

An Arts-Based Exploration of Classroom Management Through Portraiture

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Abstract

This arts-based research uses *portraiture* and *appreciative inquiry* to explore Bachelor of Education teacher candidates' conceptions of classroom management. A total of 270 sets of observational notes completed by 90 teacher candidates during their school practicum placements were used to inform the researchers' creation of arts-based literary and painted learner portraits. The research addresses the questions: (1) What characteristics do teacher candidates associate with different types of learners?; (2) How might teacher-educators critically unpack these assumptive characteristics to better prepare teacher candidates for working in diverse classrooms?; and (3) How might an arts-based way of knowing enhance teacher candidates' understandings of classroom management?

Background

This arts-based research uses *portraiture* (literary and painted) and *appreciative inquiry* to explore Bachelor of Education teacher candidates' conceptions of classroom management. In total, 270 sets of observational notes completed by 90 teacher candidates during their school practicum placements were used to inform the creation of arts-based literary and painted learner portraits. The research addresses three key questions: (1) What characteristics do teacher candidates associate with different types of learners?; (2) How might teacher-educators critically unpack these assumptive characteristics to better prepare teacher candidates for working in diverse classrooms?; and (3) How might an arts-based way of knowing enhance teacher candidates' or teacher-educators' understandings of classroom management? The research is grounded in an arts-based research approach, and as such, this article includes academic forms of writing, creative nonfiction narratives of understanding, and both literary and painted portraits.

Contextual Narrative

As I [Author 1] have mentored teacher candidates navigating their entry into the education profession, many stories of their learning have greatly influenced, and indeed challenged, my own conceptions of what it means to be a teacher in today's contemporary schooling landscape. The following is one of those stories, and I present it as a grounding entity for the research that has been undertaken:

The Unit

After finding the classroom and greeting the teacher candidate, Ms. Kirkman,¹ I settled into the back of the space, paperwork out, ready to take notes as she taught a grade three math lesson on estimation. Throughout the lesson, the students were largely engaged in the activities Ms. Kirkman had planned for them. Feeling relieved at seeing Ms. Kirkman's emerging success, I took a moment to speak privately with the host teacher: "She's doing really well, considering the circumstances," she said. "This is a very challenging group of students, even for me. Some days, I basically give up trying. This whole school is a mess." The conversation abruptly ended there, and I went back to observing the teacher candidate.

At the end of the math lesson, Ms. Kirkman asked her students to put away their notebooks and math manipulatives, tidy their desk areas, change into their gym shoes, and line up quietly at the back of the room. All the students followed her instructions without hesitation, except for one: an eight-year-old boy named Lucas.² Not only had Lucas neglected to put his math notebook and supplies away, but he also failed to locate his gym shoes, was not following Ms. Kirkman's instructions, and was instead lying flat on his back, motionless on the floor under his desk. I watched with anticipation alongside the host teacher to see how Ms. Kirkman would respond to this student's mildly disruptive behaviour. As the other students lined up quietly in anticipation of gym class, Lucas remained steadfast in his opposition, horizontal on the floor under his desk, ready to engage in a singular act of defiance. "Watch this," said the host teacher. "He does this nearly every day. It's always *something* with this kid."

Upon noticing that Ms. Kirkman was starting to look a little bewildered, the host teacher decided to lead the students down to the gym herself, and left Ms. Kirkman behind to "deal with the problem" of Lucas who simply wouldn't budge. After the students left the class, Ms. Kirkman calmly approached Lucas' desk. "We're going to the gym now Lucas. You need to get up off the floor and come with us. We'll miss you if you don't join the fun!" Unfortunately, no matter what Ms. Kirkman said to try and persuade him, Lucas would not comply. Finally, after realizing that his peers were long-gone from the room, Lucas proudly proclaimed, "I'm an inchworm! Watch me! I can get all the way to the gym on my back!" And so, Lucas literally *inchwormed* his way out of the classroom and down the hallway on his back all the way to the stairs (where he briefly stood up to take them two at a time), only to end up on his back again on the lower floor. Inch by painfully slow inch, he victoriously made it to the gymnasium, where he finally decided to join his peers for the remainder of the gym period.

At the end of the day, Ms. Kirkman and I had a private conversation to discuss the incident. Initially, Ms. Kirkman was reluctant to divulge information about her practicum for fear of implicating her host teacher and the school's administrator in what she believed to be egregious, prejudiced behaviour on their part. "You won't believe what they call Lucas and many of the other kids at this school behind their backs," she said. "They refer to him as a *unit*." During the discussion that followed, I learned what *unit* meant to Ms. Kirkman in this context. I was reminded that the school was in an extremely troubled area of the city, rife with poverty, social issues, unemployment, homelessness, broken homes, drug abuse, and other systemic community challenges. The school was near a large set of government subsidized low-income housing units, where Lucas and many other children like him lived with their families. Hence, teachers and administrators at the school surreptitiously referred to Lucas as a unit. "Oh, he's a

unit so there's not much you can really do to help him," was the mantra that Ms. Kirkman had heard repeatedly throughout her practicum. Despite my 20+ years as an educator, the dehumanizing language that had been systemically applied to this child's identity based on his social situation disturbed me. How could any educator, whose fundamental job it is to support, uplift, and encourage learners through the creation of a safe and healthy learning environment, become so desensitized to the systemic challenges facing a child that they readily practice the erasure of that child's identity in favour of an ignorant, unhelpful epithet such as unit?

Approaches to Classroom Management

As I have reflected on the experiences of Ms. Kirkman, I am reminded that classroom management is about much more than formulating simple plans of action for regulating and mitigating challenging student behaviour. Both conventional and contemporary research on classroom management reinforces the idea that the most effective behavioural management is grounded in a balance of practical teacher skills (Levin et al., 2016) and teacher attitudes resulting in a supportive classroom climate (Withall, 1979). I believe that any approach to classroom management should ensure that all students have access to supportive, trusting, positive learning environments and relationships designed to optimize opportunities for their success in the classroom. My observation of Lucas with Ms. Kirkman and the reflections that followed spoke of complex yet subtle power dynamics, stereotypes, and caricatures of students with low socioeconomic circumstances, and indeed, the dehumanization of an individual child who deserved so much more than what he encountered in the school environment. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) reminds us that teachers have the opportunity and privilege to:

[. . .] engage in acts (implicit and explicit) of social transformation, we create opportunities for dialogue, we pursue the silences, and in the process, we face ethical dilemmas and a great moral responsibility. This is provocative work that can disturb the natural rhythms of social reality and encounter; this is exciting work that can instigate positive and productive change. (p. 12)

Lawrence-Lightfoot's work resonates with me and strongly underpins my approach to shedding new light on classroom management in K–12 classrooms. I believe it is my ethical responsibility as a teacher-educator to guide teacher candidates as they learn to recognize, unpack, debunk, and proactively address social injustices and power imbalances that they encounter, and eventually help them to develop the tools to reimagine a socially just classroom.

Conceptual Frameworks

Appreciative Inquiry

This research uses elements of *appreciative inquiry* and *portraiture* respectively as a blended framework to explore Bachelor of Education teacher candidates' conceptions of classroom management. Appreciative inquiry is based on valuing personal, positive, narrative-rich stories, whereby learning can be fostered through engagement, and respect can be deepened among participants. The appreciative inquiry research process is therefore naturally inclusive and collaborative, giving equal voice to all

stakeholders (including researchers and participants alike). Essentially, appreciative inquiry “builds on positive experiences to spark positive change by honouring the expertise resident[s] in an organization and its people... by uncovering what works well in a system and devises ways to expand upon those strengths” (Filleul, 2010, p. 38). Although appreciative inquiry has primarily been used in health education (e.g., Lander & Graham-Pole, 2006) and educational development (e.g., Kadi-Hanifi et al., 2013) to conduct research that lends itself to program evaluation and systemic change, researchers in the field of education (e.g., Allen & Innes, 2013) are beginning to use it for reviewing, learning from, building upon, and subsequently strengthening and/or designing positive opportunities for developing innovative teaching pedagogies that better meet the needs of contemporary students at all levels of education. Framing this research through an appreciative model, rather than a deficit model, allowed me to focus on the depth of the stories arising from teacher candidates’ experiences that were forward-thinking and particularly compelling in nature. Most models for appreciative inquiry take the researcher through four distinct stages: discovering, dreaming, designing, and delivering (Shuayb et al., 2009). In this investigation into the nature of classroom management through the eyes of teacher candidates, the first stage of *discovering* was the focus. Here, the researcher focuses on observations, notes, and potential interview questions of the participants with the goal of investigating the nature of the phenomenon being studied.

Portraiture

I wanted to draw upon a second framework that would allow me the freedom to be creative in an arts-based approach to research and writing, while also allowing me to draw on elements from appreciative inquiry: the most significant element being the focus on the *good*. Both appreciative inquiry and portraiture seek to focus on the good in a phenomenon, while “resisting the more typical social science preoccupation with weakness and pathology” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p. 19). It would be so easy, for example, to focus on the negative implications of the situation I observed in Ms. Kirkman’s classroom. As she herself expressed to me, she was reluctant to point out the flaws and inequities in the system she was embedded in. However, frameworks and/or methods that allow me to investigate the positive, present me with an opportunity to focus on the possible transformational and growth-affirming opportunities that can be gleamed from the story at hand. In this regard, portraiture reaches an important intersection with appreciative inquiry in that it speaks to me as a researcher who cares deeply about how words and descriptions serve us pragmatically, aesthetically, and conscientiously. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016) writes, “portraiture is phenomenological methodology, but it is distinctive in that it is the first social scientific methodology that is explicit in blending art and science, bridging empiricism and aestheticism” (p. 19). Portraiture may offer researchers the opportunity to prompt teachers into re-evaluating their respective points of view, and it is through this re-evaluating of perspectives that teachers might be able to engage in a meaningful form of social justice (Chapman, 2007)—even on a small scale within their personalized classroom environments.

Portraiture as an artistic medium is also frequently referenced in K–12 curricular contexts and is therefore potentially easily accessible to educators as a learning tool (both for their own students, and for themselves as reflective practitioners). For example, portraiture is included in both the Ontario and New

Brunswick K–12 Arts curriculums as both a figurative and expressive genre of visual art. Historically speaking, portraiture is understood to be a genre or category of visual art, created using limitless mediums and with a specific identifiable characteristic (The Ontario Curriculum, grades 1-8: The Arts. 2009). The distinctive and defining characteristic of portraiture is simple: for an artwork to be considered a portrait, it must visually represent a person. In the Ontario Arts curriculum, the definition states that a portrait is “an artwork that depicts a person. They may be abstract or realistic and executed in a variety of media” (p. 200). Similarly, the New Brunswick Visual Arts curriculum (2014) provides a portrait definition that references characterizing a person within an artwork to convey their likeness.

Portraiture (whether visual or literary) may be used as a teaching tool to communicate complex ideas to students and beyond, as teachers and teacher-educators can portray more than just the likeness of a person with its use. For example, portraits can depict the inner life of a person: their emotions, personality, psychology alongside wider cultural and societal contexts. This makes portraiture an ideal artistic medium within an educational context. Throughout the Ontario and New Brunswick arts curriculum investigations, analysis and creation of portraits are referenced as a means for communicating ideas beyond just the aesthetic quality of said portraits. As an example, a specific curriculum expectation outlined in the grade 9 and 10 New Brunswick Visual Art curriculum (2014) encourages the expression of ideas, asking students to “. . . explore, challenge, develop, and express ideas, using the skills, language, techniques, and processes of the arts... (in) the making of emblematic self-portraits” (p.4). The Ontario Arts curriculum (2009) even recommends teacher prompts that support the power of portraiture in illustrating the characteristics of a person through guiding questions such as: “What aspects of your subject’s personality will you emphasize or exaggerate in your portrait?” (p 144). Portraits are used as a catalyst to emphasize emotional feelings the artist, student, or researcher has about the subject, aesthetically representing the personality of the subject through the elements and principles of design. Again, this is explicitly referenced in the Grade 9 and 10 Ontario Art curriculum (2010), where it invites students themselves to “create a mixed-media self-portrait that uses colour, line, and shape in the style of Frida Kahlo to convey their personality and elicit emotions from the audience” (p. 127).

Students are encouraged to use portraiture within the education context to express themselves, their ideas, feelings, and opinions, furthering their understanding of complex ideas within history, society, and culture. For arts-based researchers and other educators, the parallel understanding is also true: portraiture itself (whether literary or visual arts based) has limitless possibilities for exploration, investigation, and application of new learning within complex educational contexts.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for analysis were 270 sets of handwritten anecdotal observational *learner portrait* notes that were completed by 90 teacher candidates in elementary and secondary public school classrooms during their practicum placements in K–12 schools in New Brunswick. On a trifold worksheet, teacher candidates were asked to fill each of three sections with handwritten descriptions of three selected students over a five-day period in the classroom. Teacher candidates were given basic instructions on what to include in those observational notes: First, that each of the three portraits should represent a

distinct student (respectively, learner qualities that teacher candidates identified as coming from “high achieving” students, “typical” students, and “challenging” students); and second, that the observations should be mindful of five key elements of portraiture methodology (*context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole*) whenever possible. Teacher candidates were instructed in a basic overview of the nature of portraiture as a research methodology. This instruction included definitions of the five key portraiture elements, followed by an opportunity to discuss these definitions with the researchers and each other. Teacher candidates were subsequently asked to consider how portraiture might be appropriate to use as an observational tool in a K–12 classroom context. The resulting observational learner profile notes were not discussed with the teacher candidates’ host teachers, nor were these notes shared with the teacher candidates’ own students. Upon returning to B.Ed. classes at the university post-practicum, teacher candidates shared their learner profile notes with each other and discussed the complex learning environments and personalized needs of the students they had observed during practica.

What follows are three amalgamated learner portraits that were created by analyzing the qualitative data from the classroom management observations using both portraiture and appreciative inquiry as methodological guideposts. During the analysis process, each of the 270 sets of handwritten observational notes were coded for emergent themes, coded in light of the five key elements of portraiture methodology, and also separated into groupings for data originating from both elementary and secondary classroom contexts. Although the data collected reflected observations from both secondary and elementary classroom contexts, these three learner portraits will focus on the elementary classroom observational notes. The first learner portrait (Ethan) represents the learner qualities that teacher candidates identified as coming from “high achieving” students; the second learner portrait (Poppy) represents the learner qualities that teacher candidates identified as coming from “typical” students; and the third learner portrait (Jamie) represents the learner qualities that teacher candidates identified as coming from “challenging” students. The research is guided by the following questions through the unpacking and analysis of the three amalgamated learner portraits: (1) What basic characteristics do teacher candidates associate with each of the three types of classroom learner (e.g., high-achieving, typical, and challenging)?; (2) What complex characteristics do teacher candidates associate with each of the three types of classroom learner (e.g., socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, cultural context, gender, sexual orientation, language ability, learning styles, or other developmental considerations)?; and (3) How might teacher-educators unpack, debunk, or otherwise utilize these assumptive characteristics present in the learner profiles to better prepare teacher candidates for the realities of working in diverse public school classrooms? Each learner portrait is presented in the first-person narrative voice of a teacher candidate and includes a visual painted portrait that was created by [Author 2] as a response to the written portraits. In addition, each portrait is structured around four of the five elements of portraiture: context, voice, relationship, and emergent themes. The fifth element of portraiture, the aesthetic whole, is addressed at the end of the three learner portraits.

Learner Portrait 1: Ethan

Context

The high-flyer in my class is Ethan, a grade five student who is smart, competitive, and naturally inquisitive. He often wears a proper buttoned-down shirt and polka dot bowtie to class because he thinks it makes him look “like a real professor of things.” He completes his assigned homework quickly, makes few mistakes in his work, and has a difficult time being still or calm if he gets bored. I know I will always have to have another task ready for him after his regular work is done. I sometimes worry that because he is so competent at this level of grade learning, that he will inevitably be ignored or passed over in class as the teacher is addressing issues with more obviously challenging students in terms of their behaviour and more complex learning needs. Overall, Ethan models good behaviour for his peers. As a teacher, I can likely count on him to be engaged in the learning for the day, and I have minimal concerns about his opportunities to succeed in this class based on these preliminary observations. I also noticed that, in addition to being academically successful seemingly without much effort, Ethan has a strong skill set and talent for drawing. Sometimes if he finishes his math or writing early, the host teacher will ask him to create a drawing for her based on a learning theme that they have covered in class. During my practicum, I was delighted to be gifted hand-drawn pictures by Ethan: an undersea landscape with a diver, a bowtie-wearing leopard whose spots were swirling off the page, and a perfect to-scale replica of a dinner menu from his favourite local pizza restaurant.

Voice

Ethan had the ability to articulate himself so clearly even though he was only 10 years old and in grade five. He had a preoccupation with demonstrating how adept he is at using (what he jokingly called) “fancy” language. Words such as “ambiguity,” “parsed,” “dénouement,” and “exponentially” flew from Ethan’s lips as if he had used and understood such complex words since he was a baby. He often corrected the host teacher or myself when something was amiss: once, he pointed out that he disagreed with my marking of one of his simple writing tasks. “I’m unhappy with your assessment of the words I chose to use,” he had stated emphatically. As the teacher candidate, I had to check my own ego as I was repeatedly challenged by this confident and sometimes brash, yet unexpectedly charming and intelligent, young boy. Though Ethan’s ability to use his own voice to his advantage was clear, it might have been interesting to know more about his home or family context. I wondered about how he became so confident, if that confidence was deserved and why, and about the kind of support he was or was not receiving at home to help him reflect and grow as he progressed through the school year and beyond.

Relationship

Ethan’s interactions with his teacher and peers were very positive. With his peers, he was outgoing and inclusive, often taking on the role of leader or guide during group activities, such as dramatic reenactments or physical play. He would often help others when he noticed they were struggling to participate in activities. He demonstrated compassion and empathy for those who were hurting or upset,

and he never hesitated to share his lunch or toys or learning supplies with peers. The host teacher regularly takes advantage of Ethan's tendencies in this regard; asking him to assist in tasks (perhaps to keep him from boredom) and to engage him in more advanced learning activities (perhaps to help him feel special or uniquely supported). As a teacher candidate, I believe that this was a clever and useful approach to take with a student like Ethan. My only cautionary note would be to make sure that although Ethan is capable of being fully independent in the classroom, allowing him to be too independent might rob him of further opportunities to learn how to cooperate with others, how to push himself beyond his own limits, and to learn from the discomfort itself that comes from not always being right in any situation.

Emergent Themes

As I reflected on my observations of Ethan, I noticed several recurring themes that bear further thought. I also question whether these themes are common to all high-flying students in elementary classrooms, or if they are unique to Ethan. I tend to believe the latter: that although these themes emerged readily in Ethan's case, these same themes may not ring true for other highfliers in other comparable elementary school classrooms. What I have learned from my observations of Ethan is that this kind of student needs to be challenged academically to alleviate boredom in the classroom; they have a tendency to engage in perfectionism which might either drive them to success or block them from success; they may be gifted in other non-academic ways such as the arts; they tend to be naturally confident and perhaps a bit competitive; they easily take initiative in learning situations and can support their peers who do not have that same ability; and they are socially and verbally adept when interacting with others such as peers or the teacher. As an individual, Ethan was insightful, critically minded, and full of genuine enjoyment for learning. I think that such high-flying students really need to be encouraged to be the full superstars that they are, without exception, so that they can dream and then reach their full potential.



Fig. 1: Ethan's portrait (Note: Ethan's painted portrait explores how his academic strengths sometimes cause him to be bored and daydream as a result of not feeling challenged. This is shown through a whimsical thought bubble of childlike doodles above his head, which he looks at in a bored and unengaged manner.)

Learner Portrait 2: Poppy

Context

Poppy is a 12-year-old grade six student who has an older brother in the same school. She is very quiet, loves to read, and seems to only have a handful of close friends. Though she is well liked by her peers, she neither seeks attention nor volunteers to take on a leadership role in group activities. When Poppy does participate, she does so with a positive attitude, but needs consistent prompting to continue in challenging scenarios where she feels like she is somehow on display or being judged in front of her peers. There is a certain level of shyness to Poppy's personality, and according to the host teacher, her younger brother is quite the opposite and was an "outgoing, absolute gem" to teach during the previous school year. Teachers in the school continually compare Poppy's participation and achievements in class with those of her older brother and they do not seem to try to hide this obvious comparison from her.

Voice

There seem to be a lot of what I would call "Average Joes" in this particular class, such as Poppy. If a student is not standing out, for better or worse, they tend to be invisible in this classroom. Poppy knows that other students in the room will garner more attention than she would, when they disobey the teacher or need extra help, and she is comfortable being ignored regularly. Oftentimes I would observe her reading quietly on her own or peeking at her phone in her lap during class. Once, I asked her what she was doing with her cellphone, and she said that the teacher had given her permission to only "look it up or listen to it," meaning she had permission to use her phone for Googling information or for listening to music and that was it. Poppy's voice was rarely the first to be heard in group discussions or class activities. She is a very quiet girl who prefers to read, rather than speak, and tends to take the safe route when it comes to the learning environment. Poppy is not a natural risk taker, and the teacher feels that this might be detrimental to her success later in school. Poppy's parents have remarked that they wish she was more like her older brother, whose personality is more engaging and spark-igniting.

Relationship

Poppy's relationships with her peers and teachers are positive, if slightly forgettable. She participates in classroom discussions and lessons but not without prompting, she tends to stick to safe and obvious answers in her academic work, she easily slides under the radar in front of the teacher, she is quiet and focused most of the time, and she is a good listener and follows instructions. Poppy's parents communicate regularly (if a little too often) with the classroom teacher, and they frequently express concern about Poppy's quiet and shy personality. It was only after I had been observing in the classroom for several days that I discovered Poppy's first language was not actually English, but French. I cannot help but wonder if this language issue is creating a barrier for her full participation in class, and perhaps is the cause of her shyness in taking initiative in group work. There may be cultural considerations that I am not aware of. For example, perhaps her parents are expecting a certain level of outgoing interaction from her that is a part of her cultural context

at home. When Poppy communicates in the classroom in English, I wonder if this is affecting her level of social confidence and if she is scared to say the wrong thing.

Emergent Themes

It seems that the average, typical student is usually a quiet one. This quietness or introversion might be commonly mistaken for disinterest or distraction. Poppy, for example, was very predictable in temperament and not a behavioural problem at all for the teacher, which meant she could easily hide or appear invisible in class. Poppy was exceptionally kind to her peers when interacting with them, but ultimately, she preferred individualism and needed options for independent work in class activities. The host teacher shared the following advice for how to work well with a typical, average student such as Poppy: give clear instructions to the student and make sure they are following through and not just “half-participating;” know that most students you encounter in the classroom are able to self-regulate and self-monitor but this will still require follow-up throughout the day; collaborative work does not come easily to students like Poppy (they will lean towards individuality when it is offered) so you will have to make purposeful non-optional opportunities available for collaboration; and interaction with parents might need to be altered to suit their contextual needs, especially if they speak a different language at home than they do at school (literally or culturally).



Fig. 2: Poppy's portrait (Note: Poppy's painted portrait focuses on how she blends in with the class, is quiet and shy, and escapes into a book, so she is depicted as being almost translucent and blending in with the more actively engaged students that surround her.)

Learner Portrait 3: Jamie

Context

Jamie is a six-year-old student in my grade one class. On the first day when I arrived as a teacher candidate, he purposefully avoided talking to me, and physically walked away each time I tried to engage him in conversation. During circle sharing time, as his peers were sitting quietly on the carpet with their teacher, Jamie suddenly jumped up from the circle and ran across the room to where I was sitting at the host teacher's large desk. "I don't like you!" he screamed while pointing a fist full of fingers in my face.

After the brief outburst, he marched back to the carpet, and rejoined the class. Although students in this age group mostly work in groups and at shared tables, Jamie has his own tiny desk along the side of the room near the classroom teacher. He calls his desk his own “island” and often arranges a ring of shoes around the legs of his desk to “protect him from classroom sharks.”

Voice

Jamie’s voice—both literally and metaphorically—is very loud, takes up a lot of space in the room, and is impossible to ignore. He is constantly vying for attention in the most disruptive ways possible. It is difficult to tell if he is being rude and disruptive by choice, or if he has no skills for proper communication at his level of development. The teacher tends to deal with Jamie’s overbearing attitude and vocalizations by largely ignoring them. Sometimes this strategy works, and other times it fails when Jamie realizes he is not getting the attention he craves. At age six, Jamie should be at the developmental stage where he no longer throws temper tantrums, but that is clearly not the case here. One day he threw a tantrum when he discovered that his mom had only packed healthy items in his lunch. After begging his friend to give him cookies from his lunch, he then starting crying and screaming before throwing himself on the floor by the classroom door. I honestly do not think he has developed, or even learned, good coping mechanisms yet. Despite the host teacher’s attempts to reinforce his good behaviour and redirect his inappropriate outbursts, Jamie might not be getting the same behavioural consistency in his home environment.

Relationship

Jamie’s relationships within the classroom are of complete opposites. If he is not being inappropriately friendly and over the top with his emotional and needy attention-seeking from the teacher, then he is being intentionally disruptive and combative with his peers when he sees that he is not in control of a given situation. Jamie almost always disobeys instructions in the classroom and as a result, has special rules that apply only to him (e.g., he is not allowed in the hall or to use the bathroom without special supervision). Despite Jamie’s challenging behaviour, he still has wonderful moments of kindness where he exhibits a great deal of concern and care for his peers. Though I am exhausted when working with this student, I know that this is the nature of elementary school teaching. This is where the really hard work is needed on the part of teachers. Jamie requires an investment that is worth making. I genuinely love working with students like this and getting to see them grow and change. Each one is a beautiful little human.

Emergent Themes

Students like Jamie tend to disrupt the learning of others, disrupt the teacher while they are teaching, present safety issues (both physical and emotional), and are often highly distracted or off-task. At the young age of six, it is impossible to tell yet if Jamie is simply behind his peers with respect to developmental stages, or if there is a more complex learning or behavioural disorder at play. Though his fundamental needs are met by his family (food, shelter, love, etc.), it seems as though something more

subtle might be really missing in his life, which is why he is such an attention-seeking child. As Jamie gets older, the behavioural issues will either lessen as he catches up developmentally with his peers, or the gap in acceptable behaviour will continue to expand as he struggles with an underlying cause. Jamie's complex needs at age six are managed fairly well by the classroom teacher. However, if he continues on his current behavioural path, it is likely that he will need further specialized assistance from an educational support worker or assistant in the classroom. As the focus remains on mitigating his disruptive behaviour, I wonder if his learning is being seriously compromised.



Fig. 3: Jamie's portrait (Note: Jamie's painted portrait shows the extremes of his personality, how he struggles with emotional calibration, tantrums, and outbursts, but also shows his empathetic and kind actions towards his peers, represented in intense, highly saturated colours and silhouettes.)

The Aesthetic Whole and the Pragmatic

Each of the three amalgamated learner profiles of Ethan, Poppy, and Jamie, were presented in the narrative voice of a teacher candidate and framed through four of the five common elements of portraiture: context, voice, relationship, and emergent themes. As a researcher, I found the fifth element of portraiture, the aesthetic whole, to be more difficult to consider in such a siloed manner. Literature suggests that indeed, the aesthetic whole is not meant to be an element unto itself. It is instead an opportunity for a researcher to blend insights from each of the four previous elements into an aesthetic presentation of the person or phenomenon being studied. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2016) suggests that the portraitist, or in this case, the researcher, is

[. . .]interested in mapping the aesthetic context that surrounds the person or the institution, seeking to capture sensory dimensions, the visual, the tactile, the auditory... [they listen for] the metaphors, the images, the allusions people use, and the repetitive refrains that lace their talk. Then the portraitist triangulates the data from these multiple sources. (pp. 22–23)

Having to parse the themes and learning down into impermeable categories, even through creative nonfiction narratives, can feel unnatural or counterintuitive. Consciously using portraiture as a methodology allowed me to acknowledge this conundrum, and to present learner profiles that were both pragmatic and factual, while also retaining the potential to be beautifully and evocatively written (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) and thus, engaging the reader through compelling accounts of the students

being observed (the aesthetic whole—the final narrative portrait combined with the painted visual representation). It is my hope that this aim was achieved through sharing the amalgamated learner portraits of Ethan, Poppy, and Jamie, respectively, in both creative nonfiction literary *and* painted form. I believe that such learner portraits might be worthy of use as a teaching tool for both seasoned teachers and teacher candidates alike. Complex profiles that draw on both the pragmatic and practical, the aesthetic and affective, can prompt teachers into entering a paradigmatic crossroads, where they might find themselves confronted with a new perspective that had not previously been considered. For those who respond to aesthetic and affective modes of communication, portraiture lends itself nicely to calling forth new, unexpected ways of feeling, knowing, and doing.

Learner portraiture can also call forth pragmatic recommendations for action, as mirrored by the stages of appreciative inquiry (discovering, dreaming, designing, delivering). With respect to the more pragmatic recommendations that have arisen through this investigation of classroom management learner portraits, the following insights have arisen that teacher-educators themselves may want to take into consideration:

1. Teacher-educators are in a prime position to help teacher candidates learn professional ways to effectively disrupt narratives of inequity that they observe or encounter during their respective practicums;
2. Classroom management is a group effort that requires collegial reflection, revision, and reimagining;
3. The most challenging students in a classroom are not always the lowest academic achievers: academically successful students are also challenging in their own right, as are students who are navigating complex social situations outside of the school context regardless of academic ability or previous record;
4. Students in classrooms are highly dynamic individuals, which require teachers to have a huge repertoire of flexible strategies that can be adapted to suit the personalized needs of students;
5. Students who are operating under systemic fear and prejudice are more likely to act out in the classroom environment as a direct result of that inequity and will not be able to engage fully in the learning environment;
6. Systemic social inequities are pervasive in school and classroom contexts whether we personally experience them or not as teachers; we must recognize that children are unable to navigate the effects of these inequities on their own and that educators have an ethical responsibility to provide safe, student-centred learning environments;
7. Portraiture, appreciative inquiry, and other arts-based methods allow for a growth mindset to develop as the focus is placed upon the positives and the possibilities; and
8. Arts-based methods may allow teacher-educators to unpack complex classroom and behavioural management issues in creative and unexpected ways that are more accessible for teacher candidates than other traditional approaches.

Final Thoughts

At the top of my Bachelor of Education course syllabi, I always include a quote to set the tone of the learning for teacher candidates. As a part of my own initial reflection on Ms. Kirkman's experiences in the grade three classroom and her interactions with Lucas and his description as a unit, I revisited the quote I included in my Classroom Management course syllabus for the year when Ms. Kirkman was a student in my class:

What does it mean to listen to a voice before it is spoken? It means making space for the other, being aware of the other, paying attention to the other, honouring the other. It means not rushing to fill our students' silences with fearful speech of our own and not trying to coerce them into saying the things that we want to hear. It means entering emphatically into the student's world so that he or she perceives you as someone who has the promise of being able to hear another person's truth. (Palmer, 1998, p. 46)

For me, an experienced teacher and teacher-educator, and for teacher candidates such as Ms. Kirkman, there has never been a timelier quote to consider than one that calls us to listen and respond to our students with empathy and compassion, with an emphasis placed squarely on the promise of truth and honour in the classroom learning environment. Students in our classrooms, such as Lucas, Ethan, Poppy, and Jamie, deserve nothing less than our best attempt to fulfill this promise. The creative nonfiction narratives and painted portraits developed through this research and presented in this paper may prompt teacher-educators and teacher candidates to interpret the positive possibilities of classroom management, and address its complex challenges while appreciating the emotional and aesthetic qualities of the creative mediums in which these possibilities and challenges were represented.

Notes

1. Pseudonym used to protect teacher candidate's identity.
2. Pseudonym used to protect student's identify.

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