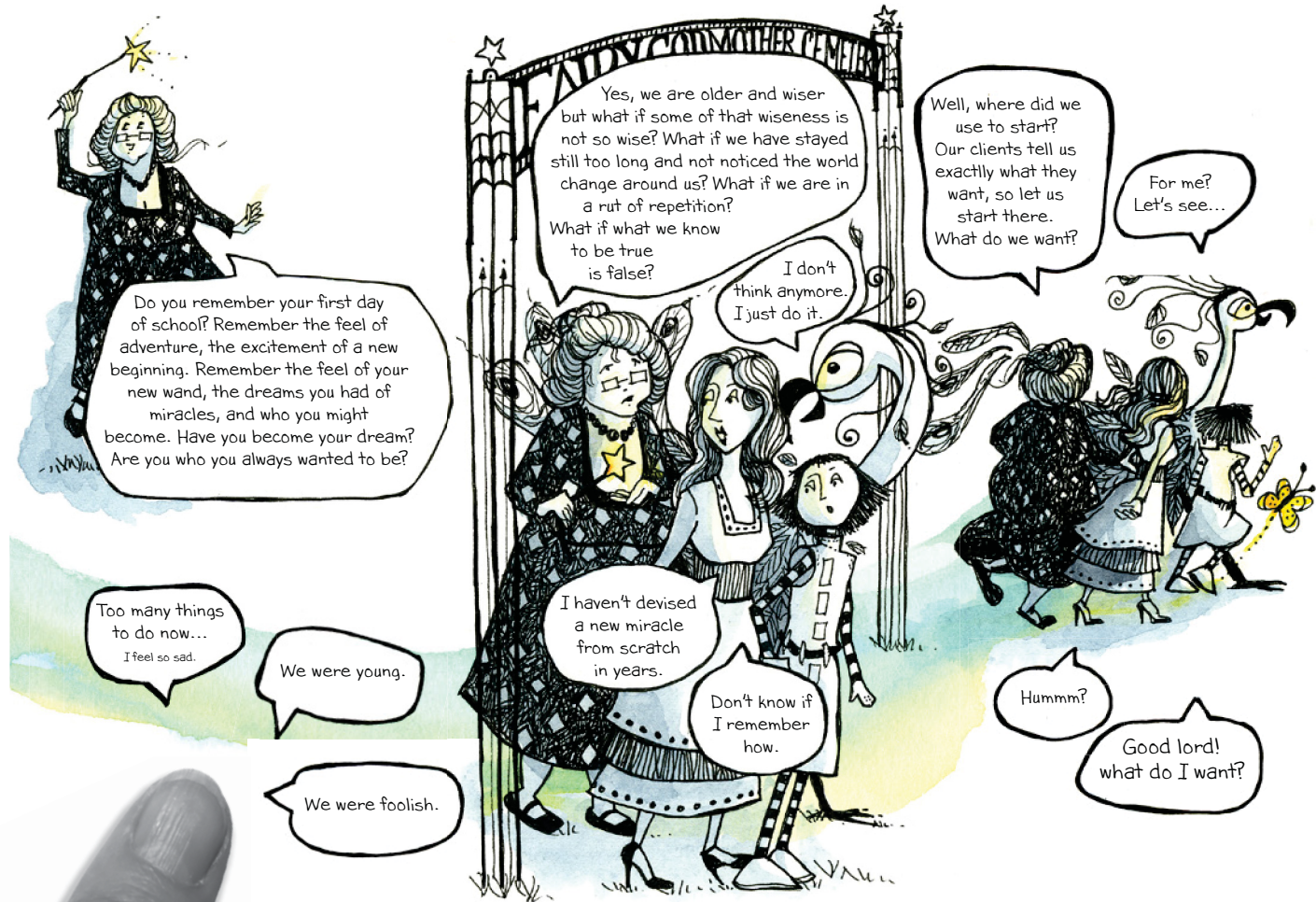
I tried, I followed all the tricks but it just came out same ol' same ol'.

We are all caught up in our fairy godmother duties. We must use the wand for ourselves.

For me? Unheard of! So selfish, so... self-indulgent!

But what about our responsibilities, our rules of magic?

What would the others think?



Do you remember your first day of school? Remember the feel of adventure, the excitement of a new beginning. Remember the feel of your new wand, the dreams you had of miracles, and who you might become. Have you become your dream? Are you who you always wanted to be?

Yes, we are older and wiser but what if some of that wiseness is not so wise? What if we have stayed still too long and not noticed the world change around us? What if we are in a rut of repetition? What if what we know to be true is false?

Well, where did we use to start? Our clients tell us exactly what they want, so let us start there. What do we want?

For me? Let's see...

I don't think anymore. I just do it.

Too many things to do now... I feel so sad.

We were young.

I haven't devised a new miracle from scratch in years.

Don't know if I remember how.

Humm?

We were foolish.

Good lord! what do I want?

Sketching to make the familiar strange

“What if...” is an example of how I used fantasy story telling as a means to shift my thinking into an unfamiliar place so as to find new ways of seeing. It has similarities to research methods that use photography, map-making, art-making, and memory books (Mannay, 2010; Thomson, 2005; Buttignol, 2002; Galman, 2009) in that within the creative visualization process one finds a new way of seeing which can result in a new perspective.

This story was created as a catalyst for my thinking and ends in a somewhat unfinished state. My decision to end at the realization of the first step in understanding or at the “turn in conversation” was determined in hopes of leaving the reader to continue thinking on their own.

The product of research, whether an article, a graph, a poem, a story, a play, a dance, or a painting, was not something to be received but something to be used; not a conclusion but a turn in a conversation; not a closed statement but an open question; not a way of declaring ‘this is how it is’ but a means of inviting others to consider what it (or they) could become.... (Bochner, Ellis, 2003, p.507)

Bochner approaches this from the onlooker’s point of view but I posit that this “invitation to consider what they could become” also comes as an invitation to the creator within the process of creating. If the main purpose of my visualization was to find an answer to a question that is answered in the sketching stage than the sketch becomes the final image. There is no need to clarify style and page placement because the purpose of the sketch has been revealed and further consideration is irrelevant. Initially I had considered this story as my one-and-only for my thesis but once beginning I became so over enthusiastic with the story telling aspect of the task that I forgot the reason I was doing it. The creative act actually over motivated me! How many teachers would love to have that happen in their classrooms—over enthusiastic students?

My purpose for this story was to step away from my over-worked problem of why I had lost my creative self. Sometimes “when a researcher is working in familiar territory there is a danger that their findings will be overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding” (Mannay, 2010, p.94). “In order to expose that which is veiled by a web of taken for granted meanings the researcher may then find it advantageous to employ techniques of ‘defamiliarization’” (Mannay, 2010, p.95). I was too close to the problem and

needed a method to place it in unfamiliar territory. The problem was also becoming too personal and I needed another perspective. So I created one.

My idea was to create a story in which the protagonists were presented with my problem and then to see what would happen as I developed the narrative. I began with developing the characters, each from an individual aspect of self—like the habit of avoiding problems by not admitting they exist or the habit of dividing life into separate pieces like work, family, and school and not amalgamating them into one. This allowed me a means to present my diverse personal opinions and views separately within the story. It also allowed me to argue for and against each opinion. To do this I needed to analyze my personal characteristics and then develop the approach each character would take to solving the problem. The process of developing the characters brought forward much insight on the problem.

During research using memory books, Thomson observed “that young people expressed ‘a different voice’ in their memory books, reflecting aspects of their character that were not evident in their interviews” (Thomson, 2005t, p.214). Reflecting on this, is it then possible that by using characters developed from self I might also find a different voice that I had not heard previously? Thomson also posits that “rather than simply understanding



the memory books and the images within them as a document of the self, we could also see the books themselves as a technology – both the means and the medium for inventing the self” (Thomson, 2005, p.217). My story was not exactly a memory book as it did not contain truthful memories but by creating my characters as “truthful messengers” (Galman, 2009) to drive the story, I hoped to find a truthful and useful solution to the problem posed.

It was during the development of this story that I recalled the image of the gravestone, referenced in the story “The

Painting". It became the catalyst for the fantasy story concept of fairy godmothers encountering the problem of ideas dying in their community. This led to further reflection on that image and the reasons and need to paint it which furthered my story development as well as aiding my understanding of why that painting was important to me and how it activated my move to return to graduate school.

While developing the story, I moved back and forth between visual and verbal creation, once again encountering the need for both voices so that if when one failed I could shift to another. Also, when one voice became stagnant, the shift to the other assisted in transforming the message to a less familiar/stagnant voice allowing for a new or at least a slightly altered and fresher perspective. With the altered perspective came different questions to answer. For example from "what do they say?" to "what do they look like?." This shows the dialectics not only of sketching, but also the creative process itself and, once again, an opportunity to have a conversation with a slightly disguised self which allowed me some distance and shift in perspective.

In discussion with a professor regarding a class exercise on body image, she explained to me that she asked the students to draw a self-portrait. Once completed all future conversations on body image referenced the

How will ANALYSIS transform story?



PLACE: Fairy Godmother-Land

CHARACTERS: pieces of self → HildaRose, Pocket Ram, Heidi... +
 move to come

PROBLEM: general unrest in the land, the fairies are becoming disenchanted with the idea of doing miracles always for others. They want their own miracles. And then suddenly another idea dies — one of a long line.

drawings. This seemed to cause the students less anxiety than if they had to discuss their own bodies without the visual reference and allowed them some distance when speaking about a personal and possibly uncomfortable subject. Images in this way are also used in research as a catalyst for conversations in interviews, a place to point and centre the conversation (Thomson, 2005). My use of a fantasy story allowed me, in a similar way, to step away from the direct problem and approach it from another angle, in a sense, interviewing myself as I developed the narrative and make decisions on how each character might respond. It is also a form of narrative inquiry and as Lyle says "...narrative has the power to illuminate for me how my personal history shapes who I become as an educator" (Lyle, 2009, p.294). For me it illuminated not just who I had become but also how to shift what I had become to something else.

Part 2: Sketching to Learn

memory

Memory is very subjective. Each of my memories about a particular book has its own angle, or view of the scene that we can remember of those experiences in our minds. Reading is the same.

pictures

These books that I fell in love with were written and set in a particular time and place. They were not just books, they were windows into a world that was different from our own.

fantasy

When the movie came out I remember going to see it. I remember the excitement of the book, the way it made me feel. I remember the way it made me feel. I remember the way it made me feel.

place

I remember the way it made me feel. I remember the way it made me feel. I remember the way it made me feel.

characters

I remember the way it made me feel. I remember the way it made me feel. I remember the way it made me feel.

How will ANALYSIS transform story?

PLAKE: Fairy Godmother-Land

CHARACTERS: pieces of soft as Hubble, Pocket film, Josh...

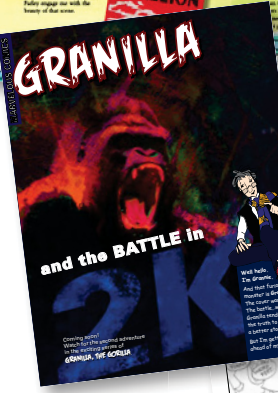
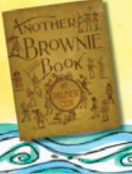
PROBLEM: I am a character who has been disconnected with the idea of being invisible. I am a character who has been disconnected with the idea of being invisible. I am a character who has been disconnected with the idea of being invisible.

creative process

It's not just the book that I read, it's the way I read it. It's the way I read it. It's the way I read it.

STEPHEN KING

DUMA KEY



Part 2: Introduction

Throughout graduate school I have made use of my creative sketching and visualization skills as a graphic designer and illustrator. In a children's literature class, as I created a visual response for a project, I discovered a memory of my first childhood books, ones filled with pictures and facts, a visual how and why. In a literacy class, as I sketched out a presentation, I discovered my need to draw as part of my problem solving process and how it aided me to develop new ideas. In an independent study on graphic novels I discovered the power of memoir, how the multi-strand braiding of visual and verbal can communicate a powerful message. In a qualitative research class, I explored the use of fantasy characters to enable problem solve, and realized how images and image-making can be part of legitimate research practices. As I sketched notes for classes, readings, and a conference, I always found understanding.

I sketch daily within my professional practice, intuitively—never thinking about why I sketch, what it provides me, or how it assists my thinking and problem solving. I just do it. It is vital to my successful creative

problem solving process. I also know that sketching is vital to my learning process and if I did not sketch I would be less of a student.

With this thesis I explore my personal sketching practices and find the answers to why I sketch, what it provides me, and how it assists my thinking and problem solving. My belief is that I am not an anomaly and that what I can learn about my personal process is similar to and relevant for other students (and teachers). I see this as an initial step—the need to understand self—before I can look at other's methods and practices. I cannot promote the use of sketching unless I first understand how and why it is relevant to me.



Background of Researcher

Nova Scotia College of Art and Design

In 1973 I entered the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), at a time when it was an internationally-influential art institution on the cutting-edge of the conceptual art world. The majority of NSCAD's student population were "mature students" studying Fine Arts. In contrast, I entered NSCAD directly from my life-long home town high-school after an elementary education heavily saturated with sciences and math with no art education. I arrived at NSCAD because I wanted to find a creative profession where I could make use of my capabilities as a problem-solver. I had a clear vision of not wanting a career as a form-filler and so took a non-traditional path in hopes of finding a non-traditional profession.

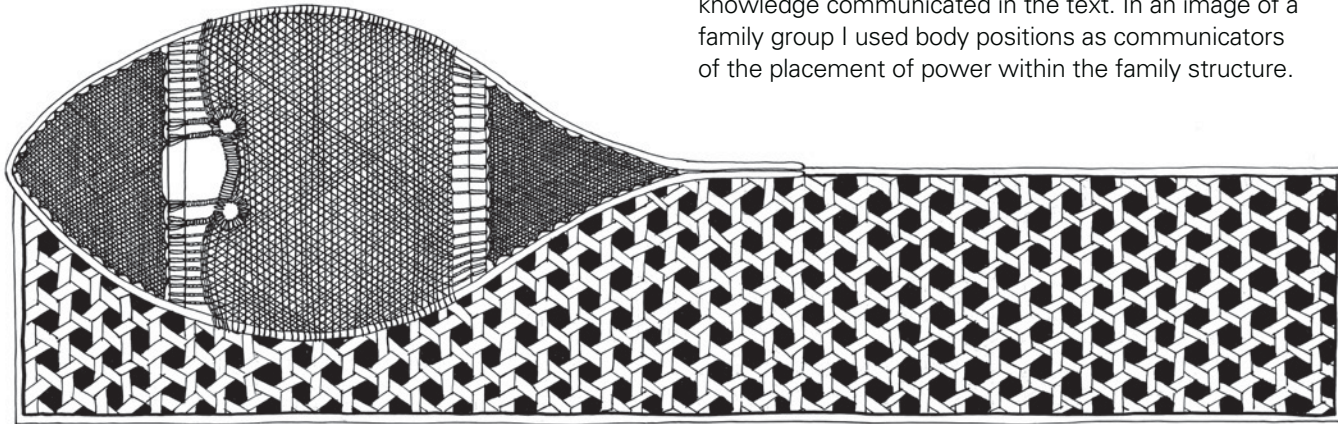
The program I registered in—Bachelor of Design in Visual Communication—reflected NSCAD's cutting-edge nature, as similar programs at that time were called commercial art or graphic design and were offered in one-year community college programs. NSCAD was the only degree-granting institution for Visual Communication in North America at that time. As the program name suggested, the emphasis was on communication—legibility, readability, and message content.

Even though the NSCAD faculty taught courses on design process and spoke intelligently on semiotics the teaching process emphasized practice. No papers were ever written and few reading lists were ever offered; instead the students discussed the concepts being taught and placed them directly into their project work. Students showed their understanding by activating it within the work to be done. I was taught and believed in praxis as the primary, if not only, singular process for learning. It was this practice that also initiated my belief that knowledge can be created, shifted, and grown within an active creative image-making process.

Nova Scotia Museum

On entering the professional world, I gravitated towards jobs and projects that focused on communicating information. A short employment in an ad agency confirmed my distaste for marketing which lacked an interest in communicating information and instead emphasized rhetoric and persuasion. On leaving the agency world I was employed by the Nova Scotia Museum (NSM) where I found a community of knowledge workers with goals directed towards information. I felt a connection to this museum community.

During my time at the NSM I had an opportunity to illustrate a children's book on the M'ikmaq. This project initiated my work as an illustrator as well as my belief in the power of the image as a communication medium. I saw images as having both an aesthetic power and efferent one (Rosenblatt, 2005) in communicating meaning. In the images that I created for this book I included, in the background, detailed aspects of the foreground image. For example, in an illustration of a M'ikmaq snowshoe, the background included the knotting detail of the sinew, thereby adding to the knowledge communicated in the text. In an image of a family group I used body positions as communicators of the placement of power within the family structure.



During this project I developed the philosophical view of illustration as a powerful communicator and an integral part of the process of creating “book”—a role that could add content.

I carried this philosophy with me through the next thirty years of my professional career dedicating my work to solving my client’s communication problems through both my graphic design work and my illustration. My most fulfilling work was illustrating children’s books but it was also here that I felt a lack of my own creativity. This seems illogical but within the process of illustrating a children’s book one is required to create a visual voice that aligns with the verbal voice provided by the author, often placing aside personal opinions and approaches. Sometimes the task becomes a technical job restrained by criteria, opinions, time, and money thereby becoming more of a problem solving balancing act than creative expression.

After years of doing these projects I began to consider my own personal voice and what might happen if I created a narrative using my own voice for both the verbal and visual. I attempted and failed... many times. The questions that I could easily answer for my clients I could

not answer for myself—what is this story about, who is your audience, and what visual tone do you wish to take? Initially the problem seemed to be one of decision making. I had no perimeters to work within, the options were wide open and could be determined by me alone. The questions then shifted to what do I believe in, what is important enough to me to “voice”? I could not answer these questions as I had always previously evaluated them dependent on my client’s needs and wants. Considering my own needs and wants within this process had become secondary and in these demanding, fast-paced times there is no room or time for the secondary.

Voice is important in the creation of a children’s books. I found that during the process of creating my clients’ voices I had lost my own. The desire to re-find my personal voice and define what was important to me was the reason I returned to school as a graduate student.

Mount Saint Vincent University

My choice of study—literacy education—was determined by my interest in visual literacy, combined with my vision of myself as “teacher.” I see my role as teacher playing out on the page of a book, the surface of a poster, or between the folds of a brochure. My “students” are the readers of the materials that I design and illustrate.

On entering graduate school at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) I encountered much that was unfamiliar but some concepts held familiar meaning—multimodal and multi-literacies. The idea of literacy being multi-modal and not just logocentric was not new to me. I had spent thirty years developing visual communications and knew well the power of the image. Even though there was discussion around these subjects none of the students in my graduate classes used visual forms in their projects, responses, or research unless requested to do so and a majority of the conversations and readings discussed literacy in purely verbal terms.

What I also noted, in retrospect, was that while my peers in my first year literacy classes were struggling to create authentic activities for their own students in their own classrooms they struggled with making learning authentic for themselves. Often they could not understand the relevance of material or how it could shift

their teaching methods, or solve their teaching problems. One classmate stated to me that she had learned nothing relevant to take back into her teaching practice, nothing that was useful. In contrast, my mind exploded with questions and I was constantly attempting to place what I learned onto my world. I searched for similarities, differences, or parallels and questioned knowledge with “what ifs” and “if so then.” I asked the questions: “Why were my peers and I so different? Was there something in my design training that helped me to “see” information in a different way?”

The answers to these questions were rooted back at NSCAD, where design methodology was central in my training to become a visual communicator. It was at NSCAD where I learned a methodology that emphasized the statement of problem, defining of criteria, and identification of audience. It was also here that students presented and critiqued each other’s work. We discussed the pros, cons, and possibilities of other directions. It encouraged multiple ways of defining the problem, multiple solutions, critiquing, brainstorming, and open evaluation. It encouraged and demanded a constant mode of question asking. Every question asked and answered altered the solution. Solutions, good solutions, required a long list of questions. The longer the list the better the solution. So I continue to ask, through classes at MSVU and through thesis.

What is sketching?

For design professionals (graphic, architectural, fashion, industrial etc.) sketching is an essential tool within the design process. It is within the process of sketching where we place our ideas and then develop and refine our designs. It is a recording of our thinking process and an interactive developmental process. It is also how we communicate to other participants in the design team. It is where we explore, learn, discover, and find new ideas. "Sketching, if effective, is a cyclical, dialectic process that results in the continuous emergence of new knowledge and reinterpretations of a potential design. It is often envisaged as 'visual thinking'" (Locher, 2010, p.139). "Sketching does not consist simply of representing on paper the images held in the designer's mind; it consists rather in a dialectic process" (Arnheim, 1993, p.15). "Freehand sketching is rapid and direct, and therefore cognitively economical, and provides instant feedback: the sketcher can enter into conversation with his or her materials" (Goldschmidt, 2003, p.81).

I am familiar with this conversation, I encounter this dialogue every time I place pen to paper. I have folders of rough sketches that I have refused to throw away and instead have filed them away in a closet. They are relevant and important because of the knowledge that I know I have gained through their development. I refuse to toss them out in the garbage.

"The ability to infer information from the self-generated sketch and to use it in order to enhance the sketcher's ability to deal with a task or problem at hand may be seen as an expansion of the problem space within which the individual is working" (Goldschmidt, 2003, p.79). This ability to infer is an intuitive one, appearing in young children as they talk about their own images and tell stories that develop as they draw. These abilities "are maintained through adulthood, and are exploited by expert sketchers in the process of designing" (Goldschmidt, 2003, p.74). If this is true then why would one not therefore also "exploit" this ability to infer as a basic learning skill in all learning circumstances not just within the training of creative professionals?

The first number of articles I read on using visuals in educational research discussed the "art-making" process and tended to look at the self-expression aspect and not the problem solving/thinking aspect. Once I found research specifically on sketching, those articles tended to be within the design domain and relegated to design research where sketching is an integral part of the design process.

One such body of research began in 2002 as a joint research project between the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Cambridge University, titled *Across Design*. The researchers' goal was to "describe

the experience of being a designer and doing design” (Blackwell, 2009, p.36). This project consisted of “a series of research workshops, each including several professional designers, initiated with the specific objective of making a comparison across design disciplines. At each workshop, designers presented case study illustrations of their practice for discussion with designers from other disciplines” (Blackwell,2009, p.36).

The most striking finding over all six research workshops was the recognition by our witnesses of the commonality in their experience. This was not because they expected uniformity, having regarded design as a generic abstract endeavor. We observed appreciative surprise from designers realizing the degree to which the experience of other professionals, who they might not have considered as natural peers, did in fact extend across design. It was striking that all designers seemed to have no problem understanding their colleagues’ presentations. Terminology was rarely a problem, and clarified easily when questioned. Even if they were unfamiliar with the domains, and thus the terminology; the context disambiguated the details, and participants described subjective comprehension of each other’s major concerns. (Blackwell, 2009, pp.44-45)

Sketching was one of those commonalities.

The *Across Design* research team defined sketching as “a drawing on paper that depicts something in an informal way, where decisions are to some extent provisional and details approximate” (Eckert, 2004, p.2). The researchers extended this definition to include other mediums than “a drawing on paper” but for this discussion I will refer to sketching as a drawing on paper since that is my specific medium to “sketch”. They found that sketches fulfilled several roles in the design process: mental images and creativity, idea generation and recording, visualization of abstract properties, and communication to others. The ambiguity of the sketch played an important role as it allowed for reinterpretation by both others and self therefore acting as a catalyst to finding a creative solution and was a integral part of the process.

I believe that sketching is a tool for creative problem solving. If 55% (TIME, 2013) of the population thinks in visuals then therefore should not all levels of education teach and encourage sketching as a tool for creative problem solving?

What is creativity?

Csikszentmihalyi discusses three different characteristics that can be defined as creative: the brilliant person who “expresses unusual thoughts” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p.25), the personally creative person “whose perspectives are fresh, whose judgements are insightful, who make important discoveries that only they know about” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p.25), and the creative persons who “change our culture in some important aspect” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p.26). Csikszentmihalyi’s interest is primarily on the third phenomenon, the creative persons who “leave a trace in the cultural matrix” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p.27). Few of us will alter the culture within our societies but many of us can strive to become personally creative. I prefer Amabile’s definition of creative thinking which “refers to how people approach problems and solutions—their capacity to put existing ideas together in new combinations” (Amabile, 1996, p.79). To me creative thinking has not much to do with who knows about it but more about the ability to solve a problem without a structured problem-solving pattern to follow. Attempting to fix a broken hinged door with what is available uses creative thinking, as does designing a new form of jet engine that uses parts manufactured with 3D printing; the level of difficulty of the problem is just different but both require creative thinking skills. In this age of what I call the “template generation,” the

prolific use of templates for everything from creating a website, a presentation, formatting a book, to the profuse numbers of craft “kits” in “art” supply stores has assisted, I believe, in dumbing down our ability to creatively problem solve. The opportunity to Google an answer instantaneously has hindered the reaction to find a solution with what is at hand. This extends not just to technical tasks but also to social skills—as the solution to every relationship problem can be found on-line in a template website including a website of instructions of how to or not to deal with the problem, usually after you register on the site and pay a monthly fee. Thinking through a problem and using one’s own skill sets of problem solving and logic is becoming a secondary solution. Is this because there is an easy place to find an answer so we don’t go there, or is it because we are losing those skills of creative problem-solving because of lack of use and therefore lack of skills? I fear the latter.

I believe that I have gained skills, through my training as a graphic designer, that have increased my ability to creatively solve problems. Sketching and visualizing on paper is one of those skills. So I wonder why then was I not taught to use these skills in school? Why did I have to wait and learn them only once I entered an institution for “art” education?

What has creativity got to do with education?

“Constructivists’ approach to learning and teaching stress the role of knowledge creation as opposed to knowledge transmission” (Plucker, Beghetto, Dow, 2010, p.84). I approach my personal learning in this way. I believe that the process of taking information in, transforming it into a personal view, and looking at it anew is an educational process. It is analogous to the design process and sketching—visualizing a concept, reworking it until it fits with your personal understanding, and in that process authenticating it for yourself. Within the sketching process one can also discover new ideas, new knowledge, and new ways of seeing. I know this is true because I use this everyday and it has become vital to my graduate studies. I believe that if sketching is of such great value to the design profession then it could be of value to the educational profession. If one believes that education’s role is to create knowledge then education’s goals are not that dissimilar from those of design.

Elliot Eisner’s comments echo my own beliefs about visualizing as more a cognitive process than an aesthetic one; however he talks of “art” and I of “design”.

It is that the arts are cognitive activities, guided by human intelligence, that make unique forms of meaning possible. (Eisner, 2005, p.76)

The arts teach students to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one’s choices and to revise and then to make other choices. (Eisner, 2004, p.5)

In this 21st century, as it moves through and past Post-modernism, the concept of following a linear path in a consistent manner to an end product has become the task of the computer. What is needed from humans are innovative ideas to solve our 21st century problems. We need to move to the place where technology can’t go without us. We need to grab hold of our humanity and use its power of diversity, curiosity, and creativity. We need to teach, learn, and encourage these aspects of our humanity within the educational system.

The arts provide the kind of ideal that I believe American education needs now more than ever. I say now more than ever because our lives increasingly require the ability to deal with conflicting messages, to make judgements in the absence of rule, to cope with ambiguity, and to frame imaginative solutions to the problems we face. (Eisner, 2004, p.9)

Mirroring the educational demand for creativity and innovation is the business sector's demands for a creative workforce to develop innovative ideas. (Amabile, 1998; Gardner, 2007; Gray, Brown, Macanufo, 2010; Roam, 2011; Robinson, 2001; Pink, 2006).

Employers say they want people who can think creatively, who can innovate, who can communicate well, work in teams and are adaptable. They complain that many graduates have few of these qualities. It's hardly surprising. Conventional academic programs are not designed to develop them and often value the opposite approach: encouraging solo research rather than collaboration, preferring data to be presented in a accepted format, measuring success according to academic merit. (Robinson, 2011, p. 69)

In my experience, education, business and the cultural sector face many common challenges. Some are compounded by the fact that they have so little contact with each other. ...I believe that the future lies in closer coordination between them. (Robinson, 2001, p.15)

Elliot Eisner's and Sir Ken Robinson's voices rang in my ear throughout my research. Robinson's almost apocalyptic vision of the current education system terrified me but at the same pushed me to believe that there was a better way to teach and learn and that the answer included fostering creativity. My view is less the incorporation of teaching art but more teaching and learning through art. I see the process of creating as a means to assist learning and to make it authentic to the learner. My experiences in my personal journey through education have proven it to me.

Within creative professions sketching is used to ignite and develop ideas; it is a vital component of almost all of the creative practices. Sketching is a tool for creative thinking.

Sketching is an integral strategy within the creative process, should one not then actively encourage and teach sketching as an educational tool that would generate and breed creativity?

Methodology

I used a **design methodology**. It follows a path similar to Csikszentmihalyi's creative process—immersion, incubation, insight, evaluation, elaboration. It is defined in different ways with different words by different people but follows the path of definition, ingestion, percolation, ideation, evaluation, and eventually, end result.

My background as a designer influenced my decision to use a **design methodology**. Because of several conversations about my choice of methodology I would like to clarify the design methodology paradigm.

The Academy is sometimes thought of as having two pillars: the sciences where one studies the natural world and the arts where one studies human experience. It has been suggested that there is a third pillar appearing—design— where one studies the artificial world (Archer, B. 1995; Cross, 2001). Within the design field of study, imagination and practicality are the ways of knowing, modeling and synthesis are the ways to find out.

Design research covers three areas :

Epistemology - the study of designerly ways of knowing

Praxiology - the study of the process of design

Phenomenology - the study of form and configuration of artifacts

I place my research within the epistemology and praxiology frames.

Design research follows a non-linear path with the majority of time spent within a state of uncertainty. Similar to the dialectic process of sketching, design is also a question / answer process that can lead one forward but often forces one to return to a previous step in the process. This can happen when new questions arise and there is a need to re-define the problem. The process is driven by the moves and argument and defining the problem is the most important aspect of the process. The researcher is led by the process and the questions that arise. The researcher cannot control the end product if they hope to “find” a final stopping place.

My research has similarities to **heuristic phenomenology** “with the identification of a question that is deeply felt, a question that has an emotional effect on the researcher and cannot be ignored. Finding the right question is potentially more important than finding the right answer” (Kenny, 2012, p.7). I began with the question of how to find my creative self, as I believed I had lost that self. It led me on a deeply personal path of discovery, eventually to the understanding of the importance of visualizing and sketching to my thinking and as my personal creative voice.

This project extended over several years and moved through many stages. As each new question arrived a new approach was needed as demanded by the question. My thesis grew and developed in an organic manner from these years of exploration but I needed to define the beginning of my thesis research, so therefore I did so with my decision to explore my sketching process.

This research was also “aimed at discovery through **self-inquiry and dialogue**” (Moustakas, 1994, p.1) which again is heuristic phenomenology. My self-inquiry and dialogue took place within the creation of graphic narratives. The dialectic process of sketching while creating these graphic narratives provided me with a place for self-inquiry and self-dialogue. Sketching is also a design method.

My decision to create graphic narratives came from my interest in autobiographical graphic novels. The creative graphic narrative medium, with its current controversial profile within the academy, provides a medium that combines the power of both verbal and visual. The word/picture interdependent combination “where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone” (McCloud, 1993, p.155) is similar to “counterpointing picturebooks” (Nikolajeva, 2006, p.17) where text and image carry “mutually dependent narratives” (Nikolajeva, 2006, p.12). My familiarity and passion with picturebooks and graphic narratives

influenced my decision to use the graphic narrative as a medium for my memoir and self reflection.

...autobiographical comics—a huge and ever growing genre of comics—address the... key questions of the memoir, and they do so in ways that are wholly unique to their medium. Like their prose counterparts, comic memoirs take a variety of shapes and forms, but comics are capable of demonstrating a broader and more flexible range of first-person narration than is possible in prose. In addition, while many prose memoirists address the complex nature of identity and the self, comic book memoirists are able to represent such complexity in ways that cannot be captured in words alone. (Versaci, 2007, p.36)

And, since I am examining the power of sketching and image-making then it follows that I should also communicate this message in a visual form. Sketching, particularly my personal sketching, incorporates both image and word, so making use of a verbal visual medium is most appropriate.

It has been suggested that I should name this methodology that I have used. It has also been suggested that **auto-graphic-al narrative** might be a good name. I must concur particularly after knowing the influences that the both graphic medium and narrative has had on my findings.

Process and Methods

My initial proposal for thesis was a graphic narrative inquiry into my personal educational experience through my MA Ed. The primary goal being to document my search for creative self, the secondary goal was to look at how my visualization process aided that search. I planned to do this by examining and documenting my sketching process as I created a number of short graphic narratives. Each narrative would be in two parts, the first part being the graphic narrative, and the second part being a documentation of the sketching process while creating the narrative. The documentation would not discuss the technological aspects but instead the intellectual process of asking and answering questions as one produces a visualization of lived experience.

Believing what I believed—that creating image/word visuals was an important part of my thinking process and not merely a technical process—I knew that once I began to develop these stories as graphic narratives the outcome of this thesis would ultimately shift. Exploring, learning, discovering, and finding new directions are the result of the sketching process. It did shift.

From the beginning I was having a problem with separating the narrative memoir of finding creative self from the sketching to learn process that I was

researching. The narrative of finding creative self became overly dominant and overshadowed the message of my sketching process. The story of my search for creative self was important to me but more important was the role of sketching and image-making in that search. Images were my voice and without that voice I was silent. What was vital to me, was to communicate the importance of fostering and accepting visualization as a medium for communication and personal voice. To do that I needed to pull away from the story of creative self and place the story of image-making as the primary narrative therefore making the finding of creative self a secondary issue. To accomplish this I shifted the narrative from my story to the story of my images. With this shift there was less of a conflict between the narrative and the process being researched as now the the process being researched was also the narrative. This was substantial in that it shifted the “search for creative self” aspect out of the foreground and into the background.

My first step with this new approach was to **define each memorable image** that I felt was significant during my graduate studies so as to find the “story” images. I wanted images that had significantly shifted my thinking during graduate school. I came up with thirteen individual images. What was significant was that only three of these could be even remotely considered final finished images; the majority of them were sketches.

As I lay the images before me I asked the question “what was the importance of each image?”. They fell into five categories: realization of the problem of loss of creative self, realization of need to sketch to think, the need to rediscover self, realization that sketching was an aid for memory, and realization that I use sketching for problem solving. As I developed the stories they redefined themselves in this way:

- 1 sketching as an expansion of the problem space
- 2 sketching as a place for visual communication
- 3 sketching as an aid for self reflection
- 4 sketching for memory and motivation
- 5 sketching as a place to make the familiar strange

At this point I began to develop each story. Throughout the story creating process I documented my sketches in my journal and file folders. The dialectic process of asking and answering questions was clearly visible in these sketches. Also while going through the process of creating a narrative for each story, I once again re-confronted and reflected on the process of creating the original image. The need to clearly say what I wanted to say forced me into the position of evaluating my message time and time again with each sketch. This was not a process of creating pretty pictures; it was very clearly a process of creative problem solving.

Insights

In summary my findings that are directly related to my process of sketching are:

- Sketching supports the development of my creative ideas. It does this through its dialectic process, as I ask and answer questions, during the evolution of an image.
- Sketching taps into my intuitive knowledge by means of the ambiguity of the sketch and the inferring that follows reflection.
- Sketching is my personal preferred means of communication with myself and the first stage of my preferred means of communication with others. I need it to communicate my thinking and the ideas that arise but most importantly, I need to sketch to think.
- Asking the question “what does this look like?” and then sketching forces me to analyze a situation or concept that is not perceivable so as to make decisions about metaphors I can use within the visual.
- Sketching is a reflective process and long-term use of sketching supports reflection in other places by realizing the importance of stopping to look back and re-interpret.
- Sketching is a mnemonic device.
- Sketching is a self-creative process that authenticates my personal learning.

BUT...

I am sitting here surrounded by notes, printouts, sketches, and books and asking myself the question, what did I learn from all of this? did I answer the questions that needed answering? why do I sketch? what does it provides me? and how does it assist my creative thinking and problem solving? Yes, I have these answers but on reflecting once again on what is before me, I see that it is not the sketching alone that I have been doing.

I have talked specifically about sketching in this paper but these stories are more than sketches, they are **graphic narratives**. I have used sketching to build the stories but once again I have left them mostly invisible to the reader who sees only the end-product of those sketches. But that is not problematic to me any more since what I have learned through the sketching process while building these stories is now communicated within the stories themselves. In the sketching process, as I developed the stories, I was provided a place to reflect on my image-making. But these stories are not just about my images, they are also a memoir of my life during graduate school. And “...narrative cannot be regarded as separate from real life; rather (it) must be understood as the revisiting of life experiences that are considered influential by the

author” (Lyle, 2009, p.296). So in fact I must include the **narrative** aspect of this research as an additional factor to the positive influences of my sketching process.

As I moved through this research I also became aware that the positive influences of my sketching process resulted not just from the act of sketching but also from my approach to the sketching process which is heavily reliant on the **communication** of a message and reflects my background as a visual communicator. My stories and images are there to communicate and therefore it is vital that I understand the message being communicated. I use sketching as a means to clarify a message. It is an inquiry tool that assists in finding a solution to a communication problem. Asking and answering questions is vital to the process. This dialectic approach to sketching is only reached if I approach my sketching with the goal of finding an answer. I must be open-minded and willing to reflect and shift to the places that the sketch takes me and “...when thinking reflectively about a problem, the learner should reframe the situation again and again, try various interpretations, and modify the resulting decision as needed” (Schon, 1983, p.63). I must be willing to enter the conversation and respond to the questions that arise and the paths that it follows. I must be willing to shift and change and go to unexpected places. This is part of the

design methodology and I approach my sketching as a designer. My training and day-to-day professional work, as a designer, has taught me the need for this open responsive attitude as I search for the yet unknown solution to the problem before me. I take that approach to my learning. It is critical thinking.

Previously I defined myself as a teacher because of my work in designing educational materials BUT I also believe in the reverse—that good teachers in the classroom need to be designers. Teachers “...must be ready to invent new methods and must endeavour to develop in (themselves) the ability of discovering them” (Schon, 1983, p.66). “As a teacher of learners of any age, it is important to help students develop the ability to reflect and think critically in order to ultimately help them make decisions independently about their own learning” (Maynard, 2012, p.8). Inventing new methods and making independent decisions demands a **creative approach** to learning.

We need to create learning. We need to put aside the templates and begin the job of learning how to think. Within the act of creating, whether it be a graphic narrative, a sculpture, a song, or a play, one learns to re-voice a message. Placing a message into another medium forces us to closely reflect and consider the message.

It is a translation process and to translate we need understanding.

The arts teach students to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one's choices and to revise and then to make other choices.... The arts provide the kind of ideal that I believe American education needs now more than ever... because our lives increasingly require the ability to deal with conflicting messages, to make judgements in the absence of rule, to cope with ambiguity, and to frame imaginative solutions to the problems we face. (Eisner, 2004, p.5)

Years ago at an elementary school parent teacher night, the art teacher (yes, we had them in those days!) got up and spoke. She said “art is not supposed to be fun.” I remember this statement even today, over 25 years later because I remember my emotional reaction—I was stunned and angry. Being non-confrontational, I let it go without speaking up. I know what she was attempting to say—that ‘art’ was a subject worth studying and not simply a leisure time doodling experience—but today I would not allow this statement to go without comment.

Fun is intrinsic motivation which is required for creativity which is required for innovation which is extremely highly regarded in this 21st century. If one hopes to educate people so as to develop innovative ideas for the future one must therefore find ways to assist the learner to have fun while learning. We should never underestimate fun in the educational process.

“..creative activity can indirectly lead to an increase in domain-relevant learning by leading to an increase in intrinsic task motivation” (Amabile, 1996, location 2824). “Moreover, virtually all theorists concerned with intrinsic motivation have described the phenomenological state as marked by both deep involvement and playfulness” (Amabile, 1996, location 2925).

...because schools conceive their task to be to pass on information rather than to foster the love of learning, children tend to forego the serious pursuit of formal education. ...the central purpose of education policy should be to understand better the dynamics of happiness and to find ways to increase its occurrence in the lives of the next generations. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1995, pp.113-114)

Sketching and image-making is a natural intuitive activity that we often participate in as children. As time passes we tend to leave it behind because of its identification as a childhood activity that is frivolous and time-wasting. We also leave it behind because it becomes a prelude to art-making which is closely labelled as a skill, talent, and gift. But if used in the right way, with the right attitude, sketching and image-making can teach a critical thinking process in a way that increases motivation and understanding. It is my preferred tool for learning.

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