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## Portraiture as Pedagogy: Learning Research through the Exploration of Context and Methodology

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### Abstract

In this reflective essay, five members of a research team involving graduate students and a faculty member offer individual “studies” of specific moments in the field in which lessons about methodology, the research context, and the researcher herself/himself crystallized. The article highlights the pedagogical possibilities of portraiture for introducing graduate students to qualitative research methodology. Each “study” illuminates how different kinds of boundaries are negotiated: whether it is the boundaries of access to a research site; the boundaries of personal or professional recognition; the boundaries of the body and physical space; the boundaries of racial identification; or the boundaries of the interior and exterior

selves. These are not lessons that can be taught/learned within the constraints of a classroom, whether a lecture hall or the most progressive seminar. It is in the actual experience of negotiating these boundaries that the intricacies of the research process manifest, and in the process, the inquiry itself grows and moves through the necessary explorations that are the heart of qualitative research.

### **Introduction**

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education towers over the surrounding buildings on the edge of the University of Toronto. A local architectural landmark, the windowless walls of the first four floors seem foreboding. At street level, the glass walls of the library provide a reprieve from the clamor of the city streets outside, offering a glimpse into the serene pockets of focused study inside. Entering the ivory-white building, the lobby feels spacious. Students and faculty circulate through a snack stand searching for caffeine or the necessary sugar kick to survive their busy day. Some stop to meet with colleagues, grabbing a seat on one of the vinyl benches along the walls. Conversations about shared coursework and approaching deadlines drown out the low grumble of the subway, which can be felt vibrating below the floor. A group of energetic pre-school children linked hand-in-hand in a makeshift human-chain clumsily maneuver their way through the hectic lobby, herded by three attentive teachers. Engrossed in their banter, they bustle through the space distracting the onlookers. On the twelve floors above the lobby, the members of the largest faculty of education in Canada dedicate their time to courses, research projects, and other initiatives, in their collective pursuit to transform educational practice locally and globally.

Inside a seminar room on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, the members of the *Urban Arts High Schools (UAHS)* research team gather to discuss research methodology, focusing on key issues related to qualitative research in general and the methodology of portraiture in particular. The research team is composed of three doctoral and two masters students enrolled in three different graduate programs and led by a faculty member who is the Principal Investigator. During the initial meetings, the members of the research team introduce themselves, negotiating the process of establishing collegial relationships, figuring out how to represent themselves in front of each other, and anticipating the upcoming fieldwork.

In addition to engaging methodological texts, the team is discussing readings on data collection, focusing on participant observation and narrative interviews. In preparation for conducting research at five public high schools with specialized arts programs in the local school board, the team works to develop practical skills for data collection, such as: writing fieldnotes, developing interview protocols, introducing the project to participants, and conducting narrative interviews. With the ultimate goal of writing individual portraits of each

school, the team also works on developing creative writing skills by reading examples of portraits about other schools (e.g., Davis, 2001; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983).

The premise of putting together a team of graduate students to do research is that an apprentice model is an effective way to introduce students to methodology and give them hands on experience in conducting research (Mullen, 2000). Involvement as part of a team in an ongoing research project opens up opportunities for students to explore “how to overcome obstacles and solve problems encountered during the process of conducting research and to justify their choices using the principles that underlie empirical research methodology” (Webb, Walker, & Bollis, 2004, p. 422). In this article, five members of the UAHS project share their experiences as members of this research team, focusing on lessons we learned about both methodology and the specific context of our research. We highlight three dimensions that are at the heart of the methodological challenges of qualitative research: building relationships, negotiating boundaries, and constructing representations. We share our experiences through brief “studies” in which we portray our encounter with particular methodological quandaries through specific moments that also illustrate something about the context of our research. We begin by introducing the research context and our choice of portraiture as a research methodology.

### **Research Context: Portraiture and the Urban Arts High Schools Project**

The broad purpose of the UAHS project is to inquire into the social and cultural dynamics that shape specialized arts programs as educational communities that are defined by the centrality of the arts (Davis, 2001). Public secondary schools focusing on the arts have proliferated in the last three decades in Canada and the United States, primarily in urban areas (Wilson, 2000, 2001). Yet, research on these programs has been sparse, unsystematic, and has focused largely on advocacy (Caillier, 2007).<sup>1</sup> Without understanding what actually happens in public arts high schools, debates about their purpose and role as publicly funded institutions has been largely speculative, based mostly on stereotypes and assumptions, and lacking depth and complexity (Clark & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2004). This lack of research presents a unique opportunity for exploratory work (Stebbins, 2001). Indeed, because so little systematic research has been done on urban arts high schools, our work had no choice but to begin with exploration in order to generate research questions that could shape future research.

The initial exploratory phase of the project sought to document the teaching and learning occurring in five public high schools with specialized arts programs within a large urban region in southern Ontario. We were particularly interested in exploring how students, teachers, and administrators described their experiences within these programs. Our aim was to write a set of research portraits of each program that would serve two main goals: (1) to identify key themes and areas for future research; and (2) to inform ongoing discussions about

the arts in education within and beyond the local schools (see Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010).<sup>2</sup> A third goal, which is the focus of this article, was to offer graduate students an opportunity to learn about qualitative research through direct experience in the context of a research team.

The methodology of portraiture, first articulated by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) and later developed with Jessica Hoffman Davis (2003; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), is fundamentally premised on an inductive rather than deductive orientation to research. The purpose of portraiture is not to test previously established theories or hypotheses. Rather, like most qualitative methodologies, the purpose is to explore participants' experiences and the complexities of how meanings are produced within a particular context. Furthermore, portraiture is oriented toward an exploration of "goodness" as defined by participants, instead of diagnosing or imposing pathologies as defined by the researcher. For the portraitist, "goodness" does not imply simply a search for what is positive or coherent about a research subject. On the contrary, rather than interpret competing or contradicting meanings and experiences as problems to be resolved, the portraitist takes such tensions and complexities as constitutive of what makes a particular research context "good" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The impulse behind this notion of goodness that embraces complexity and contradiction is echoed in more recent calls for what Eve Tuck calls "desire-based" (as opposed to "damage-based") educational research. For Tuck, "desire-based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (p. 416). Rather than looking for what is wrong with schools and communities, "desire-based" methodologies like portraiture focus on local meanings and seek "goodness," in Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1983) words, through an understanding of:

the myriad ways in which goodness gets expressed in various settings; that admits imperfection as an inevitable ingredient of goodness and refers instead to the inhabitants' handling of perceived weaknesses; that looks backward and forward to institutional change and the staged quality of goodness; that reveals goodness as a holistic concept, a complex mixture of variables whose expression can only be recognized through a detailed narrative of institutional and interpersonal processes. (p. 25)

This focus makes portraiture particularly useful as an exploratory methodology, satisfying our first research goal.

For Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), portraiture is also a distinct type of qualitative research "in its focus on the convergence of narrative and analysis, in its goal of speaking to

broader audiences beyond the academy, ... [and] in its explicit recognition of the use of self as the primary research instrument” (p. 14). Recognizing that descriptions are always interpretive, the portraitist uses creative writing to carefully craft a narrative that integrates her analysis of the data while also leaving the text open for interpretation.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, while portraiture developed independently as a methodology, it shares much in common with approaches to research associated with the banner of “arts-based educational research,” or ABER. Like ABER, portraiture is, in part, “defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or *design elements* that infuse the inquiry process and the research ‘text’” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 95, italics in original). However, the association of portraiture with “artistic activity,” to echo Barone and Eisner, is primarily allegorical and to some extent secondary to its purpose as an approach to social science research. Nonetheless, portraiture – like ABER – also seeks “to make vivid the subtle but significant so that awareness of the educational world that the research addresses is increased” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 102). In this sense, portraits are also particularly useful for our second goal of engaging in discussions about the arts in education with a broad audience (see also Hackman, 2002).

Following the aim of this article, it is the focus on the self as the instrument of research that points to the pedagogical potential of portraiture as a way to introduce the theory and methods of qualitative research in graduate education, particularly in the context of a research team. Portraiture underscores the relational and phenomenological aspects of research that are usually ignored in deductive or confirmatory research, opening up opportunities for exploring the intricacies of becoming a researcher through firsthand experience. For example, portraiture highlights the researcher’s role in constructing a vivid representation of the context and the participants by making herself visible and explicit as the instrument of research. “The identity, character, and history of the researcher, are critical to the manner of listening, selecting, interpreting, and composing the story” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 13). This requires the portraitist to explore the fluidity that shapes her positionality and to face difficult questions about reflexivity and representation (Dixson, Chapman, & Hill, 2005). These questions are particularly important as portraiture invokes ideals of authenticity that have been widely challenged within qualitative research (e.g. English, 2000; Lather, 1991, 2007; Winter, 2002).

In the next three sections, we offer individual “studies” in which each of us explores methodological dilemmas through detailed descriptions of particular moments in the field. The concept of a “study” is inspired on the pedagogical practices of several arts disciplines. In visual art, a “study” provides an opportunity to develop technical skills as well as to sketch ideas that might become part of a larger project. “Studies” serve a similar purpose in music composition, while in musical performance, “studies” (a.k.a. *études*) are usually short pieces that focus on particular technical challenges. In drama, a “study” provides an opportunity to

explore a particular character or scene within a play, or to consider different resolutions to a particular dramatic situation. Each of the short “studies” that follow represents our attempt—individual and collective—to refine our portraiture writing skills while focusing on specific lessons we learned about both the research process and about the particular context we were studying. These studies are not intended as complete portraits in and of themselves. Rather, these short reflections are intended to share a pedagogical encounter that occurred through the practice of doing portraiture.

Portraiture is certainly not the only methodology that opens up pedagogical opportunities through hands on experience. However, because it draws on the analytic character of description, it invites readers into the interpretive process, opening up opportunities for drawing multiple insights from a specific account (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Accordingly, the studies that follow are intended to open rather than foreclose conversations about methodological puzzles. Our intention here is not to contribute to methodological debates about the issues raised in these “studies.” Rather, we hope to illustrate how these debates come to life in the process of doing research, how the process helps us to learn about them, and like ABER, “to entertain questions about them that might have otherwise been left unasked” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 96). Thus, we invite readers—experienced and novice researchers alike—to engage them in this dialogic spirit.

### **Building Relationships**

#### *Kate’s study: First encounter*

Diane Green entered the cramped office with two long strides. Introducing herself as the Arts Curriculum leader, she reached across the circular table to where Rubén (Principal Investigator) and I were seated, barely bending forward as she grasped my hand in a firm handshake. She seemed to tower over us, and I felt intimidated, turning my gaze downward toward the blank page of the green notebook that I had selected for this first trip to Martelli Secondary School. Mrs. Green took a seat beside the vice principal, Stuart Fielding, a man of small stature whose thick-framed glasses sat atop his thin nose. Mr. Fielding had carefully arranged a collection of items at his place at the table: a yellow pad of paper, a blue pen, a stack of business cards, and a walky-talky, the orange tip of its antenna pointed upward toward the ceiling.

The four of us settled into our swivel chairs, and Mr. Fielding invited us to speak about the project. Rubén launched into an enthusiastic description of the research we would be doing at Martelli in the ensuing three months, reiterating information that had been provided in advance through a letter to the school principal.<sup>4</sup> As he spoke, Mr. Fielding took notes; I

glanced at his yellow pad as he wrote “2 researchers” in careful penmanship. Mrs. Green, on the other hand, did not write. She leaned back in her chair, her chin low, and arms crossed. After barely three minutes, she interjected, stopping Rubén in mid-sentence in order to ask a question: *Why* were we doing this study? The skepticism I heard in her voice caught me off guard because the school had already agreed to participate and I hadn't anticipated this reaction. Having long before obtained ethical approval from both the university and school board, and gained the support of the school principal, we now faced an additional challenge: to establish the *contextual* relevance of our research. Mrs. Green seemed to be understandably concerned about the well being of her staff and students, and she was not about to let us waltz into Martelli without a justification that was meaningful to her. The formal presentation of our research project – the one that we had crafted for approval by ethical review boards and funding bodies – suddenly appeared irrelevant within the research context.

While ethics are of paramount concern to all research practice, the requirements of the formal ethical review process can seem to challenge the very notion of exploratory work (Halse & Honey, 2007). For example, the requirement that researchers provide a set of hypotheses prior to fieldwork assumes a deductive model of inquiry, where a study is defined by its relationship to an established literature, and is able to offer a series of predicted “findings” (Tolich & Fitzgerald, 2006). In contrast, exploratory studies assume an emergent research problem that is contextually grounded (Mason, 2002). In our early sessions as a research team, we considered these competing paradigms and discussed critiques of the ethics review process as a tool to streamline proposals within a normative model of deductive research (Van den Hoonaard, 2001). There is no doubt that researchers must take responsibility for the ethical implications of their work. What this exchange highlights, however, is that the very process of gaining formal institutional access shapes how the project is represented (Tilley & Gormley, 2007). During our first meeting with the school administrators, the language that we used to communicate our research interrupted our ability to communicate with them. This required us to reconfigure how we represented the research in order to negotiate access and build trust within the research site.

What we also learned through this particular encounter is that the process of negotiating language can reveal a great deal about how the research site is understood by those within it. After Mrs. Green challenged Rubén to justify the grounds of our study, she then stated that of course arts education is essential for the development of well-rounded individuals, and exclaimed that this has been common knowledge “since the Ancient Greeks!” In that moment, the research project that had seemed perfectly clear to me on paper suddenly appeared meaningless, as I struggled to re-contextualize the study in relation to Mrs. Green’s perspective as a committed arts educator. If the value of an arts education was indisputable, then our study seemed rather redundant. This logic was further supported by a particular view

of the purposes of educational research. Mrs. Green appeared to see little value in our study because she was confident that an arts education contributes to the development of well-rounded students. That is, she was confident of its impact. Through this lens, educational research is designed to measure effects, and our interests in processes, experiences, and relationships were not interpretable within this frame (Caillier, 2007). Even though these are assumptions that our research seeks to unpack, it was crucial for us to be able to make sense of the study in these terms in order for it to be meaningful within the school and rewarding for participants.

As Rubén struggled to address her concerns, Mrs. Green insisted once again that she just did not see what possible benefit her school could derive from the research. She warned that few teachers would be willing to volunteer forty-five minutes of their scarce time for an interview if they did not see its value. Rubén nodded vigorously, and insisted that this element was very important to us. He described the method of portraiture, and shared his own experiences to illustrate its potential advantages to schools (Clark & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2004; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2001). It was then that Mrs. Green's body language seemed to begin to change. Her eyebrows rose slightly and her arms came uncrossed as she leaned forward to rest her elbows on the table. I wondered if Mrs. Green was beginning to warm to us. First, though, she had more questions about our source of funding and plans for the data. Rubén patiently explained each dimension of the project, while foregrounding the potential usefulness of the school portrait, and assured her that we would make every effort to be as unobtrusive as possible. After several tense minutes, Mrs. Green granted us her approval, and her formerly stern expression opened into a warm smile. She said it sounded like interesting research, but that she must always keep the best interests of her staff in mind. We agreed, and I felt myself relax again.

The process of negotiating access extends well beyond the 'first encounters' of the initial visit to the field. Mrs. Green had entered our first meeting determined to fulfil her responsibility toward the staff and students at her school. In fact, her questions helped us to reflect upon the meaning of research for participants, which is intertwined with, but irreducible to, our broader theoretical questions. Mrs. Green's questions also helped me to understand ethics as a lived process that is continually negotiated through interactions with participants, rather than simply an institutional mark of approval. When we had finally negotiated an understanding of our project that was meaningful in this context, Mrs. Green happily led us through the Martelli halls, sharing humorous anecdotes and suggesting key members of the school community with whom we should forge connections. Establishing relationships with those individuals, however, required us to negotiate different boundaries that illuminated different aspects of the research process as well as the context.



*Lydia's study: The intricacies of the interview space*

As I ascended the vacant stairwell, the stark walls echoed each of my footsteps and the cool temperature exacerbated the sterile atmosphere. Reaching the top floor of Cherryhill High School for the Arts my breathing became shallow in anticipation of conducting my first interview as a graduate student researcher on the Urban Arts High Schools Project. I stood outside the locked door of the designated classroom awaiting the arrival of teacher participant Francesca Mak. I hoped my nervousness would subside once she arrived and our interview commenced. Within a few minutes a young female approached me and called out my name. She appeared to be in her mid-to-late twenties. The translucent gold eye shadow that highlighted her brown eyes signalled a trendy fashion sense and complimented her youthful face. We shook hands, formally introduced ourselves, and exchanged pleasantries as she proceeded to unlock the door to her classroom. The empty room epitomized my experiences as a student and former public school teacher, with dusty chalkboards, rows of desks, and walls painted in the neutral tones of institutional spaces. Miss Mak drew back the curtains covering a row of windows along the back wall, and the glow of natural light streaming into the room interrupted my recollections and reminded me of the research task ahead.

Miss Mak and I sat at a table facing one another to begin the interview. Her initial demeanour seemed polite and friendly, but felt somewhat closed off. She seemed to hold back as she responded to my preliminary questions, offering short answers with minimal elaboration. Yet, I could not avoid thinking that there was much more to be revealed. Prior to each response, her eyes conveyed a depth of critical reflection, but I had the sense that her words represented only restricted expressions of an internal complexity that my questions could not yet reach. How would we build enough trust, given the minimal span of interview time, to establish the comfort she required to express her thoughts more fully? I wondered how the boundaries of the researcher-participant dynamic could be navigated to encourage the development of rapport and a sense of mutual trust (Britzman, 2000; Peshkin, 2001).

As the interview proceeded, Miss Mak began to recount her experiences as an undergraduate student of ancient history. Having myself completed undergraduate studies in the Classics and a graduate degree in Museum Studies, perhaps she noticed our mutual affection for history and the arts through my responsive eyes. We also shared an understanding of the challenge beginning teachers frequently encounter when searching for a teaching position. Miss Mak's vivid recollection of the foreboding stacks of resumes that all too often confront hopeful teachers as they venture out to schools in search of a position resonated with my former teacher training and prompted empathetic smiles. I suspect my facial expressions communicated a connection to her previous experiences, as she reacted to my subtle disclosures with the phrase, "Oh ya! You did that, too?" Her tone of voice was pleasant, as our awareness of shared backgrounds seemed to mark a significant turn in the interview

dynamic. From that point forward, she readily accessed professional and personal aspects of her life, divulged long-term goals, voiced opinions and confessions, and provided candid and insightful responses. Her use of colloquialisms, frank statements, humorous sarcasm, and laughter, suggested an increased level of comfort within the interview space.

In the context of the interview with Miss Mak, my identification as “teacher” seemed to legitimize my presence and to encourage a shift in Miss Mak’s focus away from my role as a “researcher.” This is not to say that a teacher identification is necessary to build a productive researcher-participant rapport within a school context. In this instance, however, the awareness of our common experience provided a point of entry, which facilitated the navigation of the invisible, yet always present and often restrictive boundaries of the participant-researcher dynamic (Mishler, 1986; Peskin, 2001).

Fine (1994) invites qualitative researchers to probe the “blurred boundaries” between self and other, for it is within these shifting “in between spaces” that identifications are perpetually constituted and realized. She suggests that research “work [that] seeks to understand how individuals carve out contradictory social identities that sculpt, harass and repel Others within and outside themselves” has the potential to illuminate the complexities of representation (p. 78). Furthermore, the ways in which both researchers and participants construct and enact contextually meaningful identifications points to the discursive systems and institutional structures that shape that process. For instance, the complicated ways in which “teacher” and “artist” identifications were mobilized throughout the research process in many ways mirrored the complexities inherent within the context of a specialized arts program (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2001; Menna, 2009).

Finding rapport through a teacher identification was initially surprising. Within the parallel collective space of the research team, the identification of teacher seemed to hold a tenuous secondary position in relationship to what appeared as the privileged status of the label “artist.” During research team discussions, artist identifications were enacted through the mobilization of various frames of legitimacy. From the prestige of pedigrees associated with formal arts training, to the recollection of childhood memories and various forays into music, drama, and visual arts, direct experiences with the arts were symbolic markers that served to legitimate contributions to the research project. When I reflect upon these encounters my own disassociation from the identification of artist within the collective space of the research team is apparent. This symbolic rebuking of an identification as artist seemed to represent a form of passive resistance to a seemingly imposed conformity stemming, on the one hand, from the fact that the arts were a central aspects of the research, and on the other, that portraiture itself mobilizes (and assumes) particular ideas about what it means to be an artist (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Dixson, 2005).

As Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) cautions, “the identity of the character, and history of the researcher are obviously critical to how he or she listens, selects, interprets, and composes a story” (p. 11; see also Chapman, 2005). My engagement with portraiture as a methodology continuously challenged me to balance my identification as a researcher against the range of experiences participants communicated through enactments of their own identifications, whether as teachers or as artists. Perhaps the negotiation of these fluid boundaries allowed Ms. Mak and I to establish a space in which she could voice her views on arts education, the role of the artist, and the nature of her professional practice within a specialized arts high school. The trust and connection established throughout this interview relationship altered my ability to access the space and culture of the school. In subsequent encounters with Miss Mak, she readily brokered introductions with colleagues, resulting in further interviews and classroom observations with teachers who had initially demonstrated reluctance to participating in the research project. Over time, my sharing in the collective stories of teachers and students at Cherryhill revealed tensions, complexities, and discourses about the arts, continually produced and re-produced within this particular specialized arts context.

The responsibility of representing these stories as I assumed the role of portraitist roused conflicting feelings over the perceived legitimacy my identifications afforded me within the research context. Indeed, my relationship with portraiture was at times tumultuous, as I was simultaneously attracted to the emphasis placed on aesthetic sensibilities while also repelled by the authority of the portraitist’s ubiquitous voice (see English, 2000). How would I capture the character and intricacies of the school culture without betraying the bonds of trust established between participants and myself? Perhaps it is within the discomfort of this space that my understanding of power relations and subject positions should be continuously framed and reflected upon. My interview encounter with Miss Mak did clarify the importance of establishing an accessible interview space wherein the potential exists for a mutually beneficial exchange. As my interview with Miss Mak came to an end, I sincerely thanked her for her time and insightful comments, to which she replied, “Oh, no problem, it was fun. I don’t often have the chance to reflect on all of this.” The dynamics of the interview interaction seemed to provide a forum for realizations and revelations for each of us.

### **Negotiating Boundaries and Space**

*Ruben’s study: On (not) talking about race*

Chanya Anderson stands out from the rest of the eleventh grade dance majors at Sherwood Secondary for her fearless movement. Her legs move like windmills as she leaps across the floor during the final combination of her modern dance class. Her long black hair is arranged

into thin cornrows that extend past her shoulders, changing colours from dark brown to golden yellow. The braids are starting to fray from swinging with the sharp and long movements of her upper body. I meet Chanya for an interview in the school library before school officially starts. She puts her pink Jansport backpack on the floor, keeping her stylish hounds-tooth jacket on, and sits with her arms crossed on the table.

I am excited to interview Chanya because, as far as I can see, she is the only student who has agreed to be interviewed that I would readily identify as “Black.” I am eager to learn what it is like for her to be a student at Sherwood, where students in the specialized arts program, at least visually, appear to be mostly “White” or Asian. As a qualitative researcher, I am always cautious about what assumptions I make regarding racial or ethnic identification on the basis of what someone looks like. Whether someone appears to be “Black” or “White” often says little about whether and, more importantly, how s/he experiences such identifications and what that means to her (e.g. Leonardo & Hunter, 2007; Velázquez Vargas, 2008). Chanya has not explicitly identified herself as Black. Yet, I assume prior to our interview that race plays some role in her experience at Sherwood. I have spent enough time hanging out around the school to note patterns that would suggest as much. Indeed, whenever I have seen Chanya in classes and around the school, she is always with two girls who also have dark brown skin, and thus I assume this matters to her.

Early in the interview, Chanya and I talk about her closest friends. She informs me that many of them are not in the specialized arts program. I am especially intrigued when she notes that she doesn’t “really hang out at the school,” and that she and her friends mostly hang out at the nearby shopping mall. When I ask whether she can draw a map of where people hang out at the school, she whispers to herself, “nobody hangs out at the school.” Having spent several lunch hours walking around hallways and stumbling over the stretched-out legs of dozens of students eating their lunch, I assume that when she says “nobody” she means none of the Black students. This would explain why I rarely see students of colour in the hallways during lunch. Reluctant to ask for a confirmation and worried about imposing the label “Black” on her and her friends, I return to the map, hoping that she will identify the labels that are relevant to her experience. But I realize that the task is meaningless – after all “nobody hangs out at the school.”

As I shift the focus of the interview to other topics, I feel that Chanya and I are not getting any closer to understanding each other better. My questions seem to confuse her, her answers are short, and she seems annoyed at my requests for elaborations. She continues to remark that she is “not sure,” or she “doesn’t know,” or she “can’t explain,” what she means. I persist, like a bad teacher intent on getting an answer out of a student, asking questions that sound didactic, as if I am more interested in testing what she has learned, rather than what she thinks

about her experiences. She offers curt and dry descriptions of her classes, and I feel further from her than I did at the beginning.

We continue talking about the specialized arts program at Sherwood, and she begins to distinguish herself from what she calls the “artsy” students in the program by talking about her fashion sense, which she identifies as “urban.” Recognizing that “urban” is often a euphemism for “Black” (e.g. Foster, 2007; Leonardo & Hunter, 2007), I pursue more questions: “Okay, so, what makes your style urban?” Chanya pauses, reflects in silence, and says quietly, “I don’t know.” Perhaps sensing my frustration, which at this point is probably apparent in the constant and nervous clicking of my pen, she continues, “I blend in more, with like, the regular people.” I decide to be more direct, confused by her use of the words “urban,” “regular,” and “mainstream” to identify herself, while still avoiding racial labels. “So, okay, so, so when you think about, so, the other [arts program students], would you describe them also as urban?” Chanya offers a definitive “no,” and I ask why not, as the clicking of my blue pen gets quicker and louder; “‘cause they dress more artsy.” We laugh together and before I manage to ask what’s the difference, she exclaims, “They are the opposite!” I pause for a moment to consider whether I should ask if “urban” means “Black”; but I don’t. Instead, I ask for clarification: “What’s the difference between urban and artsy? Why are they opposites?”

Throughout my prior experiences as a researcher and an educator in the US, my own identification as a person of colour positioned me in relative closeness to students of colour. Because being Puerto Rican in the US means by definition to be “not White,” I rarely had to wonder whether a student identified me as a person of colour and usually assumed this as a starting place for our relationships (see Fergus, 2009; Rivera, 2001). As a researcher, that meant I rarely had to ask directly about how students experienced race or dig for explanations, because students readily raised the topic with me, even if, perhaps, it didn’t actually matter. In the US, that meant that I had the ability to know certain things, but certainly not all things, about whether and how students experienced race in schools (Foster, 1994). Not so in Canada, where being Puerto Rican, or Latino, or “Spanish” – a label that continues to startle me when anyone uses it to identify me – are not understood explicitly in relationship to racial labels as in the US (e.g. Velázquez Vargas, 2008).

My exchange with Chanya did teach me a lot about how race shapes the experiences of students in this particular specialized arts program. Her relationship to the space of the school was markedly different from other students, and I would argue that race was implicit in her statement that “nobody hangs out at the school.” Her contrast between the “artsy” and the “urban” labels is also filled with racialized meaning, as she later draws connections and distinctions between hip hop and other music styles like “alternative rock” and “old stuff like

Beatles” of the “artsy” students in the arts program. Yet, we never once talk directly about race.

We cover many topics: Her challenging classes; whether she thinks of herself as an artist; the difference between an artist and an entertainer; and the difference between home and school friends. As we end, I ask one more time, hoping to make a connection now before the interview ends. “So, no one ever asked you questions about this? About the difference between urban and artsy?” Chanya says that she talks about it in the halls with her friends who are not in the arts program, who describe the arts majors as dressing “weird.” She says she reminds them that she is in the arts program as well, “And then they are like, ‘oh, well, you are different.’ [...] Because I don’t dress like [the students in the arts program].” When I ask her whether it really is just a “dress” thing, she adds another layer. “And like, they think they are stuck up, or something. [...] Because most people in the school, they are rich.” I ask Chanya how she sees that, and she asks, “that they are stuck up?” I answer, “yeah, or that they are rich?” “I don’t think that,” she clarifies, and again, we have misunderstood each other, this time not about race, but about class. But this is the end, and I’ve given up. “They just assume,” she says, and I go along, “They just assume?” She confirms, “yeah, I don’t know.” We exchange niceties after she tells me she doesn’t have any more questions, “No, no, I’m fine.” and we part ways.

In Harding’s (2005) portrait of a “successful” White teacher working with inner-city students of colour, avoiding race talk manifested through gestures that assumed a shared understanding of racial experience, such as the question/assertion, “ya know what I mean?” By contrast, it was Chanya’s “I don’t know” in response to questions that indirectly sought to prompt answers about race that effectively curtailed our ability to talk about it in any substantive way. In both examples, the descriptive depth that portraiture demands allows for a detailed account of the minutiae of how both participants and researchers avoid talking about race. In Harding’s words, the process makes the “elusive” and “risky” “challenge of researching race across racial lines” that much more “rewarding” (p. 54), particularly when the researcher is committed to a critical understanding of how racial categories are produced relationally and contextually.

#### *Yuko’s study: Embodied encounters*

In the grade eleven visual arts class at Sherwood Secondary, where I am doing my third classroom observation, students work by themselves. At each table, students find their bearings, and I begin to wander and observe. The voice of one male student echoes into the room. Sitting back, he lectures about an assignment to two female students who are both beside him. They are sitting close to him, bending forward, and asking him questions. While

he talks, his arms move widely and his finger sometimes points toward the two female students' faces. He firmly looks at them, while occasionally shifting the direction of his body. Listening to his voice, I feel my body freeze, and I wonder if I should join the table or not. I try to imagine how I might engage them, simulating in my mind how I should approach and start a conversation. As I continue to hesitate, I glance toward another table, where three male students and two female students sit quietly by each other. They surround the table, keeping almost even distance between each other. They look down to read their books and write on their own notebooks. Sometimes, they whisper to each other softly. As I watch, I suddenly feel a sense of nostalgia. The vivid memory of my high school days in rural Japan comes to mind, and I cannot stop seeing and feeling myself in the classroom with my friends at home. I tell myself, "Yes! I know! I know!" I decide to approach them, skipping the table with three students.

I slowly approach the table, walking from one corner to the other, peeking, and aware of how students react to me. I stop and start, approaching the table, slowly, and slowly. The two male students sitting at the corner move their faces up a little, and I feel them noticing my move. One student looks at me diagonally from below, and we make eye contact. I smile, stooping down, and bow in order to show politeness and respect to him, as I usually do when I recognize other bodies as Japanese or Asian. Another student looks at me, and I do the same thing. While our eyes meet, we never speak. In silence, I try to convey the message, "Hi, how are you? What are you guys doing? Is it okay if I sit at the same table?" The silence is not long, perhaps a few seconds. One male student moves his chair to the side, making space for me at the table. I take his move as a message that I am welcomed. I feel more comfortable getting close to them, and I join the table.

The students are reading quietly about Cubism from a thick art history book. After I feel settled, again, I feel frozen, not sure what to do next, surrounded by students studying quietly. I wonder if I should scrutinize students from this close, using my authority as a researcher to gaze around others. Unsure of what to do, I ask one male student sitting next to me if I can look at the paper on which the instructions for the assignment are written. He passes it to me, and as I read, I ponder the ethics of invading students' bodies with my gaze (e.g. Todd, 2003). I feel myself sharing the table with the students, and I decide to participate as a "student" at the table. I keep copying the paper, fighting with my guilty feeling of being a useless researcher, until the teacher starts lecturing to students about an assignment.

Our bodies play a central role in fieldwork (see Burns, 2006; Grosz, 1994). As Massumi (2002) states, "when I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It moves. It feels. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving" (p. 1). The way I move carries experiences accumulated in relationships

with other bodies with which I feel familiar. My eyes, exposed to images of high school students in a Japanese classroom, and my body, feeling familiarity and unfamiliarity with certain things, shaped my choice of where to sit and what to see to create this story. Once I enter into a relationship with other bodies, my prior experiences become part of the criteria for how to move in the classroom space; the histories, memories, and sights accumulated in my body direct the way I move. My limited experiences of being in relation with subjects other than those identified as Asian or Japanese, especially of high school students, places limits on whether and how I establish relationships with others.

A researcher's body is never detached from the space. It is always embedded, carrying concrete histories and memories that sometimes guide how it moves in that space. Tracking the researcher's encounters with space, identifying its relationality, and recognizing my own body's limits as a research tool might offer insights about the research context. I wonder, for instance, why I ended up in particular spaces along with other bodies. I wonder how their bodies feel, what images they see, and how they imagine their future. Outside of the classroom, I move along and interact with others through the school space. The same nostalgia I felt in the visual arts classroom, I found in the circle around the spiral stairs where I focused my observations, while I ignored other spaces where I felt less comfortable and nostalgic. While bodies were distributed along the school space, there were spaces in which the concentration of certain bodies felt familiar. This suggested that just as I felt compelled to enter certain spaces, students at this urban arts high school also arrange themselves through a sense of familiarity and comfort. This translates into particular patterns of movement, where certain bodies come to be identified with certain spaces within the school, even in a space that promotes multiculturalism and integration.

In portraiture, the researcher is listening for *a story* (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). She is assumed to act as an autonomous agent who actively engages with/in the research context to create a narrative that is both "authentic" as well as open to interpretation. English (2000) critically underscores this paradox, arguing that the search for authenticity would imply that the portraitist has "infinite and totalizing power in presenting an authentic view of reality" (p. 23). While English misreads the important distinction that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) make between *the story* and *a story*, whether *any story* can claim some form of authenticity is an open question.

Stories are constantly being created through fieldwork, not just because they are identified or created by the researcher, but because they emerge as possible stories to be told through the researcher's relations with others; the emplacement of my body shapes what kinds of data I "can" or believe I "should" collect, and what kinds of relationships I engage (Burns, 2006). What knowledges emerge about a particular setting are the result of constant negotiations



between researcher and researched, negotiations that are deeply shaped by the meaning-ful materiality of the bodies that come into contact through the shared space of the research site. These negotiations are premised on a relationship that is by definition artificial, as the researcher's body comes to occupy a space in which *it* does not and cannot "authentically" belong. Paying attention to how the process of embodiment unfolds and shapes the production of every story renders the question of authenticity moot, because the very relationships that produce the research story are always-already artificial. This raises an even more profound question about representation and the translation of these bodied encounters into research claims that are then, by definition, not only partial, but also inauthentic.

### **Constructing Representations**

#### *Elena's study: The artist and the researcher*

From two storeys below my feet, violin music echoes up the stairwell where I crouch against the white-tiled walls, scribbling notes before my last day at Sherwood Secondary. The school continues its relentless schedule of rehearsals and deadlines, and I notice a little less polish as we push into February. Auditions have passed, the galas for the Grade Eight open house are long over, and it is months away before the final shows. I have been here long enough to see four months of Hallmark-sponsored holidays adorn the walls and captivate assembly themes. Bulletin boards, carefully composed with optimistic primary colours in October are now faded and peeling, and like the students, I have stopped pausing to read what they say. The teachers greet me between classes with guilty smiles as they recognize my face but cannot quite remember my name. I have found my pace in this school, adjusted my rhythm to its pulse, been drawn in and out at will, and confided in by staff and students, though never quite trusted.

In Sandra Ackerman's grade eleven Enriched English class, the students slump in their seats. Some even lay their heads down on their desks, not bothering to hide that they are catching up on some rest. Ms. Ackerman's gold and purple earrings swing as she laughs at a joke, casually reaching over for a brownie that one of her students offers to her. She teases her students lightly for their lethargy, forgiving their exhaustion due to the student-run Fashion Show last week. Noticing me, one of the boys in the third row asks "are you getting evaluated, Ms. Ackerman?" to which his neighbour chimes in, "do they doubt your competency at teaching?" "Okay, let's start!" she says, rubbing her forehead and closing her eyes.

After the class, Ms. Ackerman apologizes for the students' unusual "performance" in the English class and she defends her choice to let them relax after their big achievement. I do

not know quite what to do with her defensiveness. She asks whether I can come back to re-do the observation, and then requests to see what I have written in my fieldnotes. I feel invaded; I quickly forget how hard I have worked to win the trust of the teachers at Sherwood, whom perhaps at first saw me as the one being invasive of their work and lives. Yet, this moment serves as a reminder that I cannot assume to go without consequence or consent of those whose lives I seek to understand and claim to represent. Having negotiated the physical and symbolic boundaries that frame this inquiry—from the “first encounter” with the institution, to the rapport established in interviews, and the negotiation of bodies in space—I realize not only that all representations are partial, but that they are the product of particular enactments or performances (e.g. Lather, 2007).

Increasingly, I have learned to see the role of researcher as a part that I am playing (Roberts, 2008). The relationships I make with people here have a beginning and an end, clearly delineated by the time allotted for my fieldwork. Our relationships are professional, while congenial and friendly, as the participants decide what they are willing to give up. A guidance counsellor does not hesitate to criticize the challenges and weaknesses that she sees in the program, while a physical education teacher announces from the outset that he will not be honest with me about what he really thinks of the school. While I am glad that they feel comfortable to define the boundaries of what they chose to disclose, as a person I feel distant, held back at arms length as we converse for forty-five minutes during a spare or lunch break.

I realized in this process that both participants and researcher are constantly negotiating how they want to be seen, what labels they wish to claim, and how they want to enact or perform various roles. Given our focus on how participants make meaning of their experiences in a place that is defined by the presence of the arts, the label of artist is one around which multiple meanings are enacted. The question stares at me from the interview protocol: “Do you consider yourself an artist?” I always hesitate before asking, carefully constructing my tone – will they feel challenged by this question? What does the category even mean to them? And more subtly in the back of my mind I quietly wonder, do I consider myself an artist?

My own identification as researcher and as artist culminates as I leave the field and begin to grapple with how to represent all that I have witnessed and learned in my four months at Sherwood. So caught up have I become in the work of gaining access and building relationships that I have forgotten the purpose of our work. I have studied the methodology, trained myself to think about collecting data, how to move through the network to find the next step, the next interview subject, the next classroom to observe. I cannot separate what I have witnessed from who I am, and I have learned to be comfortable with the ambiguity that characterizes this role of researcher. As Geertz (1973) notes:

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior. (p. 10)

It is from this context of research in an arts school that I begin to understand the value of the representation of my experiences and observations. The question of the truth that qualitative research can claim to validate loses relevance in this context, as we are interested in how the school’s actors represent themselves through capturing these “examples of shaped behaviour.”

Far from the halls and classrooms of the urban arts high schools where we spent months collecting data, I trade notebook for computer, crystallizing hastily jotted words into full narratives thick with description. I wonder if I am allowed to be feeling the catharsis that comes with turning something abstract into something that appears concrete. I watch the metamorphosis from “experience” to “data” to “portrait”; it is the process of pushing something away from you far enough that it can be witnessed by others. My role of portraitist at Sherwood suddenly becomes clear. I am audience to their performed daily roles; I am performer of my role as researcher, and after leaving the field the two synthesize as I represent both the researcher and the researched. Just as I have seen life at Sherwood weave through the realms of process and performance, each stage of the research process illumines moments of complexity that expose the many questions for us to grapple with and explore. Having changed all the names and intersections, adjusting the memories, turning fact to fiction and back again, I wonder how life at Sherwood will carry on and whether it will be as if I had never been there at all. I wonder, too, what others would have written if I had been the subject of their researcher gaze.

### *Writing portraits as a group*

Back in the window-less room where the team continued to probe the limits and opportunities of portraiture, the process of engaging the data and writing portraits as a group brought the research team face to face with the partiality that defines all research endeavours. Writing portraits as a group meant that the particular idiosyncrasies and personal histories of each researcher became hidden as the “I’s” and “we’s” disappeared from the narrative and the omniscient narrator took over the telling of what were often very personal tales. The process of identifying themes, choosing bits from the mountains of data collected, and debating their significance, required negotiating perspectives and privileging particular narratives, producing portraits that felt too neat and tidy to capture the complexity that would inevitably spill over the edges of any framework.

The task of the portraitist is to highlight contradictions and dissenting voices in an effort to convey the complexity of what is “good” about the research site from the perspective of those who inhabit it (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Yet every portrait can only be “good enough” in its very partiality and inadequacy as a representation (Luttrell, 2000). For instance, producing a research portrait requires the negotiation of ethical questions that often result in removing the very details that illustrate the significance of a particular event, statement, or the role of a given individual. The very particularity that portraiture insists can lead to universality must be stripped—or at best negotiated through the personal and political screens of the portraitist(s)—in order to comply with the commitment to confidentiality.

These challenges are further compounded when the researchers are committed to a critical engagement with questions of marginality and the center-periphery dynamics that define institutional contexts like schools (see Mohanty, 2003; Willis, 2003). Making decisions about whether and how categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality matter in a given context is further complicated when choosing whether and how to characterize such dynamics through a descriptive language that is not only partial and selective, but ultimately reductive. The portraitist inevitably engages in both subtle and not so subtle ways of writing constructed categories of difference into the narrative, often through superficial references to the appearance and demeanor of the participants: their accent, hair styles, skin tones, eyes, cadence, and their very words. But to the extent that these are always both superficial while at the same time profoundly meaningful, what does portraiture accomplish through either their insertion or omission?

These were some of the questions that plagued and enriched the process of writing portraits of the urban arts high schools we studied as a team. Confronting these in the context of an evolving research project required us to grapple with questions of representation *in practice*, rather than simply through reading and discussion, as is the case in most methodology courses. Theoretical and methodological debates came to life in the context of our work together, forcing us to wrestle with the implications of our work for the lives of participants with whom we were forging ongoing relationships. Working together through the particular challenges of portraiture as a methodology provided the research team with a pedagogical space in which to explore the thorny questions that are inherent to qualitative research in general.

### **Conclusion**

In this article we have sought to demonstrate the ways in which portraiture, as a qualitative research methodology, can be a useful strategy for engaging pedagogically in the exploration of both context and methodology. On the one hand, each of the studies we have shared illustrates lessons we have learned about the sites we are exploring and from which further

research will evolve; on the other, each moment illustrates the lessons we have drawn about the research process, including what we learned about ourselves and about the ways in which we—as researchers—are implied in the process of knowledge production.

Our purpose in this article is not specifically to engage with or contribute to debates about methodology, but rather to make the research process evident by sharing our experiences with expert as well as beginner researchers, who may be in the process of initiating their own adventures in research. Through these studies, we have tried to offer an opening into the minute particularities of our research process, using portraiture's penchant for full descriptions that invite interpretation through creative writing to illustrate what we learned in the process. To conclude, we would like to highlight three important methodological lessons that we draw from the moments portrayed through our studies.

One important lesson to be drawn from our exploration is that research is always autobiographical (Scott & Usher, 1996). "There is a personal element in research," explains Robin Usher (1996), "in the sense that doing research is moved by a desire to explain and understand that always points back to self-understandings and self-constructions" (p. 36). This doesn't mean that research is self-centred, or that it is not possible to learn something about others' experiences through research. Rather, learning about ourselves, learning about research, and learning about what we are researching are often intertwined and inform each other. Subjectivity, in fact, is a necessary aspect of research (Lather, 1991, 2007). Thinking about our personal experiences in the field is not just about understanding ourselves, but about understanding our research better. Without the latter, research becomes solipsistic, without the former, research becomes decontextualized and disembodied, giving the illusion of objectivity while relinquishing direct responsibility for the research and its implications.

Furthermore, much like the kinds of "boundary work" our research is exploring, these five moments illustrate how the research process also involves complex ways of negotiating symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Indeed, qualitative research always involves boundary work: whether it is the boundaries of access to a research site; the boundaries of personal or professional recognition; the boundaries of racial identification; the boundaries of the body and physical space; or the boundaries of the interior and exterior selves. This is not a lesson that can be taught/learned within the constraints of a classroom, whether a lecture hall or the most progressive seminar. It is in the actual experience of negotiating these boundaries that the research process is crystallized, and in the process, the inquiry itself grows and moves through the necessary explorations that are the heart of portraiture and of all qualitative research.

This article also begins to illustrate the limits of portraiture as a methodology, particularly as related to issues of representation. In his critique of portraiture, English argues that behind the veil of subjective constructivism, “What remains shrouded in portraiture is *the politics of vision*, that is, the uncontested right of the portraitist/researcher to situate, center, label, and fix in the tintured hues of verbal descriptive prose what is professed to be ‘real’” (p. 21, italics in original). While English overestimates authorial intent, his critique does point to the problem of claiming authenticity as a strategy for circumventing the problem of the validity of truth-claims. The notion that qualitative research methodologies like portraiture allow for some sort of “authentic” experience or “essential” truth to emerge is also not consistent with our own experience. Whether negotiating terms of engagement, navigating spaces in which we do not “authentically” belong, or managing the artifices of research representations, authenticity seemed to be lying always somewhere beyond our reach. If anything, claims to “authenticity” seem to lie tenuously in our attempt at candid transparency, measured by our conscious and unconscious apprehensions, how we want to be perceived, identified, and positioned as authors, and our ambivalences about what we can or cannot claim to “know.” In this sense, similar to ABER methodologies, the strength of portraiture lies in its “*generativity* – its ability to promote new questions” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 102), rather than providing “authentic” answers and representations.

As stated earlier, we are not arguing that portraiture is the only methodology that can serve as a pedagogical entry into the puzzles and dilemmas of interpretive or qualitative research. Direct engagement through hands on experience with any methodology is likely to yield many lessons that cannot be delivered in a classroom. Furthermore, the pedagogic potential of any methodology rests primarily on the particular research context and the experiences of the people who engage them; it does not reside—magically and irrevocably—on the methodology itself. Yet, the logic that underlies portraiture as a research methodology does open the doors for particular questions to emerge as it presents researchers with particular challenges.

Portraiture underscores the deeply self-conscious reflexivity that is central to all qualitative research. In its explicit attention to the role of the researcher as the instrument of research, portraiture invites explicit attention to how relationships evolve, how data is collected and interpreted, and to the researcher’s “voice” in constructing a narrative. Moreover, in its commitment to and search for the complexity of “goodness,” portraiture invites interpretive nuance, opening the door for an analysis that is neither unduly pathological nor naively celebratory. Whether and how this complexity manifests in the final portrait is always an open question that can only be answered at the moment when the text encounters an audience.

Ultimately, the pedagogic potential of portraiture as a research methodology lies in the possibility of constructing representations of “the truth” that are not only transient and tentative, but also incomplete and always-already imperfect. This not only requires a bracketing of what counts as “truth,” but of what it means to search for “authenticity.” Indeed, it is only if we are willing to suspend the illusion of either truth or authenticity, that the potential of portraiture for pedagogically exploring the precariousness of the research endeavour can begin to unravel. In sharing our experiences through these “studies,” we hope to invite a discussion that at once unravels and tangles the messy knots of learning how to be “good enough” qualitative researchers.

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1. Because this article is focused on methodology, we do not offer a thorough discussion of the literature on specialized arts high schools. A more thorough review of the literature is available in Gaztambide-Fernández (2010). Other examples of research focused specifically on specialized arts high schools include Caillier (2007), Curtis (1987), Davis (2001), Gaskell, (1995), Gore, (2005), Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, (2007), Hunt, (2004), Longley, (1999), and Wilson (2001).

2. Initial drafts of the portraits were distributed to the principals of each participating school in September of 2009, and they were invited to provide feedback and to offer ideas about the lessons learned from the portraits and how they planned to use the documents. In November of 2009, the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE sponsored a public event to share the work of the UAHS project, with the participation of two school principals and other member of the arts education community. The purpose of the event was to discuss the implications of the exploratory research with the public and to identify priorities for future research based on the lessons drawn from the initial portraits. The portraits as well as the implications and priorities for future research are included in a Technical Report (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010).

3. For a critique of portraiture as a methodology that fails to invite interpretation, despite its best intentions, see English (2000).

4. The letter was approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board (REB) as well as the School Board's External Research Review Board, and it summarized the purpose of the research as follows:

The purpose of this exploratory study is to understand the structure of these programs, their approaches to curriculum and pedagogy, and the experiences of the students enrolled in these arts high schools. The study will be used to write research portraits of each program and to develop themes that will inform a larger study of arts high schools in several urban regions in Canada and the U.S.

In addition to this overall description, the letters included details about data collection, outlining the terms of the research, the participants' rights to withdraw, and information about the use of the data for future research projects. In the letter, we also indicated that the portraits would be provided to the school once finished and that free professional development sessions would be provided to the schools to share the research findings.

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