CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIAL CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY USING ARTS-INFORMED INQUIRY TO EXPAND THINKING ABOUT ASSESSMENT IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This essay describes an art-informed inquiry to develop inclusive spaces and advance critical thinking about identity where artist-researcher-educator/researcher collaborations are enacted through oil pastels, collages, and an exhibit as a catalyst for expanding thinking about assessment identity. Those involved considered how assessment identity is a complex construct that influences pedagogy by artfully reflecting their knowledge, beliefs, feelings, confidence, and role. A library exhibit engaged broader audiences as an act of disrupting and expanding traditional expectations about educators/researchers. This project makes space to embrace diversity and multiple ways of knowing with a commitment to inclusion that interweaves imagination and dialogue.

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek. (Obama, 2008, para 40)

Higher education holds the potential to exert a significant influence on society, with the ability to shape cultural, social, and economic evolutions (Walker, 2015). This capacity for societal impact may be connected to the historical legacies of universities, stemming from religious affiliations, government involvement, and diverse funding sources, such as major granting agencies and philanthropists committed to social change (Hearn, 2021; Richter et al., 2020). Beyond these origins, higher education is a place where thinking and debating are encouraged to benefit individuals and society (Chan, 2016). Currently, Canadian universities are reframing their purposes and harnessing their power to meaningfully address the Truth and Reconciliation Recommendations (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2019). There is an opportunity in this reframing for higher education to continue to develop inclusive spaces, promote knowledge production, and advance critical thinking (den Heyer et al., 2021; Grande 2018). The call for change is loud, echoing from all facets of society and evident in the collaboration and creativity possible when considering a vision for higher education in the future (Demir, 2022).

As scholars, we invest in the university's capacity and commitment to social change. The value of inclusivity and diversity are beliefs we hold; this visual essay provides evidence about ways that artful processes can broaden representations of who is engaged in higher education and expand knowledge about individual lived experiences while communicating research to broad audiences (Morris & Paris, 2022). The arts have long held a place

in transforming people's lives and promoting social change (Erickson, 2011). The framing of art as research introduces a distinct perspective, emphasizing that art creation involves more than simply producing visual or aesthetic elements. Instead, art creation encompasses the exploration of various topics or ideas, engaging intellectually and emotionally with them, and expressing personal impressions through artistic interpretation (Marshall, 2011). In addition, artful inquiry cultivates distinctive visions by stimulating the capacity to see in new ways and break free from habitual perspectives (Greene, 1995). Arts-informed approaches have the potential to engage audiences in experiences, such as identity re/de/construction, that are difficult to articulate with words (Lapum, 2017) but hold promise to generate dialogue while envisioning a different future. Figure 1 illustrates an example of an arts-informed approach, specifically collage, that will be elaborated upon later in this essay.

The project discussed in this visual essay, along with other projects more broadly situated within higher education, harnesses the call to broaden scholarship of engagement, discovery, integration, and application

as a contribution to growth and social change (Boyer, 1996; Davey, 2017). We suggest that situating arts-informed inquiry as a method in higher education visibly expands conversations about identity and possibilities for personal, reflective practice. We first share literature about arts-informed inquiry and assessment identity as a process for critical self-reflection preparing educators to represent, witness, and embrace diversity. The inquiry context is described before providing details
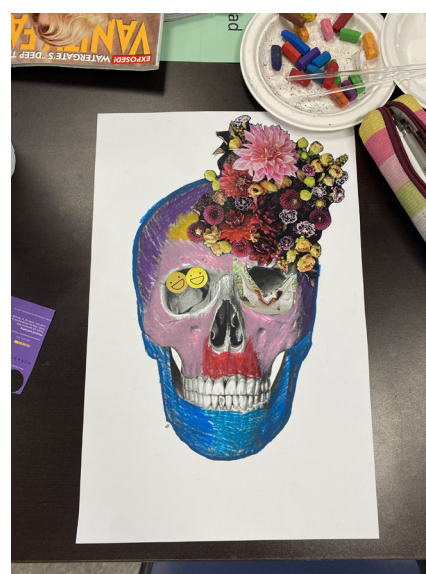
Figures 1a, 1b.
Collaging Identity. Photograph captured by Katrina Carbone (2022).
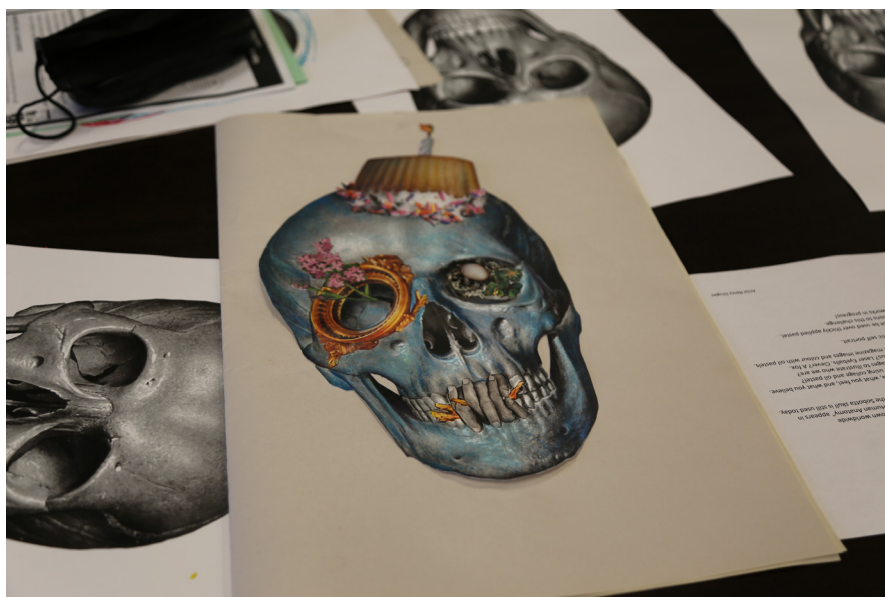
Figures 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e. Engagement and Exploration in an Arts-Informed Session. Photographs captured by Katrina Carbone and Henrietta Roi (2022).
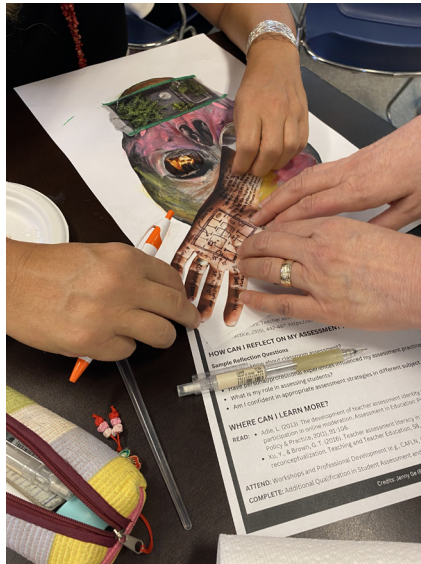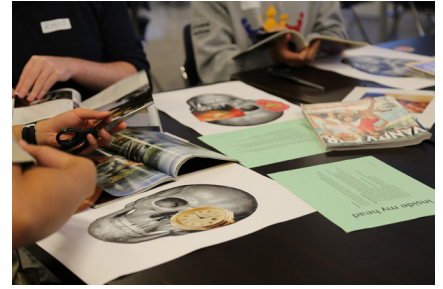

Figure 3. A Data-Informed Assessment Identity Collage Stemming from Looney et al. (2018). Photograph captured by Sumaiya Chowdhury (2023).

about how our artful and dialogic processes embrace plurality with a commitment to inclusion in higher education.

Interweaving Arts and Assessment to Expand Thinking about Identity

> Knowing, for example, takes on the attributes of a verb, that is, a process rather than an object or product that is fixed and definitively knowable. Mind, for us, is much more likely to be a fluid stream rather than a fixed rock. Our minds are always a work in progress. (Eisner, 2005, p. 20)

Arts-informed inquiry can result in the creation of new knowledge by honoring multiple realities, viewing knowledge as dynamic, and promoting a distinct way of seeing (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Grumet, 1995). Underpinning the use of arts-informed inquiry is the importance of systematic investigation (Ewing, 2013) coupled with inclusivity (Stanley, 2009) promoted when different forms of data allow for different types of questions, experiences, and sense-making. Arts-informed inquiry is distinguished by two goals: (1) involving forms of artistic expression during the process, and (2) allowing the form(s) to shape the representation of insights (Cole & Knowles, 2008). In arts-informed inquiry, art-making plays a supportive role within a holistic inquiry (Stanley, 2009) that emphasizes the utilization of artful processes as people participate using their imaginations, minds, and bodies to explore identity. Figure 2 shows an emphasis on group processes and exploration; the quality of the art is less important than the ways that art informs understanding (Searle & Shulha, 2016).

By moving beyond language, the use of artistic genres provides access to more invisible, abstract, and inaccessible forms (Marshall et al., 2019), which may allude to more conventional interactions or scholarship (McNiff, 1998). We draw from the visual arts using oil pastels and collage, as these genres encompass multiple creative processes and media. We pair these genres with dialogue and narrative as reflective practice. As Ewing and Hughes (2008) note, "we must make an effort to understand who we are and how we learn in order to move forward in our endeavors…" (p. 520). We posit that artful creations offer powerful processes in higher education for thinking about identity and identity development.

Research into identity in teacher education has been evolving over the past three decades (Meijer, 2011) because of recognition about the important transition from student into teacher as a professional role (Alsup, 2019). Rodgers and Scott (2008) highlight that contemporary conceptions of identity are context-dependent, relational, and fluid, involving the construction of meaning through storytelling. Envisioning a new role for positive social change requires unlearning traditional notions of teacher identity and preconceived thoughts based on past school experiences (Cochran-Smith, 2003). By questioning assumptions that are often accepted without scrutiny and envisioning the multifaceted nature of identity, teachers can position themselves as change agents who work toward the creation of a more equitable society (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). When educators critically examine their beliefs and actions using creativity, it can lead to the emergence of new questions and ideas about teacher and assessment identity.

Assessment identity draws on teacher identity, which has amassed a burgeoning body of literature in education (Pishghadam et al., 2022). Looney and colleagues (2018) identify five overlapping dimensions of teacher assessment identi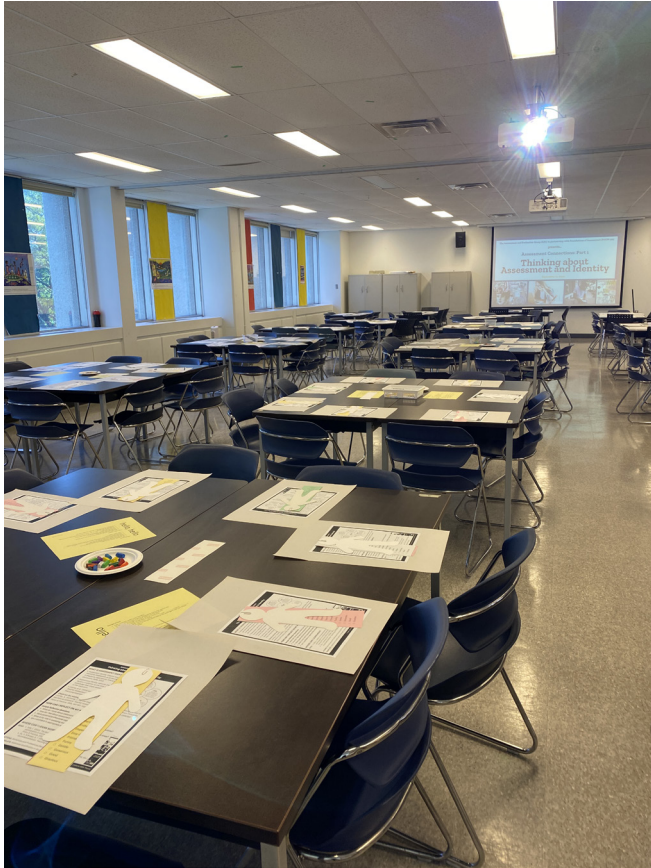ty conveyed through statements in the first person: "I know," "I believe," "I feel," "I am confident," and "my role" (pp. 455–456). Figure 3 highlights our representation of the framework using oil pastels and collage with words from the literature as well as participant experiences.

Bringing together the dimensions of Looney's framework in an artful creation (Carbone et al., 2023) depicts assessment identity as complex (Adie, 2012; Vermunt et al., 2017). To effectively develop, select, and use assessment, teachers continuously evolve their assessment identity (Kahl et al., 2013). We recognize assessment identity as an ongoing process where teachers continuously develop their skills and understanding of assessment (Wyatt-Smith et al., 2010), shaped by experiences, interactions, and discussions as a learner, teacher, and assessor (Adie, 2012).

Using assessment identity as a reflective lens is a promising approach, given its attention to individual learners with unique characteristics (Noonan, 2019). By considering past experiences, beliefs, and feelings about assessment, teachers identify gaps in their knowledge and better understand the reasons behind decisions. Using arts-informed inquiry to reflect on assessment identity provides pre-service teachers with tailored opportunities to support learning goals and identify areas of growth. The multiplicity of learning goals is part of a commitment to social change; to diversifying and acknowledge diversity within educational spaces. Teachers who are cognizant of their assessment identity are better able to navigate challenges and make informed decisions that improve learning.

Expanding Conceptions by Journeying into the Process

> Learning to teach is not a mere matter of applying decontextualized skills or of mirroring

Figure 4. A Space for Engaging in Arts-Informed Exploration. Photograph captured by Katrina Carbone (2022).

Figures 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d. Set Up and Materials. Photographs captured by Katrina Carbone and Henrietta Roi (2022).

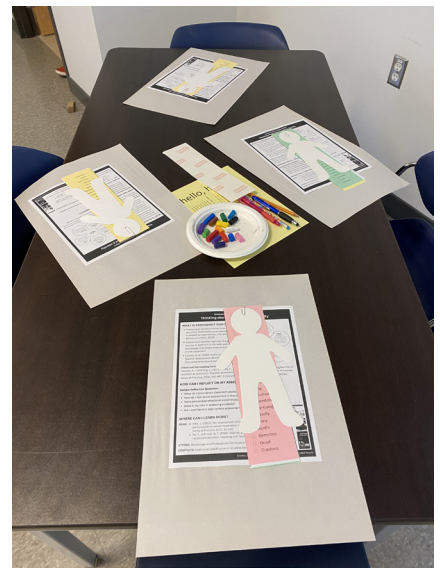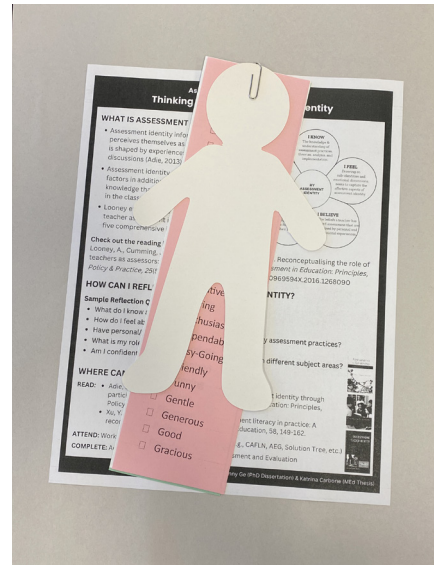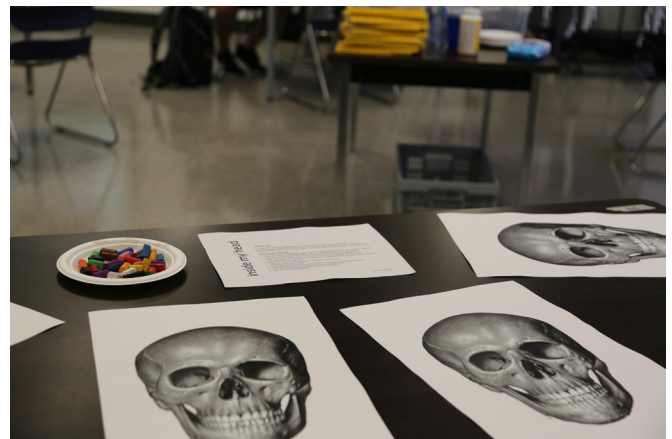predetermined images; it is a time when one's past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach—like teaching itself— is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become. (Britzman, 1991, p. 8)

This essay describes our process, a year-long journey that started with an idea about the possibility of the arts, questions about broadening identity, and a willingness to engage in creative collaboration. Our study context was a mid-size, research-intensive university in Ontario, Canada that values the process of learning to teach, welcomes diversity, and promotes inclusivity. We are situated within the Faculty of Education, which plays a crucial role in training future educators and researchers.

An invitation to participate was shared in the faculty newsletter reaching approximately 500 pre-service teachers, 100 graduate students, and nearly 75 staff/faculty. In total, Figure 4 shows where 141 pre-service teachers, 5 graduate students, and 7 members of the collaborative team participated in an arts-informed assessment identity creation session lasting three hours.

Session collaborators included assessment course instructors, graduate research assistants, arts committee members, knowledge mobilization specialists, who are authors of this piece, as well as librarians and a community-based teaching artist. Funding was provided by the Dean's office. Figure 5 shows materials, highlighting the assessment identity framework underlying the checklist and figure for pastels as well as materials for collaging.

During the session, attendees think about their teaching identity before completing a self-assessment check-list to identify their characteristics. Reviewing these characteristics, participants were encouraged focus

on how their identified traits manifest in planning and enacting assessment. Then, introducing the teacher assessment identity framework (Looney et al., 2018) provided a heuristic for reflection as we entered an oil pastel experience. Oil pastels are an accessible media which can allow non-artists to easily create images with texture, lines, color, and minimal mess (Betinsky, 1995). Each participant selected three traits and used pastels to represent their assessor identities (see Figure 6). Self-assessments were later folded to create a paperchain showing linkages across individuals within a shared profession.

Next, a collage activity was conducted using Sobotta skulls (1909; see Figure 5(d)), with the guidance of community-based teaching artist who had experience using the skull in other identity explorations. Participants created a visual representation of their assessment identity with words and/or images pulled from magazines and pastels. Post-collage, dialogic prompts provided a chance to elaborate on collages and assessment identity connections. To close the session, participants used a stream-of-consciousness approach to write narratives of assessment identity. Prompts included: examples of assessment identity as it manifested in their teaching, identifying tensions when enacting assessment, and considering assessment with social justice.

Approximately six weeks following the session, the collaborating team mounted an Identity Exhibition in our Education Library (Figure 7). The timing of this exhibit aligned with students' return to campus after six-week teaching placements. An exhibit goal was to provide another reflective experience for those who participated in the initial session to revisit their thinking about assessment identity, considering recent placements. A secondary goal was to engage broader audiences by representing a plurality of assessment identities and thereby

expand and disrupt expectations about assessment identity.

At the library exhibit, we used an arts-based knowledge translation framework (Kukkonen & Cooper, 2019) to guide our thinking about experience stations where people could view and reflect while engaging in sensemaking processes. The four stations included keyword writing on cue cards, policy graffiti, an imagination station with pastels and paper people cutouts, and an online questionnaire. Stations provided information about the exhibit as well as an instructional guide. Members of the collaborative team attended the exhibit to support engagement as needed while replenishing materials. In the final section, we share some reflections and concluding thoughts, with selected quotes from preliminary analysis, we note that as this artful inquiry continues, we will more fully explore data collected. This research uses arts-informed inquiry within a case study approach (Stake, 2013). Case study is a comprehensive empirical inquiry which is positioned in context to construct aggregate understandings of a phenomenon (Stake, 2005). Data for this study includes artistic creations and narrative reflections to explore assessment identity. Narrative explorations explore nuanced experiences which may involve the description, recollection of memories, present quandaries, and future imaginings (Lyle, 2013). Data were analyzed using a four-cycle analysis. The first three cycles were carried out inductively using a layered approach (see Rose, 2007). The final coding cycle will follow a deductive analysis using the teachers' assessment identity dimensions as a conceptual framework (Looney et al., 2018). This visual essay provides preliminary results from our initial analysis activities.
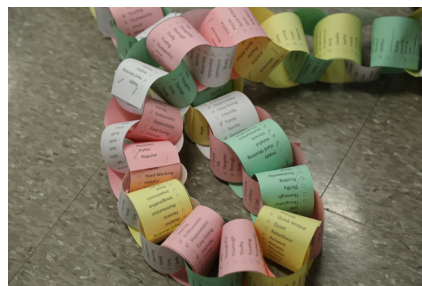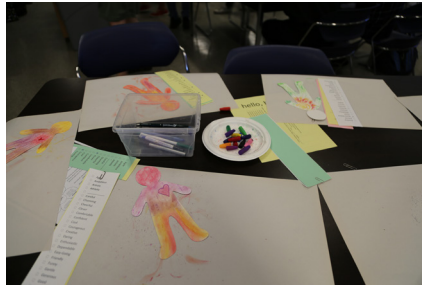
Figures 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d: Showcasing the Self-Assessment and Oil Pastel Assessment Identity Reflection. Photographs captured by Katrina Carbone and Henrietta Roi (2022).

Figures 7a, 7b. Library Exhibit Illustrating the Session Artifacts Photographs captured by Katrina Carbone (2023).

Perspectives of Arts-Informed Assessment Identity as Conduit for Change

We teach who we are. (Palmer, 1998, p. 2)

Who we are cannot be disentangled from how we teach or how we assess and yet, who we are is not fixed, our conceptions of ourselves are always evolving in response to new situations and information. We heard from one participant that "activities like this help to remind students that they are allowed to be themselves, and nobody can judge them for that." The multimodal expression includes opportunities for tacit, sensory, and intuitive knowledge that embraces subjectivity and interpretation to invite opportunities for reflexive learning (Barone, 2008; Ewing & Hughes; 2008; Leavy, 2020).

As one preservice teacher exclaimed, "arts allow people to reflect upon themselves that is outside the norm." This was a goal of the session and exhibit, a first step at engaging people with different kinds of viewpoints and experiences in a purposeful artful process as they become aware of assessment identity and/or broaden their thinking about pedagogy while cultivating an expectation and appreciation for diversity. As one pre-service teacher explained, "I have become astutely aware of the fact that... it is important for students to express themselves creatively, and exercises like this are a good opportunity for that." Reflections show that the session and exhibit catalyzed a space of the possible, were participants imagined a future they wanted to contribute to. In future iterations we would refine our collaborations throughout planning to make more explicit our roles and goals while being more direct with participants about the immediate and distal outcomes we hope for. Namely, we want participants to see how artful experiences and arts education

amplify learning and can contribute to change. While we are confident that this arts-informed experience offers an opportunity for embodied learning that supports identity development and pluralistic imaging, we are hopeful continued analysis and refinement with the data will generate findings about the capacity of these artful processes to influence participant thinking, emotion and action.

Throughout the session and in the library, we saw and heard groups questioning and revisioning their ideas about assessment, identity, and education more broadly. We suggest that even with this limited amount of time, the session and exhibit together held space for wonder generated through creativity-fostered conversations which can act as a catalyst for new understandings about oneself and others. Some might argue, as we do, that this is a space of possibility with creative and transformative potential (McGregor, 2022).

Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (2017) wrote about laying the path while walking and this feels like an apt description of creatively constructing assessment identity by engaging in an experience of learning, doing, witnessing, and reflecting. As one pre-service teacher described, "I realized that I value creativity way more than I originally thought. I love imagination and the power of the human mind to create new and engaging things." The new and engaging thing involves not only the tangible artifacts but also different, visible interpretations of the self as assessor and educator. As we saw from this process and heard from a pre-service teacher, Arts-informed experiences add emotion to assessment identity and reflection, by allowing one to display their emotions and how they feel about particular aspects of life (traits) and modeling it out on a visual platform.

Displaying emotions provides an avenue for expressing oneself by examining and potentially reclaiming identity.

Figures 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d.
Collaging in Conversation: Reshaping Understanding of Assessment Identity.
Photographs captured by Katrina Carbone and Henrietta Roi (2022).

through identity construction or transitions may be a personal experience that is held within this collective process and therefore, allows for the reconsidering of dominant narratives and assumptions.

During the session and later, in viewing the creations, some participants acknowledged complexity within their teaching and assessor selves. A pre-service teacher reflected, "I am more aware about how I would make assessments in the future to have some level of creativity that sparks students." Another pre-service teacher revealed, "as a result of this activity, I was able to see assessment in a new way. Not just as a cut and dry concept, but as a more open-ended medium that had multiple gray areas." While some students valued having a creative option, others recognized that artful and alternative ways of knowing were discomforting and sought ways to maintain control. As one pre-service teacher described, "I am very structured. When making the collage, I still wanted to have the figure look like a skull, and I considered how the parts could come together to make a very tangible whole." Arts-informed inquiry is rich in this way, it can invite people into sensorial experiences that "help us to become aware of ourselves" by providing new ways of seeing and the creation of many shapes/symbols representing the "process of learning to create ourselves" (Eisner, 2002, p. 112).

Throughout the artful processes, we encouraged expression and reflection as active and interactive processes to consider assessment identity and how the assessor's role might shape or contribute to broader aspects or desired changes in education. We are heartened to share that one pre-service teacher described that "using art in the classroom . . . can help humanize our assessment." Teachers are the guide of the classroom, whose task is to *provoke* (start the query with activity/question/models/templets), *enable* (provide information, scaffolding, guidance, and methods), and *allow* learners to critically explore their surrounding with their own distinct views (Marshall et al., 2019). Those involved in this artful process contribute to social change by seeking ways to unsettle understanding while facilitating opportunities to question assumptions that broaden the commitment educators and education can make to social change.

Collaboratively facilitating arts-informed inquiry fostered an atmosphere which embraced multiple versions of the self and recognized identity as well as teaching and research as dynamic constructs (Alsup, 2019). Arts-informed inquiry about assessment identity responds to the idea "that knowing does not come from standing at a distance and representing but rather from a direct material engagement with the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 49). Using pastels and collage as accessible media presents many

possibilities; we hope that others see the value of layering creative experiences with reflective processes to create linkages between self, others, and the collective, as well as the personal and professional.

The power of visual representation lies in its ability to simultaneously convey complex information and evoke emotional responses, allowing it to serve as both a descriptive tool and a means of presenting empirical data (Weber, 2008). In this visual essay, the images were used descriptively to share our artful process, but these images will also be used as part of the larger data set when we deepen our analysis. As part of our push to broaden scholarship and promote inclusion and diversity, our next steps include continued data analysis of existing data, planning for a future experience, and involving other university faculty in the planning to broaden our reach. Additionally, we will continue to collaborate to seek out innovative ways to center the experiences of pre-service educators and other learners to promote plurality in higher education. Arts-informed inquiry is poised to act as a positive disruptor in higher education, so that thinking and creating can contribute new knowledge through dynamic forms of engagement with vivid possibilities for provocative dissemination which provide opportunities for contributing to positive social change.

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