

Probing the Depths of the Pedagogical Fantasy: Exploring the (Re)current Fantasy of the Knowledgeable (Art) Teacher

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Abstract

Noting a distinct pattern in student teachers' self-deprecating thoughts and behaviors around the same time of student teaching each year, the author conducted a qualitative study to figure out what was potentially contributing to this phenomenon. Wanting to have a better understanding of the unknowable or unsayable aspects of the student teachers' emotional breakdowns and their teaching identities that were conceivably (re)negotiated, Lacanian psychoanalytic literature was referenced. While three pedagogical fantasies evolved from the study, only the most common and (re)current fantasy of the knowledgeable (art) teacher, the *subject-supposed-to-know*, is addressed within this paper. The author defines the *subject-supposed-to-know* and considers where and how this pedagogical fantasy is perpetuated. Suggestions are offered for art teacher educators to provide a supportive space to facilitate dialogue that is conducive to positive and realistic identity (re)formation of art student teachers.

Key words: Art student teachers, Pedagogical fantasy, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory

My interest in pre-service (student teaching) art education programs began in 2007 because of my former teaching assistant position as a university supervisor of art student teachers. Noting a distinct pattern in student teachers' self-deprecating thoughts and behaviors around the same time of student teaching each year, I wanted to know what was potentially contributing to this phenomenon. Exploring this is important because, as Britzman (2003) says "the individual struggles of particular people become an allegory for the crisis of learning a profession and the more general condition of education as such" (p. 12). Wanting to have a better understanding of the unknowable or unsayable aspects of the student teachers' emotional breakdowns and their teaching identities that were conceivably (re)negotiated, I looked to the psychoanalytic literature of Jacques Lacan (1901-1981).

The repeated occurrence of emotional distress around my student teachers led me to study the emergent identity formation of art student teachers (Hetrick, 2010a). I consider the knowledge and cultural systems, including TV and movies, through which art teaching identities are conceived, and the ontological consequences that evolve from those identifications (Robertson, 1994). Some of the ontological consequences that I explore are the effects on art student teachers' collective and self (dis)identifications. The methodology of the study includes individual interviews with three art student teachers and a group interview with the same three participants that took place after watching several pre-selected DVD clips of popular Hollywood movies and a TV series featuring arts educators. The DVD clips were shown to help answer my initial question of how popular visual culture representations of arts educators can be used as a catalyst to unfold student teachers' unconscious pedagogical desires and fantasies about teaching art. Literature on psychoanalytic theory (Žižek, 1989; Fink, 1998; jagodzinski, 2002; Hyltdgaard, 2006; Lacan, 2006), teacher culture (Markgraf & Pavlik, 1998; McCullick, et al, 2003) and art education (Barrett, 2003; Gnezda, 2009; NAEA, 2009; Stewart & Katter, 2009) prior to analysis helped approach the data with some pre-determined areas of import, but essentially it was the various themes and repetitions that revealed themselves while the collected

interview data was initially and consecutively examined that led to the construction of categories.

Using a content analysis approach, three categories were constructed of the most commonly reoccurring pedagogical fantasies that art student teachers possess and/or employ with partial regard to the type of teacher they desire to become/be recognized as. Pedagogical fantasies are fantasies that involve pedagogical encounters/exchanges between two or more people (especially teachers and students) inside or outside of an educational setting (Hetrick, 2010b). The pedagogical fantasies, of 1) *subject-supposed-to-know* (Lacan, 1977), 2) *student enchantment*, and 3) *ego-identification*, support the student teachers' desires and exist as necessary vehicles for turning their teaching realities into seemingly (deceptively) coherent wholes. While these three pedagogical fantasies evolved from the study, in this paper I conceptualize only the most common and (re)current fantasy of the knowledgeable (art) teacher, the *subject-supposed-to-know*. It is important to note that art student teachers are not the only educators to employ this fantasy, as novice and veteran teachers do also; however, student teachers are my focus in this paper.

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Depths of the
Pedagogical
Fantasy:
Exploring the
(Re)current
Fantasy of the
Knowledgeable
(Art) Teacher

Lacan's *Subject-supposed-to-know*

Within educational contexts, Lacan's *subject-supposed-to-know* is to be understood as something more than the individual words or literal phrasing separated by hyphens. While it does designate the one who knows, or the one who holds knowledge, the concept of the *subject-supposed-to-know* should not be separated from the psychoanalytic concept of transference which further endows with power the one presupposed to know. In Lacan's psychoanalytic transference

the student's love for the teacher is initiated when s/he perceives in the teacher something that s/he doesn't have... The teacher is an Authority figure who is "supposed-to-know." The loving student presupposes that this object is in the teacher "more than in him/herself," creating the fantasy—the spell of transference (Jagodzinski, 2002, p. xxi) .

Students in K-12¹ art classes regard art teachers as *the subjects-supposed-to-know*, the authority figures who are presupposed to know everything (in their case about art), or at the very least, volumes more about art than do any of them as beginning art students. Most art teachers have completed four years of art school- they should know something about it, and definitely more than their students do, or else why would teachers be up there in front of the room and instructing the students with lessons that they created. Consequently, it is the students' supposition of an art teacher who knows, who have something more than they have in themselves, that initiates the teaching and learning process rather than the art knowledge actually possessed by the teacher. Once an art teacher is situated in front of the art room and recognized as *the* teacher, the spell of transference begins for some students. For others, it will take "some time for the transference to become established" (Evans, 1996, p. 197), being completely indifferent to the teacher or thinking any number of potentially negative things about the teacher upon first sight/meeting. However, "sooner or later some chance gesture of the [teacher's] is taken by the [student] as a sign of some secret intention, some hidden knowledge. As this point the [teacher] has come to embody the subject supposed to know; [then] the transference is established" (Evans, 1996, p. 197).

Transference is therefore incredibly important to education and specifically the teaching-learning process, or pedagogical encounter. Often identified as indistinguishable from love (Lacan, 1977), the concept offers a reasonable explanation for the teachers' own students' respect and love toward them as their teachers because "[t]ransference may be understood as the general propensity to displace past relationships onto current experiences" (Robertson, 1994, p. 18). In the context of education, this is most often the students' relationships with their teachers being considered and treated with reference to the students' past relationships with their

¹"K-12" refers to the demarcation of grades 'kindergarten through twelfth' in most public and private schools throughout the United States [US]. This notation will be used in the paper as a means of specifying between students who are situated within these grades and students who attend higher education [college] institutions. As a further note of importance, most art student teachers become licensed for K-12 visual arts, so it is a commonly used and understood notation within the field of US art education.

parents. So, the love and respect felt toward the parents is transferred to the love and respect felt toward the teachers who assume a similar authoritative position in the students' academic experiences. As a teacher educator, exploring the fantasy of the *subject-supposed-to-know* with regard to transference, helps me to identify relationships within the data that aids in understanding the type of teacher that art student teachers may desire to become/be recognized as and the resulting behaviors and/or beliefs that may manifest.

Probing the
Depths of the
Pedagogical
Fantasy:
Exploring the
(Re)current
Fantasy of the
Knowledgeable
(Art) Teacher

The Fantasy of *Subject-supposed-to-know* as Pedagogue

Drawing upon Lacanian psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1964), I name the most (re)current pedagogical fantasy among art student teachers as *subject-supposed-to-know*. When utilized as an umbrella term, the *subject-supposed-to-know* subsumes the concepts of both teacher as pedagogue and teacher as reformer/philanthropist. Adapting Lacan's concept of *subject-supposed-to-know* as pedagogue, I envision it to include the characteristics of: being a knowledgeable leader in the classroom, as well as a guide or mentor; being the expert, the respected purveyor of arts knowledge (history, movements, artists, policies, techniques, and so on); and demonstrating skillful/technical abilities in a variety of artistic procedures as well as classroom management. Illustrative of these characteristics are excerpts from my participants' interview transcripts which exemplify the *subject-supposed-to-know* as pedagogue.

I see myself more as a *leader*, as a *mentor*, as an example of... successful adulthood, you know. And that I'm an *example*- if I want my students to be a part of a bigger community, if I want them to be creative citizens, then I need to be that. And that's a *huge responsibility*, that's a *huge role* that you have to play (Olivia², emphasis added) .

I expected to be a teacher that could pretty much *do anything*, so [laughs] you know that type... that do any project. Or I guess I expected to kind of *be invincible*... I think I expected, too, to come into the classroom and that

² All names were changed.

everyone to listen to me... I expected that; I expected respect immediately (Marissa, emphasis added) .

There is a need, a strong need to... keep art educators *up to date on new research* and the *things that are going on* because I think that my idea of art teachers now is that *the material and the techniques and the theories* that are being utilized and implemented in schools are extremely dated (Jean, emphasis added) .

The thoughts expressed above by my participants about being/needing to be the “leader who is respected” and “up-to-date on arts research” are completely reinforced by literature from art education (Barrett, 2003; Gnezda, 2009; NAEA, 2009; Stewart & Katter, 2009) and correspond with ideas of the *subject-supposed-to-know* in psychoanalytic theory (Finke, 1997).

Field of Art Education as Purveyor of the Pedagogue

In this section, I mention a few pieces of art education literature that exemplify the necessity for the readers, often student teachers that are assigned the articles in classes, to be knowledgeable arts pedagogues. This is to demonstrate that the field of art education as part of the student teachers’ knowledge and cultural systems is a major contributor to the student teachers’ fantasies that they must be highly knowledgeable to be competent or even *good* art teachers.

Illustrative of the desire for a knowledgeable arts pedagogue is Gnezda’s (2009) article in *Art Education* that ends with a list of nine suggested guidelines for teaching meaningful art making, including such suggestions as having “a thematically designed curriculum; open-ended, issue based assignments; presentations of exemplars; facilitation of students’ creative processes; criteria for assessment; and intervention” (p. 51). It is implied that through the implementation of any or all of these guidelines, the knowledgeable art educator will be teaching meaningful art making using knowledge tried and tested from the field of art education. Another example of the importance or necessity of being a knowledgeable art pedagogue is Barrett’s (2003) book, *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, and Responding* which is geared toward college-aged art studio

and art education students as much as it is toward practicing arts educators. Having an entire text devoted to telling one how to interpret art suggests that a knowledgeable art pedagogue should be well-trained in this skill. Similarly, Stewart and Katter's (2009) *A Global Pursuit*, an art curriculum text for elementary-aged students, is accompanied by a teacher's edition, as are many textbooks, which by its very existence presupposes that the art teacher needs to be knowledgeable, or at least *more* knowledgeable than his/her students, in talking about, presenting, and understanding art and its various concepts. This expectation for art teachers to be the *subjects-supposed-to-know* is supported and encouraged by national art teacher organizations (e.g. NAEA) as well, especially within their written standards for art teacher competency.

For example, the National Art Education Association's (2009) "Professional Standards for Visual Arts Educators represents the knowledge, skills, and attitudes art educators should possess to provide high-quality art instruction for all students" (NAEA, 2009, p. 1). Four of the first nine standards regarding the content of art begin with the phrase, "visual arts educators are knowledgeable about," and then list a series of skills, such as knowing about the cultural and historical contexts surrounding works of art, that the art teacher must have in order to be considered competent. On this three-page document there are 67 separate standards which support the idea that the art teacher should embody the *subject-supposed-to-know*. These professional standards are then passed down to the pre-service program managers as necessary attributes their student teacher candidates must employ in order to pass their practicum and receive their licenses. It is understandable that a national teaching organization of any academic discipline would require their members to be knowledgeable in their content area since most students "attribute knowledge and mastery to their teachers whether the teachers accept or relinquish this authority. Students enter the classroom believing that the teacher knows the 'right' answer" (Finke, 1997, p. 129); hence, the pedagogue is *subject-supposed-to-know*.

Probing the
Depths of the
Pedagogical
Fantasy:
Exploring the
(Re)current
Fantasy of the
Knowledgeable
(Art) Teacher

The Fantasy of *Subject-supposed-to-know* as Reformer/Philanthropist

The concept of *subject-supposed-to-know* as reformer/philanthropist includes the characteristics of: being the teacher as hero who denies himself/herself her basic needs in life so that he or she can in effect save or rescue his/her students (from danger and [self] destruction); being the proponent of social justice who enlightens students about overcoming personal/societal woes; desires the improvement and/or betterment of educational/societal wrongs through changes in consciousness or policy; and a teacher that desires to do good to/for Others with(out) expectation of immediate personal reward. This second delineation of the *subject-supposed-to-know* presents the teacher as “acting sincerely as a role model and a leader (often leading a group of iconoclasts), rescuing others from danger, and denying oneself for a larger good” (Markgraf & Pavlik, 1998, p. 278). The teacher as reformer/philanthropist is part of the *subject-supposed-to-know* because being a hero or rescuer or proponent of social justice implies the teacher knowing more than the students do about their own situations or best interests as well as how to remedy the students’ situations.

I think that’s it just really consists of helping... *helping students find themselves and find what their talents are, and what their passions are.* Because I think that when you’re *passionate about what you do* that’s when you’re the most- you can be a beneficial- not that you can’t otherwise, but- *be a productive member of society* where you’re contributing in ways and when you’re happy with what you’re doing. I think that comes naturally and I think it’s important for kids to know... to find that peace in themselves to where they feel content (Jean, emphasis added) .

I think you learn so much about *problem solving* and *trouble shooting ability from the art room* and that’s the satisfaction I get is just knowing that no matter where they [students] go and no matter what path they choose that there’s no way they can *walk out of my class* without

bettering their abilities to make decisions and think through things (Olivia, emphasis added) .

Though both subsidiaries of *subject-supposed-to-know* require a heightened level of knowledge/awareness, the reformer/philanthropist was bifurcated from the first because it seemingly exudes more concern, care, and altruism than does the teacher as pedagogue. This is evident in the student teachers' excerpts with phrases such as "helping students find themselves" and "bettering their abilities to make decisions and think through things". The requirement for being a knowledgeable pedagogue persists in order for a teacher to help students find or to better their problem solving abilities, but the reformer/philanthropist also has an aura and an expectation of a consequent positive change. These thoughts, about being/needing to be the teacher who helps students find themselves and their talents and/or bettering students' abilities to make decisions, expressed above, are also reinforced by literature from art education (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996; Wilson, 1997) and correspond with ideas of the *subject-supposed-to-know* as reformer/philanthropist.

Probing the
Depths of the
Pedagogical
Fantasy:
Exploring the
(Re)current
Fantasy of the
Knowledgeable
(Art) Teacher

Art Education Literature as Purveyor of the Reformer/Philanthropist

Illustrative of the desire for an arts reformer/philanthropist to increase student awareness and ability is a statement by Wilson (1997). Speaking about the then-recent shifts in art education paradigms, Wilson compared the differences between discipline-based art education and visual cultural education, suggesting a switch to the latter. "If art education were to become visual cultural education - I believe we [arts educators] could provide our students with opportunities to know themselves and their worlds more fully and deeply than they do through today's versions [of] art education" (Wilson, 1997, p. 10). Wilson's remark about arts teachers providing students with opportunities to know themselves resounds clearly in Jean's comment above that arts teachers can "help students find themselves." Another example of the importance or necessity of being an arts reformer/philanthropist is found in Efland, Freedman, and Stuhr's (1996) book, *Postmodern Art Education: An Approach to Curriculum*, which is geared toward higher education faculty

and students as much as it is toward practicing arts educators. Outlining five multicultural approaches found in general education and explaining them in relation to the field of art education, the authors write of their desire for the improvement and/or betterment of educational/societal wrongs through changes in consciousness or policy. Reinforcing the need for the reformer/philanthropist to be knowledgeable about the needs of the students, the authors emphasize that “with the help of the teacher, students can analyze the information, discuss their feelings and attitudes toward it [any chosen topic], and challenge existing views and preconceptions” (Efland, et al, 1996, p. 84). Their statement resembles Olivia’s hope that her future students will walk out of her art classroom having bettered their abilities to make life decisions and think through things before acting.

Conclusion

The purpose of my discussion about the focus on being a *subject-supposed-to-know* within the field of art education and its literature is not to imply that I take issue with it. Likewise, I am not recommending that as arts educators we are not to talk about artistic knowledge or be knowledgeable in the foundations of our field, have a working knowledge of various artistic procedures, the fundamentals of classroom management techniques, or suggesting that we should not introduce our students to such concepts. Rather it is my intention to acknowledge the *knowledgeable leader* as a continuous discourse within the field of art education, though one that has considered the concept of being a *subject-supposed-to-know* in ways differently than how I am approaching it within this study. It is my intention to go beyond the continuous discussion around the expectation of having an intimate and working knowledge of art (education, history, critique, techniques, etc) and explore the pedagogical fantasy that student teachers are employing as being (self) identified as all knowledgeable and what happens when they recognize they are not. Likewise, I am interested in what happens when student teachers recognize that they have not saved or rescued their students from societal danger and (self) destruction.

Recognizing the *subject-supposed-to-know* as a pedagogical fantasy possessed by many art student teachers is important to teacher educators

and/or supervisors because it helps us understand the anxieties the student teachers feel when they realize they don't hold all arts knowledge. In those moments when art student teachers begin to realize their pedagogical fantasies about teaching (art) are merely (deceptive) illusions, two of the bodily affects/effects that can possibly transpire are that of frustration and anxiety. Frustration, a feeling of dissatisfaction, often accompanied by anxiety or depression of unmet needs, actually comes from the refusal of (student) love (Evans, 1996). Anxiety, a feeling of distress or uneasiness, a sense of loss of self with no future reemergence, or a threat of fragmentation of the body (Evans, 1996), never lies and always indicates a loss of the *objet a* (Fink, 1997). These two affects that can have serious mental effects on student teachers' feelings toward self, teaching, and students are only two of the potentially disbaring results of coming too close to their pedagogical fantasies. As an example, student teachers often tell me they are anxious because they don't feel prepared to be in front of the classroom and are afraid of not having all the answers to their students' possible [imagined] questions. In moments such as these, I reassure my student teachers that being all-knowledgeable is a fantasy of their own ideation and they cannot possibly know everything about art nor have an answer to every single question raised by students—and that this is acceptable. If my student teacher's anxiety is not sayable or knowable to him/her, as the teacher educator, I make a concerted effort to be aware of that anxiety and offer the appropriate levels of support.

I offer this example as a potential way to theoretically impact and change the existing discourse and protocol (standards) for pre-service art education programs. Recognizing that the anxiety in student teachers may be exasperated by employing the fantasy that they must know everything about art and teaching should help teacher educators and/or supervisors better understand some of the conflicts and disruptions that the student teachers may be dealing with as they negotiate their school placements. Knowing this may assist the educators and/or supervisors in constructing curriculum, seminars, and dialogue that are conducive to positive and realistic identity (re)formation that includes the concept that a teacher does not need to know everything, but can, and will, learn from his/her students.

Probing the
Depths of the
Pedagogical
Fantasy:
Exploring the
(Re)current
Fantasy of the
Knowledgeable
(Art) Teacher

Probing the
Depths of the
Pedagogical
Fantasy:
Exploring the
(Re)current
Fantasy of the
Knowledgeable
(Art) Teacher

Since art teacher educators and/or supervisors are working closely with student teachers, it is an excellent time to provide a supportive space to work through the difficulties they may be facing in their clinical placements due to assuming new art teacher identities that they have not had opportunity to construct previously.

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Probing the
Depths of the
Pedagogical
Fantasy:
Exploring the
(Re)current
Fantasy of the
Knowledgeable
(Art) Teacher

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