

Editor's introduction to 'Writing on the Walls: Poetic Transcription as a Research Conversation'

This paper is a fascinating case example of the application of one intuitive research method. Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness directed towards a specific phenomenon or object as experienced from the first-person point of view. This is exactly what Martens has done. She gives us her personal emotional and cognitive responses to various classroom displays of children's artwork as chosen by their teachers. It is the reasons behind the choice of work for display that clearly fascinates her and is the phenomenon under study. There is an excellent definition and discussion of hermeneutics, which she then uses to interpret and re-interpret her experiences. This research approach offers a unique view of the phenomenon that no other method could have given us.

Writing on the Walls: Poetic Transcription as a Research Conversation

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Abstract: In this paper, I explore visual displays in elementary schools as more than just pretty pictures, but thoughtful deliberations about what it means to think to see and see to think with teachers. One cannot point to a classroom/school bulletin board and say of a visual display that 'it is this way' or 'it is another way'. Rather, it is through relational connections—utilizing poetry and poetic transcription to engage the multiple voices of the visual with those who inhabit classroom spaces—that one makes sense of what is occurring. It is through a practice of noticing that I, as researcher, endeavour to create and find meaning through a hermeneutic lens. As soon as I think I know what has been captured in the visual displays on the walls, it shifts, moves away, and I am drawn into another question to locate/relocate. This paper seeks to reveal the meaning of these spaces in conversations with a teacher, with and as poetry returned to one another, as a way to make sense of visual displays.

Keywords: Poetic transcription, visual displays, visual culture, hermeneutics, narrative inquiry, art education

In a deep sense our language contains the story
of who we are as a people.
It is reflective of our desires,
and our dreams;
In its silences it even tells us
of what we would forget (Smith, 1994, p.122).

1. Introduction. Tracing the Topic: The Questions Sketched Out

I have walked hundreds of school hallways in my former role as the Fine Arts Specialist for a large urban school board. I engaged in rich curriculum and staff-development work with teachers, assisting them to unfold and deepen learning for themselves and their students. Visiting schools over the past ten years, I have viewed countless hallways and classroom displays, finding myself wondering for the first time about the learning that took place in these educational spaces. Invited to schools, principals inevitably led me down hallways, pointing out class work on the classroom/school bulletin boards and walls. At first, I found myself nodding, smiling, acknowledging that something had been displayed. As time went on, I would ask my educational host about the work that we viewed. Their replies, uncertainties, and brief explanations never seemed to be enough to satisfy my curiosity. Why was I curious and what did this curiosity evoke in me? How did such displays come to be? And how was I to understand what I was being shown? Then, one wintry afternoon, I faced 30 identical, cotton ball snowmen on the wall by the entrance of a Kindergarten classroom. Each black circle of their bodies had been perfectly cut-out; each body held the exact same number of cotton balls and looked back at me with the same, perfectly cut, black eyes. Their 'perfection' and 'sameness' was unnerving. Both the teacher and the principal had directed me to this particular display. They were smiling and obviously pleased with the result. The teacher proudly told me of how the children had assembled the pre-cut parts of the snowmen that past

week, as an afternoon art-activity. She thought they had turned out well and, as such, found a prominent place for them on the hallway bulletin board outside the classroom door. I found myself mentally questioning this evidence of student learning and why it had been displayed in the first place. Wondering about the connection of these images to pedagogy, student voice, and aesthetic experience, I found myself dissatisfied and disappointed by the display. But why did I notice this one so pointedly? Why did I feel this way? I asked myself: What is this display about? What did it mean to say? What is it asking of me? How was it that I had never questioned my own displays—displays that mimicked the smiling snowmen? Why, as teachers, do we feel compelled to put up displays? This paper seeks to reveal the meaning of visual displays in elementary schools, through a hermeneutic lens, in conversations with a teacher.

2. Methodology. Re/Envisioning the Walls: Why Hermeneutics?

The snowmen would not leave me alone. As I walked other hallways, they were with me. With every prettily displayed picture, carefully bordered and held in place on the bulletin board, I felt more and more unsettled. To understand the questions the displays raised, to open up the possibility that there was another, perhaps multiple, interpretation(s) to what has been proffered, I needed to examine the meaning of visual displays in schools. As a teacher, I did not wonder what the displays that I created meant beyond an expectation that I knew that I had to *put them up*. Visual displays and school bulletin boards have always beckoned to me—and likewise have signalled diverse ideologies, philosophies, and mandates to teachers, parents, administrators, and students. Whose beliefs and values are engrained in these displays? To whom are they addressed and to what end(s)? How do we come to see and interpret them? Heidegger (cited in Grondin, 1994, p.96) noted, “[in] interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself”. The origin of the word, ‘hermeneutic’ comes from the Greek, ‘hermeneutikos’ meaning ‘interpreting’, and from ‘hermeneutes’, meaning ‘interpreter’. Hermeneutics derives from Hermes, the tutelary divinity of speech, writing, and eloquence (Etymonline, 2000). Through a hermeneutic lens, I have been confronted by what the notions of ‘see’, ‘think’, and ‘act’ might mean. I understand that I had perceived the world with one frame, believing that the world was fixed and as it appeared. I did not conceive that I might question or imagine that there were other possibilities, until the topic addressed me through the snowmen display. I had not noticed that I saw what I *expected* to see and what I *wanted* to see; but I did not *understand* what the snowmen meant, that they were interpretable.

According to the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, we speak to understand; and it is because we are oriented to the world as understanding beings that we are always in dialogue with it (Gadamer, 2004). As a researcher, I know that I am not alone in the world. I seek understanding through the voices of others through my interaction with the topic (Freeman, 2007a). Engaging with others in these questions, I hope to uncover more about what continued to stare at me. Gadamer (2004, p.180) writes, “[t]o understand means to come to an understanding with each other...with respect to something”. Grondin (1994, p.120) states, “[a] core concept in Gadamer’s theory of understanding is that language always means more than we actually express, does not say all that we hope to express but it is the only means through which we can develop and express understanding”. The starting point of understanding is how we situate ourselves in the world or within our particular horizon. As Smith (1994) notes, understanding between persons is possible only to the degree that people can initiate a conversation between them and bring about a ‘fusion’ of their particular horizons into a new understanding which they hold in common. The ‘fusing of new horizons’ opens up understanding, not as the past repeating itself, but as revealing something new.

I initiated such conversations with Erica (pseudonym), a nine-year veteran teacher. I wanted to honour the intentionality of the meaning of the word ‘listen’, as the “hearing and honouring” of what was spoken by her and what was revealed as a result of our conversations (Etymonline, 2000). I also chose to re-interpret the conversations through poetic transcription, so that I may capture the historical moment and provide a text with which to further engage in on-going conversations (Fleming, Gaidys and Robb, 2003, p.118). Freeman (2007b, p.94) notes that, “[w]hen a narrative was displayed in short units or lines of focused information it enabled a more direct access to its meaning and provoked a more direct response than if people were presented with a context narrative.” I have been using poetry for many years as a way to reflect upon and make sense of the world around me. Poetic inquiry, rooted in an arts-based inquiry tradition, may also allow access into the entanglement of the words that are spoken and not spoken. It may offer different ways to hear the topic speaking, in a language that I am more readily able to hear and understand. As such, I used poetic transcription, as Freeman (2007b) suggests, to provoke further questions and open up new horizons; and I

begin another conversation with Erika through a poem written from the transcriptions of our previous conversations. Prendergast (2009) notes that poetic inquiry (also commonly termed 'poetic transcription'), like narrative inquiry with which it shares many characteristics, is interested in drawing on the literary arts in the attempt to express human experience more authentically. It is through these dialogues that I gain understanding with language.

A conversation is not merely a human interaction,
it is also a display of something,
and the success and failure of the conversation,
is a success or failure in the manifestation
of the thing in question (Sokolowksi, 1997, p.231).
It is not really a conversation
Over coffee
Or the sampling
Of individual opinions
Nor is it the careful brush strokes
Or a looking glass
Affirming who is there
Concealed within each story
Is more than a life
Waiting to be told
It is living itself
Lived out
Striving for expression
It is a transformative event
Engaging
Who we are
With who we might become
Forcing a turn upon ourselves
And we stretch forward into space
A circular journey
A painful journey
Eyes everywhere (Freeman, 2001, p.649).

As this is a hermeneutic inquiry, I am, as researcher, present throughout the study and the representation of the findings. Hermeneutics places the researcher in the midst of the work, not as an observer from the outside, looking in. Rather, the role of the researcher is to open up the topic, so that what may be below the surface is brought forward and, through dialogue with the participant, new understanding can appear. There is a 'recognition', a 'kinship', something that 'rings true' that is not about replicating findings nor justifying them (Gadamer, 2004). As Moules, et al. (2015, p.3) explains, "Hermeneutics requires a bringing forth and a bringing to language of something new. We work out this newness by working it into a world of relationships that can sustain it. In these relationships, others start to recognize not only something of themselves, but also of the world; they recognize something old and something new."

The findings are presented in narrative and poetic form and include verbatim quotes from my conversations with Erika, interspersed with analysis and discussion of their meaning.

3. Results

3.1 Walls: Hiding in Plain Sight

I put a picture up on the wall.
Then I forget there is a wall...[but] I also forget the picture,
I no longer look at it,
I no longer know how to look at it (Perec, 1997, p.39).

As we moved down the hallway and stood outside the classroom, Erika pointed out work that her students had created. We spoke about how she decided what would go in the classroom and what would go in the hallway. Erika was quiet for a moment as she considered the places that she had displayed items, not just in her current location but at other schools she had taught in. She wondered about the 'best work' that seemed to stand out in the hall, away from the daily gaze of the children who created it. Erika's understanding of 'best work' was shaped though her past school experience, and she carried its legacy with her in her present teaching post.

Author: What does 'best work' mean? Do the students define that or do you help define that with them?

Erika: Well, that's a work in progress. I had a principal at my last school who challenged me to think about how I looked at children's work, and I used to honour everything that they gave to me, "Oh, this is so beautiful. You have done such a great job coloring your dragon." And you know it wouldn't be completely colored, or something would be missing in the background.... [W]e talk about, "That is great. How can we enhance this though? What could you do to add some more detail? Or does that dragon [you have drawn] look completely colored to you? It looks like there is still some white space showing, how can you color in a way that it actually really presents it as you are trying to achieve?" We need to color in one direction because one direction looks a lot neater and looks a lot nicer when we are trying to present what we are doing.

Our conversation reminded me of something that has lingered with me for many years. Why is it that teachers only want to display what they or someone else perceives as the 'best work'? Why can't they display the work-in-progress? Is it because they are uncomfortable with how the child will be perceived or how they might be perceived because of what is traditionally displayed in schools? Erika's word, 'nicer' stands out. Is a child's work akin to their character? Do 'nice' children produce noteworthy, 'nice' pieces of art? Historically, artwork, particularly lithography, displayed on school walls was meant to evoke children's essential morality. John Ruskin's influential theory of 'environmental determinism' suggests that we become determined by the social and cultural worlds we inhabit. To be in the presence of the 'good' was to become 'good' (Panayotidis, 2002, p.18). Ethics and aesthetics were inextricably linked (Britzman, 2003).

Author: Is all the students' work displayed in the hallway?

Erika: Everything that we do is displayed at some point in time, but it is hard to choose what goes up in the hallway.

Author: Harder to choose than what goes up in your classroom?

Erika: Yes.

Author: How come?

Erika: I have to consider what other teachers have displayed in the hallway, especially within the same grade. We may have chosen to do the same art project, and I don't want to put up my students' work if another teacher has chosen to do the same.

Author: Why not?

Erika: I have never really thought about it. I mean, it still honours their work, it is still their work. It is no different. It doesn't take away from what they are doing as a class. Apparently, I am competitive.

Erika expressed what many teachers may privately feel but rarely disclose, as Britzman (2003, p.29) states, "the more private aspects of pedagogy: coping with competing definitions of success and failure and one's own sense of credibility and vulnerability". Teaching can sometimes be seen as a singular, private act because the teacher may be the only educator in the room with the children. One of the ways that teachers 'see' what their colleagues are doing is through the work that is displayed on the walls in the hallway. Perhaps Erika's reluctance to 'mimic' her colleagues' display may be about the ways in which power and authority are experienced in the school. Erika may want the work that is displayed to represent her pedagogical beliefs, even if the work is the same.

Erika: I think at my last school, we were so structured in the fine arts and everything we did, and I think there was a wing in the school that I begged to get out of and I did. I was placed in another classroom because it was called 'competition hallway'. We had to change our bulletin boards every six weeks minimum.

Author: Who decided that?

Erika: Whether that came from administration or who that came from, I don't know. I actually had this conversation with a new teacher that I was mentoring at the time. We talked about a specific structure that we had to accomplish within the year, and then there were the unwritten rules. So, I never actually saw that in print, but it was something that was done by everyone.

Author: Do you remember some of those unwritten rules?

Erika: Everything had to be centered on the wall; everything had to be aesthetically pleasing, etc.

Author: What does that mean, 'aesthetically pleasing'?

Erika: I found out the first time that I used oil pastels with the students, and I was told by an administrator that I should take them down from the hallway display because they were clearly more of an 'inside classroom activity' because she felt that it was unclear how I had used the medium appropriately. She told me it looked like the students had just used wax crayons. But that said, it wasn't said in a way that was derogatory or hurtful. I was a little shocked because I had never had anyone ever say that to me before, and it really challenged me to think about why I was choosing to use any form or medium. I didn't know how to use oil pastels; I just used them the same way as I would use crayons. I thought they looked pretty!

Author: You changed the displays every six weeks?

Erika: Yes, that is how you knew you were continuously meeting the school wide expectations.

Author: Have you ever thought about why it was okay to display the oil pastel pieces inside the classroom, if they were not done appropriately?

Erika: I think that I could argue that it was a way to honour the students.

'Honour' is a word that continues to appear when teachers speak of student work. As I unpack it, I find that its French origin means, "glory, renown, fame and later, a woman's chastity (purity)" (Etymonline, 2000). Who or what is being glorified through this honouring? The student? The teacher? Is this about the glorification of aesthetic philosophies of goodness and beauty? What is the place of the 'messy' work that unfolds daily in a classroom? How is that pedagogical practice, honoured? These questions address the complexities of an 'innocent' display that, as teachers, we continue to create because we think it is what is expected of us. and perhaps there is comfort in the ritual. We create classrooms that are complicated by unspoken expectations but perpetuate a space that is predictable, stable. However, Perce (1997, p.91) writes,

I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep rooted: places that might be points of reference, of departure of origin.... Such places do not exist, and it's because they don't exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, ceases to be incorporated, and ceases to be appropriated. Space is a doubt; I have to constantly mark it, to designate it; it's never mine, never given to me; I have to conquer it.... Space melts like sand running through one's fingers. Time bears it away and leaves me only shapeless shreds.

After my conversation with Erika, I explored my questions further through a poem that I wrote in an attempt to understand what was being revealed.

I only like to put up the good work, she said.
Good work from good children
who sit with their hands quietly folded;
their feet flat on the floor.
They ask only appropriate questions and
give the teacher what she wants.
Flora Thompson's good girls:
affectionate, helpful, unselfish.
They were good daughters, good sisters, and were prepared to be
good wives.
They prided themselves on their goodness.
I only like to put up the good work, she said.
What would happen if she didn't?
Would it cause the children to become erratic, immoral, and impossible?
Would it be good?

Erika: [U]ntil I had gone to that school, I accepted everything a child did as beautiful. But I believe that the administrator at the time really wanted to showcase and honour what the students were doing. It has been a long time since I first learned that from her, and it has become a part of how I now see visual displays in hallways. For example, when I see a display and the children's work has obviously been 'slapped up' and is slowly falling down, I want to fix it. But it is not my place to fix that. It is not my display. I don't feel comfortable to approach the person who created the display because I don't want to sound critical. I think back to conversations that I had in my previous school about whether the work was inside or outside classroom work. It became really hard because we became really critical. Thankfully, I have let that go. Where we were starting to become critical of what we were teaching, and what it was we were expecting of our students. It came to the point that it was so strict that I could not have imagined how it was enjoyable for the students.

Author: How have your comments about displays been received by your colleagues?

Erika: As hard as I tried not to bring up past practices at my last school, I found myself using what I did there in my comments with colleagues. I started to realize that no one wanted to know what I did at my last school. I think that there is some fear as well because when I spoke of the expectations there, they would remark that they thought it was too much to expect as they 'just wanted to be able to teach'. They didn't realize that this was part of teaching, and they would shut me down if I pursued it. I learned to be more cautious.

Teachers that display work that is expected (and thus accepted) by administrators, colleagues, or parents appear competent and seem 'as if' they know what they are doing (Smith, 1994, p.90). Visual displays serve to locate a teacher's practice and express how they implement the curriculum. Visual displays enact complex relationships amongst curriculum, learning, and notions of visibility and seeing in elementary classrooms and schools. Can visual displays thoughtfully allow the work of curriculum to unfold in productive and rich ways? Visual displays may be akin to the scattering of seeds, the Greek origins of which is the word, 'diaspora' (Etymonline, 2000). Displaced from their original meaning, visual displays reappear in the gap between the layered possibilities of what curriculum can point to in the world. Is the work appearing on the hallways of Erika's school merely there to highlight technical perfection, or do these visual displays signal a phenomenological recognition? As Grumet (1992, p.29) asks, is it a "hybrid of objectivity and subjectivity whose very birth modifies, extends, and finally transcends its inheritance?" Is something about curriculum enacted as visual displays being called into significance? How do visual displays speak about the journey of teaching and learning? I sense through Erika's words that what is displayed is more about production and display of constructed projects than any procedural pedagogical process. Searching the term 'visual displays' online, I am confronted by thousands of websites, all offering technical answers to the construction of displays. None seem to offer a deeper consideration of 'what' displays may mean or their connection to curriculum. In this absence, how do teachers come to know about visual displays in schools?

3.2 Listen/ing: Honouring the Work

I listen
The stories of people
Open to me
Unfold
Rippling Outward
Experiences I know nothing of
And have never had
I think that I listen
Absorbed and well-meaning
I travel these landscapes
Extracting scraps and segments
Reshaping their form
Seeking out words
Not even spoken
I have not learned to listen
A fusion of horizons
Is not the engulfment
of a valley
Or the taking of a soul

When we hear only a fragment
Of the possible (Freeman, 2001, p.652).

Author: How do you think teachers learn to construct these displays in the classroom? Do you think that they are directed to do them a certain way and that becomes their practice?

Erika: I think it becomes a part of your own conceptual baggage. I think about all the little pieces of breadcrumbs that helped build who I am. I know that when I first came out of university, I took little pieces of everything and put them together, like sewing a patchwork quilt. I think about the teacher that I am mentoring this year, and I have told her that her many questions are mutually beneficial because she challenges me to remember what I may have forgotten, mostly because we become so used to routine. I really believe that I learned from my administration the ways in which I could promote what I do and still honour the students' work. Those first years were tough. I would go home every night and cry because of how much stress I was under, but I know now that it was a gift. I really feel that that experience was a gift that I have carried with me. She [my former principal] retired, but I saw her not long ago; and I said to her, "I am trying to take a little piece of what you gave me and share it with others." I am going to cry just thinking about it. I realize now that having that experience with her allowed me to develop who I have become as a teacher.

Author: In what ways do you think those experiences have influenced you?

Erika: I notice displays more now than I ever did before. I am reminded of one that appeared in our hallway last year. One of my colleagues decided to put together a display that she thought would provide students with an incentive to master reading. She created a 'mountain', and when the student 'mastered' aspects of reading, they got their name higher up the mountain. When they had 'mastered' all the objectives, they got to stand on the top. I was mortified and refused to participate. She felt that my students would be 'missing out'. She really didn't get it.

Author: What didn't she get?

Erika: I told her about a similar activity that I was subjected to when I was in grade two. My teacher had the planet Mars on the wall, and our names were on rocket ships. Every time we showed mastery of basic mathematical facts, we flew closer to the planet. When we mastered them all, we got a Mars chocolate bar. I was the only student in the class that never made it to the planet.... Now as a teacher, all I can do is cringe that I did not make a louder declaration when she proposed this idea. I did not because I was new, and I didn't want to rock the boat.

Author: What did that mountain say to you?

Erika: It did not allow that child to learn in a respectful way; displaying it in such a way that is so public, it just...it was devastating and daunting to watch it happen. What was worse to me is that no parent questioned it, and the other students seemed to like watching their names climb higher. I didn't understand what value others saw in it.

Was there something in Erika's words that pointed to the hierarchy and competition of neo-liberal agendas and how visual displays become a potent way to represent this?

Author: You used the word 'legacy' when you spoke of what is left up from year to year. Etymology tells that legacy originally meant "a body of persons sent out on a mission". You also used the word 'usual' which meant "ordinary; a habitual custom". What makes the work a legacy piece rather than just something ordinary?

Erika: Yes...it was eye-opening...it made me question the generic uses that we have in education. How many times do we say legacy?

Author: It is like the other word that you used, 'honour', whose original meaning includes "dignity, a woman's chastity."

Erika: It really struck a chord in that you try to convey to others what you do, especially the children and be cognizant of the words that you use, and when you look at the original meanings you think, maybe I am not being as cognizant.

Author: Perhaps we are using those words intentionally because something has been forgotten, and in using that word, we are trying to get back to what it really means. It [honour] also means, "glory, renowned, fame earned". I wonder if it is about kids' fame when we talk about kids work? Maybe we are trying to give them some kind of notoriety?

Erika: Absolutely. Especially when we look at how we are displaying work, or how we have been modelled or molded to display their work.

Author: Were you honouring the kids work? Were you honouring the work no matter where you hung it?

Erika: [W]hat is the difference between out there and in here? I said that so obviously, that is something subconsciously that is driving my intentions.... [W]hen you look at any piece that a child does...that is their work. Does it really make a difference? Because, really, it is the evidence of learning. What is more significant? I had a really negative sensation that that was something that I was doing in not recognizing that regardless of what we are doing with our children, it is about the children in the end. It is not about what we are doing publicly and privately.

Author: The word 'display' has an original meaning of deception and disguise. And, I wondered about what we display for the world outside. What are we trying to deceive or disguise?

Erika: [W]hat is intriguing to me is that in my first few years, I didn't want to say anything; I felt voiceless. You don't want to rock the boat or anything like that; and when I went to my new school, I started to see that this is what we were supposed to do, and I wanted to comply. I wanted that approval just as much as the students want it. I didn't think to ask why.

Author: I really wondered about how you found your voice with the display that really disturbed you. I had to write a poem about Mount Grapheme:

*Being able to decipher
letter and line
catalogued for all to see
on Mount Grapheme.
Standing on the mountain is fine
if they can play the game quicker than most.
But if they can't
there they sit
alone on the trek, silently ridiculed
oh, so publicly.
You know what it is like
as you found yourself once before
on the way to Mars
calculating basic facts without a Sherpa to guide.
Trying to reach the stars
but not quite reaching them;
Falling hard to earth
where you don't want others to ever have to follow.*

Erika: An eloquent representation of my most despised Mount Grapheme.

Author: If we are really concerned, why don't we say something?

Erika: Exactly. Why? I think it is because of fear.

Author: I want to return to something that we spoke of early on in our first visit, which was the apple border around your door. Because I am interested in what may appear as a result of poetic transcription, I wrote a poem about your apples.

*Apples framed in turquoise
brace the door.
Apologetic for the cliché images
that draw attention to the exit
too much attention?
But they remain.
Worried what's underneath
All those holes
filled by someone else's philosophy.*

*more consumed by the poor aesthetic
or those apples?*

Erika: At first, I thought I am obviously upset by the time it would take to replace it [the apples], but then I realized it is something else. Why am I so hung up on aesthetics? I have to figure out if it is a reflection of me as a professional? Is it a reflection, why is it that I have become so hung up on things that in the end don't matter?

I had the opportunity months after my conversations with Erika to return to her classroom. I noticed that there were many artworks 'in-progress' up on the classroom walls. Erika told me that she began thinking differently about what she displayed in her classroom, focusing not on what was there but why it was there. The apple border had finally come down; its original purpose now long forgotten. I think Erika benefited from an enhanced understanding of her own personal and professional reflections of visual displays in her classroom as a result of this study. I believe that she will not be able to 'look' at a visual display without our questions coming to mind. I also believe that because of our conversations, she will ask, more consciously, about the visual displays not only in her own school but in others and perhaps be able to influence a wider audience.

4. Conclusion. What Am I to Make of This?

How did the visual displays in Erika's classroom speak to my own shifting of horizons of understanding? Historically, there was an intentionality in the way most female teachers arranged visual objects so as to elicit a certain feeling and purpose; namely, the promotion of the qualities of good citizenship, taste, and moral behaviour. Teachers of the past seemed to know that there was an intentionality and a purpose in what went on the classroom/school walls. And yet, while the reasons they created these displays are clear, those images did not proclaim the message as specifically as my own. Might a similar purpose for displays, which has been silenced or forgotten by teachers, still linger today? Madeline Grumet (1988, p.81) suggests, the function of art is to, "reorganize the experience so it is perceived freshly. At the very least, the painting, the poem, or the play cleanses a familiar scene; washing away the film of habit and dust collected over time so that it seen anew. When it is most radical, the work of art draws the viewer to it, engaging expectations, memories, recognitions and simultaneously interrupts the viewer's customary response, contradicting expectations with new possibilities, violating memories, displacing recognition with estrangement."

I hear the stories of visual displays as I had not before; I was pulled into them as they came alive with meaning. Their stories have become clearer than before, as Gadamer (2007, p.319) states, "[a] story places something almost tangible before our eyes...something is suddenly there. What it is, that here is 'here', if of course, unsayable. But at the same time this means that everything that is here in such a way will represent itself differently in everyone, and yet will be the same". I can no longer accept that the images that appear on the walls of today's classrooms are any different than those that have always appeared. The difference seems to be in how the images have been 'seen' or, in some cases, 'not seen' by those who constructed them. There needs to be an interruption of the practice of simply 'hanging things up' regardless of pedagogical reasons. Teachers need to ask 'why' this display rather than 'what' should be displayed. In this regard, visual displays in schools are critical tools in constructing, disseminating, negotiating, and representing knowledge, values, and beliefs and cannot be dismissed as merely pretty pictures on the wall. I can feel the cold stare of the snowmen on the wall and see the edges of the display begin to crack open, peeling back the layers of visual displays in the classroom; no longer content to be looked upon innocently, they are waiting to be noticed because I have been asked to consider the walls.

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