Understanding the Potential for Arts-Informed Inquiry in Program Evaluation

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
June 2013

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ABSTRACT

Program evaluation is a form of systematic inquiry designed to meet the needs of those who are working on or who are responsible for a program. One challenge faced by the field of evaluation is responding to the increasing complexity of social programing and diverse informational needs. Methodological innovation is a trait of the field of program evaluation that provides opportunity for responding to challenge faced by the field. Evaluation orientations that rely on qualitative methodologies, which seek to describe, to understand or to interpret complex phenomena are potential sites for arts-informed inquiry. Arts-informed inquiry draws from creative strategies in the arts, where art is produced for the sake of inquiry. Accordingly, through this research I adopt dual roles of evaluator and researcher, to gather empirical evidence about the power of integrating arts-informed inquiry into frameworks for evaluation.

In this research, I document how arts-informed inquiry draws from artistic processes to broaden perceptions, make meaningful contributions, and expand evaluator skills. Specifically, the potential for arts-informed inquiry in evaluation is investigated by conducting an evaluation of one program, in one school district. Analysis of this two-phase process occurred by applying a heuristic of three groupings of key concepts within the field of evaluation: methods, values and use. In doing so, I provide a detailed description of the potential for arts-informed inquiry within one program evaluation. This study provides a transparent account of the inquiry process to document the implications for undertaking arts-informed inquiry in program evaluation. In addition, there are theoretical implications for the field of evaluation when they consider the process and representations shaped by inclusion of arts-informed inquiry.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the result of a supportive community that has provided me much guidance and encouragement. I am especially grateful for the guidance of my supervisor, committee members, other faculty members, friends, as well as the unwavering support from my family and husband.

My supervisor, Lyn Shulha, is an outstanding mentor in every way. During my graduate studies, I have enjoyed many opportunities working alongside her, learning the crafts of research and evaluation. Throughout this journey, she has provided all the leadership, caring, and patience I could have hoped for, making this learning experience a profound one. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler and Dr. Rena Upits, truly inspirational women who offered their unique insights and contributions in ways that deepened this inquiry. I consider this trio of women to be a ‘dream team’ because each brought their experiences and capabilities to inform this work as well as their empathy and compassion in ways that gave me the courage to peruse these scholarly imaginings. I am humbled by the gift of their willingness to give everything they had in a continuous effort to help me shape my ideas.

Each of my professors has contributed significantly to my thinking during graduate school. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. John Freeman for his unwavering support as well as his honesty throughout my graduate studies. I also wish to thank Dr. Don Klinger for his mentorship and kindness. I could always rely on either of these two men to answer questions or offer advice in ways that always expanded my thinking. My work as a graduate student was also enhanced by the attention to detail provided by the Graduate Studies and Research staff as well as the team at the Faculty of Education Library. Special thanks to Dr. Jennifer Greene for agreeing to act as external examiner; as a constant champion for the use of mixed and multiple methods in research and evaluation she has always pushed my thinking further.
During graduate school, I have made several wonderful friends who I have had the benefit of learning from and with. Many of these friends were members of the Assessment and Evaluation Group, which provided me with an enthusiastic array of colleagues who support a diverse community of practice. In addition, many people inside of this group and those whom I studied or taught with provided a friendly ear, swapped a story, and offered advice throughout these years of graduate study. In particular, I would like to thank Christine Doe and Chris DeLuca, good friends who were always willing to help and to give excellent suggestions. Without the friendship and strong sense of community among graduate students, my studies would have been a very different experience.

My family has been an irreplaceable support. I would like to thank my parents, Mike and Vikki Searle as well as my sister, Andrea Bowering, who were patiently listened to my stories and problematizing about this inquiry process. They have inspired me to think deeply about the work I do and to draw passion from the rich experiences of my life. I am blessed to have my Grandmother, Kathleen Welch, in my life as a true example of what perseverance and drive can help one accomplish. During my studies, my family grew and I was blessed to have the additional support from my in-laws, Sam and Christina Panopoulos, who have always encouraged me with their best wishes. I am fortunate to have so many caring people in my life; I could not have imagined this process without their support.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Vasilios (Billy) Panopoulos, a constant presence as I talked though ideas, worried about not ‘getting it right’ and searched for just the right word. He has helped me to celebrate accomplishments both big and small, along the way. I thank him for the late night edits, the technical support, and his enduring patience. Without him, this work could not have been completed. Most importantly, I wish to dedicate this work to our beautiful daughter, Isabella Kathleen Panopoulos Searle, so that she may grow up knowing that anything is possible when you follow your dreams.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Figure 1. Visualizing the Inquiry

Conducting research on an evaluation can be messy. To me, messy is interesting; it involves looking beyond the specifics to imagine new angles and, ultimately, to create new pathways. The thought bubbles, drawn early in this research process, show some of the connections I was discovering between the field of program evaluation and arts-informed inquiry. Encompassing this illustration is a circle, a never-ending line that reflects my hope for learning integrated within and beyond a program evaluation. For me, conducting program evaluation by integrating arts-informed inquiry promised powerful, systematic, multimodal,
mindful, and reflexive learning. This thesis documents the extent to which this promise was fulfilled.

My focus on learning, as a researcher and program evaluator, comes from my lifelong passion to be an educator. Palmer (2007) says we teach who we are and I suspect this sentiment is true for evaluators as well. Who I am is not fixed: I have many roles in life and many interests. My research and my work in the field of evaluation reflect this diversity. This study allowed me to bring together my passion for learning with a commitment to evaluation and research that is premised on connecting with others through the intermingling of discovery, creativity, and reflection.

**Rationale for the Study**

Programs are purposefully designed to address specific social or educational concerns and challenges. Program evaluation attends to the information and process needs of those working in or responsible for programs (Alkin, 2004; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). As the identified needs of program stakeholders have diversified over time, so too have the approaches to inquiry used to address these needs (Patton, 2008). Once rooted primarily in accountability purposes, investigators believed that psychometrics and quantitative methods best answered evaluation questions. I position myself within newer, expansive purposes of evaluative inquiry that embrace a full range of questions about programs and their processes. As a consequence the field of program evaluation now features a full spectrum of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method approaches (e.g., J. Greene, 1999; J. Greene & Caracelli, 1997; House, 1993; McClintock, 2004). I want to combine learning from the history of program evaluation, as detailed in the literature, with my experiences as an educator and, more recently, an evaluator.
Some argue that the best way to track the evolution of the field of evaluation actually may be to track its methodological responsiveness (J. Greene, 1999; Mertens, 2005). I agree that methodological innovation is a trait of the field of program evaluation and one that makes the integration of arts-informed inquiry a strong possibility. It appears to me that evaluators have been leaders in methodological innovation by continually proposing ways of reshaping inquiry to deal with complex questions. Given the field’s willingness to consider a variety of questions and to be methodologically flexible, an investigation into the contribution of arts-informed inquiry to evaluation is both appropriate and timely. This study descriptively documents an educational program evaluation that intentionally plans for, uses, and reflects upon the use of arts-informed inquiry.

Underpinning the use of arts-informed inquiry is the notion that different forms of data allow for different types of analyses and sense-making. I intended that purposeful drawing on qualities and traditions inherent in the arts would invite participants to be engaged in evaluative inquiry in new and exciting ways. As I will demonstrate, participants were able to bring forward creative and novel representations of the program and its meaning.

Purpose and Research Questions for the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct an evaluation of a district-sponsored, school-based program, entitled Tribes, and to use this evaluation to examine the potential contributions of arts-informed inquiry to the evaluation. In this research I use two different approaches to the context: the program within the school district and the orientations in the field of evaluation that make arts-informed inquiry a viable approach. Accordingly, these research questions guided this inquiry:

a. What does the crafting of arts-informed inquiry within evaluation look like?
b. What evidence is there that arts-informed inquiry adds value to evaluative processes and outcomes?

c. How is arts-informed inquiry useful; i.e., in what contexts, and for what purposes is it appropriate to intentionally craft arts-informed inquiry as a feature of evaluation?

**Context of the program for the evaluation.** The clients selected the program under evaluation after much consideration and research into possible choices. They chose the Tribes program because it is one that has been part of their professional practice across an entire district for almost a decade, yet, it is one that had never been evaluated. During our evaluation I learned that they shied away from evaluating it because of the affective nature of the program. While measuring affect is a challenging task, the richness and complexity of a program that has broad goals which integrate affective and cognitive components made it an interesting choice for this evaluation and research into the role of arts-informed inquiry.

The Tribes program focuses on developing a community of learners within the classroom and school. In the early 1970s, Jeanne Gibbs developed Tribes as a research-based program to give teachers, students, and administrators the tools to work together as a team (tribe) to problem solve inside and outside the classroom or school. I was excited when the clients selected this program; I first heard of Tribes over a decade ago when I was a Bachelor of Education student. Our faculty offered the course as an extra-curricular activity and I participated in the training and received a copy of the resource featured in Figure 1. As a practising teacher, I had used some of the strategies within my classroom and integrated the ideas into my overall teaching philosophy.
Initially, the program was created to address the prevalence of violence, bullying, and negative social behaviours in schools because unsafe environments prevent learning. In addition, this program acknowledges that students involved in bullying (as bullies, victims, or bystanders) are likely to face increased difficulties with confidence, physical health, and ongoing relationship problems (Olweus, 1991; Rigby, 2001). By promoting active strategies, the goal is to create a safe and caring place where students can invest their energy in learning. If a student chooses to act out, the repercussions are known in advance.

The program is based on four main agreements that all students, teachers, and administrators follow. The four agreements are attentive listening, appreciations (no put-downs), mutual respect, and the right to pass. Tribes is broadly implemented across North America, with certified training available in Faculties of Education, as well as throughout many school districts.
across Canada. Despite its prevalence in our education systems, there is relatively little evaluation data published about the implementation and sustainability of Tribes.

**Context of the evaluation.** Context plays an instrumental role in evaluation practice and decision making; it can be thought of as the interplay between people, program, politics, and the environment. Alkin, Vo and Christie (2012) confirm the importance of context in an evaluation process and evaluator decision making. As a multidimensional construct, context includes “the social and political conditions under which a program is being evaluated, the issues and questions that should be addressed and whether these questions are answerable given the evaluator’s resources and constraints” (p. 31). Context is not time bound. Historical constructs emerging from the phenomena under study, as well as the field of evaluation, represent another aspect that plays into all of these variables. Throughout this dissertation, context considers the intersection of where the evaluation takes place, the evaluation clients, and the program under study, as well as the values, knowledge, skills, and theoretical perspectives influencing evaluator behaviour (Alkin, Vo & Christie, 2012)

This study of arts-informed inquiry is situated in an evaluation of the Tribes program within one school district. It is a program that emphasizes multiple ways of knowing, developing community, individual expression, and reflection. The qualities of arts-informed inquiry as integrated into this evaluation mirror several of the key tenets of the Tribes philosophy. Arts-informed inquiry in an evaluation focuses on making a commitment (to a particular art form) while remaining open (being responsive to clients/participants/context) during the inquiry process (emergent methods). From practical experiences as an educator and my theoretical learning as a graduate student, I could envision this program, my orientation to evaluation, and arts-informed inquiry as complementary practices.
One influence emerging from the context of this program was the emphasis on reflection; it played a critical part in both the program and evaluative processes. In arts-informed inquiry, reflection takes place at many levels and in ways that are ongoing and iterative. I invited board level personnel, school administrators, classroom teachers, and elementary students to join me in an array of reflective practices as part of this program evaluation. I chose to represent the final report and presentation using artistic processes (such as poetry, photography, and narratives), which invited multiple audiences to engage with the content and findings from the evaluation. The processes used to engage participants and the forms developed to represent learning from this evaluation were designed to be appropriate across multiple contexts. My commonplace books are a strong indicator of my lifelong commitment to reflection in its many forms. In addition, undertaking a meta-evaluation of this process was not only central to this research but also consistent with my value of reflection.

At the outset of this research, Tribes was being implemented in a select group of elementary and secondary classrooms across a geographically large school district. The Tribes program fell within the portfolio of the two Learning Coordinators for Safe Schools. One of the Learning Coordinators articulated her reason for wanting to evaluate this program:

Tribes is one of our key programs that we believe is at the core of creating an inclusive environment for young people. In this world of evidence-based programming, we really felt we needed data to support what we believed inherently about Tribes. We wanted to be able to demonstrate to the powers that be, to all of our stakeholders, the importance of it and its value. (Meta-evaluation interview, March 30, 2010)

The review and evaluation of the Tribes program was intended to help them understand the program in action, so they could make appropriate decisions about its future within the district.
Before I undertook this evaluation work, the Learning Coordinators and the Research and Assessment Manager, on behalf of the district, expressed support for my intended research study about the value of arts-informed inquiry in a program evaluation. The evaluation of this district’s Tribes program contributes to the base of empirical evidence about arts-informed inquiry in the field of program evaluation. The context of this evaluation was dynamic and involved many stakeholders, such as Board personnel, program trainers, school administrators, and classroom teachers as well as program participants who were elementary school students.

I negotiated the specific questions and plan for this evaluation with the clients, with the goal of assuring that the evaluation purposes met their information and process needs. A copy of the evaluation plan is included on http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle. As the contracted evaluator, I was responsible for responding to and making suggestions about the design of the overall evaluation. The district granted permission to use the evaluation process and data as part of my research into arts-informed inquiry in program evaluation. It was important to me, as both an evaluator and a researcher of evaluation, that this evaluation fit the context of the school board, as well as the field of evaluative inquiry.

From the field of evaluative inquiry, I drew together qualitative, responsive, and participatory forms. As qualitative forms of inquiry have gained prominence, responsive evaluation has emerged as a complementary approach that addresses the social complexities and diverse contexts of contemporary evaluation (e.g., Abma, 1998a, 2003, 2006; Constantino & Greene, 2003; Stake, 1975, 1980, 2004). Responsive forms now include approaches such as participatory and collaborative evaluation. Each approach has established independent theories, with a shared goal of responding to stakeholders and engaging stakeholders as well as program users, in various evaluation responsibilities (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Fetterman, 1994;
Greene, 1988, 2001; King, 1988; O’Sullivan, 2004; Rodriguez-Campos, 2005; Shulha & Wilson, 2003). A common emphasis is to ensure that the needs of stakeholders are met. I anticipated that responsive evaluation would offer an appropriate fit in this context because it values openness by focusing on program activities from the perspectives of people involved. It is a theoretical approach that encourages attentive, empathetic listening to focus on stakeholder experiences and issues.

While there are many theoretical differences between responsive and participatory theories of evaluation, they share a common pursuit of engaging stakeholders and participants (e.g., Cousins & Earl, 1992; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Cousins & Shulha, 2006; Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Patton, 1997). King (2007) remarked that all evaluation work is participatory to some extent; evaluators do not work in isolation. In my mind, a participatory orientation that prioritizes joint meaning-making sets an ideal context for exploring arts-informed inquiry in evaluation. Yet the inclusion of arts-informed inquiry recognizes that, like evaluations themselves, participatory forms exist along a continuum. The emphasis of participatory theories has been on meeting the needs of stakeholders and, more recently, on how meeting this need has the potential for engaging stakeholders in ways that encourage evaluation use (Patton, 2008). From the start of this evaluation and research process I anticipated that these theories could provide a solid foundation for integrating practices from the field of arts-informed inquiry.

**An Introduction to Arts-Informed Inquiry in Evaluation**

Arts-informed inquiry is a source of inquiry that makes me feel alive because it engages all of my senses, my cognition and, often, my physical body in the practice of understanding. In addition, I chose to purposefully work with arts-informed inquiry because it is congruent with already accepted orientations of evaluation. The specific orientations I explore in this work are
those of responsive and participatory evaluation. Evaluation orientations that rely on qualitative methodologies, which seek to describe, to understand or to interpret complex phenomena may be compatible with arts-informed inquiry. Based on my experiences to date, I anticipated that arts-informed inquiry could offer a valuable mechanism for evaluators.

Some evaluators have already begun using arts in their work (e.g., Abma, 1998b, 2002; Constantino & Greene, 2003; Dart & Davies, 2003; J. Greene, 2001; McClintock, 2004; Simons & McCormack, 2007). Unfortunately, while gaining credibility, examples of these evaluations are still more commonly found in discussions and presentations of practice than in published pieces that examine the implications for evaluation theory. Nevertheless, this literature provided me with a starting point for imagining the arts in evaluation. The more I read, the more I began to see that when used, these practices were often piecemeal or happenstance as opposed to being intentionally inclusive of the arts. In contrast, my dissertation study builds on the possibilities evident in the field of evaluation, purposefully using, as well as documenting and reflecting upon, the dimensions of arts-informed inquiry within a program evaluation.

In my work, a program evaluation conducted using arts-informed inquiry is distinguished by two main goals: involving forms of artistic expression during the process of the evaluation and allowing the form(s) to shape the representation of the program and what is learned about it (Cole & Knowles, 2008). Cole and Knowles explained that, “arts-informed research is a mode and form of qualitative research in the social sciences that is influenced by, but not based in, the arts, broadly conceived” (p. 59). Arts-based research is defined as the systematic application of arts-based tools and the creation of artistic products during all phases of the research, from initial conceptualization to final representation of findings (Cahnnmann-Taylor, 2008; Leavy, 2009; McNiff, 1998, 2008). Arts offer a distinct way of seeing (Barone 2008). When art is central to
the research, the quality of the art becomes an important consideration. Arts-informed inquiry is different in that art-making is viewed as a playing a supportive role within a holistic inquiry (Stanley, 2009). The quality of the art is less important than the ways that the art informs understanding; this is critical when considering the role of arts in program evaluation. These two modes of inquiry share a commitment to using artistic tools but they are enacted in different ways.

Some readers may not be familiar with the term *artistic tools* or how these would operate in an evaluation or research capacity. Artistic tools refer to skills enacted in a variety of genres, that might include, but are not limited to, literary forms (e.g., Barone, 2001, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); visual art (e.g., Butler-Kisber, 2008; Leavy, 2009); performance (e.g., Fels & Belliveau, 2008; Miller, 2001; Saldana, 2003, 2008); and dance or folk art (e.g., Bagley & Cancienne, 2002; Bagley & Snowber, 2003; Ball, 2003, 2008). Although each genre has distinctive elements, they share a view that encompasses multiple creative processes and media as a method of communicating. This possibility is what excites me as a researcher of program evaluation: exploring ways artistic genres can open up spaces where we can simultaneously work with materials, ideas, people, and processes.

My assumption approaching this evaluation was that as scholarship, the arts could be viewed as a holistic process able to unite theory and practice, connects personal and professional, and bridges individuals from various communities of practice. Finley (2005) suggested that research using the arts crosses traditional boundaries between art and research; it also intertwines art forms to suit the research context and goals of the inquiry. Using arts-informed inquiry as a feature in program evaluation allowed me to expand the boundaries of what traditionally counted as knowing. In this research I document how arts-informed inquiry draws from artistic processes
to broaden perceptions, make meaningful contributions, and expand evaluator skills. These are significant contributions with the potential of expanding conventional notions about artistic contributions within the field of program evaluation.

Those who work with the arts, are known to (a) make use of tools from sciences as well as arts in developing understanding during all phases of research projects; (b) recognize the influence of researcher-researched positions; and (c) enlarge and diversify audiences for research while nurturing new and ongoing conversations within the research community (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008). While these behaviours are not unique to arts-informed methodologies, they are common to research that draws from the arts. If artistic modes of inquiry are to be integrated into evaluation, it is essential that these be examined for their capacity to be both viable and powerful approaches for evaluators and program stakeholders addressing a variety of complex questions.
Chapter Two: Theories of Evaluative Inquiry

Figure 3. A Very Brief Graphic Visual History

From Theory to Practice

The very brief visual history portrayed in Figure 3 is meant to convey how I have made sense of the broad knowledge of the field of evaluation and how theories have evolved over time. Many evaluators and evaluation texts begin by situating their work in the history of the field of evaluation (e.g., Christie, 2003; O’Sullivan, 2004; Patton, 2008; Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2004). Positioning helps to orient readers while showing connections between past and present. The earliest age of evaluation is typically characterized as attending to issues of oversight, compliance and program accountability (Madaus & Stufflebeam, 2000; Scriven, 1963). Chronbach (1963) was a pioneer in expanding the purpose of evaluation, to include its
role in program decision making. He also cautioned that if inquiry techniques must be adopted by evaluators to fit the context of their work. In my evaluation practice, I honour how the field of evaluation has evolved by attending to the increasing complexity of social programs enacted in dynamic contexts. In the context of the Tribes evaluation, I found myself counselled by two well documented and interrelated approaches: responsive and participatory evaluation.

**Responsive evaluation.** The goal of this approach is to generate expansive ideas about stakeholder interactions (e.g., Abma, 1998a, 2003, 2006; Constantino & Greene, 2003; Stake 1975, 1980, 2004). Responsive evaluation is a term that was coined by Stake (1967) and has been written about by many other theorists (e.g., Abma, 2006; J. Greene, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). As Abma acknowledges, “the goal of responsive evaluation is to enhance the understanding of a program from the life world perspective of insiders (Verstechen), and in that sense, the approach differs from evaluation approaches aimed at prediction and control (Eklaren)” (italics in original, p. 32). It draws on personal experiences to open up thinking regarding program activities and engagement. It is a theoretical approach that values multiple viewpoints by focusing on the concerns of people within the program.

A responsive approach requires an evaluator to spend time observing and interviewing to gain a deep understanding of the program from multiple perspectives and to inform the evaluation issues, subsequent activities and reporting. Naturalistic forms of inquiry are characteristic of responsive evaluation (Stake, 1978). Evaluation processes evolve slowly through observation, interviews, reflections, and analysis of documents. Stake (2004) advocated for a “holistic mind-set, responding to the activity, the complexity, the situationality and the quality of education with the fullest interpretation” (p. 207). Responsive methods provide an appropriate orientation for experimenting with artistic techniques because both use naturalistic
strategies to seek the particular, value individual experience, and purposefully prepare an environment for inquiry.

The phrase *naturalistic forms of inquiry* should not imply a passive or inattentive approach since the opposite is true. When conducting naturalistic inquiry, I discovered that an evaluator must possess a keen ear, be skilfully engaged in observation, and attentive to nuances, body language, and visual cues. Applying these skills can generate deep understanding and rich program description. These skills must also be applied if an evaluator is to collect data using arts-informed inquiry. The use of artistic strategies provides an opportunity to generate holistic forms of knowing. As Simons and McCormack (2007) note, “when participants have the opportunity to portray their experience through different art forms, they often reveal insights that they cannot articulate in words” (p. 296). Although there is typically a topical focus, or the evaluator generates the guiding question(s), the creative nature of arts-informed inquiry leaves room for naturalistic inquiry. Participants are encouraged to make connections with one another in the course of exploring an idea, developing interpretations and constructing questions, while the evaluator is cast in the role of focused observer.

The values inherent in responsive evaluation make this theory an ideal fit for the use of arts-informed inquiry. Both evolve slowly, thoughtfully, and through engagement. There are many ways to conceptualize engagement; Stake (2004) was careful to emphasize the idea that responsive and participatory evaluations are not the same thing. Yet, his concepts of responsive evaluation open the way for additional theories supporting participant-oriented evaluations (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Stake, 1967).

Responsive forms of evaluation, including participatory (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998), empowerment (Fetterman, 1994), and collaborative (O’Sullivan, 2004; Rogriquez-Campos,
2005) are proposed to have different approaches; yet, all share the goal of responding to stakeholders, as well as engaging stakeholder and program user participation (Greene, 1988; 2001; King, 1998; Shulha & Wilson, 2003). While there are practical differences between responsive and participatory forms of inquiry, they have common pursuits and share goals that resonate with the principles of arts-informed inquiry. Specifically, these “theories of evaluation emphasized the importance of observation and dialogue, qualitative methods to gain a greater understanding of the program, and flexibility in evaluation designs and measures” (Fitzpatrick, Christie & Mark 2008, p. 10). One of the main similarities between participatory and responsive forms of evaluation is the emphasis on engagement.

**Participatory evaluation.** Much has been written about the possibilities for evaluations to be participatory and responsive (e.g., Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; Cousins & Earl, 1992; Cousins & Shulha, 2006; Patton, 1997). Traditionally, the emphasis of participatory theories has been on meeting the needs of the stakeholders. More recently, this emphasis has shifted to determining how meeting these needs holds potential for engaging stakeholders and program personnel, thus promoting evaluation use (Patton, 2008).

King (2007) remarked that all evaluation work is participatory to some extent; evaluators do not work in isolation. Like evaluation itself, participatory forms exist along a continuum where there can be varying levels of involvement intended to engage and recognize the value of multiple stakeholders. Although levels of engagement vary, Wadsworth (1993) declared his view that the basis for evaluation is “on people, for people, or with people” (p. 1). In my view, participatory approaches provide another way of conceptualizing evaluation processes and representations that explore the impact programs have on people, for specific audiences, and with participants.
There is no singular definition of participatory or collaborative evaluation. While there are different orientations and foci which can distinguish them, both focus on evaluation as a process that promotes deeper levels of meaning by negotiating relationships that are sensitive to context and broadly defined (Cousins, Whitmore & Shulha, 2013). Many authors continue to draw from the work of Cousins and Whitmore (1998) who identified how the concept of participatory work is used differently by different people: “For some it implies a practical approach to broadening decision making and problem solving through systematic inquiry; for others, relocating power in the production of knowledge and promoting social change” (p. 87). I use a combination of these ideas in my own work: I am committed to involving others in decision making so that evaluation processes also enhance evaluative thinking within individuals and organizations. For me, participatory evaluation is an orientation that shares characteristics with creative processes. Creative processes involve a holistic and emergent approach that stimulates description, reflection, the solving of problems and a willingness to respond to intuition as well as creativity (Leavy, 2009).

Methodologically, participatory perspectives suggest that rigour is found in collaboratively crafted evaluation questions, joint meaning-making activities within the evaluative process, and ongoing opportunities for engaging in thoughtful analysis and reflection, as well as forms of representation that clearly share discoveries (Cousins, 2003; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Patton, 1997; Poth & Shulha, 2008). Special care needs to be taken when involving stakeholders, participants, or the audience in arts-informed strategies. Ways of considering audience involvement in evaluation processes and representation will differ by evaluator as well as evaluation context; these considerations must be taken into account in all participatory work, no matter what types of processes and representations are used. When
thoughtfully applied, principles from arts-informed inquiry in participatory contexts can extend ways of joint meaning-making, expand forms of representation, and promote shared insight within the context in which they are created.

Emphasizing joint ways of knowing, creative forms of understanding, and participatory ways of making meaning goes beyond methodological choices about how to conduct an evaluation. It also calls evaluators to question and identify their epistemological positioning. One of the critical elements in a participatory approach is self-reflexivity (Heron & Reason, 1997). This quality requires purposefully locating oneself within the research process to minimize the unintentional effects of power (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Given the dynamics of politics and power relations that are constantly present in participatory evaluation projects, self-reflexivity is critical to creating a transparent process that provides an invitation for participation.

Active, ongoing, and critical reflection of evaluation processes models the importance of inquiry activities for stakeholders throughout a project, not just at the end. Intentionally making and using explicit reflective processes during a participatory evaluation can deepen understanding, build relationships, and enhance communication. McNiff (1998) noted, “our research activities can document the non-linear and precarious ways of creative transformation … Using the “‘magic’ of creation … allows us to work with all of our expressive and cognitive faculties” (pp. 43–44). The intangible effects, those difficult to measure, are too often ignored when evaluating programs. Yet, program evaluation that is responsive and participatory allows evaluators to attend to all aspects of participant experiences. This is an invitation as well as a responsibility to explore programmatic experiences from as many vantage points as possible, in as many ways as possible.
An Argument for Integrating Evaluative and Arts-Informed Inquiry. As we near the end of this section, a dynamic trio stands on stage intertwining theories of responsive evaluation and participatory evaluation with arts-informed inquiry. This integration holds the promise of multiple ways of making and understanding meaning in program contexts. These theories emphasize working creatively with those involved in the program to generate questions, share information, and expand understanding. Participant–evaluator interactions are founded on respect for individuals and prioritize multiple methods of collecting information from diverse sources for the purpose of promoting use.

Processes and forms of representation are conceptualized early but remain open and fluid throughout the inquiry. Audiences for the evaluation are imagined from the outset. Alternative forms of communicating and reporting are considered (Torres, Preskill & Piontek, 2005); as are the role of stories (Abma, 1999; Constantino & Greene, 2003; Krueger & Casey 2002); arts-based methodologies (Simons & McCormack, 2007); and possibilities of dialogical processes (Schwandt, 2001). All favour the inclusion of naturalistic processes as a way to offer opportunities for meaningful involvement. In contexts that require the clarification of merit, worth and significance, such conclusions are best rendered using an array of participants who are skilfully included, thoughtfully probed, and creatively engaged.

Some evaluators have already begun this type of work by paying special attention to social relations and complexities developed in evaluative contexts (e.g., J. Greene, 2008; Patton, 2010 Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Flexible positioning of arts-informed inquiry within the trans-discipline of program evaluation (Scriven, 2008) appears to have the potential of complementing and augmenting responsive and participatory approaches. The resulting inquiry brings forth deep insights when seeking to understand and represent experiences within programs, processes,
or systems. The context of the *Tribes* evaluation reported on in this study offered an ideal context to investigate the power of this marriage.

**A Heuristic for Exploring Arts-Informed Inquiry in Theories of Evaluation Inquiry**

Evaluation has emerged as a distinct area of professional practice with a rich and varied history. Emerging theories of and approaches to evaluative inquiry now make it possible to make design decisions based on the needs and demands of the evaluation context. At the most basic level, Alkin (2004) argues, “there is a relationship between evaluation theorists, that theories build on other theories, and that all evaluation has roots in social science research methodology and accountability” (ix). Given the diversity that currently exists in the field, it is important for evaluators to be aware of and be explicit about their theoretical framing, methodological approach, and rationale for the selected approaches within a given context.

I find program evaluation fascinating in this way: Theory and practice blend in contextual circumstances to produce evaluation findings that are specific to the phenomena under study. The immediate and practical contributions an evaluation can make within a given context are framed by the broader theoretical or societal contributions that are also possible. This possibility is the “dance” in evaluation: blending technical and interpersonal skills to maintain the delicate foregrounding and back-grounding in evaluation work. There is constant and circuitous movement between questioning, doing, reflecting, and learning. This process is what I find so rewarding about work in the field of evaluation: the potential for immediate engagement, dynamic learning, and expansive understanding within a specific context, coupled with knowledge that insights from these processes can propel expansion within theories of evaluative inquiry.

In the previous sections, I explored the history and two theories of evaluative inquiry.
Another way of looking at these theories is to consider categories that span all areas of the field of evaluation. A heuristic offers a way of managing the complexity of evaluating social programs, the multitude of participatory theories of evaluative inquiry, and infinite possibilities for enacting arts-informed principles. Abma (2006) cautioned that “heuristics do not guarantee certain outcomes; rather they assist people in finding answers to the question of how to act in certain situations” (p. 39). I use a three-frame heuristic as a way to locate my findings within the theoretical frameworks in the field of evaluation.

My heuristic is based on Alkin’s (2004) model of evaluation: methods, valuing, and use. Alkin’s model is depicted in the symbol of a tree, where prominent theorists are broadly grouped on branches. The methods branch invited me to think about research methodology and the construction of knowledge as well as the implications for using the methods of arts-informed inquiry in evaluation. The valuing branch enabled me to consider and make explicit, the values guiding arts-informed inquiry in a responsive and participatory evaluation. The use branch provided placement for theorists and models oriented towards decision making, and offered me the opportunity to delve into different types of use made possible by this evaluation. The configuration of this heuristic allowed me to group key ideas together, while structuring a rationale for infusing arts-informed inquiry into the field of evaluation.

The three groupings, as well as the allocation of the theorists, were not without critique from the evaluation community (i.e., Davidson, 2006; House, 2004). House identified the strengths and weaknesses of the tree metaphor, he described the weaknesses as an over-simplification of the interconnected, non-linear contributions and cross-influences that exist. Yet, he agreed with the centrality of the three key conceptions, admitting “you cannot conduct evaluations without deciding how to derive criteria (values) for the evaluation, what data
collection methods to use, and what to do with the findings” (House, p. 291). Alkin (2012) has recently revised the image of the evaluation tree. In this more recent iteration, the base of the tree has been expanded beyond accountability, control, and social inquiry to provide a greater foundation for this field of practice to rest on.

No image or symbol can serve all people or meet all needs; this image of a tree certainly has the potential for forcing a linear structure on a dynamic process and over-simplifying complex processes. At the onset, it may seem incongruent to isolate and separate aspects of holistically oriented principles in arts-informed inquiry, or responsive and participatory evaluations. However, the purpose of this heuristic is to intentionally focus the discussion, to see how the principles of arts-informed inquiry resonate and are enacted.
Chapter Three: Research Study and Evaluation Methods

Figure 4. Thumbprint Visual Narrative

This thumbprint is one way to position myself within this work. Scholars in the field of evaluation as well as the arts have influenced my thinking. My experiences also play a role in shaping how I view the potential for this work. I was concurrently an evaluator and researcher, using qualitative methods in systematic ways to explore phenomena, gather data, and represent understandings about the veracity of integrating responsive, participatory, and art-informed evaluation. A qualitative paradigm is most appropriate for this work because the purpose of this study is to describe, explore, and understand. Using qualitative methods allowed me to gain a deep understanding of the role played by arts-informed inquiry within an educational program evaluation.
Flinders and Mills (1993) provided a rationale for the use of qualitative skills in program evaluation:

Such an orientation could contribute enhanced responsiveness and increased political authority for the work of qualitative evaluators. It could expand the import and impact of qualitative evaluation beyond the “telling of stories.” And it could thereby contribute to a revision of the heritage of what it means to do science … A more explicitly theory-oriented qualitative evaluation can help rewrite the nature of knowledge about human phenomena. (p. 33)

Both a case study and a qualitative orientation legitimize opportunities for sharing, analyzing, and questioning experiences, but this research moves beyond simply listening to these experiences in the rigorous process of analyzing and representing data. When speaking of the interpretive aspects of case study, Stake asserted, “there is much art and much intuitive processing to the search for meaning” (1995, p.72).

Greene (1994), McDavid and Hawthorn (2005) as well as House (2005) are examples of theorists who have detailed the epistemological foundations of qualitative evaluation and documented some of the changing perceptions of value. Key values emerging from my reading of these chapters showed that qualitative program evaluation offered a good fit for a relationally based program. Although there is not one specific set of values attached to qualitative program evaluation, there is general agreement that qualitative evaluators use natural observation, recognize meaning as socially constructed, and value situational inquiry. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identified a tendency of qualitative researchers to “emphasize the value-laden nature of enquiry” (p. 8). These values align with the Tribes program, and my evaluator and researcher values, as well as key ideas emerging from arts-informed inquiry.
Qualitative evaluators and researchers tend to employ a range of interconnected interpretive methods (Foster, 2007). This range of methods is critical because there is no single method that can capture the complexity that exists (Patton, 2002). The use of artistic qualitative methods and introduction of interpretive arguments requires attentiveness and mindfulness during the evaluation process. Eisner (1994) confirms, “evaluation requires a sophisticated, interpretive map not only to separate what is trivial from what is significant, but also to understand the meaning of what is known” (Eisner, p. 193). Using a framework of qualitative evaluation and adding arts-informed methods has an effect on creating new ways of engaging within the field of evaluation.

Arts-informed inquiry engages evaluators working within a qualitative orientation as “artist—scientists,” who use creativity and intuition to focus their projects (Janesick, 2001). This form of inquiry is an ideal pairing with some of the more conventional forms of qualitative evaluation methods because it expands vivid, creative, and innovative understandings of programs. It does this by allowing for “artistically crafting the description or situation so that it can been seen from another angle” (Eisner, 1997, p. 22). Arts-informed inquiry is an extension of the qualitative paradigm that determines the value of a program through relational strategies, to create opportunities for engaging in arts-informed inquiry as part of data collection.

**The Qualitative Case Study**

Case study methodology has a “distinctive place in evaluation research” (Yin, 2009, p. 19). Stake (1995; 2005) emphasised that one value of a qualitative case is the attention focused on a single case.

The real business of a case study is particularization not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others
but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself. (Stake, 1995, p. 8)

The qualitative case study is the most appropriate method for framing this study because it provides an in-depth and detailed understanding of arts-informed inquiry used during the Tribes evaluation within one school district. Yin (2009) defined a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident” (p.18). In this case, a qualitative case study illuminated decisions made, as well as the results of those decisions.

Qualitative case studies are characterized by concentrated time immersed in the inquiry, where the researcher is in contact with activities and decision making so that she is reflecting, revising, describing, and detailing emerging understanding. According to Stake (2005), the case study provides an opportunity to craft a thorough, holistic description and analysis of a phenomenon so that it is both “a process of inquiry and a product of that inquiry” (p. 444). Time immersed in the inquiry and in contact with many aspects of the program is an important quality when trying to gain holistic understanding of the role of arts-informed inquiry as a feature of an evaluation.

The case study approach offers an encompassing method that provides a frame for data collection, as well as an approach for data analysis (Stake, 1995; 2005; Yin, 2009). The embedded nature of recognizing and studying complex phenomena makes reflexivity critical and demands data collection strategies that document impressions, deliberations, recollections, and records related to the case. These features of a case study are easily aligned with strategies
employed when arts-informed inquiry is infused within a participatory and responsive evaluation. Within an evaluation, a case study describes and explains a socially complex phenomenon even when there is “no clear, single set of outcomes” (Yin, p. 20). The qualitative case methodology encompasses both phases of this research, the evaluation and the post-evaluation research. Table 1 delineates how this case study unfolded by describing activities in the evaluation phases and stages.

Table 1
Overview of Evaluation Phases and Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Evaluation Stages</th>
<th>Key Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phase One: Evaluation       | Stage One: Focusing the evaluation                                                | • Gaining site access  
• Ethical approval  
• Focusing on a program  
• Developing an evaluation plan |
|                             | Stage Two: Initiating participatory engagement and situating myself in the inquiry | • Sharing and getting feedback on the evaluation plan  
• Document analysis  
• Literature review  
• Engaging Trainers  
• Observation and data collection at training events |
|                             | Stage Three: Conducting the evaluation with data collection using arts-informed inquiry | • Interview Administrators  
• Elementary and secondary teacher sharing sessions  
• Classroom-based arts-informed inquiry |
|                             | Stage Four: Disseminating evaluation findings                                    | • Joint analysis of data with Research and Assessment Manager, Learning Coordinators and Trainers  
• Preliminary findings to Learning Coordinators and Safe Schools Superintendent  
• Final report submitted  
• Presentation at Learning Agenda |
| Phase Two: Research on the evaluation | Stage Five: Meta-evaluation                                                     | • Individual interview with 7 evaluation participants: Research and Assessment Manager, Superintendent of Safe Schools, 3 Learning Coordinators, 1 Trainer and 1 Teacher |

In the first phase, I aimed for representation of multiple perspectives about programmatic experiences and activities. I used many methods to collect these multiple experiences and where appropriate, participants engaged in reflection about their participation in the evaluation. The second phase, the post-evaluation research, expanded on the first phase by inviting a small group of stakeholders to participate in a reflection about the evaluation processes.
In the first stage, I adopted dual roles of a program evaluator and a researcher of arts-informed inquiry. The evaluation was conducted over twelve months. Once the evaluation was complete, I conducted post-evaluation research over an additional six months, thus completing the second stage of the study. All of this inquiry complied with the ethical and proprietary standards outlined by Queen’s University, the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the school district. A copy of the General Review Ethics Board approval is located in the Appendix. I also received ethical approval from the participating school district. I was required to comply with the internal review procedures for the school district including using pseudonyms for all of the reported data. My case was bounded by documentation created and data collected throughout the evaluation process as well as research conducted during the meta-evaluation phase. All participation was voluntary and the identity of the participants remains confidential and anonymous. The next section provides more details regarding participant and then, stakeholder involvement.

**Participants.** Engaging multiple sources provides an opportunity to enhance the research on the evaluation processes and findings, while also promoting stakeholder inclusiveness. Stakeholders are broadly defined as people, groups, or institutions that have an interest in the program (Rossi et al., 2004). Patton (2008) defined stakeholders as “people who have a stake—a vested interest—in evaluation findings” (p. 61). The number of people who have a stake in a program or evaluation of a program varies greatly. In an educational evaluation, this might include board level personnel, program trainers, or participants, all of whom have a direct interest in the program. This may also include a broader ecology such as school administrators, school support staff, parents/caregivers, or members of the broader community.
In this case, a total of 244 people were involved in the evaluation process. Stakeholders ranged from the Safe Schools Superintendent, Research and Assessment Manager, and Learning Coordinators to school-based administrators; participants included classroom-based teachers and students. Weiss (1986) pointed out that having a stake in the evaluation involves a concentrated group of people. Although we could have included broader members of the school or larger community, the evaluation focused on people with a “vested interest” who could most directly benefit from the evaluation (Patton, 2000, p. 427). This was a large group, but as is usually the case in a participatory evaluation, stakeholders were involved to varying degrees. Ongoing communication and thoughtful planning were required to determine the different stakeholders and their relative involvement. Table 2 offers an outline of each stakeholder group and describes their involvement across both phases.
Table 2  
*Stakeholder Involvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant(s)</th>
<th>Phase One: Involvement in the Evaluation</th>
<th>Phase Two: Involvement in Research on the Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research and Assessment Manager</td>
<td>Received all documents related to university ethics clearance. Approved and provided guidance about the nature of this evaluative inquiry within school district. Participated in a joint analysis session prior to final report, was vocal audience at post-report presentation. Assured that the inquiry aligned with district priorities.</td>
<td>Participated in a post-evaluation interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Schools Superintendent</td>
<td>Participated in aspects of the evaluation process: review of evaluation plan, provision of program data, joint analysis of data collected, presentation of evaluation report to Learning Agenda, and an evaluation debriefing.</td>
<td>Participated in a post-evaluation interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Learning Coordinators</td>
<td>Involved in all aspects of the evaluation from initial drafting of evaluation purpose and questions to the final reporting and presentation.</td>
<td>Ongoing informal feedback and communications. Nine shared-reflection interviews during the process. Each participated in individual interviews post evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Program Trainers</td>
<td>Provided feedback on draft evaluation plan (n. 15); and contributed data about program training; participated in an array of data collection events using multiple data strategies (n. 13); and analyzing the data (n. 15). Trainers offered email comments about the final report (n. 3).</td>
<td>Trainers offered email comments about the final report (n. 3).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 School Administrators</td>
<td>Elementary School (n. 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64 Elementary Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>Participated in data collection events at training sessions (n. 33), sharing sessions (n. 29) and collaboration for classroom-based arts-informed inquiry (n. 2).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Secondary Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>Participated in data collection events at training sessions (n. 11) and sharing sessions (n. 19).</td>
<td>1 teacher from classroom-based inquiry participated in a post-evaluation interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Occasional Teachers</td>
<td>Elementary trained (n. 18), Secondary trained (n. 7); participated in data collection events at training sessions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97 Elementary Students</td>
<td>Participated in classroom-based inquiry: one class of Grade 6 students (n. 23) and two classes of Grade 8 students (n. 74).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 2, stakeholders were organized into four groups; each group had a different level of interest and involvement in the evaluation. Making methodological decisions that meet differing levels of stakeholder needs is part of the craft of evaluation.

Cronbach (1982) observed, “developing an evaluation is an exercise of the dramatic imagination” (as cited in Patton, 2008). My goal as an evaluator and an evaluation researcher was to invite stakeholders to facilitate this dramatic imagination in a way that not only valued
their contributions, but also promoted use of evaluation processes and findings. Arts-informed inquiry was used with stakeholders by interweaving it with other qualitative practices.

**Stakeholder involvement across groups.** The left column outlines five people who were most involved throughout the evaluation as well as the research on evaluation processes: the Research and Assessment Manager, the Superintendent of Safe Schools and three Learning Coordinators for Safe Schools. This group can be described as key stakeholders because they were closest to the evaluation work during all of its phases and played an integral role in disseminating the findings. During the evaluation, their involvement included conceptual work such as negotiating how the evaluation and the use of arts-informed inquiry could assist with learning about, and making decisions for, the *Tribes* program. Their participation also included practical work, such as suggesting key informants, reviewing instruments, and collaborating on a presentation of the report for the leaders within the school district. The frequency and types of interactions I had with each person varied. Overall, I was most in contact with the Learning Coordinators. Two classroom teachers were seconded for a three-year term as Learning Coordinators within the school district office. Three people have been identified in this role because eight months into the evaluation, one of these individuals took a leave from the position and was replaced. While on leave, she continued to be involved in the evaluation and, later, in research on the evaluation. This group was also the most involved in the meta-evaluation; each participant consented to a post-evaluation interview that involved one-on-one dialogue as well as an image-elicitation activity.

Each of the 15 program Trainers involved in the study holds a classroom-based position, has attended *Tribes* training and a *Tribes* leadership course, and is a self-described practising *Tribes* teacher. During the school year, each Trainer participates as part of a two-person team to
offer at least two training sessions. Trainers are also involved in attending *Tribes* conferences, updating district *Tribes* materials, ongoing mentoring of *Tribes* teachers, making *Tribes* accessible outside of the school board, and providing formative feedback to the Learning Coordinators.

The Learning Coordinators identified the importance of involving the Trainers early on in the process. As a result, the Trainers played an instrumental role in checking the direction of the inquiry, bringing important questions to light, providing data about the program, sharing in analysis of data collected, and reviewing the final report prior to presentation. In addition to ongoing, informal formative feedback through email, Trainers were invited to participate in three evaluation episodes: (a) reviewing the evaluation plan; (b) providing data about their *Tribes* experiences at training sessions; and (c) assisting with analyzing the data. Documents to support these processes are available under the data collection and analysis tab on [http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle](http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle).

Trainer involvement was critical to providing program perspective, including the history and evolution within the board and within their classrooms. They were also in a unique position to provide clarification about the training sessions as well as the *Tribes* process, while also being able to offer anecdotal information emerging from their interactions with teachers across the district. Trainer participation started with the more conventional Socratic method of presenting the evaluation plan, coupled with group dialogue. This process evolved in our time working together to eventually include many arts-informed techniques used in concert with more traditional qualitative forms. The Trainers were enthusiastic about exploring *Tribes*, participating in a group interview that used image-elicitation, concept mapping, art-making and collaborative poetry writing. Attendance during the evaluation processes was very good,
especially considering the breadth of responsibilities Trainers have. Email provided an alternative mechanism for keeping individuals up to date about the evaluation plans, sharing summaries of data collected, and overall progress. All Trainers provided ongoing feedback during the evaluation processes, in addition to being invited to participate in a post-evaluation interview. Three Trainers emailed comments about their involvement in the evaluation in lieu of an interview. One Trainer, who was very interested in the evaluation process, participated in a post-evaluation interview using image-elicitation.

School-based participants represented another important piece of this inquiry. The Learning Coordinators and Trainers identified five administrators who were implementing Tribes as a school-wide approach; all were contacted about the evaluation and three of these administrators elected to participate in individual interviews. Administrators participated in a two-step process involving an interview and school tour, described later on in detail. Teachers in this group participated largely at training sessions and in sharing sessions. Data collection activities with those who participated at training sessions and sharing sessions included an array of strategies from pre/post-survey and focus groups, interwoven with more creative endeavours such as image-elicitation, journal writing, photo documentation, collaborative poetry writing, and collage making.

I created a list of fourteen teachers who were using Tribes from suggestions made by participating administrators, the Learning Coordinators, and Trainers. I invited all of these teachers to participate in classroom-based inquiry; two teachers offered to share in an arts-informed inquiry project. In both cases, the teacher and I worked together in person, over email and by phone, to devise a project that would offer information about the program while fitting within their classroom curriculum goals. It was important to identify an art form that would
provide data for the evaluation, meet their professional goals, and be suitable for the students. In
the Grade 6 classroom, we devised an arts-informed inquiry that took place over two sessions, to
complete a drawing and a focus group discussion, which began from their drawings. This
process gave me the advantage of spending time in the classroom, observing how the program
was enacted while also allowing me to speak with small groups of students about their
experiences.

In the Grade 8 classroom, we collaborated more extensively to devise and conduct a
Creative Arts project that took place over eight weeks. This project was an ambitious
undertaking that involved the use of drama, storyboarding, digital photography and Moviemaker
software to convey classroom values and experiences. The teachers were invited to participate in
a post-evaluation interview and one of them was able to provide data related to this research on
the evaluation.

Two areas complicating this discussion of stakeholder involvement across groups
included the breadth of stakeholders as well as the array of interconnected activities. To help
clarify these aspects, Table 3 provides a data matrix to illustrate stakeholder groups and the
multiple data collection strategies. My goal is to highlight that the methods were not used in a
one-off fashion, but were instead used in a focused, purposeful, and repetitive manner. This
intentional overlapping of strategies with different participant groups allowed me to see how
aspects of arts-informed inquiry could operate in different aspects of evaluation practice. In the
next section, I provide a description and rationale for each of these strategies.
Table 3
Matrix of Stakeholder Groups and Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Assessment Manager</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Coordinators</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainers</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administrators</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional Teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8 Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 Students</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X represents participant experience with a method

Data collection strategies. The choice of data collection strategies, like the choice of evaluative approaches, needs to be context specific. Jennifer Greene (1998) expresses her belief that while there are historical methodological traditions, qualitative evaluation practices are highly variable. The strategies described in this section are divided across the two main phases. The purpose of data collection was two-fold: In the first phase, my primary focus was to collect data that would provide answers for the evaluation questions; in the second phase, my goal was to collect data to generate a descriptive, holistic understanding about the crafting of arts-informed inquiry within an evaluation. In writing this dissertation all the available data sources were integrated to capture and understand the process of arts-informed inquiry in an educational program evaluation.
It was difficult to parse the data that were collected specifically for the evaluation itself from the data collected for the purpose of research about the evaluation. In the end, I devised three separate but interconnected areas in order to tell the story of this data collection in the clearest way possible: (a) data collected during the evaluation for the purposes of the evaluation; (b) data collected during the evaluation and intended for use in this research; and (c) data that were collected after the evaluation was complete, during the meta-evaluation phase, for the sole purpose of informing this research. Although there was overlap and interconnectivity across the some of the techniques used, these next sections isolate and detail the data collection techniques that were used for different purposes. Each aspect of the data collection begins with a short introduction and table giving an overview, before a more detailed explanation.

**Data collected during the evaluation phase.** During the evaluation phase, there were five main forms of data collection: document analysis, participant observation, individual interviews, arts-informed group interviews and the use of creative arts. Table 4 lays out each of these forms and gives an overview of the primary purpose, site, selection of participants, and the forms of data collected. Each of the data collection techniques employed during the evaluation is then explained in the upcoming sections.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Primary Purpose</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Selection of Participants</th>
<th>Forms of Data Collected</th>
<th>Fusion of Arts-Informed Element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
<td>Review documents related to program to gain comprehensive understanding of program goals, mission, and vision</td>
<td>Home office</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Program-related documents, training manuals, and evaluation forms, memos to staff, support materials such as brochures and fact sheets</td>
<td>Concept mapping of key ideas related to evaluation questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
<td>Understand program in context Build rapport with Trainers and teachers Go through experience as participants do Understand goals and motivations of participants</td>
<td>Board of Education</td>
<td>Trainers and Teachers</td>
<td>Field notes in Commonplace book Pre-and Post-survey Photographs of process</td>
<td>Drawing and photographing of experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-and Post-survey</td>
<td>Gain perspectives from participants at training sessions</td>
<td>Board of Education</td>
<td>Teachers at training</td>
<td>Copies of the survey and the survey tracking/tally sheet</td>
<td>Use of images and symbols aligned with program values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Understand program in action Capture multiple perspectives in the context of different school environments</td>
<td>School sites</td>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>Open-ended questions with recorded responses, notes taken in my commonplace book, photographs and artifacts that supported program</td>
<td>Asking for storied data, anecdotes, and experiences beyond simplistic responses Photographing school sites for evidence of program in action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts-Informed Group Interviews</td>
<td>Teacher perspectives and experiences during training and implementation</td>
<td>Board of Education</td>
<td>Tribes Trainers Teachers</td>
<td>Open-ended questions answered through arts-informed processes: image-elicitation, folded poetry and collage Photographs of the process</td>
<td>Use of multiple arts forms to explore program and capture participant voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Arts</td>
<td>Students’ perspectives and voices about their experiences in the program</td>
<td>School sites</td>
<td>Grade 6 Students Grade 8 Students</td>
<td>Group discussing, art-making, photographs of process, journal writing, reflection about the process</td>
<td>An art form at the heart of each grade level approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Document analysis.** This is a common procedure in the field of program evaluation and it provides a useful foundation for an external evaluator beginning a new study (Caulley, 1983). Throughout this study, I conducted an in-depth document analysis of current program materials and past evaluation documents to explore possibilities and connections to the current evaluation questions while providing support for decision making about the program. Examples of documents analyzed included program texts, board policy in the area of Safe Schools, Board mission and vision, minutes from Safe Schools Learning Coordinators or Tribes Trainers meetings, and promotional materials for the program and past informal reports that were created internally. Documents were analyzed with the evaluation questions in mind, but also with the purpose of gathering insight into the evolution of the program. My analysis included exploring images and symbols related to the school board and program. In his own work, Caulley outlined eleven advantages of document analysis and these documents provided empirical evidence of the program development. They were also useful in this evaluation because they provided a critical recording of what the program was hoping to achieve in its implementation.

**Participant observation.** This ethnographic strategy invites documentation about perceptions, events, and processes that are essential for understanding human behaviour (Eder & Corsaro, 1999; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Tedlock, 2005). It is a way of “setting the stage” across both phases, by documenting observations about interactions, behaviours, values, and actions as they occur. This strategy required that I actively document and reflect on my own observations, as well as my participation, during the course of the proposed study. According to Tedlock, participant observation “produces a combination of cognitive and emotional information” (p. 474). Although participant observation was an ongoing strategy of data collection, it was explicitly conducted at the outset of the evaluation process at three different
events: two *Tribes* Training Sessions and a *Tribes* Sharing Session. In total, I spent forty hours observing at these events. At each event, one of the Learning Coordinators introduced me and the nature of my participation before I went on to outline the primary purpose and nature of the evaluation as well as my secondary purpose, the foci of my research study. My approach to participant observations included noticing, taking part in activities, interactions, processes, and conversation. I drew on my skills as a performing arts educator to see and document the nuances in my observational experiences. I relied on attention to detail, note taking, photographing, and drawing in my commonplace book. These extensions of my observations allowed a conventional form, participant observation, to merge arts-informed inquiry while highlighting the principle of reflexivity. Each of the arts areas of photo documentation and drawing are explored next, along with further details about their analyses.

**Photo documentation.** In evaluations, photographs and images have the potential to be included in many ways: to make a record of events that enables imagery, capture subtleties, improve understanding of complex contexts, extend evaluator and participant observations, evoke descriptions or emotional responses in discussions, provide another mechanism for self-reflection, and enhance reporting strategies (Dempsey & Tucker, 1994; Fang, 1985; Rose, 2007; Templin, 1982; Piontek, Preskill & Torres, 2004). Photographs provide a form for seeing as well as a methodological choice that illustrates a particular moment in time (Torres, Preskill & Piontek, 2005; Walker, 1993). Wang and Burris (1994) considered photographs to be a key technique in participatory and collaborative evaluations. They suggested that images allow for developing rapport, eliciting detailed information, and fostering negotiated interpretation. When used in concert with other strategies, images can question assumptions and afford moments of surprise.
Evaluators must think carefully about the goals of the evaluation when selecting from available ways to collect and use photographs and images (Hurworth & Sweeney, 1995; Piontek, Preskill & Torres, 2004). I used photography for the purposes of documentation and elicitation; both of these extend word-based forms of meaning-making when integrated throughout evaluative processes (Fang & Ellwein, 1990). Photo documentation is discussed here because it was a strategy first used in conjunction with participant observation. When this proved to be a good way to capture details of the program activities, I expanded my use of photo documentation to include it in other data collection techniques. As is shown in Figure 5, using photo documentation allowed me to make the evaluation process visible. With my camera always close by, I was able to record a diverse pool of evaluation activities. I was not the exclusive user of the camera: Learning Coordinators used it to take pictures when I was busy facilitating and a few times participants even picked it up to capture something of interest. The camera was part of the working context; although it was used to record experiences, it was not a focus of these experiences.
When I look at the photos of the diverse evaluation processes today, I am much better able to understand how valuable a mechanism the camera was for tracking the evaluation. As with other arts-informed strategies, the use of photographs was not a stand-alone strategy in this evaluation context. Instead, it was used to promote memory, reflection, interpretation, and dialogue. Some of the images were also used in creating the final report and presentation. Although the majority of the images do not include people, any images containing participants do not appear in this dissertation for ethical reasons and can only be found in the report submitted to the school board as well as a password-protected area of my computer.

Sullivan (2010) described society as visually literate. I cannot think of visual literacy without hearing the saying, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Even though images can be read quickly, it still takes time to understand, describe, and analyze visual content (Sullivan, 2010). The documentation aspect of photographs in this evaluation was focused on making a record of the process for the purpose of reflection. Photographs were taken to record the setup of the room, participants during activities, samples of artwork, and any other images that captured the spirit of the event. This ongoing form of documentation allowed me to easily revisit the evaluation’s data collection events and bring them to life during my analysis for the evaluation report as well as for the crafting of this dissertation. Documenting the artwork made by participants at data collection events enabled reflection and joint analysis between the Trainers, Learning Coordinators, and me.

**Pre- and post-survey.** Surveys are a tool that can be used to ask the same questions to all participants. In this case, I conducted a survey as people arrived for the *Tribes* training on the first day and as part of the conclusion of the training on the second day. Both surveys were largely attitudinal, but established baseline data relevant to training experiences, goals for
program implementation, and areas of concern. Together, pre- and post-survey instruments can be used to document the activities in the training program, look at plans for future implementation, and describe program experiences from participant perspectives. During my initial participant observations, I noticed that a large group of teachers had arrived and did not know one another, while many also had little knowledge or experience with the program. The instructors and teachers who had just arrived from their own classrooms were busy setting up. I saw an opportunity to implement an instrument that would help participants reflect and focus by documenting their purpose for attending the training, their programmatic expectations, and their hopes. The images and language on the pre-survey aligned with the program values by striking a reflective and yet engaging tone for their time at the training.

Prior to sharing ideas, the Trainers introduced me and provided a general explanation of the program evaluation. At three training events, I explained the secondary focus as well as my research and answered any questions about the evaluation or research. In addition, I explained how we would use the ideas gathered from the pre- and post-surveys that participants were invited to submit anonymously. The post-survey was a familiar expectation for the Trainers because the corporate group that provides the Tribes materials, CentreSource, requires a survey to be completed by all training participants. The CentreSource instrument focused on the program content and delivery of the training. To meet the needs of the evaluation and expand the potential for this data collection technique, I received permission from CentreSource to modify their training form, so that it would encompass information for their needs as well as details about Tribes within the local context. The revised post-survey developed for the evaluation used programmatic symbols to cue memory and highlight core aspects of the Tribes process. It also provided a space to record a plan for implementation in the classroom, as well as
an invitation to reflect on the program in concert with professional goals, philosophy, and pedagogy.

To aid in the analysis of information collected from the pre-and post-surveys while also ensuring that it provided insight to the people who needed it the most, I developed and taught the Trainers how to use a tracking sheet. They summarized key ideas and numerical values associated with the scales on a template. This process enhanced their understanding of the information collected from participants as well as their ability to see how data could offer insights about a program. The pre- and post-surveys were distributed at the remaining four Tribes training sessions that year and the data from the surveys was analyzed and reported on as part of the evaluation. The survey is posted on http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle.

**Individual interviews.** There is an abundance of literature to guide the structuring and documenting of interviews. Interviews are viewed as a powerful way for understanding perceptions (Eisner, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 2005). Many qualitative researchers use the interview to glean information. Techniques used in interviewing have broadened in the past decade and it has been recognized that different types of interviews are suited to different situations (Fontana & Frey, 2005). I accessed the literature on qualitative interviewing for guidance about the numerous styles, differences in crafting questions, setting tone, and following up with participants (Patton, 2002). According to Fontana and Frey (2000), “unstructured interviewing provides a greater breadth than the other types, given its qualitative nature” (p. 652). My goal was to allow ideas to emerge in unstructured interviews that took a conversational approach. I did use an interview guide and, at times, image-elicitation as part of the interview.

In setting up the interviews with school administrators, I explained the purpose of the
evaluation as well as its secondary focus, my research. I invited participants to meet with me for approximately one hour at a time of their choosing. The goal of the interview was to get the interviewees to share *Tribes*-related experiences or documentation that they felt would offer insight into the program evaluation. I offered to send an outline of the evaluation plan as well as an overview of my research and the topics for the interview in advance; in each case, I was taken up on this offer. I also asked if interviewees would provide me with a tour of their school and allow me to photograph any visible program materials. In comprehensively recording dialogue, documents, and images, my intent was to be able to portray a clear and vivid picture of program practices in action within different contexts.

My three interviews with school administrators were crafted using a topic guide where I had identified possible questions and the discussions were audio recorded. Eisner (1998) claimed, “the interview is a powerful resource for learning how people perceive the situation in which they work” (pp. 81–82). These interviews were conducted early in the evaluation and allowed me to understand interviewees’ perceptions of the program in action. Each interview provided a window into a different school context, with discussions and touring lasting sixty to ninety minutes. The documents I collected included behaviour-tracking sheets that aligned with program ethos, pamphlets for parents, newsletters from classrooms within the school community, overviews and slide presentations from school-wide assemblies, and staff orientation materials that explained their school’s approach to the program. During school tours, I photographed visible artifacts such as notice boards, display cases, posters, and laminated hallway reminders, of the four program agreements. Taken together, the interviews, documents, and images provided a lot of insight about the administrator’s values, their aims for the school community, their experiences with the program and their perceptions of programmatic challenges. As Eisner
stated, “it is surprising how much people are willing to say to those who they believe are really willing to listen” (p. 183). By asking questions, listening, and recording each interview, I was able to immerse myself in their school experience, explore specific issues related to the evaluation, and, at the same time, be responsive to the dialogue.

**Group interviews.** The primary purpose of the group interviews was to collect data that could assist with evaluating the program. Patton (1990) described the process of group interviews as an opportunity for exchanging ideas and broadening initial responses. He also makes an important point that consensus is not necessary. The emphasis of group interviews is to generate dialogue where people can reflect on their views within the context of others’ conversation. Therefore, the key feature of a group interview is that data emerges as a result of group dynamics and interactions.

Group dynamics and interactions always have to be carefully structured, especially when working with larger groups. According to Casey and Kruger (1994) and Patton (1987), a focus group typically has between six and twelve people. Casey and Kruger offered further guidance for thinking about group interviews when he suggested that different groups be convened to enable the emergence of themes and patterns in perception. Considering the logistical challenge of bringing people to the School Board office during the school day, we decided to host multiple group interviews simultaneously. By structuring these interviews as a large group exercise using creative processes, I was able to convene multiple groups in a single session. Group interactions were focused around arts-informed inquiry and allowed us to engage multiple participants in generating reflective, tactile products with the intent of eliciting information about their program experiences. My skills as an educator and drama facilitator proved useful in structuring these activities, especially while thinking about both the evaluation questions and the progression from
one activity to another.

A pilot of the activities was conducted with the Learning Coordinators, prior to hosting any of the group interviews. The pilot allowed us to understand ways we could make meaning from the arts-informed processes and what types of analysis would allow us to answer the evaluation questions. Our agenda for the group interviews was based on the pilot undertaken with the Learning Coordinators; the agendas are included on http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle. Prior to the event, the skills needed to support the data collection activities were reviewed with the Learning Coordinators. This review included ways to balance an open-ended discussion with the need to stay on-track, how to operate the digital recorders used for each group, what aspects of the discussion or interactions were important to note, and what to do if an unexpected situation arose. We also planned for ways that activities conducted in the group interviews could be educative.

My final task in this component of the study was to prepare a feedback questionnaire that asked participants to reflect on the evaluation activities and provide feedback about the process. Participants completed the sheet anonymously at the end of our time together to provide feedback about the program as well as the evaluation activities. They could then decide to drop the sheet in one pile if they were willing to participate in the research on the evaluation or to drop it onto another pile if they wanted to offer feedback but were not interested in participating in the evaluation.

As a data collection technique, group interviews were conducted four times: twice with Trainers and once with teachers from each division, thus encompassing both elementary and secondary perspectives. Trainers were invited to attend these sessions to offer their unique perspectives, given their unique position of being Trainers as well as users of the program.
Teachers who were *Tribes*-trained were invited to take part by signing up via the school board’s online tools. Every teacher who was interested in participating was included and half-day coverage for his or her supply teacher was provided from the Safe School budget. All of the group interviews took place over a four-month window during afternoon hours and lasted approximately three hours. The group interviews were viewed as dynamic processes that fused a more traditional qualitative form of interviewing with artistic processes.

The data collection events began with the Learning Coordinators introducing me as well as the purpose of the evaluation. I followed with a verbal outline of my research and distributed the Letter of Information and Consent Form. At each group interview, we progressed through three phases that mirrored the *Tribes* processes: inclusion, influence, and community. The inclusion process was viewed as a welcoming time, where we got to know the group, explained the goals of the day, and collected data in the form of folded poetry. Information about the folded poetry and other specific arts strategies is discussed following this overview. The next process provided an opportunity to look at the influence of the program during implementation, by considering the nature of the relationship between the program, teaching, and learning.

With the Trainers, perceptions of influence were uncovered using an art-making activity. Teachers used an image-elicitation activity based on three questions that brought influences to the surface during implementation. The decision to use different artistic processes was made based on the size of the group and the amount of time available for dialogue. In both instances, we wanted to ensure that participants had enough time to express the program in action and discuss any challenges or concerns with their colleagues. The final element of our group interviews was to try to understand how much the sense of a safe and caring community was heightened, if at all, by *Tribes* processes. These concepts are critical within the program and
Safe Schools areas and are a core focus of the school board. Both groups engaged in dialogue about the program, its contributions, challenges and future direction while joining disparate images and ideas to create a cohesive collage that reflected program values and goals moving forward.

As outlined above in the overview of the group interviews, distinctive forms of arts-informed inquiry were embedded into the meaning-making process. Each form was carefully selected for the contributions that it could make as a data collection technique. Descriptions of folded poetry, image-elicitation, art-making, and collage are provided below to show how each provided creative dialogical spaces for making joint meaning around the evaluative questions. The following paragraphs describe the rationale employed; provide relevant reference to support the work; and detail how it was enacted in this evaluation process.

Figure 6. Photograph of Poetic Scrolls

*Folded poetry.* Poetry can have dimensions that are aesthetic, spiritual, and/or intellectual endeavours. Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) suggested that “sharing a poem may be a
much more effective way to bring a discussion of research findings back to a group of students or teachers, than sharing a lengthy research article or book-length manuscript” (p.13). There are many reasons poetry can reach people; it may be the language arranged to evoke emotions, images drawn together to represent an experience, or the distilling of emotions laid bare. Ultimately, poetry can convey experiences and, as such, has limitless potential in our work as evaluators. As I developed a technique that I call folded poetry, I drew inspiration from the poetry workshop ideas of Kowit (1995) and Goldberg (1986, 1990, 2004) as well as my own experiences as a classroom English teacher.

Folded poetry is not poetry in a strictly artistic sense. Instead, the technique of folded poetry is best described as a piece of collaborative writing that borrows from poetic elements. These poetic elements include the use of a central theme as well as images and metaphors or similes to draw together disparate ideas, experiences, and emotions from participants. Folded poetry is an accessible, inclusive, responsive, and generative anonymous group writing experience that takes place over several guided processes.

The first process takes place prior to a group interview, when I devise six to eight poem prompts by revisiting the evaluation questions. The prompts used in this evaluation are included on http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle. I try to have more poetic prompts than I will actually need, and rely on my ability to “read” and observe a group to see how they are engaging with the process. At the group interview events, folded poetry was selected as the first arts-informed process because it can be completed anonymously, it engages everyone without centring on anyone, it uses a word-based creative strategy, and it contributes data about the program in the participants’ own words. I selected folded poetry as our first arts-informed experience, rather than images or art-making, as I believed that participants would be most
comfortable with words.

I introduced the concept of folded poetry by sharing a short poem about poetry to invite people to evoke poetic expression. Subtly, I challenged participants to capture their own program experiences in response to my prompts, using sentences, word clusters, or stand-alone words that brought their ideas to life. After each prompt–response was completed; the paper was folded to cover the writing and passed clockwise to the next person. By the time the group had worked through a selection of prompts, the poems looked like scrolls. The now-folded poems were placed in the centre of the table, and participants were invited to take a deep breath, select a scroll, read in silence, and give the poem a name.

After the initial step of recording and sharing their ideas, the process diverged somewhat, depending on the group, their responsiveness to this experience, and our available time. Rather than asking them to read their complete poems aloud at the group interviews, I instead asked that they look for pieces of the writing that stood out to them by surprising them, making them seek clarification, or by recalling their own disagreement with the writing. I invited them to have a discussion based on the aspects they had identified. At the group interviews, the Learning Coordinators and I acted as guides to probe for deeper understanding and these discussions were audio recorded. Each group was then given a piece of chart paper and invited to pull pieces from the collaborative poems into a single stanza, to capture an idea, emotion, or experience that they wanted to convey to the whole group. In some cases this happened very quickly, while in other cases the group simply engaged in discussion about what they wanted to communicate—both were considered valuable experiences. Many groups identified two or three ideas rather than isolating a single focus.

During the presentations, the participants were a keen audience, having been through a
similar process themselves. In all cases, I offered instructions on how to conduct this type of inquiry in their classrooms and typed up the poems to email out with a note of thanks for their participation. The next steps of the folded poetry process involved typing up and analyzing the data, sending the participants a collection of their poems, as well as one crafted verbatim from all of their ideas. The final step was to select which, if any, of the poems would be represented in the final report or presentation.

**Image-elicitation.** The second main way that images were used in this evaluation was through a process of image-elicitation. This data collection technique uses images to provoke a response (Calderola, 1988; Harper, 1988; Heisley & Levy, 1991; Tucker & Dempsey, 1991; Weber, 2008). The strategy of image-elicitation was used across many participant groups as a way to have participants present their perspectives and identify issues that were significant to them. Image-elicitation can be undertaken in many ways and can include having participants take images, asking participants to find images, or using researcher-taken or found images.

In this case, my use of image-elicitation was focused on using existing images chosen from two sources. The two sources were purposefully selected to provide a selection of images that was broad enough to capture an array of views, but not so massive that it made choosing impossible. *The Very Best of Children’s Book Illustration* (1993) involved a comprehensive selection of coloured images that focused on children and childhood. In *Tina Modotti* (1999) images were used to represent politics, social life, and art. The next figure shows a series of images laid out ready for participants to select from.
Figure 7. A Selection of Images for Elicitation

The images were mounted on card stock to create a deck of 65 images. The deck also included one blank card, which participants could take to project an imaginary image, if they could not find an image that spoke to them.

Photo elicitation was intentionally placed as the second arts-informed experience because this technique required individual exploration of an art form as a medium for communicating in a small group. My goal in using photo elicitation was to learn how participants experienced the program by having them select images and offer comprehensive descriptions. I knew that images offered a way to “pay attention to things in new ways” (Weber, 2008). I asked three questions to prompt image selection so that participants could access different levels of consciousness to reveal their beliefs, memories, perspectives, and experiences (Harper, 2002). Each image had an identifying number on the back and these numbers, participant responses, and
key aspects of the ensuing dialogue were all recorded on a template, either by me or by one of the Learning Coordinator facilitators. Dialogue stemming from the symbols, metaphors, or imagery that participants invested in the photographs provided opportunities for embodied knowledge because the “visual disarms or bypasses the purely intellectual, leading to a more authentic and complete glimpse of what a particular experience is like or of what people think and feel” (Weber, 2008, p. 46).

**Collage.** A third form of arts-informed inquiry infused within the group interview process was the use of collage. Collage was viewed as an accessible yet flexible medium, which allowed participants to artfully express their ideas about the program in relation to a specific focus. I selected it because like many other forms of art, it can take multiple shapes and use various media (Vaughan, 2008). Participants were prepared to experiment with this art form after their engagement and excitement built from the previous word- and image-based strategies. By introducing collage as a data collection technique, we provided yet another way to respond to the plethora of learning styles evident in any diverse collection of learners. In doing so, additional participants’ voices and perspectives could emerge and be documented. Butler-Kisber (2008) supported this type of process-oriented understanding of collage, by providing this personal and theoretical insight:

> Whether used as a reflective, conceptualizing, or elicitation approach in the analysis, representation, or both, collage has the potential for providing new and different ways of thinking about phenomena and revealing aspects about everyday life and identity that are unconscious or implicit. (p. 272)

Collage making was used as a reflective process to organize and make program values explicit as nested within pedagogical philosophy and classroom practices. Each group was given a set of
resources that included different textures of paper, markers, glue, tape, magazines, and newspapers. They had a set amount of time to create their work and their dialogue during the creation was transcribed. The Learning Coordinators and I facilitated the collage work by moving from group to group, asking probing questions about the choices that were made, as well as listening to or observing the process. After the collages were completed, participants were asked to take a step back and view their work while revisiting the initial question. We asked each group to select one or two aspects of the collage to showcase for the large group while we took notes on the showcase pieces. Collage provides a powerful tool for understanding because it visibly documents ideas using an aesthetic, multidimensional perspective that stimulates dialogue within small and large groups.

**Creative arts.** Drawing and photo story were used as creative arts strategies to offer an imaginative space to hear from a range of student participants because they expressed difficult-to-explain ideas related to complex phenomena of learning, environment and relationships. Based on my research into both strategies, I knew that drawing (e.g., Freeman & Mathison, 2008; Irwin & De Cosson, 2004) and photo story (e.g., van Gils, 2005; Hurworth, 2004a; Meadows, 2003; Robin & Pierson, 2005; Walker, 1993) offered unique perspectives for data collection. From the evocative nature of these texts, I was able to imagine extrapolations in an evaluation context. These were not new strategies, but their use in this evaluation and the sharing of them within an academic context was novel. Art-making with students provided a context to stimulate their recollections and experiences about the *Tribes* program while opening greater access to their emotions and generating more lively exchanges with others. Drawing and dialogue with Grade 6 students as well as a photo story project with Grade 8 students both used creative arts processes to provide empirical evidence about the program.
These forms of inquiry were selected because the creative inquiry processes needed to fit within the context of the participants. When planning the activities, it was most important that I be attentive to the spirit of the people I was working with. Their classroom goals, artist skills, interests, and willingness to participate in the evaluation were all critical factors. Prior to this experience, I had often encountered teachers who described evaluation as a waste of their time; I wanted these evaluation experiences to make inspirational use of their participation. To achieve this, I sought ways that the evaluation could access emotions and experiences in the time that was available, using the resources or materials agreed upon within the space offered. The next two paragraphs describe each of the visual methods, as they were highly context-specific and the decision for each came about in a different way.
Drawing and dialogue as data took place with a Grade 6 teacher and her class. McNiff (1981) described how children use their drawings to synthesize their experiences when he suggested that “art then becomes a means through which the child can communicate about those phenomena which are too complex to describe verbally, but which are being perceived and integrated into a child’s organization of reality” (p. 29). Their interpretations, a few of which are included on these pages, may seem simplistic at first, but they revealed difficult-to-describe affective qualities of the Tribes program in action. The chance to talk with students emerged after an administrator heard about our inquiry and shared the idea with a Tribes-trained teacher in her school. Based on this connection, the teacher invited me to observe her class and interview her. After our initial conversations, she indicated that she was willing to ask her students (via permission from their families/caregivers) to participate in the evaluation. Our plan evolved through phone conversations as we prepared for my visit. During one telephone conversation early in our communications, she discussed their current study of line drawing. Based on this work, I suggested that drawing would be an appropriate form for exploring student views about
Freeman and Mathison (2009) showed that drawings “mediate understanding in new and interesting ways for both the creator and the viewer because of its partial, embodied, multi-vocal, and nonlinear representational potential” (p. 113).

They outlined several useful considerations for communicating through participant drawings, so we used their work as a guide to help plan for the inquiry. To learn more about the program in action, I asked the students to draw a response to three questions: (a) What drawing could you make to describe Tribes in our classroom? (b) What agreements stand out for you and how do you practise these? (c) What Tribes activities do you do and why are they important to you?

The students spent about thirty minutes sketching and creating their drawings while I circulated around the room, talking with them about what they were working on. Occasionally, I would return to an empty desk at the back to make a note or record an observation such as the example below:

*Figure 10. Student Drawing about Inviting Others to Join*
Crouching beside their desks, I asked: How was the artwork answering their questions? What were they finding easy or difficult in conveying their ideas? Was there anything they wanted to share, but could not find a way to say with their art? I was surprised by the openness of their answers and how clearly they were able express their views about both Tribes and art-making. Students were very invested in their drawings. To ensure that everyone would have enough time to finish without feeling rushed, I agreed to return the following afternoon to see their completed work and talk with them further.

(Commonplace book, February 2010).

Not surprisingly in hindsight, the process took longer than I had imagined. When I returned the following afternoon, I spent the lunch hour taking photographs of the students’ artwork and set up a table in the hall to meet with students. The class was engaged in small group novel study, so I was able to pull out groups of four or five students at a time. As students joined me with their artwork, they seemed a bit nervous and quiet. Even though we had spent the previous afternoon together, I was a relative stranger asking them to talk about their artistic creations, their thinking and their emotions. Later that day, I reflected in my commonplace book how much meaning children embed in their art work and wondered how often adults really listen to or engage with it? We quickly overcame any awkwardness when I offered to go first, revealing my less-than-talented drawing of being in their class the day before. My image got students laughing and conversations started to flow. As they talked, I recorded key words to help me connect their images with our dialogue and took detailed notes on what they described. I was able to hear from the entire class over the course of the afternoon, but this structure limited the depth to which I was able to speak with each participant.

Selected images of the students’ drawings and parts of their interpretations are portrayed
here; others were included in the final report. The student-artists were able to convey their understanding of experiences related to the program and share how these experiences made them feel, shaped their classroom environment, and helped them to learn. My opportunity to observe a class, interview a teacher, watch students draw, and talk with them about their drawings was possible because of the generosity of their teacher and our ability to imagine a creative arts process that infused evaluative inquiry into the classroom context.

Serendipity also played a role in an opportunity to collect data with Grade 8 students. About a week after I had observed a Tribes training, I received an email from a teacher who was a trained visual artist interested in participating in the Tribes inquiry and research as part of her Arts curriculum. She was hoping to have her students explore drama, photography, and digital filmmaking and wondered if my previous experiences combined with her professional experiences and the evaluation/research would provide a good opportunity for us to work together.

We met a couple of times in December to collaborate on the creative process of the photo story inquiry, so that it would meet the needs of the curricula, as well as provide data for the evaluation. In January, we launched the first ever Grade 8 Creative Arts where multiple arts forms and processes to help students create a photo story about the ways Tribes experiences had shaped their classrooms. Photographs provided a form for seeing, as well as a methodological choice that illustrated a particular moment in time (Torres, Preskill & Piontek, 2005; Walker, 1993). Walker suggested that photos hold potential to avoid the ‘trap’ set by the limit of language by accessing complex social settings.
The project was based on ideas developed by Wang and Burris (1997) as a way of telling a story through photographs. Students provided their own digital cameras and flash drives (although we had extras for any who needed or wanted to use ours), and the school provided the digital software. The premise of photo voice is fairly straightforward: Participants are given a prompt or questions, create the story and/or take the photographs (in either order), use technology to devise their stories, share, and discuss with others.

In our creative arts project, students were asked to work in groups to create a short photo story to show their views of learning, to indicate what has shaped their learning and what aspects of their current learning environment they wanted to maintain in their high school classrooms. We asked them to imagine that their audience was their families, teachers, and peers from the current school year, as well as their upcoming Grade 9 teachers. The students were asked to
collaboratively create a story that answered three questions: (a) How would you describe learning in your classroom? (b) What characteristics do you hope continue? and (c) What activities are important to you?

In addition, to ensure that the creative inquiry process fit the participants’ context, it also needed to meet the goals of the evaluation. Fang (1985) suggested that images held potential because they could record an activity, illustrate a point, and offer multiple perspectives of the same event. For the evaluation, I wanted to see which, if any, of the Tribes qualities emerged in participants’ discussions and representations. I also wanted to get a better idea of Tribes in action and learn whether or not the aspects of learning that students valued resonated with the Tribes program. I was hopeful that I would gain a better idea of the suitability of Tribes programming for high school students and gain insight regarding any modifications that might need to be suggested. This creative arts process was able to accommodate these goals, along with their curricular goals. During the project, my time was spent observing, taking field notes, interacting, reflecting on my interactions, collaborating with the teacher, photographing elements of the inquiry process, providing informal updates about the project to the Learning Coordinators, and considering how to best disseminate the ideas brought forward by students.

There was a lot going on during this project: daily mini-lessons related to technique or skills required for the overall project, drama activities to reinforce these skills, time for groups to work and spread around the school, individual reflective writing/drawing time, and closing community circles. Following the advice of other researchers who have used this technique, mini-lessons included instructions about ethical aspects of inquiry and the use of photos, technical aspects of photography or computer usage, and creative aspects of photo story making (Fang, 1985; Templin, 1981; Walker, 1993). Fang and Ellwein (1990) emphasized the need to
obtain the consent of subjects, consider the influence of the photographer, and the quality and integrity of images, as well as the use of images in disseminating evaluation findings. The student photo stories were a big undertaking that required an investment of ideas, evaluator time to work onsite, and a willingness to trust that the creative inquiry process would illuminate unique insights of the program from student perspectives.

![Figure 12. Planning out the Photo Story by Laying out a Storyboard](image)

Students were simultaneously exploring with cameras and developing their narratives. We used role-play and storyboard making to help them document the progression of their ideas and chart the creation/location of images to depict their ideas. Cole, Neilsen, Knowles and Luciani (2004) acknowledged that “stories point to issues about multiple ways of knowing, telling and showing about creativity, healing and spirituality in education, about the infusion of arts in to research…” (p. 41). Throughout the process, I worked informally with the students to discuss their stories and observed Tribes processes such as warm-ups, activities, and reflective community circles.
One of the goals that emerged during the project was the importance of encouraging student reflection through journal writing. To encourage this, I brought some of my own personal journals written when I taught overseas to show the students that aside from my own writing, these journals also included writing and photographs from a Grade 8 experiential learning trip to the Amazon. The students were very curious about this and seemed surprised to see an adult who was writing a journal as a vivid testament to experience. After that show and tell session, a greater number of students volunteered to allow me to make copies of their writing and I even noticed student journals becoming more detailed and imaginative.

The culminating activity that emerged from this data collection technique was a community-wide film festival, hosted by the students. Many people attended this event: three teachers from neighbouring high schools, other teachers and students from within their school communities, and families of the students. Their short photo story films provided a multifaceted way of illuminating student experiences with the program. By using images, words, and music, the students were able to reflect on the Tribes classroom, reveal some of the complexities of trying to honour the four agreements of the program within the daily context of schooling, and share anxieties about transitioning to secondary school.

Photo story was a good fit for the Grade 8 class because it corresponded with their overarching literacy and arts curricula. As Hurworth (2004b) explained, “use of photographs can foster interactive types of evaluations to effect social change by asking participants to take photos of themselves” (p. 171). This data collection technique encouraged students to take photos and create stories, it revealed which aspects of their learning environments were important to them, and allowed them to use imaginative ways to reflect on their classroom experiences while positively imagining the future (or at least managing their anxiety about the
unknown). Finally, their photo stories provided a context for producing a visual text about student experiences within the *Tribes* program, which could be seen by decision makers and community members.

**Data collected during the evaluation for intended use in this research.** I collected three main forms of data concurrently during the evaluation, which provided practice insight to the process of incorporating arts-informed inquiry. These data collection techniques also made significant contributions to the research on arts-informed inquiry within this educational evaluation. A description of each of these forms and their unique contributions illuminates these data collection techniques.

### Table 5

*Data Collected during the Evaluation for the Purposes of this Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Primary Purpose</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Forms of Data Collected</th>
<th>Fusion of Arts-Informed Element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Review of evaluation documents   | To review the evaluation process dimensions of arts-informed inquiry            | Electronic as well as paper copies maintained in a file system | • Plan  
• Agendas  
• Minutes  
• Emails  
• Documents | All of the documentation is carefully crafted with attention to aesthetic elements |
| Ongoing paired and group interviews | To obtain feedback about the evaluation and the use of arts-informed inquiry as the evaluation was in process | Board of Education Office                 | • Paired interviews with Learning Coordinators  
• Group interviews with Learning Coordinators, Superintendent and Research and Assessment Manager | Asking for storied data, anecdotes and experiences beyond simplistic responses  
Use of images  
Large concept map for reflective activity |
| Common-place book                | Reflective space to document field notes, a spectrum of observations, questions and ideas that developed nuanced insight about the contributions of arts-informed inquiry during this evaluation | A black bound book with white pages       | • Writing  
• Drawing  
• Graphic organizers  
• Collage  
• Poetry  
• Images | A compendium of arts forms for recording and expressing purposes |
**Evaluation documentation.** As is the standard procedure during an evaluation, documents were created throughout all types of evaluation activities. Examples of these documents included the following: letters of information, consent forms, emails, evaluation plans, agendas, meeting minutes, summaries of related research, data collection instruments, informal/summaries reporting from specific evaluation activities, and the final report/presentation. A data log allowed me to keep track of dates, evaluation activities, documents created or received, and future plans (see http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle). This log was solely for my own tracking purposes, but it also enabled clear, efficient, and ongoing communications with the Learning Coordinators. Keeping track of the evaluation documentation using my log provided me with an emergent picture of the evaluation as it was progressing as well as a retrospective capability when it was completed. The log was a tool to identify documents created throughout the evaluation and allowed me to review each one to see what kinds of contributions, if any, the document could offer to my understanding of the program or using arts-informed inquiry as a mechanism for evaluating the program.

**Ongoing paired and group interviews.** One of the biggest contributors to my ongoing understanding was a series of discussions with the Learning Coordinators, Superintendent of Safe Schools, and the Research and Assessment Manager. The most helpful resource I found to guide my questions and thinking was Hanssen, Lawrenz and Dunet’s (2008) critique of *Concurrent Meta-Evaluation*. In this article, they advocate that concurrent meta-evaluation improves the opportunity for enhancing evaluation practice. The ongoing interviews were considered part of a dynamic process to understand how they make sense of the program, evaluation, and the arts-informed inquiry within the evaluation. In all cases “interviewer and interviewee are in partnership and dialogue as they construct memory, meaning, and experience
together” (Madison, 2005). By engaging in ongoing thinking about the evaluation processes and outcomes, I was able to be responsive to the needs of the primary stakeholders and more effectively assess and adjust the role of arts-informed inquiry in situ. Our conversations were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim and I also took notes about tone, body, facial expression, and non-verbal communications during the conversation. Depending on what was most convenient for participants, the interviews took place in a variety of locations: their offices, coffee shops, school board cafeteria, and my own home.

I met with the Learning Coordinators nine times over the school year, for approximately one hour each time. These interviews were structured as open-ended conversations where we moved beyond planning the evaluation to a reflection on the decisions and processes of the evaluation. I did not use a specific set of questions for these interviews but I did have a set of topics to guide the discussion. Key topics for these interviews included the role of arts in the evaluation, creative forms during group facilitation, quality and quantity of information that arts-informed inquiry provides, appropriateness of arts-informed inquiry to provide relevant program evaluation information, analysis and meaning-making in arts-informed inquiry, representation of ideas, and creative strategies for dissemination of the evaluation findings.

In addition to monthly meetings with the two Learning Coordinators, there were two occasions where the three of us were able to meet with the Superintendent and another two occasions where the three of us met with the Research and Assessment Manager. The purpose of broadening our group was to keep others informed about the evaluation’s progress, as well as to seek their input about the evaluation’s direction and processes. At the initial meeting, the evaluation plan was presented as a dialogical tool whereas in later meetings, artifacts from the evaluation process were included to bring the evaluation processes alive. The artifacts included
samples of the folded poetry, images from our group interview data technique, and a large graphic organizer summarizing data from a variety of sources. These artifacts allowed everyone to see the types of information being collected from the divergent data collection techniques and to review both the quantity and quality of information arts-informed evaluations could provide.

**Commonplace book.** As a participant in the process, I maintained a commonplace book throughout both stages of this inquiry, to illuminate the evolving nature of learning (Patton, 2002). Personal data collected through the commonplace book allowed me to intertwine the previously described data collection strategies in a creative, reflexive way. The commonplace book is a new framing of the journal strategy I have used for collecting ideas for over a decade. Yet, it goes beyond traditional field notes or journal strategies. Sumara (1996) described it as a space for critical reflection, making sense of experiences that involve the self and others through the process of interpretation. This learning is shaped by ideas, observations, experiences, and puzzlements that are expressed in words, mind mapping, note taking, drawing, images and collage (Richardson, 2000; Wolcott, 2001). My commonplace book provided a space for documenting and reflecting on the multiple forms of fieldwork and arts-informed pursuits.

Fieldwork involves studying people in their own environments, throughout the process of evaluation. Documenting dates, context details, and observations in a non-judgmental way is commonly referred to as field notes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). All of these pieces lead to an extensive documentation that integrates observations and ideas with evaluator decision making and activities throughout the evaluation process.

My commonplace books are bound black diaries with 240 white pages. Over the course of this inquiry, I have filled three of these with notes, ideas, reflections, and other pieces of data as described above. I am rarely seen without one of these books, as I find that seeing what I am
thinking is a necessary part of my cognition. These books have also filled a need for me by bringing artistry to my evaluation work. Much of the planning, designing, imagining, and recording I do is done in an artful way. The books are textured with photographs of my table-sized mind maps, quotations and images pulled from magazines, napkins glued so as not to lose an idea after a post-conference discussion, and pages upon pages of notes. These books are a chronicle of my thinking and a textual record of this process. One way to describe my thoughts about writing is to look to an entry:

I have found that writing out my thoughts promotes reflection by bracketing off time away from doing to think. Ever since I was a teenager I have used writing as a way of observing my thoughts and feelings, recording observations to try and understand the world around me. My commonplace books are a safe place to develop and experiment with ideas. A commonplace book brings together ways of seeing, thinking, feeling and hearing. I use found image, photographs, quotations, printed texts, sketches, narrative writing, poetry, lists, notes and graphic organizers to document thinking, decision making and activities. My commonplace books are introspective places that reflect the systematic, intuitive and creative nature of arts-informed inquiry. (Excerpt from September 2009)

Experiences are documented by blending poetry, images, sketches, artifacts, photographs, and conversational moments to illuminate ideas and reflections. Qualitative inquiry is an approach, a way of seeing that encourages a diverse collection of investigative strategies, allowing for an in-depth examination of individual experiences and how people make meaning from their experiences (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, Richardson (2000) explained that the researcher is the instrument; the data, analysis, and findings are all filtered through his or her biases and subjectivity. Richardson (2000) and Wolcott (2001) both suggested ways of
developing ideas through writing: strategies of asking myself questions, making mind maps, note
taking, drawing figures or tables to conceptualize something, and considering the role of artifacts
in the learning process. All of these pieces led to an extensive journal of my personal learning
during this evaluative process.

Concept mapping. This technique combines a visual and textual way of making sense
from multiple ideas. Concept maps provide a graphic organizer that can work as a frame for the
overall project, help to reduce qualitative data, analyze themes, and look for intersections or
display findings (Novack, 1998; 2010). Depending on the circumstance, I use large-scale
concept maps or even a small sketch of my ideas. In either case, the ideas are held within my
commonplace book. Examples of using concept maps included planning the inquiry from a
research perspective: in dialogue with the Learning Coordinators to develop a frame for the
overall project; with the Learning Coordinators and the Research and Assessment Manager to
consolidate the data and analyze themes; and with the Trainers to present data analysis and
engage them in looking for intersections. At each of these exchanges, the initial concept map
that began in my commonplace book eventually grew to become a three-foot by eight-foot visual
tool, providing a schematic for laying out ideas, making connections, enabling dialogue, and
facilitating programmatic understandings. Figure 13 shows an example of a completed concept
map that I used with the Trainers, the different colours represents data from different
stakeholders.
**Figure 13.** Image of Data Concept Map used with Trainers

**Data collection in the meta-evaluation phase.** Two main types of data collected during the meta-evaluation phase included individual interviews and reflections documented in my commonplace book. Table 6 outlines both of these strategies and provides an overview of the details. Although each strategy has been discussed previously, details pertinent to positioning the strategy as an essential component of the meta-evaluation are provided.

**Table 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Primary Purpose</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Forms of Data Collected</th>
<th>Fusion of Arts-Informed Element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual interviews</td>
<td>To obtain feedback about the evaluation and the use of arts-informed inquiry as the evaluation was in process</td>
<td>Board of Education Office</td>
<td>• Interview • Audio recorded • Verbatim transcription • Note taking</td>
<td>Asking for storied data, anecdotes and experiences beyond simplistic responses Image-elicitation with Learning Coordinators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common-place book</td>
<td>Reflective space to document field notes, a spectrum of observations, questions and ideas that developed nuanced insight about the contributions of arts-informed inquiry during this evaluation</td>
<td>A black bound book with white pages</td>
<td>• Writing • Drawing • Graphic organizers • Collage • Poetry • Images</td>
<td>A compendium of arts forms for recording and expressing purposes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Individual interviews.** Approximately six months after the evaluation, I completed six individual interviews. Each lasted approximately one hour, took place in a location convenient for the participant, and was audio recorded and transcribed. The questions I devised were drawn from my research into the field of meta-evaluation, as defined by Scriven (1991) and more recently defined by the use of meta-evaluation in *Program Evaluation Standards* (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson & Caruthers, 2011).

Compared to information collected during other parts of this study, the post-evaluation research was rather straightforward. I interviewed the Superintendent first and followed that up by interviewing the Research and Assessment Manager. Both of the participants offered a systems-level perspective on the evaluation work. My next interview took place in one of the classrooms where I had earlier situated the teacher and student classroom-based creative arts inquiry. Returning to the Board of Education, I interviewed each of the three Learning Coordinators (the Learning Coordinator on maternity leave was able to join us to be interviewed). In an informal communication intended to make final arrangements to set up the interviews, one of the Learning Coordinators requested that I bring the set of images, so she could “play” with them one last time. In addition to a set of semi-structured questions, I crafted a few questions specifically so that the images could provide yet another perspective. I offered the option of talking with and from the images to all of the Learning Coordinators and later wished I had done this in each of the post-evaluation interviews.

**Commonplace book.** McMillan and Schumacher (2006) identified personal data strategies, such as a commonplace book, that can monitor and document a researcher’s perspective. My commonplace book spanned all aspects of the evaluation and research. In the meta-evaluation phase, I returned to my initial ideas and slowly, methodologically, and
attentively worked my way through the completed script of this evaluation. By providing a comprehensive record of our learning, my commonplace book has become an integral piece of the meta-evaluation reflection. The commonplace book provides an appropriate last strategy to refer to, because it spotlights documentation across both phases, as well as all aspects of theory and practice.

**Analysis Procedures**

The process of reading, analyzing, and re-reading data took place continuously since the beginning of this project. I transcribed the data verbatim as it was collected during the evaluation and in the post evaluation. By listening to, reading, and reflecting on the data, I was always in the process of making notes, referring to data and trying to find connections across the data. Merriam (1998) described data analysis as a process where the researcher makes sense out of the data. Data analysis was my attempt at making meaning from the course of the evaluation as well as in my research on the evaluation. As the data for the evaluation was collected, I maintained a comprehensive data log which helped organize the data in its entirety during the evaluation and as I moved into the meta-evaluation. At times, it was difficult for me to distinguish between data collected for the evaluation and data collected for the research; one was always in the process of informing the other. I found that I had to keep separating my ideas for these two different foci.

During the process of analyzing data, I crafted two separate concept maps to display the data alongside my developing ideas, interpretive comments, theoretical insights, and questions. I was fortunate to have a large space to work in and these concept maps provided me an opportunity to physically move around the data and literally position myself in different vantage points while working though ideas. These concept maps evolved over the course of the inquiry;
as I worked, I would often identify categories and then note these in different places to work on later when establishing themes.

After completing and transcribing the meta-evaluation interviews, I reviewed each piece of data collected during both phases while asking myself what contribution these data could make to my understanding of arts-informed inquiry? If there was a notable contribution, I summarized the idea on the large concept map where it seemed most appropriate and expanded on the idea in a new section of my commonplace book. The themes and ideas morphed several times as I delved further into the evaluation and research processes. As I wrote this dissertation, the concept maps were hung on a nearby wall with colour-coded participant responses, sticky notes, arrows, boxes, and symbols reminding me of the people who have directly and indirectly participated in and supported this work.

I also analyzed the data using a compilation of strategies that involved working with hard copies of the data in a manual process and used a qualitative software package called ATLAS.ti 6. In both formats, I coded for topic identifiers, identified thematic ideas, made interpretive comments in my commonplace book, or used the memo function of ATLAS.ti 6. My commonplace book and the memo function were key places where I flagged information to revisit, expanded on what I was thinking as I was reading, and recorded questions or insights as they emerged. I decided to use both a paper and an electronic method because I felt that the tactile experience of manipulating the data was important for my own learning. In the end, I do not think this dual process made for more work but, rather, provided another way of engaging with the data and drawing out meaning during the analysis phase. Without question, ATLAS.ti 6 offered greater ease with coding, categorizing, and organizing data across the multiple documents, which was far faster than anything I could achieved with scissors, highlighters, and a
pen. Analyzing the breadth of data collected was a time-consuming and laborious procedure, but it was also captivating. Arts-informed data provided additional challenges because there is less literature to provide guidance and because I am less experienced with this type of analysis. The procedures, challenges, and resulting insights are discussed in more detail in my results. Ultimately, perseverance paid off and I was able to establish patterns and themes that provided evidence to answer the evaluation questions.

At the end of the evaluation, a final report and presentation was completed to meet the needs of the primary stakeholders. The majority of the analysis was completed on my own, at the request of the Learning Coordinators who were busy with their roles and also wanted the final report to come from a more distanced perspective. Yet, once the preliminary themes were established, I invited the Learning Coordinators to read over the ideas to see if my analysis aligned with what they had been hearing and learning throughout the evaluation processes. In addition, Trainers were involved in reviewing the concept mapping and offering ideas. These collaborations provided important steps in the process because we were able to review the evaluation activities while dialoging about what the data was showing. While my thinking was informed, analysis of the data, and the conclusions reached remained my own. The key ideas were put together in final report and presented to the district (http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle). Given that this dissertation focuses on my research into the use of arts-informed inquiry rather than the evaluation itself, the remainder of this section is limited to the analytical focus of the research questions that guided the study.

**Analysis procedures post evaluation.** I reviewed all of the data and brought it together as a case (Yin, 2009). These research questions guided this phase of the inquiry:

a. What does the crafting of arts-informed inquiry within evaluation look like?
b. What evidence is there that arts-informed inquiry adds value to evaluative processes and outcomes?

c. How is arts-informed inquiry useful; in what contexts, and for what purposes is it appropriate to intentionally craft arts-informed inquiry as a feature of evaluation?

Qualitative case study analysis involves a multilayered process of analysis in the continued search for meaningful patterns and themes to emerge within (Yin, 1994) and across the case (Stake, 2005). Stake raised questions about the stories of cases and reminded evaluators that cases can be told in many ways because “case content evolves even in the last phases of writing” (p. 456). In the process of writing this dissertation, I have also found this to be true. Even though the text has a linear appearance, its creation was circuitous. With this in mind, I have worked to include pieces of the evaluation data throughout this dissertation, but had to be selective as to what stories could be told.

One of my goals was to use images, stories, and poetry in the process of the evaluation as well as in the dissertation, to represent the multiple dimensions that are possible in arts-informed inquiry. As Eisner (1998) believes, this process does not depict “sloppy planning or wishful thinking … its function is to highlight the complexity of such work and its dependency on the sensibilities and good judgement of the qualitative researcher” (p. 170). A text that uses multiple forms is the best method for exploring this arts-informed inquiry in an educational evaluation, not only because it is an artistic strategy, but also because it is “humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and human perceptions, bearing both the limitations and the strengths of human feelings” (Richardson, 1997, p. 65). Arts-informed inquiry presented through a variety of artistic strategies provides a context for humanizing research on evaluation so that people hear, feel, and see; it is a powerful space that fuses intellect with creativity.
From the outset of documenting my research on evaluation, I anticipated analyzing the data according to the heuristic borrowed from Alkin (2004); namely, methods, valuing, and use. These three broad categories provided a basic structure for the inductive analysis. According to Johnson and Christensen (2004) inductive analysis is “immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships; begins by exploring, then confirming, guided by analytical principles” (p. 362).

My commonplace book was the first place that I started re-analyzing the data, for the purpose of understanding the research on evaluation. In my commonplace book I applied coding strategies similar to those outlined for fieldwork, interviews, and participant observations. Sumara (1996) explained that revisiting entries allows you to “notice and locate patterns of repetition and points of resistance—both of which become important sites for personal and collective interpretation” (p. 45). Using my commonplace book to draw together multiple strategies shaped the analysis and post-evaluation processes by generating more comprehensive reflection with the key stakeholders and myself.

My analysis continued as I flowed between my commonplace book, the large concept maps, and in the electronically stored files of ATLAS.ti 6. Together, these three forms provided a way to analyze the evidence and to generate meaning about key aspects of arts-informed inquiry in program evaluation. Each aspect of the heuristic is a results chapter that offers evidence and interpretation from my experiences. My attempt at bringing artistry to this dissertation is reflected in the interweaving of story, reflective writing, documents, and visual artifacts from the process. My writing succeeds if you, the reader, are able to vicariously experience the lively, in-depth evaluation process and imagine for yourself the qualities that arts-
informed inquiry can offer. In this chapter I have tried to convey a sense of the fullness of my experience, the richness of the data, and the complexity of this undertaking.

**Qualities of Goodness**

In their writing about arts-informed inquiry, Cole and Knowles (2008) identify the need for qualities of goodness. In other words, qualities of goodness are those that can be used to assess and explain, the merit of the data. The qualities encompass concepts of credibility, fittingness and accuracy as all of these describe standards that can be used to judge the quality of data and methods of analysis. Most appropriate to understanding the credibility of data constructed by using arts-informed inquiry is to draw criteria from qualitative research. In this case, I draw from Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) concepts of naturalistic inquiry. The framework they put forward is focused on (a) credibility; (b) transferability; (c) dependability; and (d) confirmability. Each of these was considered for judging the credibility of the data and analysis during the evaluation as well as in the data that is represented in this dissertation.

Trustworthiness in this research design is supported by the convergence of data from multiple strategies across diverse participant groups. There was an appropriate breadth of sampling across the research and evaluation because all participants had knowledge about the program and an opportunity for reflection on the arts-informed strategies use in data collection. In addition, the Program Trainers, Learning Coordinators, Superintendent of Safe Schools as well as the Research and Evaluation Manager enhanced the credibility by taking part in participant evaluation strategies purposefully designed to help to confirm the results of participants. Data used for the focus of answering the research questions in this study evolved through concurrent analysis and interaction between what was known and what I needed to know. By identifying what I needed to know, I was able to center my evaluator-researcher skills
also to include persistent observation, detailed reflexive writings, drawings, art-making, and photographing over a prolonged engagement.

My evaluator-researcher practices during the evaluation and throughout the meta-evaluation enhanced the authenticity by honouring multiple realities and accuracy in representation. Throughout this dissertation, the presentation of data, from participants as well as from my own reflections, affirms my perspectives and acknowledges the human experiences as they were lived and perceived during this study. Following the traditions of the bricouler and the sentiment of thick description, I have focused on integrating sufficient evidence, direct quotations, and figures to provide readers with an understanding of each of the dimensions of the heuristic that frames this inquiry.
Chapter Four: Methods that are Rooted and Reaching

This chapter draws from the evaluation data to describe what the crafting of arts-informed inquiry looks like. My goal is to reveal the evaluation process in a way that draws the reader into the method’s decision-making processes. The drawing you see below is a symbol of this chapter’s intent: to be both rooted and reaching.

![Drawing of a tree and hand]

**Figure 14.** Rooted and Reaching

Trees are depicted in many cultures and faiths as a motif that shows links, interconnectedness, and/or growth. The concept of the tree of life was established in ancient Egypt and still exists in China, where a tree is symbolically associated with immortality. Sometimes a tree is used to show the multiple branches of Christianity. Within the fields of education as well as evaluation, knowledge is occasionally represented figuratively using the image of a tree (Alkin, 2012; Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008;). The illustration of the tree
branch in Figure 14 is intended to represent what is known about inquiry from differing viewpoints while suggesting the potential for interweaving these perspectives. For me, the hand represents reaching into the unknown, reaching beyond the boundaries currently ascribed to qualitative program evaluation.

Bringing program evaluation and arts-informed inquiry together requires explicit rendering, in both literal and figurative senses, to show ways that the defining elements connect. This depiction is broadly divided into two sections: Rooted shows the foundations that the work is built on while Reaching uses examples from this research to demonstrate how choice of method can inform the field of program evaluation.

**Rooted**

*The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance.*

—*Aristotle*

Aristotle reminds us of art’s powerful capacity to communicate our understandings to the world. Communication is central to the field of evaluation. Communication through the arts becomes particularly appropriate when inquiry dwells in subjectivity, thrives on discovery, and revels in the explanatory. I was not looking to create artists or to have the participants create pieces of art. Instead, my emphasis as an evaluator was to draw from strategies and techniques used in the arts, to generate a form of qualitative data that might inform more conventional qualitative strategies.

The inclusion of qualitative methods in program evaluation represents broadening epistemological perspectives that are rooted in deeply knowing and understanding a program (McClintock, 2004). Qualitative methods in evaluation continue to develop in response to an
expanding recognition of the voices and views that evaluations have the potential to represent, in changing social and value contexts (J. Greene, 1999, 2000; Simons & McCormack, 2007). An expansion of traditional qualitative methods represents alternative genres for encompassing data collection, analysis, and representation (Patton, 2008).

**Building on tradition.** This research on arts-informed evaluation is rooted in the qualitative paradigm; I have relied heavily on the concept of **verstehen**, where a systematic interpretive process leads to deeper understanding. **Verstehen** aligns with Geertz’s (1973) call for “thick description.” To create a thick description, my systematic processes included keeping a detailed log of all evaluation activities related to the evaluation as they unfolded as well as detailed records within my commonplace book. Together, these two complementary systems provided a way to keep track of all the interactions with clients or stakeholders, my own emerging ideas, plans for the evaluation, and documents developed for the evaluation.

By choosing an arts-informed enhancement to the qualitative methods, the subjectivity and reflexivity of the researcher–evaluator could be acknowledged in the evaluation process. In fact, in this approach, the presence of the researcher is fundamental and viewed as an asset (Cole & Knowles, 2008). Janesick’s (1998) discussion of the qualitative researcher’s role applies equally to evaluators employing qualitative methods:

> The role of the qualitative researcher, much like the artist/dancer's role, demands total involvement and commitment in a way that requires a total immersion of the senses in the experience. ... The researcher is connected to the participants in a most profound way, and that is how trust is established, which in turn allows for greater access to sources and which ensures an involvement on the part of participants that enables them to tell their respective stories. (p. 61)
In Janesick’s view, dance and art are used as a core metaphor for qualitative research. Like scientific inquiry itself, she shows how the arts are a place for theorizing, recording, drawing, and imagining.

By involving arts-informed inquiry in this evaluation and research I examine the extent to which participants both converged and diverged in their ways of seeing the program: its context, processes, products, and outcomes. In Varela’s (1987) opinion “what we do is what we know, and ours is but one of many possible worlds. It is not a mirroring of the world, but a laying down of the world” (p. 62). The researcher becomes an adventurer who uses multiple forms of qualitative inquiry to invite exploration. This was my vision for arts-informed inquiry in program evaluation.

**Setting the context.** As we move into the ways in which this evaluation–research sought to explore alternative methodological forms, I first used data from the very start of our process to establish the context. The entry below is reminiscent of the vignette presented in Chapter Two and describes my first face-to-face meeting with the Learning Coordinators:

We talked for hours. The program coordinators described the range of programs they offered and detailed some of the research and evaluation that was conducted in the district. It was hard to keep it straight. I mapped out ideas as they talked but tried to strike the right balance between listening, writing and questioning… With so many programs under their care, the program coordinators were struggling to decide which ones would benefit most from a careful, external evaluation lens. They outlined the two they were thinking of and I offered to do some preliminary research to see what, if any, evaluation had already been conducted. (Commonplace book, August 6, 2009).

Relationship building is central to program evaluation, even more so when working as an
external evaluator who sees the potential for using methods that may be unfamiliar to clients and stakeholders. Walking to my car after my first meeting with clients, I had a lot of self-doubt about my efforts to build credibility (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson & Caruthers, 2011).

Did I say enough? Too much? Should I have revealed more about my thinking of arts-informed inquiry in evaluation? I wanted the clients to choose the program they most wanted to learn about and to understand some of what program evaluation could offer them without feeling burdened by too much information. I also wanted to be ethical and honest in my intentions and goals as a researcher. How do we find the balance between their needs and mine, client relationship and friendship and even, science and art? (Voice memo, August 26, 2009)

I sent a follow-up email to thank the coordinators for their time, provided an outline of what we had talked about, and invited them to let me know if they had any additional questions (Email, August 27, 2009).

My first official task was to research both of the programs they were proposing. As a contracted external evaluator, it was not up to me to decide which program was selected. In my commonplace book, I noted that both programs were multi-modal and that arts-informed inquiry could be an appropriate and legitimate addition to conventional evaluation approaches.

Our second meeting took place at the district office. I began by asking what they hoped to accomplish and then listened while they described and debated the two programs in light of the information that my summaries were able to add to their knowledge. We talked through hypothetical possibilities; for example, if we evaluated program $x$, we might learn $y$ and $z$. I viewed this dialogue as time well spent. I was becoming confident that slowly but surely, we were building a relationship. I was establishing credibility with the clients and I was gaining
more insight into the types of questions they cared about. Patton (2008) about “attending to the personal factor” to focus on building a strong and positive relationship (p. 87). During this discussion, the concept of involving aspects of artistry surfaced as I explained how the evaluation could use multiple forms of data to elicit and retell the story of a program in a way that offered diverse insights. Later, one of the Learning Coordinators commented that she had been “able to draw parallels between planning for the classroom and planning for the program evaluation in ways that provided clarification” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).

After subsequent discussions with colleagues in their district office, the coordinators sent me an email outlining their chosen program of focus, Tribes. I was invited to make a presentation to them and two others who had ultimate responsibility for the program. Preparing for the meeting was stressful; I knew that a compelling presentation about the value of using an external evaluator and the potential for using arts-informed inquiry could lead to a contract and an opportunity for empirical research on the approach. A review of this meeting suggests that I was not as articulate as I had hoped to be explaining how and for what purposes arts-informed inquiry would be interwoven into the design. My efforts, along with the trust we developed in each other’s skills and intentions did lead to both an evaluation contract and an endorsement by the group. The extent to which I was able to implement this vision and cultivate the promise of arts-informed inquiry is detailed below.

**Reaching**

*I found I could say things with color and shapes*

*that I couldn’t say any other way—*

*things I had no words for.*

—Georgia O’Keeffe
Artist Georgia O’Keeffe used colour and shape to communicate rich ideas, beyond her conscious use of space or structure. The purpose of using arts-informed inquiry in this evaluation was to allow me, as well as the participants, to intentionally reach beyond what our language could describe or quantify. The art forms drawn on during the evaluation were not rigidly defined but broadly grouped as literary, visual, performing and digital. These forms were used both in isolation and in combination to communicate our ideas. Eisner (1982) argued “arts are cognitive activities, guided by human intelligence, that make unique forms of meaning possible” (p. 48). This research considers how the use of arts-informed inquiry, as an alternative, might enable us to be aware, to discover, and to cultivate nuanced information about how participants experience a program.

Among other abilities, evaluators use observational, intellectual, analytical, and communicative skills. Artists use their skills to bring forward mental, physical, intuitive, emotional, non-linear, and experiential ways of knowing (Loori, 2005). Arts-informed was purposefully selected to integrate these abilities and skills by adding dimensions to the data that were expressive, aesthetic, creative, and imaginative. By fusing artistry into the overall approach, what could be counted as data and how the participants and I represented knowledge in evaluative contexts expanded. Done skilfully, this research should be able to offer evidence that arts-informed inquiry evoked or inspired empathy; tapped into intuitive, creative, and spiritual dimensions; or enabled understanding in a more holistic way (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Simons & McCormack, 2007). McNiff (2008) suggests that art can inform the experiences and processes in many disciplines because “art enhances the process of discovery in science by its responsiveness to the unexpected” (p. 39). I believe arts-informed inquiry has the potential to be playful, creative and purposeful.
This chapter reaches beyond the simpler task of arguing for arts-informed inquiry by identifying the presence of Cole and Knowles’ (2008) criteria for “enhance [ing] the possibilities of information gathering and representation” (p. 60). A more significant contribution to the field of evaluation is achieved by (a) providing a rationale for drawing from multiple artistic genres; (b) describing my critical thinking and commitment to form; and (c) investigating form as part of the creative inquiry process. Data from this evaluation is used in this way to provide a more detailed look at the possibilities of arts-informed inquiry as a qualitative method in evaluation.

**Rationale for using multiple forms.** Form is an essential element in arts-informed inquiry. I begin by providing a rationale for my choice of multiple forms, examining the relationship between form and aesthetics. Then, I consider the implications form has on process, as well as in the representation of evaluation findings. In practice, decisions about form are often considered simultaneously, rather than linearly as depicted in this text.

From the outset of this evaluation, I had hoped to be able use arts-informed inquiry in some useful way. There was enough evidence in evaluation literature (e.g., Abma, 1998a, 2001a, 2003; Constantino & Greene, 2003; Dart & Davies, 2003; Dempsey & Tucker, 1994; Fang, 1985; Goodyear, 2001; MacNeil, 2000) and a growing commitment from arts-based educational research (e.g., Butler-Kisber, 2008; Eisner, 2008b; Goose, 2005; Upitis, 1999) to provide me with enough confidence that intentional use of artistic forms could enhance work in program evaluation.

I approached this goal in an open-ended way because I knew that the idea would need to resonate with clients within my specific evaluation context. At first, I was unsure if it would be better to explore one arts-informed strategy in depth, or experiment with a range of genres. I felt somewhat like Pirandello’s (1958) characters, but instead of searching for an author, I was an
evaluator searching for an evaluation context. As I reviewed the data and reflected on the whole evaluation process, I discovered that four considerations that came into play in the eventual integration of multiple forms: (a) my sense of artistry; (b) the desire to connect creativity and learning in the evaluation context; (c) the broad questions in this evaluation; (d) the structure and constraints of the evaluation context; and (d) the imagined audiences.

My sense of artistry. Proponents for arts-informed inquiry do not expect that researchers, or in this case, evaluators, are artists. McIntyre (2000) stated that the goal is not to make researchers or participants into artists, but to explore the inquiry process using artistic qualities. My sense of artistry was engaged because the creative process offered a mechanism for generating responsive ways that transcend the literal or linear (Cole and Knowles, 2008).

In this inquiry, I saw myself as a bricoleur of sorts, who would ultimately identify and choose the tools most appropriate for the context. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) described a bricoleur as one who blends together many pieces for use in new and unconventional ways. I acted as a bricoleur by choosing artistic forms that enhanced and extended the ways of working in an evaluation. My goal was to engage others in a way that would lead to the meaningful communication of process and findings. To achieve these goals, I combined multiple forms that had potential to create a dense, complex, reflexive, and interpretive image that represented participants’ lived experiences as well as my understanding of the phenomenon. I intentionally collected data with an eye to what could be assembled in the final report/presentation. My commonplace books grew thick with notes, sketches and inspiration pulled from many sources as the evaluation and research process unfolded.

I had experience using all of the forms employed in this evaluation prior to this inquiry during my personal attempts as well as during my time as an Arts teacher with K–12 students.
From my own experiences as well as my students’ anecdotal accounts, I knew that art-making held power for revealing ideas that lurk just below consciousness, which might not otherwise be given a voice (Butler-Kisber, 2008). In almost two decades as an evaluator, researcher, educator and facilitator, I had witnessed how art-making, in its multiple forms, could foster an environment of discovery.

**Connecting creativity and learning in an evaluation context.** In a creative environment, individuals are immersed in learning and creation in tandem. In planning the evaluation methods and data collection activities, I anticipated learning and creativity by infusing traditional qualitative approaches with arts-informed inquiry. This fusion expanded my evaluator repertoire while keeping in mind that using arts-informed inquiry to transform an evaluation context will look different with each participant group.

With some groups, planning for creativity was very elaborate, as was illustrated when working with students using two different forms of art to connect creativity, learning, and program evaluation. Grade 6 students talked about their program experiences by creating line drawings and bringing their artwork to small group discussions (Commonplace book, February 6, 2010). Grade 8 students expressed their views of the program over a month-long creative arts project that involved journals, photo taking, movie making, and a film festival showcasing their ideas (Commonplace book, February 18, 2010).

Figure 15 shows students working on a project that brought multiple facets of the program to life, but also showed how using a creative lens for program evaluation could blend intellectual, emotional, and social responses into a meaningful whole. The nature of the project required student collaboration by asking students to bring together their unique skills to tell a story about their experiences of Tribes in their classroom. In this
image you see one student working the computer while another is listening for the music cues. Figure 16 depicts a program made by students for the culmination of the project.

The title, Secondary Struggles was selected by the students to demonstrate what a learning environment without Tribes would look like. Audiences for the films included other intermediate students at their school, school administrators and their parents/guardians.

Figure 16. Program for Film Festival

In contrast to these multi-day opportunities to engage with students and their teachers in classrooms, evaluation data collection activities with teachers and Trainers at the board office was constrained by time. Group of teachers ranged in size from 14–24 participants. Each group was led through three exercises. Each exercise that lasted for an afternoon (3 hours). Some adults appeared excited at participating in the arts-informed inquiry; I could see they were curious as they looked at the images laid along one side of the room and the materials that sat neatly arranged on tables. Others were more hesitant, sometimes mumbling or other times

Figure 15. Grade 8 Students Collaborating

Figure 16. Program for Film Festival
exclaiming with downright incredulity, “I’m not an artist” or “I don’t know how to do that” (Commonplace book, February 8, 2010). To some extent, I had expected this initial resistance as well as their excitement.

I was careful in my instructions while setting up each activity, to distinguish what we were doing from what artists do. Once the group was assured of this, many participants visibly relaxed and they started working together, albeit slowly at first. Occasionally, the Learning Coordinators or I would model the tasks in ways that sparked laughter and helped to establish a sense of camaraderie. My commonplace notes reflect an awareness of growing confidence as the relationship became more firmly established and the arts-informed practices became more commonplace (February 8, 2010).

One consequence of arts-informed inquiry was a focus on creativity and learning that heightened engagement and investment. By the end of our data collection events, some participants expressed regret that our time together was over. I took this as a positive sign that the program evaluation activities had been engaging and meaningful. I also made a note in my commonplace book that a few elementary teachers had wondered aloud if there was maybe just one more question we wanted to ask or one more idea we could explore together (Commonplace book, January 18, 2010). To me, it was a good sign that participants lingered at the end, talking with one another, adding final touches to their work, and appreciating the pieces created by others.

Collecting data using arts-informed inquiry was interesting; I didn’t want my time with the groups to end. Based on the enthusiasm after the first session held with the Trainers on January 14, 2010, I emailed images of art created, and provided instructions for undertaking these evaluative, arts-informed activities in their classrooms. This follow-up gesture was
appreciated; one Trainer mentioned it in an email (May 22, 2010). Surprisingly, a year later I was still remembered as “the Tribes lady” during an informal conversation that began during a visit to the board office (February 22, 2011). At the end of sessions with teachers, I invited them to complete feedback forms providing any additional information about the program and also, inviting their comments on their experience at the sharing session. One participant commented:

It not at all what I expected, but better, because it was a chance to roll my sleeves up. I enjoyed working through the activities. Not only did they help me to reconnect with my original goal but it gave me new ideas that I can take back to my classroom” (Secondary teacher, February 8, 2012).

Many participants asked for more sessions like the one we held, so they could connect with other Tribes-trained teachers, as well as have “refreshers and courses like this” (Elementary teacher, January 18, 2010). Quite a few participants even described it as fun. Now that I work for the same school district, my willingness to embrace and experiment new ways of researching and evaluating is well known. Recently, Shulha and I agreed that I am a bit of a positive disrupter (personal communication, March, 2013).

These feedback forms provided another layer of information related to the program as well as feedback about the nature of the evaluation activities.

Figure 17. Working with Concept Map and Commonplace Book
Figure 17 shows me mapping data onto one large concept map. I learned that arts-informed inquiry was an opportunity for expressive ideas that lead to surprising awareness and positive connections. This sense of discovery over what strategies drawn from the arts can reveal is not a new phenomenon. Other artists have experienced a similar sense of awe in discoveries promoted through the arts; writer E. M. Forster (1927) once stated, “how can I tell what I think until I see what I say,” while the vocalist Adele (2011) proclaimed that she doesn’t know how she feels until it comes out in a song. In the experiences of these artists, and in this evaluation/research context, creative experimentation with artistic forms promoted reflection and critical thinking.

Ultimately, using arts-informed inquiry was spread across an entire school year and produced more artifacts than I could ever hope to showcase in a final report, presentation or this dissertation. The expandable folder featured in Figure 18 was another strategy that I used to track, organize, and analyze data for this evaluation and research. The integration of these skills and ideas reveals a desire for arts-informed inquiry as an alternative method within qualitative methodological traditions, to push at the boundaries and evoke conceptual artistry within the field of program evaluation.

The quality of the evaluation questions. Using multiple forms during the exploration of arts-informed inquiry proved appropriate, because the Tribes program has an encompassing approach to reduce violence in schools by promoting inclusion. Given the breadth of this program as well
as the multiple ways it can be enacted, it did not surprise me that the evaluation questions were focused on broad understandings about perceptions and implementation. With the questions in mind, I drafted an evaluation plan that included an outline of possible methodologies. I proposed a range of art forms that could be paired with more traditional forms of word-based data to provide additional insight into a complex program (the evaluation plan is included on http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle).

The Learning Coordinators were enthusiastic that the questions and proposed arts forms aligned with the program itself (Phone conversation, October 10, 2010). However, the Research and Assessment Manager expressed concern that this approach may not work, advising me that I would need a rigorous approach if this were to serve as data for a PhD (Commonplace book, October 13, 2010). After considering the program, the evaluation questions and different ways of approaching the choice of form, I decided that using several arts forms offered the best option for program data as well as my dissertation research. Emboldened, I also felt as though my passion alone could ignite the required creativity of participants, something that seemed to be reinforced by the willingness of the Learning Coordinators.

In the beginning, I collected traditional qualitative data, in the form of participant observations at training sessions (Commonplace book, November 25 & 26 2009) and through on-site interviews with administrators (December 11 & 15, 2009; January 15, 2010). By using more conventional forms as a starting point, I was able to continue gaining trust, developing credibility and developing deeper relationships with my clients as well as with some of the program Trainers and other participants. As the evaluation processes progressed, I was also able to gain a much better understanding of how the Learning Coordinators worked and see ways that the evaluation questions could be useful to them.
At a reflective session after we had piloted data collection strategies at my house, one of the Learning Coordinators revealed:

When you said you wanted to use this artistic data, I had no idea what you were talking about or how it would work. But I trusted you and the work I have seen you do, so I was prepared to invest in the process, (Learning Coordinator, January 8, 2011)

Part of this trust came from the fact that she was aware of my background as an arts educator and researcher. Her opening allowed me to explain that using multiple arts forms over time could increase the group’s confidence that we would be able to answer the questions of the evaluation. In a meta-evaluation interview, another Learning Coordinator revealed her thoughts on how the choice of multiple forms matched both the program’s, as well as the evaluation’s, focus:

I think the choices you made in terms of ways in which we could evaluate Tribes were very well suited for the Tribes process itself … if we had surveyed … without so many other kinds of data I think it would have been limited in its worth. Tribes is so much more than that and I think because of the different strategies that we have a lot more to talk about. We got a lot more perspectives from the various people involved … I think it was really well suited to the nature of what we were trying to evaluate. (March 9, 2011)

Using multiple forms was an intentional choice that allowed for a comprehensive approach to answering the evaluation and research questions, building on the enthusiasm of the clients and stakeholders while also addressing concerns of gatekeepers.

**The structure and constraints of the evaluation context.** Looking across my data log I was reminded of the ongoing issue of constrained time and financial schedules within educational system. This meant that we had to build evaluation processes into existing program structures. While this is not an ideal solution, it is a workable one. I conducted evaluative
processes with the Trainers, where they would be coming to the district office as part of annual programming meetings. Over the course of the evaluation, I had four main interactions with them as a group: (a) an electronic greeting for the plan and feedback (October 28, 2009); (b) a four-hour data collection event (January 14, 2010); (c) a joint analysis and preliminary findings presentation (May 20, 2010); and (d) an electronic greeting for the final report (September 20, 2010). In between these four main dates, I communicated and interacted with the Trainers by email, by phone, and in person.

*Tribes* sharing sessions made access to teachers possible; these sessions represented a new initiative taken by the Learning Coordinators, in response to their perception about how to best meet a need some teachers had articulated. The three sharing sessions included an open-ended agenda; after observing the first one held on October 26, 2009, I imagined ways that the evaluation activities could provide an ideal complement to their structure. The Learning Coordinators and I worked collaboratively to design and facilitate the remaining two sessions for elementary teachers (held on January 18, 2010) and secondary teachers (held on February 8, 2010).

The inquiry processes solely defined by the evaluation were the interviews and school tours with administrators as well as the two classroom-based experiences with elementary teachers/students. Student data had to be collected during the school day in ways that aligned with their teachers’ goals, curriculum contexts, and their parents’ approval. This was difficult to organize and time-consuming to work out. Meeting face-to-face to talk through ideas, taking notes in my commonplace book, and then preparing a summary document of our discussions allowed me to keep the evaluation activities moving along. I followed up often, with emails and phone calls to teachers via school offices, but I always tried to be mindful of their busy schedules.
and demanding positions.

In a meta-evaluation interview, one of the teachers described how “at first, this evaluation of Tribes was just another thing I had committed to do, but then after I met you, and we had a chance to talk, I could see that it was going to work out okay” (March 1, 2011). As an evaluator who is also an experienced classroom teacher, I understood the value of aligning with other classroom initiatives and the possibilities of emphasizing the creative nature of the evaluation approach. In my commonplace book I reflected, “by offering a new idea or skill within the classroom framework, the evaluation can attend to the structures of schooling and make contributions beyond the final report” (February 6, 2010). The act of considering the stakeholders and participants as situated within their contexts was a purposeful, reflective, and contemplative choice.

Limited time and financial resources was an issue compounded by the volume of stakeholders as well as the program participants I hoped to engage. In some ways, all involved with the program are stakeholders, but I interpreted differences between stakeholders who could affect change (i.e., trainers, administrators, or teachers) and participants with a passive role (i.e., students). Collage offered one way to respond to the constraints of working with a large group of teachers within a contained amount of time, while still offering opportunities for meaningful engagement.

The choice of using collage was based on discussing the potential group dynamic with the Learning Coordinators (January 14, 2010), reviewing research about possible forms, visualizing how the size of the group and the use of artistic forms could interact, and discussing further by email to make a final decision (January 15, 2010). The structure of the sharing session was open ended, but in addition to our evaluation data, we had to make sure we provided
participants with opportunities to share.

With this context in mind, our overarching goal was to draw out practical knowledge, demonstrate appreciation, and foster a sense of reciprocity. Collage was an intentional choice that met the structure of the day as well as the goals of our evaluation, since it could foster dialogue while allowing pluralistic value sets to hang together in a visible and concrete way.

Butler-Kisber (2010) suggests that collage offers a “nonlinear and intuitive” way to elicit multiple perceptions, by making thoughts concrete (p. 102). As you can see from the collage depicted in Figure 18 how, images and words were integrated in a tangible way, to convey some of the intangible aspects of the program. Using collage focused on the concrete and practical, while also inviting perceptual and conceptual emergence.

Figure 19. Collage Created by Elementary Teachers
It was interesting to watch as the teachers made their collages. Although each group operated differently, repetitive elements made it appear as a dance-like process. In my commonplace book, I described a fluid movement between searching for images, sharing a found image, and discussing potential meanings (January 18, 2010). Simultaneously, participants engaged in acts of cutting, looked for connections to other images, or searched for more images. The collage making typified the Tribes program qualities of appreciation and reflection. At an evaluation reflection session, one of the Learning Coordinators said that the collage was her favourite part:

What teachers need the most is a chance to talk, to share strategies, and find answers to their questions. This evaluation strategy gave us the opportunity to have a common focus, a shared goal, but in way that promoted their discussions. I think they got real value from this. (February 22, 2010)

During the collage making, teachers were actively appreciating their own discoveries as well as those made by others, while they reflected on their program experiences.

After seeing something similar happening during our next sharing session with secondary teachers, one of the Learning Coordinators paused the work of creating to comment on what was occurring (Voice memo, February 8, 2010). Collage making was more than an evaluation activity; it was also a metaphor for the program. Connections were visible during the process as well as in the final products. As I listened to recordings of teacher discussions while analyzing their assembled pieces, I found myself able to be more explicit about how collage allowed for making connections to the program and provided data for the evaluation. Use of collage was just one of many experiences that illustrated how we worked within the enabling and constraining structures of the evaluation.
**Imagined audiences of the evaluation context.** An imagined audience added another dimension to the evaluation planning and affected our decision to engage with multiple artistic forms. It is not uncommon that evaluators use forms such as stories or photographs during an evaluation process, only to produce a fairly standard report (J. Greene, 1999, 2001). I was committed to identifying appropriate forms, enacting them in the process as well as in the final representation. Cole and Knowles (2008) suggested that it is easier to establish trustworthiness when arts-informed inquiry flows from process to representation because the data can be seen and it stands alongside the findings. I wanted to devise a final report and presentation that could speak to audiences ranging classroom teachers and school administrators, parents of the school community, and leadership within the district.

**Figure 20. Final Report Pages 6 & 7 Show Integration of Text and Images**

One advantage of using multiple forms was the ability to layer ideas throughout our process. This layering culminated in a final evaluation text that demonstrated the unfolding
inquiry using images, stories, poems, and narrative combined with more traditional aspects of qualitative reporting. The intent of Figure 19 is not to provide you with a reading experience but to provide an opportunity to see the way that images, text, direct quotations, and colour can be interwoven.

The Superintendent commented that “using multiple forms bring out the nuances of a program by illuminating different experiences, intensities, and perceptions” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 30, 2010). The practices used throughout the work met my research purposes and also provided unique and distinctive access to understanding participant experiences that would not have been possible through traditional methods alone. A Learning Coordinator commented that the form,

allowed people to just expand and provide maybe a little bit more of what they really valued about the program … this allows people to really, I guess, make a personal connection to it rather than just a theoretical connection to it. (February 22, 2010)

These are just two of many examples, collected formally and informally, that showed how using multiple forms allowed for experimentation within an evaluation that aimed to speak to multiple audiences. Another Learning Coordinator applauded how the diverse stakeholder and participant processes came together in the final report:

There are just many more layers to it and it does, you know, some people are comfortable giving information this way and certain people will give in another way. So I think it just opens that up—the creative process. We’re all creative thinkers in our own way. (Meta-evaluation interview, March 30, 2010)

I intentionally cultivated this layering of ideas throughout the process and then represented it in the final report. As the *bricoleur*, I was able to choose the most appropriate tools during the
process to create a visually dynamic report. Visual messages and media bombard audiences; evaluation reports need to operate in a way that will catch their attention. Arts-informed inquiry offers another tool that allows us to initiate evaluation processes and products to reach diverse audiences.

**Commitment to form.** Form is a defining element within arts-informed inquiry; it also plays a central role in program evaluation. Evaluation literature tells us that the form(s) an evaluator chooses can shape the way that questions are framed and can provide scope for extending or limiting understanding (i.e., Christie & Alkin, 2012; Patton, 2008). Similarly, the artistic forms that we draw from have a profound impact (Cole & Knowles, 2008). In my experiences as a performing artist and a writer of commonplace books, form and content usually emerge in tandem. This was not the case in this program evaluation. When drawing on strategies from the arts to inform this inquiry, form was purposefully orchestrated in ways that could reveal content about the program from different angles.

Many of the methodological strategies we selected were repeated across participant groups, including image-elicitation, folded poetry and art-making. Some strategies were specific to a participant group, such as the creative arts with Grade 8 students and drawing with Grade 6 students. A few strategies were more happenstance, like the journals used in a training workshop or the redesign and implementation of pre-and post-instruments. Across all of the forms used, I was writing in my commonplace book, making concept maps, and also recording experiences through photography. In hindsight, there were likely too many forms for a single evaluation or the undertaking of a dissertation. At times, it felt as though I had multiple projects embedded within one larger one. Yet, this compendium of forms can also be viewed as evidence of my commitment to the potential of arts-informed inquiry in the field of evaluation.
Form can be broadly grouped as literary, visual, performing, and digital. These groupings are not rigidly defined. Whether using these forms in isolation or in combination, there are many possibilities for exploration. Cole and Knowles (2008) invited readers to consider form in its eight dimensions: (a) as structural element; (b) as technical element; (c) as communication element; (d) as aesthetic element; (e) as procedural element; (f) as reflective element; (g) as a genre; and (h) as a method. As the dimensions of genre and method have been previously discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, this section details the remaining six dimensions of form.

**Form as structural element.** Working with artistic forms produces knowledge through purposeful communication. When multiple participant groups engage in meaning-making using the same form, I saw the implications of form as a structural element. An example of this scholarly play can be seen in my work with image-elicitation. This form was used across multiple participant groups to gain a deep understanding of how program values were experienced from different perspectives.

The home constructed image sets have been so valuable, in my evaluation practice. The time invested making them was rewarded because I was able to use them with all groups. This not only promoted consistency in the evaluation process but it allowed me to hear how participants from a range of perspectives talked about the program and their involvement with it. It was a great activity to start groups with because it was low risk; people felt comfortable selecting an image and using it in response to a question or idea. Each time, the images were laid out on long tables or along the floor, a question prompt was given orally and recorded on chart paper/the black board. Then, groups were asked to first walk the length of the images to see if this viewing process helped to stimulate
their thinking. There were always more images than participants, usually a 3:1 ratio so that I could ensure there would be lots of choice. I invited them to share an image if another person was drawn to a similar one. On a second pass, they were invited to select one and move into groups. Participants each had an opportunity to share their image as a way of speaking to the question posed. The Learning Coordinators and I facilitated this sharing by taking notes on a template I prepared. In addition, each group was audio recorded and I listened to these and made notes. (Commonplace book, January 11, 2010)

This description provides detail about the structure used for image-elicitation. After participating in and facilitating this image-based activity, one of the Learning Coordinators reflected that “this was a powerful way to begin conversations, the images got people thinking deeply and encouraged them to share more than they might have” (February 8, 2010). Image-elicitation was an artful process; images selected frequently were featured in our final report to reflect participant selections and experiences, which also worked in concert with the themes presented in the text.

**Form as a technical element.** When we consider form as a technical element, we are referring to the physical appearance and the “compositional arrangement” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 63). There are many examples of form as a technical element within the process and representation of this evaluation. One example of form as a technical element took place after seeing their evaluation forms and having an informal dialogue with the Trainers. There was potential to alter the form of the training sessions beginning with the forms already in place. At the time, the *Tribes* training was evaluated using a form designed with external users or the program licensure in mind, rather than designing the form in conjunction with the goals of the Learning Coordinators or Trainers.
Soon thereafter, we received approval to modify the existing evaluation forms. Our newly devised forms more closely met the stated goals of the Learning Coordinators (December 7, 2009). We included modifications to existing closed-ended items added an open-ended question, a program symbol to promote reflection, and an image. These visual cues were used to promote thinking and invite a narrative description. Creating this template was a good example of how existing evaluation structures and technical forms can be modified and enhanced by artfully attending to methodological components of form and content.

This form was revised by Trainers and then piloted at a training session (December 9–12, 2007). It took us a couple of revisions to create clear instructions, but the Learning Coordinators eventually revealed, “we could see how these pieces of information could inform one another and give us a clearer picture” (Email, January 6, 2010). This experience developed confidence in my abilities to guide the inquiry and furthered my relationship with the Learning Coordinators as well as the Trainers:

A commitment to form really requires paying attention, as a participant observer I am not just recording what I see but I am also pushing at the boundaries of what is there, in an attempt to discover what might be. This pushing is delicate work, especially as an external evaluator in a dense organizational culture. I work carefully by going slowly, asking questions and listening. I try to prioritize ideas in my head before I speak. Beyond developing the evaluation questions, revising the Tribes training form was our first piece of concrete work. I think this was an important first step because I took something they were already administering but not using and providing some avenues for enhancing use. I hope they are beginning to see how the evaluation can be both innovative and informative!

(Commonplace book, December 12, 2009)
By redesigning the evaluation forms, I was encouraging the arts-informed inquiry based on an existing structure in this program.

It was an incremental advancement, to be sure. Yet, introducing a pre-training instrument coupled with different styles of questions on the existing instruments promoted thoughtful communication at the start of the training and provided a record of what participants hoped to learn. In a post-training conversation, one of the Trainers revealed, “I never really looked at the data before because the training is over, so what is the point, but now I see ways that I could use this information when we come back…” (January 14, 2009). This small, but positive attitude shift by one Trainer reinforced my enthusiasm and commitment to blending traditional with alternative forms and playing with structural elements.

Another area that conveys form as a technical element is the layout of the final report. Multiple forms used during the evaluation process were integrated so that the inquiry could be both seen and felt.

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**Figure 21. Final Report Pages 4 & 5**

Although you cannot read the text, Figure 21 is an image of these pages to show how colour, art...
work, photography, poetry, and text were integrated.

In a meta-evaluation interview, one of the Learning Coordinators offered her perspective:

*Tribes* is a kind of process and because it does take so many paths and turns, I found this was a really interesting way to evaluate it. It seems to, you know, fit. *Tribes* is not all about just scales and numbers and right and wrong, there is a lot of interpretation, a lot of your own personal piece you put into it. (February 22, 2010)

Although the speaker above was not directly involved in data collection for the evaluation because she assumed the position toward the end of the project, her reflections and involvement in disseminating the findings brought another dimension to the original vision. It was very interesting and affirming to hear that, without prompting, she was able to recognize and appreciate the alignment that had been discussed and identified as we planned the evaluation.

**Form as communication element.** In an evaluation, the dimension of form as a communication element involves thinking about the inquiry process as well as the eventual representation for an audience. I wanted to understand how the choice of forms an evaluator makes influences communication and understanding. As Dewey (1934) suggested:

> Every art [form] communicates because it expresses…. Communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular; and part of the miracle it achieves is that, in being communicated, the conveyance of meaning gives body and definiteness to the experience of the one who utters as well as to that of those who listen. (p. 253)

In the exploration of methods, I showed how this evaluation undertook a wide scope of forms to promote individual voice and collective listening in pursuit of shared communication. Thinking more deeply about form as a communication element was important for understanding the tools
of this research and the choices I made.

Form influenced our planning for communication when we worked with different participant groups. For example, the Trainers (January 14, 2010) and the teachers (January 18, 2010 & February 8, 2010) both participated in data collection events that purposefully progressed through a series of experiences and drew from different genres, to communicate and reflect on program experiences.

My purpose in intentionally undertaking exploration with multiple forms was to identify forms that aligned with the program as well as the stated goals and questions of the evaluation. In addition, I wanted to ensure a range of forms was offered in recognition of the diversity of the participants. If the program focuses on inclusion through multimodal strategies, I think the evaluation should as well. (Commonplace book, October 10, 2009) I wanted to show a commitment to working within both a traditional and an alternative method. I also wanted to ensure that all participants would be able to express their voice. By using multiple forms, I discovered ways that sequential structuring of arts-informed inquiry could enhance interactions between stakeholders and positively affect communications about the program.

**Form as aesthetic element.** I think a visual artist or poet might look at our process or final report and not consider either to be very artistic. I would disagree. Within the scope of arts-informed inquiry, form as aesthetic element situates the document within “the conventions of the genre” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 63). The genre in this case is a program evaluation; given this genre the *Tribes* report is quite aesthetic. Leavy (2009) described this eclectic process as “carving [or using] emerging tools to adapt the tenets of creative arts in order to address social research questions in holistic and engaged ways, in which theory and practice are intertwined”
As you can see from the images I have included from the final report, I did my best to enhance the aesthetic qualities within the field of program evaluation. In order to make a commitment to the aesthetics of form, one must make a commitment working in that form, learning about and engaging within the aesthetic dimensions of the form, and, if necessary, seeking collaboration to bring the selected form (or forms) to life. Simons and McCormack (2007) point out that arts in evaluation relies on a willingness to engage with a disposition of flexibility, an ability to interweave theory and practice, personal and professional, and the parts of the process within the whole of the context. If an evaluator possesses this disposition and can identify artistic practices that would enhance an evaluation, but lacks the skills, experience, or confidence to carry out his or her creative vision, working in collaboration with an artist is always an option.

Although I was very committed to crafting an aesthetic and dynamic report, the scope of my vision exceeded the reach of my technical skills. In this evaluation, I worked in collaboration with a graphic artist to realize my vision for the final report. My work with a graphic designer over a four-month period (May 2010–August 2010) generated a final report that can demonstrate and tell how the program, as well as the evaluation, brought together multiple perspectives in a single and coherent composition. Every stakeholder I spoke with provided exclusively positive feedback for the way I presented an authentic vision of the program, provided meaningful data, and increased the likelihood of readability by using an artistic approach to presenting the information.

On September 20, 2010, the Learning Coordinators, Superintendent, and I presented the final report at a group comprising senior leadership within the district. I will never forget the warm and receptive response given to our presentation. District leaders, some of whom were
learning about the program for the first time, commented that the report had given them a much better understanding and they were now more able to clearly see its application in schools. Another member suggested that this type of evaluation research provided a useful model for inquiry within the district (Voice memo, September 20, 2010).

**Form as procedural element and emergent phenomena.** In a program evaluation, artistic forms enhance communication when we explicitly consider how form and content are situated within context. For me, inspiration is developed as a result of fusing form, content, and context. Analysis of my commonplace book reminded me of an emergent idea that occurred when I witnessed the first *Tribes* sharing session.

This was my first chance to see the Learning Coordinators in action and to hear teachers talk about their experiences implementing the program. As a participant–observer I took notes throughout the meeting, recording ideas expressed, the ways people interacted and looking for ways to understand the program more fully. The Learning Coordinators had intentionally structured the sharing session so that it mirrored a *Tribes* Trail: moving from inclusion to influence and then community. Watching them enact this process gave me an idea for collecting data with future participants; we could use a similar progression to frame our questions and develop deeper understanding. (Commonplace book, October 26, 2009)

Initially, I was excited that the *Tribes* Trail could serves as a metaphor and offer structure for future data collection events or perhaps the evaluation as a whole.

At our meeting on October 27, 2009 the Learning Coordinators and I discussed the use of the *Tribes* trail as an overriding metaphor for the evaluation as well as the work we would do with participant groups. I presented the concept of intentionally fostering alignment between the
program and the evaluation of the program. In my commonplace book, I noted that the Learning Coordinators responded positively to this idea and wanted to learn more; they offered me copies of all their program materials and resources (October 27, 2009).

That weekend I poured over the program documents filling my commonplace book with ideas and sketches regarding ways to integrate the trail and the concept of a community’s progression in a way that would allow us a meaningful structure.

I may have taken on more than necessary here, a mistake I make all too often. Structuring a data collection event with teachers around the trail seems like a good idea, and from my observations it works well. But context is everything, the teachers are familiar with the trail and its context within the program, outside audiences would not be. The trail, as an overriding structure for the evaluation could be a useful educational tool or it could be another unnecessary constraint in an already dynamic program nested within a complex system. (Commonplace book, November 5, 2009)

In the end, we did use the metaphor to guide some of the evaluation activities but we decided not to try to squeeze the evaluation into this form. It was disappointing to let go of an idea. I learned a valuable lesson from my participant observations and dialogue with clients: move slowly, so ideas can be considered more carefully when presented. By taking more time to develop an idea and think it through, I would be better able to maximize the different ways that form communicates.

I took this lesson to temper my enthusiasm and conscientiously move slowly. To help me gain a deeper understanding of the program, I committed ten hours across three days to observe a \textit{Tribes} training session (November 25–27, 2009). This experience gave me a deeper understanding of the program in action. At this point, the elements of form and content that
would ultimately shape the evaluation remained undefined. To add depth to my understanding, I took photographs, invited participants to anonymously submit copies of their journals, and conducted an informal post-training interview with the Trainers (Commonplace book, November 27, 2009).

These strategies established my commitment to qualitative methodologies as a way “to know and understand others through emphatic introspection and reflection based on detailed description gathered through direct observation, in-depth open-ended interviewing, and case studies” (Patton, 2008, p. 430). I hoped my commitment to an alternative method within evaluation would acknowledge form as an emergent phenomenon that is holistic, personal, and responsive.

Form as reflection of the qualities of goodness of inquiry. As an external evaluator, I was committed to inquiry that was relevant and substantive. Prior to meetings or discussions, I developed ideas about how we could blend traditional qualitative processes and innovative arts-informed strategies, to promote critical reflection. Cole and Knowles (2008) describe how “under scrutiny it ought to be evident that the purposes, processes, orientations, literatures, and outcomes of the study work together in harmony” (p. 63). This integration is central to the way I work. From theory to experience, experimentation, and reflection, there are many tools I use to support my pursuit of sound scholarship.

The quality of this work as a whole was important to me for many reasons. In addition to my PhD data, it was an idea that I nurtured, learned about, and planned for over five years. Not surprisingly, I was invested in learning techniques and dedicated to excellence. The passage below reveals some of my concerns regarding the “creative meshing of scholarly and artistic endeavours” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 65).
In spite of my bravado with the Research and Assessment Manager, I was a bit apprehensive of the risk involved with introducing such new or novel data collection strategies at group data collection events. After all, I would only get one opportunity with each group and the data needed to answer the evaluation questions. I need a way to test out the ideas on someone beyond my family and friends. (Commonplace book, December 7, 2009)

Although my proposed strategies integrated more traditional forms, I wanted a chance to pilot them with people who understood the program and organizational culture as well as the purpose of the evaluation. I viewed the piloting of these instruments as part of the emergent and refining process of the evaluation, an essential step before using them with participants.

*Figure 22. Before and After the Art-Making Strategies*

The Learning Coordinators were curious to learn how evaluation data collected using arts-informed strategies could influence understanding. They agreed to participate in a pilot of the proposed arts-informed methodologies and provide feedback about the experience. I arranged for them to visit our home for an afternoon, where we worked through three different but interconnected data collection strategies (December 15, 2009). Each strategy was purposefully
structured for us to see the potential for collecting data at future *Tribes* events. Figure 22 shows how I prepared for and then clean up after our art-making.

We began with folded poetry, a strategy I had experimented with before. This strategy draws from poetic techniques to create a piece of collaborative writing. Then we moved to the dining room where images were spread out for an image-elicitation exercise. After experimenting with four questions and their responses we progressed to the kitchen where a plethora of art materials were laid out waiting. Both Learning Coordinators were eager to play and explore the materials; they quickly selected a question to work on and quickly began testing brushes, paint, watercolour pencils, and glitter pens. (Commonplace book, December 15, 2009)

A voice file along with several images documented the prepared environment. I designed arts-informed strategies that drew from different artistic forms to enable reflections on programmatic content.

These images demonstrate how I prepared for the data collection event. Prior to our time together, I crafted a protocol for each aspect of the data collection. For example, the folded poetry required identifying a set of prompts, locating 11x17 paper and having a selection of writing instruments available. I selected and laid out materials for art-making. To prepare for image-elicitation, I cut identified images, mounted them on card stock chosen to amplify the colours and arranged them for the elicitation activity. A commitment to using artistic forms in data collection requires quite a bit of attention to detail and pre-event set-up, so that time spent with participants can focus on reflection.

While the Learning Coordinators created artistic representations in response to a question they selected, I sat with them and reflected on the processes they had been through. One of the
Learning Coordinators stated, “I like this method because it’s very different, it’s multi-faceted, because it involves very different people and the diversity of it, you know [Tribes] can be very complex yet there is an overriding calm about it …” (Interview, December 15, 2009). Together they expressed excitement at seeing the materials prepared for them, at having processes to work through that moved them deeper into thinking and communicating about the program.

I could hardly contain my excitement at the event’s conclusion. Different modalities for collecting data had provided a chance to reflect on the program, engage participants, express ideas, and give shape to their experiences. In short, it was successful beyond my greatest hopes! I described how “… it was hard to remain neutral during the three data collection processes, while listening as well as taking notes about their experiences and reflections, I could quickly see themes and patterns emerging …” (Voice memo, December 15, 2009). Before the Learning Coordinators left, I promised to conduct a preliminary analysis of their ideas and provide a summary of what I had learned to date. In a follow-up email, I invited feedback about the process and they affirmed how much they enjoyed the process (December 17, 2009). Over the holidays, I transcribed the data while juggling my roles of evaluator and evaluation researcher.

**Form as Part of the Creative Inquiry Process.** The creative inquiry process was established slowly, piece by piece, over a long period of time. I can see how and when new ideas emerged, by looking at multiple data entries in my log or paging through my commonplace books. Cole and Knowles (2008) described how form as part of the creative inquiry process relies on “common sense decision making, intuition, and a general responsiveness to the natural flow of events and experiences” (p. 61). Although emergent in nature, it is a process that requires imaginative vision and tenacious perseverance.

Form as part of the creative inquiry process actually started before I had even secured a site
for this research. In April 2009, I met an elementary school administrator at a graduate student event, where we began talking about our research interests. This conversation led to a series of connections that eventually brought together areas I was interested in researching: program evaluation, inclusion, bullying, and the use of arts-informed inquiry. The initial meeting was serendipitous: It spawned a series of communications and exchanges of ideas that ultimately developed into the inquiry process for this evaluation.

In some ways, it is possible to plan for the creative inquiry process, like one might plan a lesson. In many other ways, the creative inquiry process is about responsiveness. The following entry in my commonplace book alludes to that discovery:

When I think back to my writing of the dissertation proposal, with my hopeful methods all laid-out for an imaginary evaluation, I realize that I did/could not truly anticipate how much the inquiry process would take on a life of its own! The dynamic of what is happening is difficult to explain, there are so many people, so many pieces … I am not sure how it will all come together. On one hand, I am trying to plan and document everything, but it is hard to contain. The more innovation in the thinking and approach, the more it changes. This process is reminding me of a transparent emerald green dragon kite that I once had; it was solidly attached to a blue handled plastic string with a long tail always dancing in the wind. That is this inquiry so far, a unique opportunity with hopeful outcomes as I try to allow freedom for it to be carried in new directions, but balance this with the need to hold on and control.

With any innovation, it is hard to gauge how much you will have to let go, or how successful it might be … I think it is natural to wonder about if the idea will work… They have lots of ideas and questions. I am surprised and a little worried, how will I
accommodate this interest? Can the evaluation plan we have outlined contain the innovations of the inquiry? I need to (re)think about some creative methods for collecting data that best respond to the questions, are richly detailed but not overly labour/time intensive. Imagining all of the possibilities is one of my favourite tasks. (Commonplace book, November 27, 2009)

This passage reveals some of my thoughts and discoveries early in the evaluation project. It also shows how important it is to have a vision of where you want to go, even when you do not have a map to get there.

Kelly and Leggo (2008) described the “instigating moment” where we “mine” our perception (p. 35). My perceptions about crafting arts-informed inquiry as a feature of program evaluation spoke to the qualities of creative emergence. The use of multiple creative forms in this evaluation allowed me to be attentive and open, to honour inspiration. Dewey (1934) claimed that, “the real work of an artist is to build up an experience that is coherent in perception while moving with constant change in its development” (p. 53). This also sounds like the work of a program evaluator using arts-informed inquiry; to create a pathway that generates a rich creative experience for the purpose of developing understanding.

During this evaluation process, I had to make many considerations beyond what creative forms and processes I would use, considerations that shaped the overall progression of the evaluation. To describe these I have used four sections: (a) the process of making; (b) moving from process to interpretation; (c) moving from interpretation to product; and (d) the final report/presentation. These divisions are artificial isolations of the interconnected and recursive nature of a creative process but the delineation of these sections provides a structure for sharing ideas.
**The process of making.** The creative inquiry process may provide opportunities to cultivate embodied learning as a feature of evaluation. Embodied learning occurs when ideas and energy literally flow through stakeholders and participant bodies. Csikszentmihalyi (1998) described how “flow provide(s) a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality” (p. 70). As I observed participants during art-making, I could see that they were physically as well as cognitively engaged.

Because all participants did not grant permission to use their images, I cannot share all of the images, but I can describe how these show active participation, people standing, sitting, leaning, crouching. Their faces look pensive and hands are expressive; often they appear focused on their task. My analysis of these images tells the story of how an evaluation process can unite the mind and body. Ideas literally flowed through the participants and around the room. The theoretical definitions of embodiment and flow are further revealed in this Learning Coordinator’s description of the process:

[Arts-informed inquiry] allows people to think outside their normal box … it allows people to go beyond just the numbers and the content of what it is, and kind of spitting back research or what they think that interviewer wants to hear. It really does allow [the process] to be a little more true, a little more intrinsic, a little bit more valued in that sense …” (Interview, February 22, 2010).

As the Learning Coordinator confirms, the artistic processes embedded within more traditional evaluation practices honoured diverse ways of engaging, making sense of, and expressing programmatic experiences.

**Moving from process to interpretation.** The crafting of arts-informed inquiry demands that evaluators and researchers consider who will be involved in the interpretation. From the
outset of this evaluation process, I recorded questions about interpreting art in my commonplace book. I drew from a plethora of researchers and tried to imagine how these would operate in the pragmatic field of program evaluation. Questions about how to move from process to interpretations compelled me:

What does it mean to interpret arts-informed inquiry? Can art be interpreted in a way that contributes to program evaluation? Who is qualified to interpret? Does interpretation operate differently when participatory and responsive processes are being used? How can the voices of the participant connected with the art stay intact? What aspects of interpretation need to be considered to ensure that the analysis procedures are trustworthy?

(Commonplace book, November, 2009)

I cannot answer all of the questions posed above, or countless other questions that are strewn throughout my commonplace book. I can however, tackle a few that I have problematized.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) first referred to the issue of analyzing and interpretation as the “crisis of representation.” In more recent literature, this crisis is sometimes referred to as an issue of “voice” (i.e., Finley, 2005; Berger, 2013). I consistently sought ways to engage participants, not only in the making of artistic forms of data, but also in the move from making data to interpreting it. In preparation for collecting data with the Trainers, I planned to involve them in the analysis:

First we write the poems. Participants will interpret the ideas individually and then as a group. Individually, they will take a poem to move through additional tasks, such as reading and crafting a title to capture the essence of the poem, circling a word or sentence that stands out for them. Once they have had quiet time for these thinking processes we will share as a group. Each group will record the key ideas or themes that stand out for
them and select one to share with the larger group. All ideas will be collected so that participants can begin to see how this process promotes interpretation (Commonplace book, January 11, 2010).

Involving the Trainers as participant-artists allowed me to see that they were best positioned to identify the connections, metaphors, and underlying meanings. I was able to learn from their poetic creations, but also by witnessing and recording accounts of their thinking.

During the evaluation processes, participants created work that was personal, thoughtful and individually meaningful. It was easy to see how much they invested, just by witnessing the time and attention they spent creating (Commonplace book, December 15). By having a layer of interpretation that begins with the participants themselves, evaluator and participant can work together to move beyond description and articulate values of a program. With all stakeholder groups involved throughout this evaluation, the piece of art became the focus for dialogue and further reflection; participants had an opportunity to describe the meaning with which they imbued their artwork (Casey, 2009; Simons & McCormack, 2007). Emerging ideas became the qualitative text, which was then analyzed for the evaluation and this research.

**From interpretation to product.** Using a range of arts-informed inquiry practices throughout provided me with an expansive repertoire of material to complete the final report and presentation in hopes of evoking responses from readers. The Superintendent applauded this format and believed there were “a lot of good entry points; the goals, the key learnings … I think it is good that you showed examples of thing, that’s good for people to see how it aligns” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 30, 2010). I tried to make the interpretation stand out by using an array of graphic techniques.
Figure 23. Final Report Pages 10 & 11

I hoped that using multiple fonts, images, colours, watermarks, and photographs would allow audiences to see, feel, and hear the program in action. Audiences, invited into the world of the program through the evaluation, could apply the insights, reflections, and lessons learned to their own lives, classrooms, and/or programs.

Many of the Trainers and teachers I worked with commented that they were surprised to hear their voice in the report or see the poems. One teacher emailed me to say, “I saw the Tribes report, and it looks great. I was so pleased to see that you included some of those poems, they really sounded like what we talked about … I gave [the report] to my principal to read …” (Email communication, October 3, 2010). When this teacher emailed me I felt a surge of happiness, because not only had someone read the report, but she had passed it on to someone else, too. In this example, a teacher’s willingness to spread the word about an evaluation report,
or bring it up in a conversation, conveyed to me a certain respect for the program as well as the evaluation work. Word of mouth is a popular marketing technique that is also very useful in the field of evaluation.

My supervisor and I both wondered if the poetry would resonate with school leaders. We need not have worried; the poetic voice was viewed as trustworthy and accessible. During the meta-evaluation interview with a Superintendent, I found out that her favourite part was the poems. She described how “they really get at the heart of the program and make you think, hey, why aren’t we doing more of this and why don’t all teachers have this going on” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 30, 2010). I am always interested to learn about what speaks to people, what ideas resonate with them, and the ways in which language or images reach them.

My experimentation with poetic forms began tentatively, but they are a technique I have used since in many different evaluation settings. The use of poetic techniques helped audiences to witness the experiences of Trainers and teachers who were implementing the program. The inclusion of poems holds open spaces for participant voices while also finding ways to evoke interest from diverse audiences.

The final report. In this evaluation, the creative inquiry process needed to culminate in a final report. Cole and Knowles (2008) considered form a technical element when they referred to “the physical appearance of the document” (p. 63). The question of form and representation considers the overall goal of using the chosen form(s) and the intended effect of the artistry.

Several visions for representing the data were considered throughout the evaluation process. The Learning Coordinators and I had agreed to some type of written document coupled with a presentation, but we deliberately waited to see what would emerge and what new possibilities might transpire (Phone conversation, October 10, 2009). In consultation with the
Trainers, we ultimately decided on a magazine-style layout (Commonplace book, May 19 & 20, 2010). Our thinking was that this format would be more formal than a newsletter, but still allow us to showcase images, poetry, words, and stories from our inquiry alongside more traditional text-based reporting.

Noting how the use of multiple forms in the report expanded our reach, the Superintendent commented, “I think your audience for reading something like this is way larger” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 30, 2010). Coupled with the formal report was a presentation that included an overview of the program and a brief description of the evaluation process, as well as a guided look at several areas of the report. After the presentation, in a chance encounter, an audience member shared, “the report was compelling, enjoyable and informative to read” (Commonplace book, October 18, 2011). Her comment was a good sign of the welcomed praise to come. Using arts-informed processes and forms of representation was a risk, given that this glossy approach was outside of the traditions of usual board practices as well as an undeveloped idea within the field of evaluation.

The final report included traditional evaluation reporting elements such as program description, evaluation methodology, key learning, reporting by evaluation questions, future steps, and references (http://michellesearl4.wix.com/michelle-j-searle). In addition, the report included poems written by participants, quotes from student journals, and stories of Tribes experiences. To amplify the arts-informed features it was produced in colour using word-banners, illustrations from the image-elicitation processes, posters, and drawings created by students, as well as the integration of district-created symbols about student learning. Taken as a whole, the report is a mixed media piece, with multiple combinations of media integrated into a single composition. One Learning Coordinator indicated that:
I really like the way that [the final report] was laid out. It is easy and to the point of what is going on and where. If someone doesn’t want to read through the full twenty pages, they can get to where they want to go … I thought it was really well done … The way it was formatted, I think makes it very user friendly. (Meta-evaluation interview one, February 22, 2011)

Photographs, poetry samples, journal excerpts, and other textual or visual artifacts from the inquiry were essential to offering clear and concise ideas in an engaging format. The Research and Assessment Manager commented on the expansive role of in the final report.

I really liked the abstract nature of it. You certainly have a sense of where you are moving to, but there are so many more parts to the whole. You have different ways of looking at it, different entry points, different layers of information and experiences that, altogether make it way more valuable. (Meta-evaluation interview eight, March 30, 2010)

The comment about the report’s complex nature was intentionally aligned with possibilities presented through the program. The program itself is often referred to as a process and the icon of a trail indicates that there are multiple positions along a shared path and equally as many entry points. While compiling the final report, I wanted to follow Eisner’s (2008a) suggestion to “try telling what we know with anything that will carry the message forward” (p.9). The evaluative messages are carried forward by all of the traditional and arts-informed processes used throughout the process as well as in this final representation.
Silverstein’s poem is an invitation to enter into a storied way of understanding, to come in and learn with one another. His vision guided my work as an educator from the moment I first saw a laminated copy of this poem on a drama studio’s door. As a graduate student, I later submitted the poem as part of an award-winning essay for the American Evaluation Association Student Competition (2009). This poem and the ethos for my work are founded on inclusion and imagination, Arts-informed inquiry in evaluation extends the invitation to join in and share what you know, while exploring what we can learn together.
A Sketch of Values in the Field of Evaluation

This chapter begins by establishing the relevance of values within the field of evaluation and ends by providing empirical evidence that supports using arts-informed inquiry in evaluation. Evaluators are concerned with the question of values; as House (2005) instructed, “values lie at the heart of evaluation” (p. 1072). Even when we look at the word “evaluation,” “value” is nestled in its centre. Evaluation comes from the French verb “évaluer,” meaning to “to find the value of” (http://www.etymonline.com). Associated words or phrases include value, values, valuing, valuenance, value systems and value-added. All of these words and their related value concepts come into play in the field of program evaluation.

Scriven (1991; 1996) argued that determining value is an evaluator’s primary function. Recently, Alkin, Vo, and Christie (2012) argued to expand this by saying “that the role of the evaluator in valuing is to activate, facilitate a structure, be engaged in, and contribute to the process of determining merit or worth” (p. 39). These authors have acknowledged that program context can shape the mode of valuing and that evaluators need to be responsive to adapting their approach to valuing.

There are many ways to establish the value of a program and/or position the concept of values. Evaluators ask questions about what is valued, how it is valued, and whose values are represented in evaluation theories and practice (e.g., Alkin, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Henry, 2002; House & Howe, 1999; Mertens, 2008; 2010; Weiss, 1998). I would like to add my own question to this list, to ask what evidence there is that arts-informed inquiry adds value to the processes and products in the field of evaluation.

Determining the value of a program or an approach sounds simple enough, but is not actually that easy because values are quite complex. As Stake (1973; 2002) pointed out, “in
program evaluation, [values] pertains to the whole constellation of values held for the program” (p. 4). Imagining values as a constellation symbolizes their interconnected areas, which can be taken into consideration when reflecting on the roles that values play in a program evaluation. We must consider the values of the evaluator, the clients, the program, and the program participants, just to name a few. One can begin to understand how this view introduces the multiple and interconnected dimensions related to valuing. This research helped me see and document different key aspects of evaluation practice as well as the value of using arts-informed inquiry from multiple angles.

Jennifer Greene’s (2011) preconference address, posted online to the American Evaluation Association, makes an argument that values and evaluation quality are connected.

Within this set of interconnections—evaluation relationships with values, and both with evaluation quality—let us remember the plurality of understandings of evaluation quality, and thus of salient values and thus of the character of evaluative relationships, that constitute our community. We are graced with a powerful diversity of standpoints on these central evaluative concerns, and we gather strength from this diversity. We also gather strength from our fundamental respect, one of the other, and our commitment to dialogue and deliberation rather than conflict and confrontation.

Reading these words inspires me to create evaluations that provide spaces for engagement, promote relationships, and honour growth. Greene’s sentiments align with my view that an evaluator should act as a facilitator, participant, or embedded member of the process, who makes meaning with others (Patton, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 2000; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). Abma (2001a, 2001b) and several other evaluation scholars reflect on the importance of dialogue as
more than just talk, dialogue promotes relational aspects and engagement. As an evaluator as well as a researcher of evaluation, I am interested in coming to understand the phenomena.

The remainder of this chapter looks closely at the values that became explicit in my orientation and decision making as an evaluator as well as the ways they were made manifest by this arts-informed inquiry approach. Of particular interest to me was an opportunity to focus on qualities that offer distinct value when arts-informed inquiry is used as a feature within a program evaluation. These three qualities reflect broad themes from the data and encompass a number of values that emerge when using arts-informed inquiry in program evaluation: (a) attending to the relational quality; (b) offering multiple ways of seeing and understanding; and (c) aesthetic forms in the process and product.

**Attending to the Relational Quality**

It is accepted within the field of evaluation that values are held within individuals, organizations, and specific programs. The field of evaluation also accepts that these values derive from innumerable influences. As evaluators, we must therefore be conscious of our values and the ways they shape our practices. We must also be attentive to the values in the organization, the programs we work with, and the individuals operating within those contexts. I believe these qualities are part of the way that we recognize evaluation as a social practice (Abma, 2001a, 2001b; Visse, Abma & Widdershoven, 2012; J. Green, 2002, 2011; House & Howe, 1999; Patton, 1990. Evaluators need to be conscious of attending to relational qualities.

Arts-informed inquiry brought value to social practices in this evaluation by creating unique opportunities for attending to relational qualities. I define *relational qualities* as the features that promote a relationship; this process can begin with getting to know one another and developing a common vision, as well as building trust through dialogue that involves sharing and
listening. From the onset of this evaluation, I purposefully cultivated and attended to trusting, open dynamics with the clients, stakeholders, and participants. Abma and Widdershoven (2008) explained “social relations are important as an object of evaluation, because they are integral to and partly constitute the quality and effectiveness of the program” (p. 211). It is not the mere presence of a relationship between people, but the quality of that relationship that matters. I was reminded that relationships need to be nurtured: they require courage to begin, persistence to move deeper, and a willingness to trust together.

**Trust and inclusion.** As an evaluator with a responsive orientation and practising within a complex system, I felt it was appropriate and necessary, to use inclusive strategies to obtain multiple perspectives. This recognition was reinforced when one of the Learning Coordinators stated, “the *Tribes* process justifies my belief that, at the centre of everything is the people and relationships. This has to be a focus in the way we evaluate too” (Interview, November 26, 2009). The Learning Coordinators often described their work with Trainers and other educators as inclusive, collegial, and informal. I wanted our evaluation processes to align with this ethos.

Inclusion is a major focus within this program, as well as a central value in my own daily life. I have been involved with inclusive education for many years, instructing courses about understanding equity issues and exceptionalities in the classroom. As an international educator, I consider myself a global citizen, which gives me a lens that provides an expansive way of seeing the world, as well as a commitment to finding ways to redress some existing inequities.

I try to be mindful of a quotation that typifies my philosophy as well as my commitment to the relational qualities of trust and inclusion. It is from the anthropologist Margaret Mead who said, “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has” (in Lutkehaus, N. C. (2008). Arts-informed
inquiry can engage a small group of stakeholders in powerful experiences that help them see their program and maybe even some larger educational issues in a different manner. When using arts-informed inquiry within an evaluation, each person creates a tangible representation of his or her own experience. This process of creating requires trust and facilitates inclusion, by positioning the inquiry as a space where all ideas are appreciated. This sense that everyone has something to offer was part of the message in a 1997 Apple advertisement, which claimed, “the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.” In this work integrating arts-informed inquiry into a program evaluation I see a similarity between Mead’s advice and Apple’s message, both advocate for different spaces for engagement. In turn, this engagement relies on valuing relational qualities in ways that establish trust and facilitate opportunities for engagement.

There are many examples of how I built trust as a foundation for enacting inclusion with the clients, stakeholders, and participants. First, I had to establish a strong level of trust in working with the Learning Coordinators.

We were at the Williams coffee shop today when she said to me, “we trust you” and it was a small comment that just folded into everything else we were talking about. But it was a bit awkward, it is such a huge compliment, how do you respond to that? I never have been good at taking compliments and so I just sort of mumbled, “that’s good”! and it wasn’t until later, driving home that the enormity hit me, and then the gratitude so I sent her an email to let her know how much it meant to me. (Commonplace book, December 7, 2009)

The Learning Coordinators and I developed our relationship over a sustained period of time, by communicating in multiple ways that allowed me to back up what I was saying with attachments,
links, references, and anecdotes. The trust we had in our working relationship was communicated in small ways when we were working with broader stakeholders.

Establishing relationships, building trust, and fostering inclusion during data collection are equally important. When I met a group to collect data, I knew that I needed to develop a trusting rapport fairly quickly. Sometimes it was the first time that either the Learning Coordinators or I were meeting a teacher face-to-face. Many times, it was the only time I would get an opportunity to work with the participant. My reflections from our data collection events help to illuminate the inclusive nature:

We chatted as people arrived, sharing the language of teaching, classrooms, students, and schools. Some would wander to the snacks, chatting while they fixed a coffee or selected a treat; these brief connections created a bit of a buzz in the room—a pleasant energy … During the image-elicitation activity, participants wandered together, often quietly discussing as they looked. Sometimes one person would exclaim aloud and there would be a murmur of excitement as someone compared an idea. Everyone was very polite, solicitous even, in selecting and sharing. People could pass but not one person did … (Commonplace book, January 18, 2010).

This is one example that shows arts-informed inquiry is a social practice, which can be infused into every facet of the evaluation to enhance inclusion within a group. After a sharing session with teachers, one of the Learning Coordinators commented that “their reactions to one another were intense, they did not want to stop talking. They were afraid as it was pretty unknown territory, but when they got into it, there was connection … nobody was alienated” (Interview, February 8, 2010). By focusing on relationships and building inclusion from the beginning, I was able to develop trust across participant groups.
Relationships extended beyond our designated time in the evaluation. On either side of an evaluation activity, one might have found me sharing a snack or enjoying a coffee with a participant, fixing a broken zipper on a student’s coat, or helping a school administrator unload boxes from a car. Each of these instances built trust and strengthened the relational quality by modelling the practice of an evaluator–researcher who is connected to and engaged within an educational community. To this day, whenever I come across conferences or articles related to innovative program evaluation or the Tribes program specifically, I send them on to the clients and key stakeholders. These exchanges have provided a means to communicate beyond our initial contract and strengthen the relational foundation we established. Because I now work part-time for the school board as a researcher and evaluator focused in the area of Safe Schools, the strength of our relational qualities has continued to deepen.

**Guided by standards of practice and a duty of care.** During all of these relational instances, I was guided by the principles put forward by the Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbourough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011) as well as the Guiding Standards set forth by the American Evaluation Association (2004). In addition, I was attentive to the duty of care put forward by the ethical principles and practices of our university and the school board. The excerpt below shows how these principles and practices provide insight into evaluator conduct that seeks to be conscientious and deliberate:

Things moved quickly since I sent the first email; I’m angry with myself for putting it off so long. It had little to do with procrastination and more to do with not wanting to impose, being afraid to ask and unsure if I could articulate and distinguish my ideas in a way that would make sense to others. As researchers we have to maintain a high ethical standard; I want this work to be meaningful and I don’t want to waste anyone’s time.
The emergent nature of this project makes it difficult to identify absolutes!

(Commonplace book, July 16, 2009).

This evaluation began with a chance encounter with another graduate student from a different institution. The ensuing dialogue provided a connection where my skills as an evaluator and vision for artistry would play out. As I surveyed the entirety of my data set, I was reminded how the potential of a simple act of dialogue, where relationships can be built by listening and sharing, cannot be underestimated.

As we progressed through this evaluative inquiry, my commonplace book reflects how I vacillated between elation, nervousness, and concern. I wanted to attend to as many of the Program Evaluation Standards as possible although I knew this would be impossible (Yarborough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011). Before starting the inquiry, I contemplated the challenges ahead. There was an underlying nervousness as I balanced my professional relationship as an evaluator within a large school district with my role as a graduate student who was researching evaluation.

The university has specific requirements for ethics and timelines for the submission of paperwork that were difficult to meet given the open-ended and emerging nature of this evaluation project. Although I wanted to invest in the relational qualities, I also needed to complete the technical requirements necessary to move forward with the research. I was concerned that time spent developing a strong relationship was time not spent making progress on the details and decisions related to the evaluation process. These tensions were resolved over time. As the evaluation began, ethics for the research aspect of the study were approved by the university community and within the school district.
As I reflected on these tensions and our duty to care for one another, two images came to mind. The first is a drawing (Figure 25) from my commonplace book that I frequently sketch. It reminds me of the title of a novel waiting to be written. In my sketches, women are holding hands and supporting one another in a true spirit of community. These women are representative of so many of the amazing people who have supported this inquiry in its various stages: my strong all-female dissertation committee, the women in our graduate studies office, and those working with the Learning Coordinators. Wisdom gathered from all of these women set the tone for the relational quality of this evaluation and is connected to my reflection about a standard of practice for evaluators, that “time spent building relationships IS time spent developing the inquiry!” (Commonplace book, January 11, 2010).

Figure 25. Wisdom and Wonder in a Circle of Women

The second image that comes to mind is one created by an elementary school teacher as part of her group collage. The second image (Figure 26) features a painted hand with a central message, “Hands On! Working Hand-in-Hand” (Elementary Teacher, January 18, 2010). A
common thread in both these images speaks to the value of the relational aspect within program evaluation between research and in the use of arts-informed inquiry. The intersection of these ideas can be positively guided by the standards of practice and duty of care.

Figure 26. Hand Image as Part of a Collage Made by Elementary Teachers

**A focus on clients.** From my hopeful student perspective, the process to gain approval and access for the evaluation and research took a long time. A relationship that began with an email on July 13, 2009 became formalized on October 23, 2009 when the Learning Coordinators contracted me to evaluate the Tribes program. We learned a lot working together over an extended period of time. Using the arts as part of the program evaluation created time for the exchanging of stories. As we sat making art in my kitchen, one of the Learning Coordinators shared this story:
I don’t know about my career, the first half of it was all about battling structures and then, you know, honestly, some of the kids would call me by [my first name] or something and the principal called me down and told me it was inappropriate. I said, why? He said it was disrespectful, but I felt pretty sure my kids respected me. I know *Tribes* is not the only thing in the world but for me it offers legitimacy in my discussions with decision makers because I have these debates with administrators or colleagues about what makes a good teacher and I believe it starts with the relationship. I would always say that. (Interview, December 15, 2009)

Time spent creating art allowed for a trusting bond, where we could speak openly and share with one another. I have found that it is hard to hide in the arts; that the process of making art requires an authenticity and an honesty that brings new dimensions to collaborating with clients or stakeholders.

Now that I work within this same school board, I can better see how the time spent building our relationship paved the way not only for the eventual decision to contract an external evaluator but also for the freedom we enjoyed throughout this inquiry as well as in its culmination. Many people play a role in a decision-making process and I have now seen, from within the institution, how many layers must be penetrated and how carefully each argument must be crafted. In my commonplace book I reflected, “I can better appreciate how the time and efforts in getting to know one another, to understand a range of priorities, to dialogue about key questions, and to consider future implications enriched the *Tribes* inquiry” (Commonplace book, June 10, 2012). In hindsight, I can see how fortunate I was to be able to spend time developing this relationship with my clients and how much this relationship contributed to our work together.
I prepared for our first meeting by drafting talking points and questions. Although I am a person who is generally overly prepared and hyper-organized, my goal was to first understand more about their context and ascertain their familiarity with program evaluation. Rather than using a pre-planned set of questions or examples of my arts-informed ideas, I focused on identifying their perspectives and goals while also gauging their reactions to a range of evaluation approaches. This approach follows the advice of Sullins (2003), who suggested that participatory approaches should be tailored to local context and build on established philosophies, rather than imposing a particular model.

The meeting lasted over four hours! Despite my nervousness, it was interesting and fun. I was surprised, but pleased, that we had many points of contact and shared interests. One of the Learning Coordinators was a drama teacher and that helped tremendously. The other, a math teacher, was a harder sell! When we made the meeting, I wondered if an outdoor venue would be appropriate, but the patio was a perfect meeting place for getting to know each other. Just being outdoors set a relaxed tone and made me feel like I was reconnecting with old friends rather than meeting new clients! (Voice memo, August 6, 2009)

Our relationship progressed using many forms of communication in the coming months. By combining email, phone, and face-to-face opportunities, we were able to share ideas and develop an evaluation focus.

As an external evaluator who also lived and worked more than 500 kilometres from the research site, I learned that attentiveness to the quality and consistency of communication matters. As our relationship progressed in the early stages of this inquiry, I was finding a lag in communications and miscommunication about tasks that needed to be completed. Because tone
and clarity can sometimes be lost in an email exchange, I rectified this by following up important communications with a quick phone call. This choice helped to show the client that I was committed even when I was off site and kept us all updated on our progress.

The Learning Coordinators were very receptive during all of our communications. One Learning Coordinator commented, “you were always so organized, it was easy to work with you. I always felt like we got a lot accomplished when we were meeting together” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 9, 2011). This was gratifying to hear because I had struggled with setting boundaries between developing strong relationships and moving our work along. As my commonplace book explained:

I’ve learned to build in time at the start of meetings for a social check-in … Now that I have this set aside, I feel less rushed and more relaxed. I try to be realistic about what we can accomplish. They are so busy in their work lives that the evaluation kind of represents a break for them. (November 26, 2009)

I tried to be attentive to the multitude of their responsibilities and balance my desire to move the evaluation along with wanting to have them along with me. I realized that the evaluation was a central experience in my life, but it was just one of their many responsibilities.

One area I had to continuously negotiate was figuring out the best way to pitch program evaluation material with different stakeholder groups. I wanted to reach people when they were starting with their evaluative thinking. My theory was that this would keep the focus on the program and their experiences, and not overwhelm them with technical evaluation information or details about the arts-informed goals. As one of the Learning Coordinators said, “Tribes is part of my portfolio, but it is a large portfolio, and it’s not my whole job. The evaluation has forced me to pay attention and to think through this process; that is a good thing” (Evaluation interview,
February 22, 2010). Occasionally, I felt challenged by trying to juggle the relational aspects with the awareness of everyone’s responsibilities, level of attention, and technical skills, and the detail required to complete such an in-depth, systematic inquiry.

Conducting this inquiry over almost two full school years allowed us to deepen our relationship. One of the Learning Coordinators reflected:

[The evaluation] takes up a fair amount of time, but I think it is valuable time. We are busy, but we’re thankful because we could not have done this. We wouldn’t find these things out without this kind of evaluation, we really wouldn’t. Often in a busy board it is status quo, I mean you find out just enough for survival purposes. We knew Tribes was coming to a head where it probably would just stop, rather than grow in a different way and that was our fear. But now we have some evidence and a possible direction to plan for the future. (March 9, 2011)

Our relationship has subtly transitioned now as I continue to work closely with them as an internal researcher and evaluator solely focused on Safe Schools within the district. The initial foundation that we built during the evaluation of the Tribes program, as well as our commitment to an array of methodological strategies, has continued to create a positive and fluid working relationship.

**Broadening relationships with stakeholders and participants.** A total of 244 people expressed their thoughts and experiences regarding the implementation of Tribes. Involving this number of people required continually attending to relational qualities in new and different situations. House and Howe (1999) confirmed the image of the evaluator “as an embodied and engaged self” who “reflects and establishes values like care, proximity, reciprocity, intuition and relatedness. This notion of self is connected with the idea that knowledge is a co-product and the
scientist is an active consumer” (p. 136–137). Whether working with a group of teachers who were meeting for the first time or students who spent seven hours a day together, I applied qualities of active listening: asking questions, sharing my thinking, providing resources for further thinking, and cultivating opportunities for engagement.

The success of these qualities can be seen in my ability to forge relationships with teachers and students, some of whom I only spent a few hours with. A teacher who invited me to work with her class noted:

I am just trying to sort it all out. It has taken me twenty years to come to grips with it, and that is why I want to learn more. *Tribes* is a good place to start; believe it and then see how you develop your style and where you want to go. The whole philosophy of teaching is much more than before. (Interview December 17, 2009)

Like this teacher, I was willing to invest in the process, which resulted in many students telling me that they looked forward to my classroom visits (Commonplace book, February 18, 2010). I believed that by developing connected relationships and offering multiple forms of engagement, I could assemble a meaningful account of the program, in ways that connected the personal and professional to support learning and growth.

One of the facets of arts-informed inquiry that worked well for me is that the careful planning and crafting prior to the activity allowed me to step aside during the data collection and focus on observing, interacting with, and probing participants. With teachers, this included carefully setting up the environment to plan for the initial aspects, such as consent forms, name tags and sign-in sheets, while also displaying the art-making materials. My intent in setting a display of materials was not only to ensure smooth transitions between activities, but also to entice participants, to create anticipation and provoke a sense of play. From the sketch in Figure
27 you can see the layout of the room and get a feel for the planning that optimized different parts of the room for different aspects of the data collection. Advanced preparation made me available to greet and get to know participants informally as they arrived, to watch as they drifted to different materials, and engage them in dialogue.

![Figure 27. Layout of the Room where We Worked with Teachers](image)

While participants were engaged in the art-making, I was afforded another opportunity to see how they were making meaning, to probe for understanding, and to help groups stay focused. After an intense art-making session with Trainers, I wrote:

Using arts-informed inquiry, I witness people making a tangible product. Their art-making, in its multiple forms, conveyed a range of experiences and their mutual understanding about the program. The artistic processes enrich; stakeholders are engaged in sharing by doing, seeing and feeling simultaneously. This level of openness we achieve in a short amount of time is astounding. It may be difficult to attain a similar level of closeness in focus groups when working as an external evaluator, conducting an inquiry that draws stakeholders from across a large geographical region as well as ones who are distributed across classrooms spanning K–12. I keep thinking of the phrase
“telling is not teaching.” Transposed here, evaluating is not relating. I want to relate, I care about the experiences people have and I think the arts allow us to represent and understand these experiences more deeply. (Commonplace book, January 14, 2010)

I enjoyed observing as participants engaged in the art-making; it was the realization of a dream about bringing evaluation and the arts together. As participants explored materials, they also engaged in dialogue and sharing; both of these are key components to responsive evaluation (Abma, 1998b, 2005).

Recognizing that evaluation is a relational process can shape the way that interpersonal dimensions are addressed within evaluative contexts. Mark (2003) agreed that evaluation is not only a scientific or technical practice, but also a social practice within a social world. Arts-informed inquiry creates space for this socialization, providing learning opportunities for the evaluator, evaluation clients, participants in the evaluation process, and, potentially, those who share in the evaluation findings.

**Multiple Ways of Seeing and Understanding**

Many scholars have supported the idea that the arts provide access to a different way of knowing (e.g., Cutcher, 2010; Barone & Eisner, 1997; Eisner, 1993; Stanley, 2008). New understanding can surface as we move beyond the literal to use versatile and flexible forms. As McNiff (1998) suggested, “artistic knowing is different than intellectual knowing; this distinction is the basis of its creative value” (p. 36). Creative value has potential encourages multiple ways of seeing and understanding through integration of many different forms.

In this case, the integration of many forms allowed me to better convey the depth and dimensionality of the program. Simons and McCormack (2007) called this multifaceted perspective “a rich texture and tapestry” (p. 295). One of the Learning Coordinators commented:
We really felt this was something we’ve always known needed to be evaluated but we didn’t know how to do that effectively and I think that your unique perspective of different ways to evaluate was enticing and we felt it was something that would work.

(Interview December 7, 2009)

Arts-informed inquiry makes often-implicit values held by stakeholders, more explicit, and the difficult-to-communicate aspects more transparent. Two main ways that multiple ways of seeing and understanding add value to an inquiry are through opportunities to express and reflect. Data to support each of these are discussed in the sections below.

Express. Working with arts-informed inquiry in program evaluation recognizes that the questions we ask and the way we present our discoveries can be expressed in multiple ways. Our ways of seeing or expressing understanding “cannot always be solely dictated by or expressed by the language of the academy or in numbers” (Ewing & Hughes, 2008, p. 515). Similarly, Eisner (2002, 2008a) explained that our language does not define the limits of our cognition, nor is our knowledge always reducible to language. When we were discussing the possible value of using arts-informed inquiry, one of the Learning Coordinators commented:

If you give me a form to fill out I will think about it and automatically answer, but when we worked with you to create the art, everything was heightened and I was using more of my senses to come up with, okay, what do I really believe here. I think this was much more honest. I really think that when people are answering, they’re invested. (Interview, September 11, 2009)

When arts-informed inquiry is used as a method to collect data, participants are engaged in authentic forms of expression. They are driven to create meaning and express understanding. In
this process, I found that expressive forms can reveal what the conscious mind or literal language struggles to say.

Arts-informed inquiry allows evaluators and participants to engage mindfully, bringing new ideas and understandings to the surface. I encounter a shift between consciousness and unconsciousness when I am assembling a collage. Collage is a practical and accessible art form where materials and ideas from different places are pulled into a single composition. When I am working on a collage, my conscious mind thinks it knows what I want to convey, but the images, words, and colours that are pulled together from different sources often surprise me, by representing a slightly different story or another angle than I had originally considered. Butler-Kisber (2010) suggested that collage “can help to conceptualize dimensions of understanding that were previously unconscious, and how a collage creation can be a way of making thoughts concrete, facilitating the thinking, writing and talking about the inquiry” (p. 103). Her description sets up how collage was used with teacher participants.

*Figure 28. Collage made by a Group of Three Secondary Teachers*
Collage was one of the ways that teachers were asked to express their personal experiences of implementing *Tribes* in the classroom. It was an ideal art form because within a single composition there was space for convergent and divergent ideas to coexist. Figure 28 relates to one teacher’s explanation:

I like *Tribes*, but it’s hard to sustain and to make time for. I wanted to find an image that showed how much work it is, like these men lifting the block, but I also wanted to show that you are not working alone. The words surrounding the image are large and they help to balance out the message. (Secondary teacher, February 8, 2011)

From her description, we can see how the juxtaposing words and images is a way of also contrasting ideas with experiences. The fragments have been glued together to represent her experiences within the program while also depicting a willingness to work with others to stay positive and energized.

The collages provoked dialogue during their creation as well as in the group process of reflecting. One teacher commented on the process of sharing the collages by saying, “*Tribes* is about attentive listening and that’s what this is about. This evaluation process is about listening to the responses and ideas of people who have actually been involved in implementing the *Tribes* process” (Secondary teacher, February 8, 2011). The alignment between the program and evaluation process was not accidental, but I still felt a small thrill that a participant noticed this nesting. Teachers felt valued because they were asked to represent their experiences; within this evaluation process, their experiences counted.

The collages made as part of this inquiry were not sophisticated in terms of the artistic techniques used, but they were ideal for representing complex ways of seeing and understanding in a single composition. After we had concluded the sharing, one teacher commented:
I would definitely use this in the classroom. Just as we teach to multiple intelligences, I think it reaches so many more people. There was a lot of variety in the ways that we can receive information … there are just so many layers to it. (Secondary teacher, February 18, 2010)

Now that I have discovered how much participants enjoyed this art form as well as how accessible it was for conveying rich understandings and how invested participants were, I would provide more time and opportunities to enrich the artistic quality. Atkinson (1996) offered many ideas about the technical aspects of collage, which could be used to incorporate slightly more advanced techniques such as transparent overlays while also adding texture through the use of beeswax or adding found materials. These techniques, as well as others, could easily be learned by an evaluator, or in partnership with a collagist and could further enhance the inquiry. Increasing the artistry would build on the comments of another teacher who stated that, “…collage just opens up the creative process, we are all creative thinkers in our own ways” (Elementary teacher, January 18, 2011). These reflections and adjustments might enhance the sensory qualities of the experience, provide additional dimensions for expression or representation, and extend opportunities for learning or sharing.

Looking across the descriptive data collected from the collage or visual art that was made during the evaluation process allowed me to see how many ideas can be imbued in a small space. The collages were completed on 8½- by 11-inch sheets of paper while the art-making experience with the Trainers took place using watercolour paper the size of a post card. The Learning Coordinators positively commented on this diversity saying, “everyone has different ways of expressing themselves and so using different processes and materials really creates opportunities for everyone to be involved” (Interview, January 14, 2010). I found that it is valuable to vary the
materials and processes when engaging in arts-informed inquiry as a mechanism for data collection, because you can see the way form and materials shape expression.

During our art-making experiences, Trainers were invited to choose a question about the value of the Tribes program and create a representation in response to this question. While making his piece featured in Figure 29, a Trainer discussed the symbols:

I wanted to show that we all come from different areas, representing different cultures and with different pasts. Yet, the lines running through the work suggest that we are all connected and want to promote learning in our students where they feel happy, peaceful and included. (January 14, 2010)

![Figure 29. Photographic Image of Marker Artwork Made by a Trainer](image.png)

The ideas that surfaced during the art-making were descriptive and specific. As a researcher of the process, I could see and hear how an image depicted a complex understanding of the program.

Another aspect that was interesting to note involved the different ways Trainers interpreted the same question. All of the questions stemmed from the evaluation questions but
allowed Trainers to pull the one that they felt they could respond to artistically. During the art-making, Trainers were involved in discussing the program and the ideas they wanted to represent with their creations. While listening to recordings of their conversations, I was reminded how a few struggled with wanting to express a conceptual idea but felt that their art-making skills were insufficient. During the art-making, I had attended to this by reminding them that each person would have an opportunity to present his or her piece.

*Figure 30. Collage of Artwork made by a Trainer*

After making the art featured in Figure 30, one Trainer explained:

> At the centre you will see the little mirror, a place where you can see yourself. *Tribes* is truly about human development and learning. I truly believe that as we get to know one another better, we’re less likely to intentionally hurt that person. (January 14, 2010)

Like the collage, art-making is a form of embodied learning that activates the imaginations of participants and promoted generative creativity that encouraged deep thinking about the process, as well as the program.
In embodied learning, the body is a locus of experience. Learning is contextual, physical, and perceptual. An evaluation draws participant experiences from more than mental knowledge; it also draws from the embodied ways of knowing. This idea relates with Widdershoven’s (2005) explanation: “understanding is not an isolated event. It is part of a process of becoming involved in a phenomenon a process that is there already before one actually turns to it and which goes on after one has turned away from it” (p. 255). By engaging in art-making as part of how participants expressed ideas, they were given time to connect their knowledge and experience, to consider, to feel, and to express. Widdershoven suggested that an evaluator “tries to open the perspectives of people in a practice” (p. 260). While facilitating art-making, I could literally see this expansiveness taking place and it was remarkable. In my commonplace book I explained:

When you are evaluating and researching, you are so busy. It is so different being in the field, instead of conceiving of ideas alone at my computer. I love the sense of urgency that comes from working with participants and creating understanding together. Using arts-informed inquiry heightens the unknown and increases the ambiguity; for me this feeling of discovery and foray into the unknown is energizing! (Commonplace book, February 6, 2010)

I felt the energy from the arts processes was stimulating, but I was still grateful to occasionally get behind my camera, distance myself, create a record of the experience, and spend a quiet moment recording an impression. I was thankful for long and uninterrupted train rides where I could reflect, process, and write. Arts-informed inquiry requires attentiveness while participants are creating, it forces you to tune out everything else and sit beside them, listening, and asking
questions. I value these expressive ways of knowing, the insights participants shared, and the thinking it stimulated for me.

Expressive, embodied ways of understanding requires making time to play with the figurative and to listen to the intuitive. A sense of play is created when working with materials, ideas, people, and processes. Central to arts-informed inquiry as a practice in evaluation is the dialogue or texts that are created as a part of the process. As Ewing and Hughes (2008) documented, “it is clear that all arts-informed research incorporates some form of written text … the art is not an end in itself—it forms an integral part of the research design or a tool in the inquiry process …” (p. 515). In this evaluation, many discussions took place that were recorded and transcribed. The transcribed dialogue then became the text, which could be paired with the artistic pieces for analysis. This process aligned with Widdershoven’s observation that “… dialogue is the vehicle for change since through it, people are invited to develop new, shared meanings and are oriented towards reaching agreement …” (p. 262). The different examples showcased here endorse the idea that arts-informed inquiry can emphasize multiple ways of expressing an idea in support of a holistic understanding of a program.

**Reflect.** Our research and evaluation work is a reflection of our understanding of the world, as well as our imaginings of a possible world. When I started learning more about program evaluation in graduate school, I immediately saw a potential for connecting the social sciences and the arts. I am not the first to make this connection (e.g., Janesick, 2004; Uhrmacher & Matthews, 2005). Intentionally applying and documenting the way arts-informed inquiry operates within the realm of program evaluation is a new idea. In this section, I want to focus on reflection from two different angles: how value is enhanced by the reflexive activities of the evaluator and also by participants who were reflecting on a program.
Evaluator reflexivity. In reflexivity, the presence of the researcher can be seen and felt within a research context (Creswell, 2003). Before entering the research process I visualize the inquiry by allowing it to play out on my mind’s stage. Then, I work as a reflexive researcher by recording voice memos, keeping commonplace books, and engaging in art-making practices. In one example I reflected, “Each day I cultivate a sense of wonder and curiosity. While I may appear to be daydreaming, I am actually replaying events over in my mind, looking for ways to understand and to improve” (Commonplace book, February 5, 2010). By cultivating reflexivity, I try to go deeper into the process of knowing, to reflect on the program as well as on the nature of the inquiry. Higgs (2008) suggested that “the artist, using special training, creative sensibility, and the willingness to move and to be moved in a reflexive act, creates a way of knowing” (p. 551). I suggest that evaluators also have this special training, allowing them to use, learn, or collaborate in ways that enhance creative sensibilities.

A characteristic of reflexivity is the researcher’s signature (Cole & Knowles, 2008). As a relative novice to the field of evaluation, I would say that my signature as an evaluator is still fluid. When I look back over my work as an educator and artist I see an emerging signature in my aspiration to use multiple modalities to creatively engage participants and represent ideas. The Superintendent endorsed this approach:

There are a lot of abstract benefits from the program that are not easy to quantify … because we assessed in a vast number of ways, we really got to the root of things and I feel that we can speak confidently about the value. (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011)

Melding different research methods during the process and representation requires an ongoing willingness to step into the unknown and negotiate what is possible and informative.
My experiences suggest that when arts-informed inquiry purposefully unites process and product in a representation there is potential reach out to audiences. Trainers involved in the process expressed delight in seeing their art work and ideas represented in the final report, teachers commented that they could hear themselves in the data, and one of the Learning Coordinators described the report as a “testament to a complicated process, that plays out in classrooms across the district” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011). At our final presentation, one school board executive claimed that this research was a good example of an external project that had the potential to enrich learning for people who are not familiar with the intricacies of the program (Learning Agenda Presentation, September 20, 2010). In this case, researcher reflexivity intertwined with arts-informed inquiry helped to make the process more visible and the representation appealing.

**Participant reflection.** For some participants, reflection is easy, being able to dwell in a past experience or a wandering of the mind. For others, reflection is difficult if they revisit sites that may push them into uncomfortable sensations. While arts-informed inquiry invites these types of reflections, the evaluator needs to be prepared for what may ensue. The passage below is taken from my commonplace book to describe an experience of participant reflection:

After observing that participants at training did not know one another and were waiting around, silently, disjointedly for *Tribes* training sessions to start, I suggested we use a pre-training instrument. The instrument used a mixed method approach, scaled items, open-ended questions and a visual stimulus. My intent in this pre-training reflection was two-fold, an individual opportunity for reflecting on the choice to participate as well as to use these reflections as a prompt in the community circle that is the customary beginning of a *Tribes* training … compared to my previous observation, the responses seemed
richer, more detailed, more honest. Participants were not just expressing the first idea that came to them, but connecting their desires and experiences with hopes. And then, one participant started to cry as she spoke; visible on her body and in her voice was the pain, frustration, and disconnection she was experiencing as a teacher. I wondered, for the first time, if prompting reflection was responsible; if we could adequately attend to her despair? I watched closely as the circle progressed, reassured that her willingness to be vulnerable was cathartic, seeing how other members quickly responded both physically and emotionally. (Commonplace book, December 9, 2009)

By using multiple methods to reflect on ways of seeing the program, I wanted participants to be engaged. My observation at this training suggested that preparing to share their experiences strengthened the depth of their communication and opened up a willingness to be seen, felt, and heard.

Image-elicitation uses visual stimulation in combination with affective and cognitive processes to provide a way of articulating difficult-to-express qualities. I learned that this could be a conduit for meaningful discussions experiences. Most participants seemed to enjoy looking at the images in response to the questions posed. When progressing along the tables to select their images, teachers would comment on an image selected by someone else and make connections about the way that image had resonated for them. For example, one teacher said, “I almost picked that one. I was thinking about how it reminded me of the first time I tried using a community circle” (Elementary teacher, February 8, 2010). The images helped to overcome silences that are often present when a group of participants gets together for the first time.
Figure 31. Dancing Dinosaurs

After selecting images, participants would return to a table where they worked in small groups with a facilitator to share their images and the rationale for their selections. Working with the image depicted in Figure 31, one teacher explained:

I think early on sometimes, we’re trying to do everything by ourselves. The figures are moving together, they are listening to the same tune and the fireflies might be their ideas lighting up the sky. As we become more experienced, we see the value of collaborating with our colleagues to find out how to best implement [Tribes] in the classroom … everyone looks happy and that is what happens when you work with others. At the beginning you are not sure how to do it and you are struggling alone—setting collaboration up from the start and providing access to ongoing supports would make it easier. (Elementary teacher, February 8, 2010)

As the example above illustrates, images evoked thoughtful and detailed reflections of Tribes. Images selected multiple times, like the dancing dinosaurs in Figure 30, were featured in the
Tribes report, along with verbatim quotations. The use of these images and quotations served to accentuate key themes in the report. In hindsight, I wish I used these images more boldly in the report because I did learn how arts-informed inquiry makes participant reflections more accessible by using image, metaphor, colour, and shape to promote shared understanding.

Poetic technique also provided a way of expressing experiences of program implementation. Prompts such as, “describe a moment when you see Tribes working,” were used to invite participant reflection by using metaphor, simile, and imagery. Metaphor is often used as a way to describe experiences that are difficult to put into words. The act of having a prompt and filling it with descriptive language is a way to reflect inner experiences, as demonstrated by the following quote:

With the arts, it is different—the whole thing is experiential, you’re doing something together, you know, sharing, we’re working on our own but we’re working together at the same time and so it just brings everyone closer together, too. I wish we could do this kind of thing more often. (Secondary teacher, February 8, 2010)

As a researcher, I was relieved to hear this participant share her experience because it showed that arts-informed inquiry took people into new ways of evaluating and sharing. Another teacher commented:

It’s a very simple task, but it was really interesting to see how it all came together. It seemed really fragmented, at first and okay, well I thought, we’re doing this and something is going to happen right? What came out in the end was thoughtful and right on. (Secondary teacher, February 8, 2010)
Many teachers took copies of the instructions for this technique, to try it in their own classrooms. One teacher described the potential value of using this technique to help students who are reluctant writers (Commonplace book, February 8, 2010).

Another reason I enjoy working with poetic technique is the endless opportunity for analysis. One of the Learning Coordinators reflected on using this activity with teachers: “I think it promoted much more thoughtful discussions among the people who were involved. When I visited different tables, I think they really had some deep conversations and I think there were surprises” (February 22, 2010). There is value in the depth of discussions, the level of engagement, and the surprises participants encountered but the value did not end there.

After the participants wrote and reflected on their poems, I took the poems home and transcribed them, conducting a theme and pattern analysis before stitching their verbatim words together into new poems. These poems were emailed out to participants; in addition to showing my appreciation this contact also served as a reminder of the Tribes community they are part of, even when out in their schools. The poems may also serve to activate their own imaginings about what is not said. For example, one of the Learning Coordinators commented that the poems “showed what Tribes feels like and helps the reader to draw conclusions about why it is so important for our schools” (February 22, 2010). This research has demonstrated that artistically rendered works have the capacity to provoke learning, reflection, and surprise.

The ability to be surprised is an enticing element when considering arts-informed inquiry in evaluative contexts. This work showed me that the use of arts-informed inquiry promotes unanticipated openings during the artistic processes as well as in the creative representation of ideas. One of the best examples of this comes from my work with the students:
Both projects took place in schools, utilizing the classroom, the hallways, and the stairways as places to explore and express students’ thinking about the program. The students were enthusiastic participants; to them this research was new, novel, and innovative. (Commonplace book, February 6, 2010)

Student enthusiasm translated into heightened participation, a desirable quality for learning about student experiences within the program and this style of evaluation. I had not initially anticipated that I would have access to student journals, yet after discovering that I did, it allowed me to communicate with them even when they were working on the project and I was not on site. I would arrive a bit early for my days in the classroom and have a chance to read through their ideas and respond before we met. Sometimes excerpts from the journals revealed thoughts about the program, such as “Tribes is really good, I will miss the community circles when I go to high school next year” (Student journal, February 12, 2010). At other times, the journals revealed ideas about the evaluation process. For example, one Grade 8 student wrote, “this project gives us a chance to do something different, I’ve never made a movie before” (Student journal, February 12, 2010). Another student talked about “having the freedom to go around the school with my group” (Student journal, February 12, 2010) or “I am not sure if our film really shows Tribes but making it forced us to think about it” (Student journal, February 12, 2010). From their reflections, I can see how setting up the data collection as an inquiry process freed the students from their usual routines and modes of learning in a way that encouraged reflection about the program and process.

In both examples of my work with students, the evaluative inquiry was embedded within their curricular contexts. This collaboration provided data for the evaluation and research, as well as new lessons for the classroom teachers. One teacher reflected,
that is why the multiple forms are so important. We have to be able to work with students who are not quite sure how to express themselves or how to connect the ideas and we have to offer to differentiate. (Elementary teacher, January 18, 2010)

Creating storyboards, using images in Moviemaker, and hosting a film festival were new experiences. Student groups had a question to answer: “How would you portray your Tribes experiences?” but they had freedom about the way they wanted to represent their story in film. They created the data and participated in the dissemination for a broad audience. The inquiry process was also applied in the Grade 6 classroom. The teacher reflected on this evaluative collaboration:

We make art all the time, but I rarely talk to the students about the art they’ve made. I take their work at face value, but I can see now how much it has to offer and how much more I could understand. (Elementary Teacher, February 6, 2010)

By using multiple methods to reflect on ways of seeing and understanding the program, I was able to model the process of learning from inquiry that integrated artistic processes. These opportunities, while creative and dynamic, were also systematic, to align with the needs of the evaluation and curriculum. This evaluative inquiry in classrooms provides another example of how arts-informed inquiry goes beyond the making of art to promote the reflection of programmatic experiences.

**Experiencing Aesthetic Forms in the Process and Product**

Research using the arts includes the presence of aesthetic qualities or design elements that challenge the conventional notions (Eisner & Barone, 1997). I have noticed that people in evaluation, research, and education often hesitate when they encounter words such as *aesthetic*, *beauty*, or *sensitivity*. In my evaluation work, arts-informed inquiry is a way to subtly bring
these concepts in, to engage with, and reflect upon aesthetic engagement. As Dewey (1934) suggested, the aesthetic is not removed from our everyday experiences, it is very much part of it.

I define “aesthetic” as the sensory conditions that make us pause, heighten our awareness, and broaden perceptions. According to Maxine Greene (1995), aesthetic transformation means “to enable people to uncover for the sake of an intensified life and cognition” (p. 125). My experiences in this research demonstrate that when arts-informed inquiry is interwoven into a program evaluation, it can expand the boundaries of what counts by engaging participants or audiences in ways that are creative and innovative.

Arts-informed inquiry draws on aesthetic elements to express experiences and perceptions. Dewey (1934) argued that to understand the nature of art necessitates expanding our conceptions of art beyond the view of fine arts. More recently, Knowles and Promislow (2008) suggested, “knowing through the arts is more than mere knowledge about the arts” (p. 518). Arts-informed inquiry draws from the aesthetic for the purpose of expressing and understanding. Increased experimentation and documentation in this area can help participants to see beyond the idea of the fine arts. When reflecting on the art-making experience, a Trainer acknowledged that arts processes could reveal “a deep and passionate understanding of the core values of Tribes, not only from the creation itself but the way particular ideas were explained” (January 14, 2010). Participants were able to see the aesthetic in their experiences; they were also able to identify value from the power of their creations.

**Process.** Their arts-informed creations were often influential because of the images and metaphors they selected, created, and explained. The image-elicitation used throughout the inquiry is a good example of this; Figure 32 shows an image that was selected multiple times by different groups. One teacher suggested, “an artistic tree in the waning light of day [which] is a
reminder to reflect and be appreciative” (Elementary teacher, January 18, 2010). During a meta-evaluation interview, the same image was picked by a Learning Coordinator who explained, “the sun is rising on a day filled with new possibilities, the motivation needed to propel Tribes in our system is a bit easier today, because of what we have learned” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011). The image was featured in the final report and is also included here, to show how experiencing reflection through image-elicitation provides a way to nurture imaginative and reflective capacities that inform programmatic understanding.

![Image of Tree and Sky](image)

**Figure 32. Image of Tree and Sky**

Reflections generated using images or other forms of arts-informed inquiry, produce thoughtful spaces that are filled with quiet contemplation as well as lively conversations. Either way, evoking an aesthetic understanding is one attempt to bridge the evaluator–evaluated divide, by creating time and space to connect with participants. Opportunities to explore art-making go beyond verbal modes of thinking and encourage participants to focus on detail, listen, observe, and imagine. These aesthetic qualities were evoked at different times, for different people. Another example happened when teachers finished making their collages; a participant stood
back and commented to the group, “I noticed that all of these pieces are abstractions of Tribes. Each one, in a different way, captures the sentiment!” (Secondary teacher, February 8, 2010). These abstractions were not the end unto itself, but instead formed part of a process that involved dialogue, creation, description, and reflection. This is perhaps the greatest gift of arts-informed inquiry--an opportunity to integrate processes that enhance understanding by promoting and heightening awareness.

Invoking aesthetic qualities in the process, as well as the final representation, allowed me to learn and tell the story of Tribes in this district. Telling this story involved bringing together artifacts from across the inquiry, interweaving participant voice with theory and analysis in ways that could command the attention of broad audiences. I liken the process to one described by a teacher participant after collaging. When participating in a gallery walk to examine the collages, the teacher commented, “I notice that many people have used as many different materials as they could to try to get at the multiple layers, the whole dynamic complexity” (Elementary teacher, January 18, 2010). These senses of texture, layering, and dynamic complexity are qualities I wanted to convey in representing data from the evaluation.

**Product.** The final report integrates art forms from the evaluation processes with themes and findings generated from analysis by participants to show how we persevered through an inquiry that involved a range of stakeholders with an attention to multiple details. In this case, invoking aesthetics was an embodiment of the Tribes culture within this district. Artistic modalities offered value by bringing forward qualities that communicated empathetic understanding of implementation. Included in the final report, Figure 33 was selected by an Elementary teacher to show that she was where she wanted to be, in an environment where learners are curious and independent.
The teacher described, “the sounds of independent and engaged learners is joyful music in my classroom” (January 18, 2010). This sentiment could also describe audiences of the report. I want them to be curious and independently able to experience the program, evaluation process, and findings.

The Superintendent was pleased that this research had caught the attention of a representative from the Ministry of Education. She said, “the auditor’s report makes us more accountable for funding; we’re ready to move beyond scores and so are they. This report shows that there are different approaches to accountability. That message has to get out …” (Meta-evaluation, March 23, 2011). Using arts-informed inquiry helps to get the message out by engaging stakeholders and evoking curiosity in audiences.

In my capacity as a researcher for Safe Schools, I recently sent a copy of this report to the Ontario Tribes Learning Consortium. Many people wrote back immediately to praise the information and style of the report. Several were asking for permission to share it widely as a way to disseminate the program. They have asked me to speak with their group in the fall of
2013 to share ideas for conducting this kind of research in other sites. Their comments about the accessibility of our findings and enthusiasm for the imaginative and reflective nature of the evaluation are related to experiencing aesthetic forms in the process and product.

In this section, and in this chapter, I bring to life some of the values that are enhanced when arts-informed inquiry is infused within program evaluation. There are many more stories I could tell and more examples I could give, but I feel these three categories have appropriately contained the key values accessible to the field of evaluation. As Hughes and Ewing (2008) emphasized, “arts-informed inquiry is of most value when it explores, analyses or represents individual’s experiences, perspectives or understandings about complex or ambiguous phenomena, issues or concepts” (p. 519). For me, arts-informed inquiry proposed an invitation to explore different ways of conducting program evaluation with others. In these new ways, we explored multiple ways of seeing and understanding to construct meaning. I discovered that experiencing aesthetic forms in process and product heightened the awareness of participants as well as audiences.

One of my early commonplace book reflections asked, “How can arts-informed inquiry in my evaluation work help me convey programmatic experiences as vivid and as full of life as the people and places they represent” (Commonplace book, August 6, 2009). I do not believe there is one answer to my musing. Instead, I believe that in each evaluation or research context, we draw from our repertoire of skills in search of understanding. I wrote “using arts-informed inquiry reminds me of a kaleidoscope, slowly turning and turning, seeking new formations, showcasing new colours and finding new patterns” (Commonplace book, August 6, 2009). Full of colour and possibility, the kaleidoscope is an apt metaphor for the value enhancement experienced when using arts-informed inquiry in a program evaluation.
Chapter Six: Enhancing Usefulness in Evaluation with Arts-Informed Inquiry

Figure 3.4. Travelling Band

This image aptly portrays my view of how arts-informed inquiry can enhance usefulness within evaluation. Everyone is engaged and is given a role to play when bringing evaluation skills infused with an arts-informed inquiry perspective. Together, the evaluator and program stakeholders can find ways to use tools that make meaning and enhance understanding. Contandriopoulos and Brousselle (2012) state, “use is at the core of every evaluation endeavour” (p. 61). While the field of evaluation has a much better understanding of use despite its complexity, it remains a critical factor. Use has been an object of scholarly writing and empirical research in the field of evaluation for almost four decades (e.g., Suchman, 1967; Weiss, 1972; King & Pechman, 1984; J. Greene, 1988; Shulha & Cousins, 1997; Alkin & Taut, 2003; Patton, 1997, 2007).

Utility occupies the first program evaluation standard because it is a central aspect for determining the worth of evaluation process, findings, and products (Yarbrough, Shulha,
Hopson, & Caruthers, 2010). In my view, this is one of the core distinctions between research and evaluation. Taut and Alkin (2003) suggested that if evaluation is to be measured by the characteristics and standard of research, “it is bound to fail” (p. 10). Instead, the field of evaluation makes judgments about an evaluation’s usefulness. Throughout this research on evaluation, I have refined my views on usefulness and sought perspectives from stakeholders to better understand the potential for use of arts-informed inquiry.

This chapter builds on the established understanding of use as a multidimensional concept and responds to the call for research into the impact or usefulness of program evaluation (Christie, 2003; Henry & Mark, 2003). Since the 1970s, multiple definitions of use have been generated and different aspects of use defined. Johnson et al. (2009) suggest that the “new millennium has … reconceptualized the field’s understanding of impact” (p. 378). I embrace multiple, overlapping definitions to understand the usefulness of arts-informed inquiry within a program evaluation. In program evaluation literature, as well as in this chapter, evaluation use and utilization are enlisted synonymously; here are three of the definitions of use I considered:

1. Johnson et al. (2009) defined use as “the application of evaluation process, products, or findings to produce an effect” (p. 378).

2. Alkin and Taut (2003) defined evaluation use as “the ways in which an evaluation and information from the evaluation impacts the program that is being evaluated” (p. 1).

3. Patton (2008) identified use as “how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experiences” (p. 37).

Common to all these definitions is the notion that use includes results or findings from an evaluation as well as the process. There are many other dimensions that can be considered when
understanding use; a brief historical gaze helps to situate these different dimensions and lay a foundation for decisions made in this chapter.

A Historical Gaze of Use in Evaluation

In the 1970s, conceptions of use within the field of evaluation focused primarily on instrumental use. Evaluators looked at how their evaluation findings shaped decision making, which was considered instrumental use (Shulha & Cousins, 1997). The program evaluation standards identify “the need to demonstrate program accountability remains a significant impetus for evaluation, the uses made of evaluations have expanded” (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2010, p. 4). Additional dimensions of use emerged in the 1980s (e.g., J. Greene, 1988; King, 1988; Patton, 1997). Evaluators and stakeholders have acknowledged that use occurred conceptually, symbolically, and persuasively as well as politically. As the dimensions of use have continued to expand so have conversations about how to acknowledge the effects of evaluation, the language of categorization, and the usefulness of taxonomies (e.g., Kirkhart, 2000; Henry & Mark, 2003; Patton, 2007). The table below identifies different dimensions of evaluation use and scholars in each area who were considered during this research.
Table 7
Different Types of Evaluation Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Use</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of scholarship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>Direct use of evaluation results to impact on a direct action within the program or organization</td>
<td>Cousins &amp; Leithwood, 1986; Fleischer &amp; Christie, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual, Enlightenment, or Knowledge</td>
<td>No direct decision has been made, but there may be shifts in the way users think about the program and/or the process of evaluation</td>
<td>Rich, 1977; Weiss, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic, Persuasive, or Political</td>
<td>To justify a decision already made, or demonstrate a willingness of the program personnel to be evaluated</td>
<td>Owen &amp; Rogers, 1999; Shulha &amp; Cousins, 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Enhances understanding in intentional and unintentional ways</td>
<td>Patton, 1997, 2008; Preskill &amp; Torres, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>This theory brought the intersection of time, source, and intention to the forefront</td>
<td>Kirkhart, 2000; Henry &amp; Mark, 2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering multiple types of use within the Tribes evaluation context allowed me to better understand the contributions made by arts-informed inquiry. Shulha and Cousins (1997) explained that “the rise of considerations of context as critical to understanding and explaining use” (p. 195). There are many approaches to choose from, each with different types of use that can emerge or can be nurtured.

Findings use and process use are two primary types of uses that are often juxtaposed yet complementary. Alkin and Taut (2003) suggested that “it is important to make clear that evaluation use can occur as a function of evaluation process as well as due to its findings, and in both cases either conceptually, instrumentally or symbolically …” (p. 10). While I agree that the process and findings have elements of use, there are many contexts where, if an evaluation does not have findings that can be interpreted as useful, the usefulness of evaluation processes may be called into question. In this chapter, I have borrowed from Alkin and Taut’s organizational structure to differentiate between findings and process use. I begin by outlining stakeholder
descriptions of how the findings from this evaluation proved useful, and then I discuss process use in detail.

Findings Use

Weiss (1998) emphasizes, “originally all we thought about was findings” and that evaluators generated findings and expected that people would use them (p. 21). Even then, she realized that understanding of use is more nuanced. Preskill (2008) provided an example of this by focusing on making ideas useful and lasting. One of the ways I have tried to present findings that would be useful and lasting is to incorporate the use of arts-informed inquiry into the representation of ideas. It is interesting to note that when stakeholders were interviewed about findings use, they did not see that aspect of the evaluation as separate from other aspects of the evaluation, despite direct questioning about the role of arts-informed inquiry. Below, I offer some rationale for the way I presented the findings, followed by a table that documents findings shared from stakeholder perspectives.

Figure 35. Sketching the Layout for the Final Report

**Rationale.** I began with Federman (2004), who explored McLuhan’s (1964) declaration that the medium is the message. I examined a plethora of texts covering the elements of graphic design (e.g., Lupton & Phillips, 2008; Krause, 2004; White, 2002). Figure 35 shows some ideas
and sketches in draft form before I collaborated with a graphic designer. We crafted a report that was as visually appealing as it was rich with idea. Regarding this alignment, the Superintendent commented, “that is what Tribes is, a process that takes many paths and turns. I found this was a really interesting way to represent that. It seems to, you know, fit” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011). In reporting on the findings, I wanted to honour the program by reflecting its process, as well as the multifaceted and creative activities of our evaluation.

When done well, evaluation infused with arts-informed inquiry can help to engage readers. Once readers are engaged, ideas must be carefully and thoughtfully presented if they are to resonate with audiences. To isolate a few key ideas regarding how to make ideas stick with audiences, Preskill (2008) drew my attention to Heath and Heath (2007). She used their work to argue, “that the keys to achieving stickiness are ensuring that the message is (a) unexpected, (b) concrete, (c) credible, (d) emotional, and (e) that it tells a story” (p. 136). I tried to apply these ideas to the findings when thinking about the report. I wrote about trying to make it “copier-worthy” in my commonplace book.

No matter where in the world I have worked, mornings in a school followed a similar routine: sign in; pick up mail; make copies; and then, head to my classroom. There was a brief rush of excitement when my mail contained something other than attendance forms. I enjoyed the moment of quiet, while I stood flipping through an article or magazine at the copier. In truth, pre-Internet era, reading at the copier comprised most of my intake of professional literature. If something was interesting and eye-catching, I might return to it later. So, however this report looks at the end, it has got to be copier-worthy!

(Commonplace book, May 23, 2010)
Copier-worthy means eye-catching, with bold words, images, and colour. To some extent, I knew I had achieved this when the Research and Assessment Manager commented, “I really like the way it was laid out. It’s easy and to the point. If someone doesn’t want to read through the full twenty pages, they can get to where they want to go” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 30, 2011). Now that I work at a school board office, I have a better understanding of how the report is different from more conventional text-based reports. The figure below shows a sample of two pages to illustrate the interweaving of text, arts-informed inquiry, and graphic design. You can see poetry, drawings, journal excerpts, graphic images, and text.

**Figure 36. The Final Report, Pages 12 & 13**

Although elements of arts-informed inquiry were interwoven in the report, it still encompassed traditional elements of evaluation reporting, such as a summary of the methodology, key findings, and a narrative structure. As you can see above on the right, concrete links to other board and ministry initiatives were made available. Other pages focused
on key learning and future considerations. The Superintendent remarked, “I love how the six key points can be pulled out. I have done numerous presentations since, where I take these out and say, you know, here are six key findings that we found and that gets people into it, they can read more. It is nice to have this in your pocket and very helpful to our board” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011). The layout of the final report was a balance between artistry and integrity; while I wanted to infuse arts-informed techniques, I also needed to ensure that the format would be engaging for a wide audience.

Credibility was enhanced by collecting multiple forms of data, from different stakeholders across an extended time. The Superintendent surmised this goal and the intended program alignment when she said, “Tribes is about attentive listening and that is what this report is about. This is about listening to the responses of people that have been involved in the process” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011). This breadth and diversity allowed me to speak confidently about program implementation. The Superintendent and the Research and Assessment Manager also acknowledged the volume of people who had been engaged and commented that this qualitative work had gone beyond simply gathering testimonials. Findings use is enhanced when the evaluation is viewed as credible and the information is presented in a purposeful way.

Taken as a whole, the report tells a story of the program, but within the larger narrative there were also poignant stories and voices from teachers as well as students. As we were discussing the report, the Superintendent exclaimed:

You know what else about this research? People want to read it because it does flow like a story, so it’s not boring. It’s creative and it’s interesting and you can pick areas and
sometimes I got to one area and then sometimes I want to focus on another area. It’s really quite lovely. (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011)

The storied aspects of the report were intentionally designed to bring dimensionality to the program as well as to create an emotional context for understanding. A Learning Coordinator commented, “people really told you what they have learned and including this really allowed people to really make a personal connection to the report” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 9, 2011).

**Examples of findings use.** As I contemplated findings use, I decided to not differentiate between different types of use or highlight the specific role of arts-informed inquiry in enhancing use. In part, this was because it would be difficult, if not impossible, to tease apart. Knowing that stakeholders did not make distinctions between types of use or between the evaluation and the arts-informed inquiry in the evaluation also influenced my decision. As the Superintendent said, “this report is excellent, I don’t know if that is because it was arts-informed or just because of the overall flow of the report. But I do know that it has led us to taking a closer look” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011). Most important for me is that previous sections explained the choices I made to support findings use while the following table identifies how stakeholders used findings in the report. Table 8 provides nine examples to show action and learning that directly resulted from the findings in the final report.
### Table 8

**Examples of Findings Use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
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| 1 Trainers conducted revisions to the training package, so they could ensure it was appropriate for school board context and focus, and maximized time with participants. | • A Learning Coordinator remarked “I like the idea that it doesn’t have to be this huge assessment, you can learn something new by just finding ways and different ways to reflect and take a look at the benefits and would be changed. We have certainly done that” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).  
• Another Learning Coordinator identified, “we shared copies of the report with all of the Trainers, they have a hard copy and it is posted online. They were excited that there was so much work put into this and felt there was more validation for what they do. Now there is something concrete for them to look at and show others to say what is actually coming out of this” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011). |
| 2 Reconfigured sharing sessions in person and online, to nurture community as well as to provide more opportunities for ongoing connection. | • The Superintendent emphasized “Elementary teachers were encouraged to use their professional development day to visit other Tribes classroom; we are now encouraging this during the training and helping to connect those two” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011).  
• One Learning Coordinator explained the rationale for developing more of an online presence: “There has been a lot of different directional pushes this year and teachers are tired and teachers are finding it very difficult to be away from their class more often and so we have to explore other ways of [being] connected and supporting” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 9, 2011). |
| 3 Increased the online presence and resources for Tribes-trained teachers, through school board portal. | • A Learning Coordinator confirmed, “we’ve shared through the Tribes icon, so anyone who has taken Tribes will find more information there. It’s also posted on our website and we are often directing parents to that spot when they have questions. We are trying to hit all the stakeholders but it is nice to have a place to be able to direct them to” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).  
• Another Learning Coordinator said, “Now I’ve got teachers and principals emailing me; they say, ‘I just saw this research and I want to know how can I get Tribes training at my school’ or one who just said, ‘I’ve got a class of kids with special needs and this would work; can you help me bring it in …?’” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).  
• “We’ve put videos on there of teachers talking about their experiences. It’s just a more welcoming place … it is certainly a dynamic piece and it’s a work in progress but it’s much more inviting … we’re still developing it, but it’s a much better space than it was even a couple of months ago” (Learning Coordinator, Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).  
• The Superintendent told me “we’ve added division folders so teachers can communicate back and forth” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011). |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Enhanced administrator awareness and potential for support by using the evaluation report as a dialogical tool to expand program knowledge at summer administrator training sessions.</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>• The Research and Assessment Manager commented, “we assume that people know what Tribes is because it has been around for so long, but I’m sure for some of those people sitting in the room, they had heard the word but they didn’t really understand what it was; it was very important to share that information with them” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 30, 2011).</td>
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<td>• The Superintendent emphasized, “we want to encourage the administrators to bring together Tribes-trained teachers on a regular basis and have follow-up conversations with them about how it’s going and the success or challenges of it” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5</strong> Increased access for secondary school teachers and students by modifying delivery of training to include a whole school, secondary training approach.</td>
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<td>• A Learning Coordinator identified, “we want to take a look at the whole school training approach, it will be ongoing so we can take in all the different facets. We want to see if there is an effect in the community at large; the picture is not yet complete” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 9, 2011).</td>
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<td>• Another Learning Coordinator reflected on the high school pilot they had completed, “it’s really interesting to see how that dynamic can shift within twenty people within one school. I think it’s really encouraging that there’s many people who can push change through” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).</td>
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<td>• One Learning Coordinator observed, “a lot of times they’re of the mind that this is an elementary initiative and there’s not a lot of validity in the high school setting and the pre-training instrument helped us to identify that because teachers were very honest about it and that’s great. But when they leave, they are saying, ‘I can totally use this and it fits with what I am doing …’” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 9, 2011).</td>
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<td><strong>6</strong> Shared this report with other districts in the province who are engaged in using this program.</td>
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<td>• The Superintendent believes, “there was a couple of boards who had gone to our website and saw the evaluation, they were very interested. They mentioned it to the Ministry representatives who got in contact with me to ask more about it” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011).</td>
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<td>• One of the Learning Coordinators stated, “At the recent Tribes conference we shared the report; data, data, data, we have lots of that but this is what we really need, a way to shift perception of what evaluation can be and what you can actually get out of it” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).</td>
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| 7 | Presented the results to Learning Agenda, a leadership group within the school district. | • A Learning Coordinator identifies, “they want evidence to support the validity of a program and to know if it is worth spending money on; if they don’t have data to support that it is not going anywhere. One thing about this report is that it points to the sustainability of the program; it isn’t just a one-shot thing, it’s a process; it develops, it takes time” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 9, 2011).  
• One of the Learning Coordinators said “I thought it was really great that the Research and Assessment Manager spoke up about the piece and said that this was a very valid piece of work because his word goes a long way and so that was very encouraging” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).  
• At the time of the meta-evaluation interview, the Superintendent told me, “we still have not had any feedback from the Learning Agenda beyond what we received that day … this is great and this is good … but we are closer now to making this a corner piece, to take this data and what has gone on and really integrate it into the district because we can show how it helps to build communities where kids can feel safer” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011).  
• One of the Learning Coordinators described how “it is a bit discouraging when we don’t get a bit more feedback, it just kind of sits where it is … the shift takes a long time and I think it will be a shift but we would like the world to turn faster” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011). |
| 8 | Presented at district Safe Schools Think Tank, to a diverse group comprising educators, community members, scholars, and researchers. | • In response to this presentation, one of the Learning Coordinators stated, “it’s refreshing that people are so encouraged to move forward with [Tribes] … people are really looking for ways to sustain it and that’s important because there are so many initiatives that it is a little overwhelming. Tribes is sticking and people want to continue looking at the report and the program and that is what excites me most” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).  
• Another Learning Coordinator suggested, “the report helped create a picture of Tribes in the district right now; we can take this information as we make decisions about how it fits into the big picture; it helps to give us direction to do that” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 9, 2011).  
• The Superintendent claimed, “we used it to show how it connects; you integrated so many aspects aligned within the board and that makes sense to me; it can’t just be out there, it’s got to be part of everything we do” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011). |
| 9 | Ministry grants that are available to schools were requested, to gain Tribes resources. | • A Learning Coordinator remarked, “there was Ministry grant money this year and all schools could spend up to $1000 on creating or promoting positive spaces within their schools. A lot of schools requested money for Tribes resources; I think the report certainly played a role in it” (Meta-evaluation interview, February 22, 2011).  
• The Superintendent told me, “We were already pretty committed to Tribes, so we pay for the training … now we are going to provide the resources. They used to have to pay for the resource… But I think the big thing is not the change of money but the change of focus … funding is still there but is about a change in focus; it can affect the climate and culture of the building itself” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 23, 2011). |
These nine examples of findings use provide concrete and direct indicators within the district. The story of the findings from this evaluation has continued to wield influence. In February 2013, I was contacted by the Ontario Tribes Learning Consortium and invited to join them at their regional conference in April. The conference organizers were excited by the report and eager to have me discuss this type of evaluation with the program creator, their honoured guest Jeanne Gibbs, and the keynote speaker Michael Fullan. This group has also asked me to develop and present a workshop in October 2013 to other boards who are interested in conducting this type of evaluation. These are exciting opportunities that have resulted from the report findings.

Process Use

Process use requires attentiveness to the qualities that unfold during an evaluation. We can learn as much from the process of evaluation as we can learn from the findings themselves, quite possibly more. Rather than viewing evaluation as an end goal, I encourage people I work with to join me in finding innovative ways to make the processes informative, experiential, and growth focused. In some contexts, evaluators can enhance process use by involving arts-informed inquiry. This methodological enhancement provides access to benefits that are cognitive, social, and emotional.

The field of evaluation conceptualizes process use as the types of learning that take place, intentionally and unintentionally, by involvement in a program evaluation. Preskill, Zuckerman and Matthews (2003) indicate, “we view process use as the learning that occurs from being involved in any phase of the evaluation process” (p. 427). During involvement, participants might increase their professional or personal knowledge, research skills, or evaluation
understanding. Credited with being the first evaluator to define process use, Patton’s (2008) most current definition includes:

Individual changes in thinking, attitudes, and behaviour, and program or organizational changes in procedures and culture that occur among those involved in evaluation as a result of the learning that occurs during the evaluation process. (p. 155)

Although he was the first to define this concept and has developed many renderings of his ideas, evaluators acknowledge that process use is a concept filtered throughout the historical literature of the profession. Jennifer Greene (1998) may have been the first to identify connections between evaluation utilization and stakeholder participation. Process use is now recognized as a central feature in collaborative, participatory, utilization-focused, and learning-oriented approaches to evaluation (e.g., Alkin & Taut, 2003; Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lee, 2004; Preskill, Zuckerman, & Matthews, 2003). There are myriad characteristics that promote process use in participatory evaluations (Cousins & Earl, 1995; Cousins & Chouinard, 2012; J. Greene, 1998). A participatory orientation extends opportunities for learning, collaboration, and communication, while also providing possibilities for conceptual, instrumental, and symbolic process use. I use data from the evaluation to explore each of the three types of use.

**Conceptual use.** An evaluation that informs or educates how participants think about evaluation or their program has conceptual use. As Fleischer and Christie (2009) indicate, conceptual changes help key stakeholders to understand the program in a new way. Conceptual change is part of the invitation I described in the earlier values chapter. By provoking conceptual changes, evaluators and researchers can ultimately contribute to shifts in human understanding.
Facilitating arts-informed inquiry as an aspect of a program evaluation is one way to evoke liveliness, creativity, and wonder. Devereaux (1991) reminded us that art can teach us by allowing us to see familiar experiences in new and unfamiliar ways. Blending the arts within an evaluative inquiry enhances opportunities for conceptual use by offering different ways to engage participants imaginatively, through embodiment, or by using active processes that stimulate their senses. During this evaluation and research, I documented changes related to the expression of ideas, elaborative thinking, focused perception or noticing, and the development of empathy, compassion, and confidence. I have identified three main conceptual uses: (a) invoking a sense of wonder; (b) cultivating openness; and (c) optimizing relationships.

**Invoking a sense of wonder.** With all of the participants involved, I had hoped to do more than simply conduct an evaluation, or collect data about a program. I wanted to facilitate an experience that would engage and provoke conceptual use. One example of this featured a Research and Assessment Manager who began this process with a cautious approach toward this dissertation. At the end of the journey, he was able to convey a sense of wonder. Two years later, he hired me to infuse this evaluative thinking and arts-informed inquiry into their practices at the board.

To be honest, I am not sure how I would do it. I don’t understand it well enough to know how to incorporate it…we should be open to those other formats. You get kind of comfortable with certain things. One of the things we face here is our depth on topics and techniques isn’t deep, but it is broad. (Meta-evaluation interview, March 30, 2011) Depth and breadth always seem to be at odds with each other in education. During the Tribes evaluation project, I had the luxury of making a commitment to both. My experience taught me how the arts can provide a surprising access to depth even when time with participants is limited.
to a few hours. I believe this is because it is a novel format, leaving participants less guarded and therefore better able to describe their cognitive and emotive reactions.

With all participant groups, I use multiple forms of arts-informed inquiry to give voice to *Tribes* implementation experiences, generate opportunities for dialogue, and spark new ways of thinking. As an integral part of this process, the Learning Coordinators saw it enacted with many different stakeholders, thus enabling them to comment on the role of arts-informed inquiry throughout this process:

The arts process is just, I think, wherever you begin with it and what you find out from your first activity or task helps you decide where you can go from there … however it speaks to you is okay. Here I am. It’s good you know, and it’s not about the right answers. You don’t feel like you are being tested. This is much more abstract than that; it just really involves thinking and feeling about what makes sense. (Learning Coordinator, January 8, 2010)

The Learning Coordinator described how she saw the arts unfolding within an evaluation context and the possibilities it represented for others. Nussbaum (1997) examines “habits of wonder promoted by storytelling [that] define the other person as spacious and deep, with qualitative differences from oneself and hidden places worthy of respect” (p. 90). Something rich and interesting happens when data collection draws us out of ourselves, focusing our attention and challenging us to wonder.

As a teacher, I learned that I could evoke a sense of wonder by simply rearranging the room, interrupting the patterns of the established or the expected. I did the same thing with the teachers involved in this evaluation; I removed tables, created stations, and set up circles. These minimal changes physically created spaces for congregating in the room and captivated their
attention from the moment they entered. On a feedback form, one teacher revealed, “I was reminded of how I can reinforce community simply by greeting my students, being ready for them, and enthusing positivity, thank you” (Feedback form, January 18, 2010). Of course, captivating them as they enter is not enough. As evaluators, researchers, or educators, we must work to infuse and sustain this energy. Another teacher divulged, “I have been in a slump, there is no time to share or reflect in my classroom. This afternoon I got lots of ideas about how I can change that” (Feedback form, February 8, 2010). Teachers were describing enlightenment that had culminated from our shared experience. The Learning Coordinators noticed this way of bringing people together:

When we visited different tables, they were having some really deep conversations about what Tribes meant to them and there were some surprises. I think they enjoyed sharing their points of view and they felt really great to connect with one another, they risked a lot in those conversations but they got a lot of feedback. (Learning Coordinators, Interview, February 22, 2010)

The sharing sessions inspired a sense of wonder; they also used arts-informed methods to provide data for the evaluation.

Success with arts-informed inquiry comes from carefully employed freedom with exploration. One Learning Coordinator reflected that “the session was more structured and I wasn’t sure if that was a good thing. But it really gave us a better understanding of what is going on in these classrooms and what challenges the teachers are facing,” while another Learning Coordinator added, “and it was fun” (Interview, February 22, 2010). Enhancing opportunities for learning during the course of an evaluation can positively shape attitudes and inspire. Fisher (1998) integrated wonder and learning while describing how “to notice a phenomenon, to pause
in thought before it, link it by explanation into the fabric of the ordinary” (p. 55, cited in McCarthy, 2004). Striving for Fisher’s sense of wonder to enhance conceptual use seems similar to embracing Dewey’s (1934, ed. 1980) concept about finding the extraordinary in the ordinary. Participatory processes that use arts-informed inquiry in an evaluation alter forms of engagement by focusing our attention and generating opportunities to embrace a sense of wonder.

**Optimizing relationships.** Another way I had hoped to enhance conceptual use was through the optimization of relationships with stakeholders and participants. I worked most closely with the Learning Coordinators and Trainers, so it is not surprising to note that the data I have speaks primarily to their conceptual changes.

Many months into the evaluation process, one of the Learning Coordinators commented, “we love talking with you, you’ve already given us so many suggestions and ideas we had not thought of” (Interview, January 8, 2010). Our relationship allowed them to have a “fresh set of eyes” (November 26, 2009) on the program. At one point they explained, “we haven’t evaluated this program earlier because it needed to go beyond the quantitative and we didn’t know how” (Interview, October 27, 2009). In my commonplace book, I wrote about the palpable energy, enthusiasm, and forthright exchanges that took place (December 28, 2009). Our relationship grew even deeper when the Learning Coordinators got to experience how arts-informed inquiry integrated communication and data to speak to their Tribes experiences. This was primarily accomplished by using processes that were relational yet individual and succeeded by blending intellectual with emotional. After seeing the arts-informed processes in action, one Learning Coordinator explained:

For me personally, I know that all the surveys and quantitative data are very important. Everybody talks about that and we know that if you can’t measure your goals directly
you shouldn’t be doing whatever it is. It sounds like that, quite often at least, in the world of education. This, Tribes, though, it is a process that is harder to measure. We want to understand the process. I am excited that we are using different methods; these are ideas that are rooted in Tribes and they really get people talking. (Interview, January 8, 2010)

Learning Coordinators were uniquely positioned to witness how arts-informed inquiry shaped interactions. After observing the arts-informed inquiry with Trainers and teachers, one of the Learning Coordinators commented, “I guess part of this is, with the arts, the whole thing is experiential, you are doing something together, you know, sharing, each person may be doing their own thing but they’re working together at the same time” (Interview, February 22, 2010).

Optimizing my relationship with the Learning Coordinators enabled me to foster conceptual use by promoting learning, reflection, and engagement. While I am not suggesting these ideas are unique to arts-informed inquiry, I do propose that the presence of arts-informed inquiry, a relatively new phenomenon, heightened the potential for dialogue, clarification, and thinking in ways that enhanced conceptual use.

I also emphasized the development of deeper relationships with the Trainers to ensure there was an interest and commitment for understanding the program. Trainers were involved at multiple points and seemed interested in arts-informed inquiry as a method for understanding. The evaluation had the capacity to bring Trainers and Learning Coordinators together to renew their focus on the program. The Learning Coordinators described how this time together was different; it interrupted their normal routines and reinforced their shared purpose. Opportunities for shared dialogue and honest reflection enhanced conceptual use by provoking wonder, optimizing relationships and cultivating openness.
**Cultivating openness.** A recent article by Harnar & Preskill (2007) guided my thinking about evaluators who are committed to an engaged and open process. Although my priority was taking advantage of the opportunity to research the role of arts-informed inquiry in an evaluation, my underlying goal was to remain open and respectful of the decision-making processes. In meetings as well as in email communications, I strived to find ways to provide information about evaluation processes that would enable the stakeholders to make informed decisions as we moved along. The Research and Assessment Manager commented, “there is no question I’ve seen the change over the year in terms of the questions that they are asking … It’s more sophisticated questions that they’re asking and it’s deeper; it’s about implementation and outcome” (Meta-evaluation interview, March 30, 2011). Being positioned within the evaluation, yet slightly apart from the day-to-day dealings, provided an interesting vantage point to ascertain subtle shifts in the evaluation. I discovered that cultivating openness requires a fine balance between leading the process and loosening control to share in the questioning.

An example of how participants responded to this openness emerged during the piloting of the data collection strategies at my home. The Learning Coordinators described the process of our evaluation by selecting an image, while one reflected:

I hope I am not that woman, but you know, this evaluation has kind of overwhelmed me when thinking about how we will take an honest look at what Tribes really is all about. I really want have a big picture to look at but I do not have any idea how to manage that. I have this idea in my head of how to measure things, you know, linear and more confined and I guess the rest of the picture for me is, as much as this is troublesome, the rest of my thinking is stuck. I don’t know how we can do that type of evaluation and show people
what matters about it. In my heart I believe it is good, but that is not enough, right?

(Interview, December 15, 2009)

Figure 37. Trapped and Looking for Help

The trapped woman was a metaphor for anxiety that she felt as we embarked on this open evaluation process. She expressed how she felt that neither her heart nor her intuitive, expressive, and observational way of knowing was enough. I believe that Davis (2012) would argue that even that which is beyond measure still has value. In this example, the image powerfully conveyed feelings by using a symbolic metaphor to provoke a thoughtful conversation, which lasted throughout the evaluation and continues to this day. As Devereaux (1991) explains, “art is both the truth of discovering something new and the truth of recognition” (p. 65). I discovered that cultivating openness could be rather revealing. Interweaving arts-informed inquiry provides another way of identifying value beyond what can easily be measured.

Regular meetings, communications, and reflective opportunities with the Learning Coordinators benefited our learning during the process and reminded me to always stay open and
attentive to new possibilities. In one example, four of us were having lunch together when one of the Learning Coordinators said, “I would trust the arts implicitly, but the other two are wired a little bit differently; we balance each other out pretty well but they learned a lot, we all have, and we loved it” (Interview, August 26 2010). Openness was cultivated through semi-structured and ongoing communication as well as time-intensive engagement with stakeholders. By focusing on developing conceptual use during the process, I was able to expand my earlier thinking regarding the literature review from 1998–2006, where Johnson et al. (2009) identify “more than just involvement by stakeholders alone … interaction and communication between evaluation clients and evaluators is key to maximizing the use of evaluations in the long run” (p. 389). I sought to involve stakeholders, but even more important was my intention to use arts-informed inquiry as a way to encourage open, embodied, honest, and sensorial experiences.

Infusing arts-informed inquiry into the process of this evaluation allowed us to introduce wonder, heighten relationships, and encourage openness; it was a rich and rewarding process. Despite this, conceptual changes may seem less concrete than the instrumental ones identified because they do not result in direct action. The story of this evaluation formally stopped when we submitted and presented the report (September 20, 2010). However, in many other ways, the story still continues.

In May 2012, I was hired by this school board to work in Research and Assessment Services. My work has continued on, and today it specifically focuses on a collaborative project between Research and Assessment Services and Safe Schools. This opportunity has offered me a unique chance to observe conceptual changes over time. There has been positive support for elaborative thinking and experimentation with new ideas that use multiple modalities. Very recently, the Research and Assessment has begun a departmental renewal process, resulting at
least in part from some of the questions we are asking and ideas we are exploring. I am not suggesting that either my work at the school board or this latest renewal are a direct result of the *Tribes* evaluation. Instead, I suggest that one case study of arts-informed inquiry has influenced a willingness to explore other ways of learning as well as different ways of working with stakeholders.

**Instrumental Use**

During the process of an evaluation, instrumental use occurs when actions directly inform decision making, taking action, or solving a problem (McCormick, 1997). During the evaluation process, the Learning Coordinators articulated how “you ask a lot of really good questions; it has helped us to think about the way we do things” (Interview, December 15, 2009). Learning Coordinators were able to make connections that led them to rethink and modify the program, training, and their interactions with Trainers. These instrumental changes happened almost simultaneously, even though they have been described here in a linear and narrative fashion.

We started the evaluation process by taking a closer look at the program training. Data was already being collected at training sessions to contribute to external accountability, but it was not being used for actual school board purposes. Once we identified how this data could be used to meet additional purposes, changes were made to the structure, allowing data to be collected at the training. When I broached this idea of dual purposing with the Learning Coordinators, they realized that “we collect all this data for CentreSource but we never thought of using it for ourselves; we aren’t really sure how to, but it would make sense” (Interview, November 26, 2009). As a result of our modifications, the Learning Coordinators had access to quantitative as well as qualitative items from participants during and immediately following training. One of the qualitative items was an image-based identification question. A Learning
Coordinator explained how “everybody learns in different ways, right. You’re not going to get the same information from everybody by giving a generic question you know … this opens up the extent of the information we’re going to get” (Interview, December 7, 2009). The revised instrument allowed the Learning Coordinators to meet the licensing agency’s needs as well as to gather some context-specific data within their school board.

Prior to implementation, I provided Trainers with instructions regarding the effective administration and efficient reading of the instrument. I intended to invite them to identify patterns or themes that might have an immediate impact in their training while also identifying feedback that could populate an ongoing database of responses. One Trainer who had piloted the forms in December commented, “I liked having a look at those because it gave me a better chance to get to know my group and find out what they needed” (Trainer focus group, January 14, 2010). Ultimately, this data led to further changes such as the identification of the teachers’ desire to have division-specific training.

Participants wanted training beyond the basic certification and they requested increased differentiation between elementary and secondary classrooms. Many teachers also identified a desire for more members within their school community to be trained, which would allow them to share resources and ideas. These requests resulted in two things that happened during the evaluation: (a) the high school training package was purchased from CentreSource; and (b) a pilot, whole school training was conducted at a secondary school (February, 2010). Although we did not collect any data from the high school pilot, the Learning Coordinators identified this as an ideal place to conduct a future case study. Further, as a result of the data compiled, the Learning Coordinators approached the Trainers regarding the possibility of offering new division level training.
Incorporating new training allowed the Learning Coordinators to refine their thinking regarding how the Trainers were organized. Trainers were provided a choice and could either remain a basic trainer or take additional professional development and become certified as a specialized trainer for middle school or high school divisions. Many trainers were excited about this opportunity and as the group talked about it, I could see that the offer of additional professional development had a rejuvenating effect (Commonplace book, January 14 2010). They decided to use the introduction of the new program, as well as the possibility for additional programs as a way to refine a commitment from the Trainers.

Prior to meeting with Trainers, the Learning Coordinators noted that “it is really hard to get the Trainers in here; many have moved into leadership roles and are assuming new positions and it is just not as easy for them to come in” (Interview, January 8, 2010). When the possibility of additional certification was discussed, the Learning Coordinators made a natural progression to talking about the commitment of leading training. They also identified a desire for Trainers who were also classroom teachers to enhance the opportunity for an authentic connection between the Trainers and participants, who were largely teachers. The Trainers were receptive to these suggestions resulting in much discussion (Commonplace book, January 14, 2010). As a result of these conversations taking place during the evaluation process, the Learning Coordinators and Trainers took a closer look at the programs offered as well as the commitment required. The evaluation process led to immediate instrumental use by offering a chance to extend skills and a process for systematic reflection, all while modeling data-informed decision making.
Symbolic Use

Symbolic use is also referred to in the literature as persuasive or legitimate use. Owen and Rogers (1999) describe symbolic use as an evaluation that is undertaken when the stakeholders have no intention of using it. Many theorists have suggested that symbolic use occurs when the rhetoric of evaluation is more important that the evaluation itself (Alkin & Taut, 2003; Fleischer & Christie, 2009). Regardless of the name used to describe it, there is usually a negative association made in the literature (Patton, 2008). Despite this, Ryan and Cousins (2009) identified that “more recently, evaluators have suggested the legitimacy of using evaluation to support an existing position” (p. 61). Considering this potentially legitimizing role, the presence of symbolic evaluation use can certainly be viewed more positively. The presence of the evaluation, as an applied form of research, bypassed the usual barriers. The reciprocal learning opportunities created from the evaluation focus of this research provided access into stakeholder and participant groups that might not have otherwise been possible.

Symbolic use also supported the position of mixed methods as a form of inquiry. As stated earlier, the main type of research undertaken at this school board is quantitative survey based; the presence of an evaluation that was using other strategies was of interest to program decision makers, participants, and the research department. Initially, interest may have been attributed to the timing of the first provincial policy in assessment and evaluation, Growing Success (Ministry of Education, 2010). This document calls for attention to qualitative processes such as anecdotal, observation, and dialogical, as ways to assess students. Some teacher participants expressed a desire to participate in this evaluation as well as the recognition of an opportunity to learn more about how to enact these new assessment practices. One of the teachers in whose classroom I collected data stated, “I know you want to learn more about the
program and I can help you do that, but I am hoping you can help me to learn more about how to use alternative processes in my classroom” (Interview, December 17, 2009). In this instance, the teacher was less interested in the evaluation and more interested in the potential for her own professional development.

A final characteristic of symbolic use was further illuminated in conversations with the Learning Coordinators. During the process, Learning Coordinators were always thoughtful about the ways the evaluation would be perceived by others. As an example of this, consider that one Coordinator stated how “for the most part it is important that we figure out if we should carry on…. it is also important to us that you do a thorough job” (Interview, December 7, 2009). Anecdotal evidence obtained by the Learning Coordinators, prior to my involvement, suggested that people who did not know the program experientially may have perceived that it was an overly affective, prescriptive, alternative program for use in elementary school classrooms. The Learning Coordinators expressed hope that a researcher from a reputable, external educational institution would be able to show that the program had more value (Interview, November 26, 2009). Without an engaging process and credible findings, the evaluation might only have provided symbolic justification for a program decision. Instead, the evaluation went beyond symbolic use; the process of the evaluation has invited stakeholders within a large organizational system to take a closer look at a district-wide program, as well as the way evaluation is conducted.

When used properly, evaluation findings as well as the process itself can both be powerful tools for social change. Maxine Greene (2001) suggested that imagination is an expansive place of “resisting fixities, seeking the openings” (p. 22). This reminds me of the space generated by arts-informed inquiry in the Tribes program evaluation, useful findings
derived from a meaningful process. This chapter documented ways that arts-informed inquiry was useful for stakeholders, participants, and audiences. I hope to continue crafting processes and products that awaken possibilities for understanding and stimulate the capacity for imagination. Dewey (1934, ed. 1980) called imagination a “blending of interests where the mind comes in contact with the world” (p. 237). Moving forward, I would like to encourage this blending of systematic processes with arts-informed inquiry, so that others can marvel at its possibilities for program evaluation, while seeing real value generated from expansive opportunities for reflection and reaction. Preskill (2008) remarks:

I believe evaluation creates the potential for creativity, innovation, change, new energy, and a better future. Although ambiguity and the unknown can be unsettling and at times downright scary, the alternative is certainty, which often results in stagnation, negativity, and arrogance. (p. 137–138)

I echo her beliefs and believe that using arts-informed inquiry in evaluation is another way to uncover the potential for meaning-making and engage people in thinking and feeling, as well as to promote learning, growth, or change. Arts-informed inquiry has proven its ability to positively emphasize the usefulness of program evaluation.
Figure 38. A Sentiment for the Program and this Evaluation

A Trainer created Figure 38 in a response to a question about the outcome of program implementation, but it could just as easily have been created as a keyword for arts-informed inquiry in program evaluation. In the process of this research and the representation of ideas, I have considered many facets of evaluation. The first question in the figure aptly asks, “Where do I begin?” and offers useful advice to anyone who is trying a new idea, to “take small steps.” Using arts-informed inquiry requires layers of trust. Evaluators must trust in themselves and find their voices amidst a plethora of theories, approaches, and models. In addition, evaluators must also develop trusting relationships with others. My experiences as an evaluator and an educator suggest that people do not often feel very trusting when it comes to evaluation; using arts-informed
inquiry offers one way to change that. Evaluation itself can be anxiety provoking; involving the arts could affect this negatively or positively. In performing this research on evaluation, I found that when trust exists between those involved, arts-informed inquiry works in concert with other approaches to minimize anxiety and maximize learning through engagement. A third layer of trust revealed to me by this research is the ability to trust the process, useful advice in this program specifically, and also more generally in the work of an evaluator–researcher who is using arts-informed inquiry.

The arts align with values already present in the field of evaluation; they offer an additional way of seeing and understanding that can add new dimensions to our work as evaluators. Eisner (2008a) said, “the arts are a way of enriching our awareness and expanding our humanity” (p. 11). Seeing how evaluation can perform a service for society by looking holistically at participants and programs is significant. The uses of arts-informed strategies within evaluations are not intended to replace more traditional participatory approaches. Instead, this research shows that arts-informed inquiry has the potential to extend possibilities in evaluation by bringing together information in ways that offer unique and meaningful insight within the context of educational program evaluations.

This final chapter shares my discoveries about the unique ways arts-informed inquiry in evaluation, addresses questions and issues that are informed by artistic processes not rooted in the arts. Although this distinction may seem subtle, I believe it is significant and may make artistic modes of inquiry more palatable within the field of evaluation. This research examines the power of integrating arts-informed inquiry with participatory and responsive approaches to evaluation for the purpose of making sense of
how a program is working as well as sharing that sense-making. I have discovered that evaluation, research, and arts practices share overlapping processes and goals, including the need for creativity, innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness, as well as the willingness to work and create with/for diverse audiences. This chapter looks at the research holistically, to provide a discussion focused on three areas: (a) growth of the arts in evaluation research; (b) positioning of arts-informed inquiry; and (c) finally, expansion of knowledge.

**Growth of the Arts in Research and Evaluation**

*Come to the edge, he said.*

*We are afraid, they said.*

*Come to the edge, he said.*

*They came to the edge,*

*He pushed them and they flew.*

—Guillaume Apollinaire

Working with the arts in evaluation has the potential to bring us to the edge of what we know, or what we think we understand. Experiences of learning and the arts exist in the philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle as well as more recent education contemporaries such as Pestalozzi, Montessori, Steiner, or Dewey. The scope of their contributions provides a window into early developments, which offer a necessary foundation for the emergence and subsequent expansion of arts-based educational research (ABER). Surprisingly, Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) suggested “there were few, if any, explicit references to the arts in research before 1980. As to artistic products, there
were fewer still” (p. 5). The explosion of work in the ABER field since 1980 continues to document its potential. Cahnmann-Taylor and Siegesmund and (2008)said, “arts-based educational research is capable of reflecting the resonance of lived experience by refocusing attention on the interplay between non-symbolic and symbolic meaning to form understanding” (p. 244). Although the foci of ABER and arts-informed inquiry are different, the expansion and recognition provides a foundation for my work. My research extends this body of work by offering an explicit reference to artistic processes as well as representations using the lens of arts-informed inquiry within a program evaluation.

Pivotal thinkers, such as Maxine Greene (1995), Eisner (1997, 1998, 2008a, 2008b), and Barone (2001) have made seminal contributions to thinking about the values, contexts, processes, qualities and possibilities stemming from the arts. In this research, I drew from their work as well as other scholars who have added their voices to this dynamic field.

The value issues that [M.] Greene continually wrote about could not be resolved with empirical evidence alone … educational practitioners must confront and make sense of considerable contextual variation, and this contextual variation both limited the utility of social scientists’ abstract generalizations and theories (see, e.g., Cronbach, 1982) and led for calls for contextualized knowledge that practitioners could heuristically use rather than formulaically …. (Donmoyer and Yennie-Donmoyer, 2008, p. 211)

From the outset of this research, I acknowledged that evaluation is an applied field where context plays a role. One of my research questions asked, what contexts were appropriate for arts-informed inquiry? Part of providing meaningful understanding is recognizing
that not all contexts are suitable for this type of inquiry (Eisner, 1993, 1997; Ewing & Hughes, 2008). Many contexts are appropriate, but an evaluator must be aware of multiple considerations before and during arts-informed inquiry. I found that working with arts-informed inquiry enhances understanding of context by creating spaces that foster connection, stimulate reflection, and promote understanding.

Arts-informed inquiry within this program evaluation generated activities that emphasized learning through process while also recognizing that learning takes place over time. In this research, as well as in my subsequent work with this district, I learned about the importance of accounting for history, learning from multiple perspectives, embracing inclusion, and honouring participant voices. These values are already present in the field of evaluation and are shared by those who work with arts in scientific contexts, including (a) making use of tools from sciences as well as arts in developing understanding during all phases of research projects; (b) recognition of the influence of the researcher-researched position; (c) enlarging and diversifying audiences for research while nurturing new and ongoing conversations within the research community (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008). While these values may not be unique to arts methodologies, they do provide a way to re-frame traditional processes and forms of representation, opening possibilities for new understanding and joint construction of meaning.

Positioning of Arts-Informed Inquiry

Arts-informed inquiry emerged as a response for the need to go beyond art-making while remaining attentive to the qualities of art form and interpretive elements. Knowles, Cole, & Promislow (2008) described how “the work nudges at the boundaries of research conventions, extending notions about process and representation, it creates
spaces where new and wider audiences can access the articulation of new knowledge” (p. 2). In the first of four Backalong books published in a series about arts-informed inquiry, researchers Cole, Knowles, and Nielsen (2001) identified that they were more interested in spreading ideas about arts-informed inquiry than they were in detailing the distinctions in naming and labelling. Yet, in the fourth text in the series, Knowles, Promislow, and Cole (2008) articulated the need to attend to the responsibility “of articulating the nuance of meanings, purposes, and processes” (p. 4). A central distinction described throughout their work as well as by others who work with these ideas, is one of commitment and flexibility. As Ewing and Hughes (2008) explained:

   The art is not an end in itself—it forms an integral part of the research design or a tool in the inquiry process to collect and/or analyse and/or represent data … arts-informed inquiry is therefore not to be conflated with “the arts” there must be critique, interpretation or interpretive understanding beyond the subject of one’s inquiry. (pp. 515-516)

The quality of the art remains an ongoing debate in the research community. In this evaluation and research, I followed Finley’s (2005) idea that the attention is not directed towards the art but is instead focused on the process. One consequence of this focus is that the art made as part of the process of a program evaluation does not need to attend to the same aesthetic qualities as art that has been created simply for art’s sake. The art made during the course of this evaluation and research did consider aesthetic elements, focusing mainly on expressiveness. Ewing and Hughes described this interpretation as “expressive construction” (p. 516). Art is created as part of a reflective process, to communicate understanding, share experiences, and/or reveal beliefs. This aligns with
Knowles, Promislow and Cole’s (2008) idea that the art should be a catalyst with potential for making a difference. In my work using arts-informed inquiry in this program evaluation, I vocalized respect for the arts and the various ways it can enrich our lives and inform understanding.

This flexible and expansive nature of arts-informed inquiry relies on artistic form(s) and process(es) alongside text as a way of “transcending literal and linear interpretations” (Ewing & Hughes, 2008). Applying arts-informed inquiry within this program evaluation led to overlapping stages of data collection, analysis, and dissemination, so that one phase influenced another. Framing evaluative inquiry in this way allowed this intermingling to bring forward the evocative and expressive nature of the program. Barone and Eisner (2006) described the potential for this versatility as the “enhancement of perspectives” (p. 96). In this evaluation work, I applied the practice of arts-informed inquiry by working with artful descriptions and vivid portrayals of an educational program in context.

**Principles and Practices of Arts-Informed Inquiry**

Arts-informed inquiry provided me with a way to reveal the complexities of one educational program while bringing forward the nuances within a program evaluation. The principles and practices of arts-informed inquiry provide a fluid approach when used within an evaluation context. In my experience, this approach recognizes and appreciates that there are multiple ways of knowing, reflecting, and sharing how we know. Finding more ways to engage in evaluative inquiry offers further opportunities to disseminate what we learn, making it more likely evaluators can stimulate reflective thinking and learning. This argument suggests that applying the principles and practices of arts-
informed inquiry within program evaluation offers evaluators a complementary way to augment their skills.

The next section examines empirical evidence from this research as well as theoretical ideas related to each of the principles of arts-informed inquiry. Cole and Knowles (2008) identified six principles of arts-informed inquiry: (a) form, (b) methodological integrity, (c) creative inquiry process, (d) presence of the researcher, (e) strong reflexive elements, and (f) audience. Imagining, enacting, and reflecting on this dimensionality provides a strong foundation for understanding the application of these tenets within an evaluation context and serves as a way to bring together key ideas from across this research.

**Form** The beauty of form as a defining element is its simplicity. At the most basic level, form refers to a commitment to an art form or forms (Cole & Knowles, 2008). It is the medium of imaginative or creative self-expression, the modality, genre, or medium shaping the inquiry. Form is a distinctive element because it shapes and ultimately denotes the creative research processes and representations that separate it from other, more conventional types of inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 2006). In this inquiry I focused on using multiple forms that could elicit information and represent understandings discovered through the inquiry process. Arts-informed inquiry provided opportunities for detailed and thoughtful communication of ideas and concepts that enabled the conceding of experiences’ complexity.

If we are to enhance the potential breadth of understanding, or authentically convey the sensorial qualities of an experience, the forms used in the process of evaluations must be extended to encompass process and representation. Eisner (1993)
suggested that arts “give us insights that inform us in the special ways that only artistically rendered forms make possible” (p. 7). I followed this thinking in the final report, so that the arts would not only display what is known, but also generate new ways for how the program can be understood.

If there are different ways to understand the world, and if there are different forms that make such understanding possible, then it would seem to follow any comprehensive effort to understand the processes and outcomes … would profit from a pluralistic rather than a monolithic approach. (Eisner, 1993 p. 8)

Using multiple modalities made the final report visually appealing, but the use of artistic forms served more than a decorative function. During the process, different forms allowed for accessing different types of understanding and drawing out diverse participants. In collaboration with a graphic designer to decide on how to best represent the final report, I discovered how much skill is required to attend to and enhance artful qualities in the representation. I needed to remain conscious of, and responsive to, the forms of the inquiry as well as the shapes of the representation that met the needs of the intended audiences for the evaluation.

I have realized that form is both discovered and developed. Discoveries of form may emerge when the data are collected. Arts-informed inquiry becomes useful when evaluators have the ability to develop, engage in, and make sense of artistic forms. This ability is developed through collaboration or by experience with that form. An arts-informed researcher must possess “a willingness to be inspired by the arts” (Sameshima & Knowles, 2008, p. 109). While there were multiple forms available for consideration, forms I have already used before this evaluation offered me the greatest possibilities for
expression. My experiences guided me in “the creative meshing of scholarly and artistic
dependents” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 65). If an evaluator possesses imagination but
does not have experience in a particular area, piloting forms before data collection is
valuable. In this research, piloting provided me with a valuable opportunity to collect
data about the program from my clients. In addition, piloting also provided the clients
with an opportunity to experience, see, and feel the genres of data collection proposed.
Our shared willingness to explore form together strengthened our relationship and
understanding.

Choices of form(s) can provide scope for extending or limiting understanding as
well as enhancing or limiting evaluator credibility. Solnit (2001) described how “form is
to content as spirit is to matter” (p. 52). In other words, the essence of our evaluative
work is revealed through the shape of our inquiry. Cole and Knowles (2008) stated, “the
relationship between and among research purposes related to knowledge advancement
and research communication, art form, and the artist-researchers’ grounding in and
developing expertise/competence with the chosen art form is key” (p. 62). The visual and
textual forms we use reflect the spirit of the evaluator as well as the substance of the
evaluation. I believe that this evaluation process and report says that I am an evaluator,
researcher, and educator who is passionate, innovative, and dedicated. Essentially,
whether you are working from the lens of a researcher or evaluator, using artistic forms
or other forms of engagement, the message is clear: form matters because different types
of forms allow for different kinds of interpretations.

Methodological integrity. This principle reflects coherence between the chosen
art form or forms, the framework of inquiry, and the phenomena under investigation.
Coles and Knowles (2008) described this as “the relationship between form and substance of the research text and the inquiry process related to the text” (p. 61). In this research, methodological integrity was exemplified because the rationale for using multiple forms provided a unique way to illuminate a complex program while also revealing how different stakeholders experience the program.

This element provides an alternative way of framing ideas about internal consistency. Rather than looking for the ability to replicate research or at the specific precision of an instrument, methodological integrity takes a holistic view. Sameshima and Knowles (2008) explained the importance of creating and presenting work that benefits “the study and the topic, as well as the purposes and people involved and the processes employed” (p. 109). In this case study, you can see this element reflected in the findings and representation; stakeholders and audiences described the evaluation as fitting the program, being believable, and easy to understand. Attending to methodological integrity enhances the authenticity of the work by revealing “truthfulness and sincerity in the research relationship, the process of inquiry, interpretation, and representational form” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 67). These questions of truthfulness, integrity, and veracity remind me of when Guba & Lincoln (2005) asked the question, “can our co-created constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon?” (p. 206). In this evaluation, methodological integrity was evidenced through a move away from more traditional constructs of validity, towards qualities of goodness found by integrating arts-informed inquiry. These qualities of goodness are described differently by each qualitative researcher but generally encompass ideas of relevance, coherence, verisimilitude, and justifiability. In the
practice of this evaluation, the qualities of goodness were founded on the interaction between context and artful possibilities, meaningfully creative processes balanced with attentive noticing, pushing for innovation while carefully attending to the rendering of experiences.

**The creative inquiry process.** This principle refers to the need for innovation, openness, and imagination. Kelly and Leggo (2008) described the underpinnings of creativity and language associated with it; they connect to what is original, new, and novel. A creative inquiry process is a fluid, inductive, social process that engages individuals. By using creative and imaginative strategies in tandem with more conventional forms of data collection, participants were able to see beyond their individual, everyday experiences (Sullivan, 2005). Within an evaluation context, the creative inquiry process positions the promise of imagination as a way to reflect on experiences, listen to intuition, and merge feeling with doing. As Maxine Greene (2001) described, the arts allow us to “uncouple from the ordinary” and delve into the rich complexity that surrounds us (p. 67). Bringing creative strategies into evaluation processes and representations conveys new energy, enthusiasm, and ways of seeing.

I experienced how adherence to this principle alters the relationship between the researcher and participants. In this evaluation as well as in my continued work with this district, my efforts are characterized by promoting joint engagement through a creative inquiry process. As Cole and Knowles (2008) described:

Rather than adhering to a rigid set of guidelines for gathering and working with research material, a researcher using an arts-informed process follows a more natural process of engagement relying on common sense decision making,
intuition, and a general responsiveness to the flow of events and experiences. (p. 61)

The creative inquiry process breaks through routine and convention, but also requires cession of some control to cultivate and celebrate the area of focus. The use of arts in my evaluation practice is a deliberate attempt to balance the judgmental and potentially limiting aspects of work in this field, by staying open to perceptions and possibilities.

This open process reminds me of Stake’s (1973) responsive evaluation as well as the questioning smile Stake himself gave me when I shared my concept of program evaluation and spaces of possibility while serving as Co-Chair of the Edward F. Kelly Conference (2005). Since then, I have come to understand that arts-informed inquiry and responsive program evaluation are two approaches that complement one another by continually putting the client, stakeholders, and primary goals of the evaluation at the forefront of decision making. In this research, the creative inquiry process brought together head and heart as well as concept and feeling, in processes that fuse imagination with knowledge. The spirit and passion of the researcher-evaluator is focused towards cultivating creativity by navigating scholarship and critical reflection.

**The presence of the researcher.** Who we are in qualitative evaluation and research work matters. The presence of the researcher is aligned with subjective qualitative approaches that recognize the research and researcher as interwoven (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this case, where arts-informed inquiry is intentionally brought to the field of evaluation, the presence of the researcher is modified to encompass the position of the evaluator. Arts-informed inquiry in evaluation includes the evaluator’s artistry and even brings it to the forefront. Cole and Knowles (2008) described this as
“conceptual artistry and creative and aesthetic sensibilities, not only technical skills or an externally sanctioned title of ‘artist’” (p. 61). As an arts-informed evaluator can be an evaluator, researcher, and an artist, these identities can co-exist.

Bringing arts-informed inquiry to the highly contextualized field of program evaluation, evaluators will work artfully in the ways that we engage people, shape ideas, understand experiences, and present knowledge. We can collaborate, so that artists’ representations of programmatic experiences inform thinking and make contributions to evaluative work. A researcher-evaluator must have enough courage to take risks and cope with ambiguity while still meeting the needs of clients as well as stakeholders.

Although integrating artistic processes may be a new role for some evaluators, it is not the first time evaluators’ roles have expanded. In 1978, Alkin began his speech at the Exposition for Measurement and Evaluation by asking his audience “not to applaud too wildly, or to stamp your feet or to otherwise show indecent appreciation … ” when he suggested that the evaluator become an integrated information specialist working along-and-inside the program. Even though the field of evaluation historically dealt with measurement from a less personal and emotive stance, our current understanding of complexity in social programming has made us ready to engage with the participatory, emotive, and idiosyncratic qualities that are part of the field of program evaluation. During this evaluation, I realized that evaluator-researchers must be fully present, conscious of the dynamics of an organization, reflecting on the role that they play or the work that they do, while also being attentive to opening spaces of possibility. These spaces of possibility might enable capacity building, social betterment and policy shaping as well as listening to and witnessing individual experiences.
I discovered that if evaluation-researchers are to be “information specialists” who can design, collect, analyze, and present evaluative inquiry infused with artistic qualities, we must also be skilled at the act of noticing. Noticing is an active and informed skill that brings new and unexpected patterns or connections to the forefront (Maxine Greene, 2001). Perceiving meaning from artistic data takes time, not unlike the time invested in any detailed analysis. Allowing for time to notice, as well as having the skills to distil information, reminds me of the first stanza from Blake’s poem, “Auguries of Innocence.”

To see a world in a grain of sand,

And a heaven in a wild flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,

And eternity in an hour.

This poem focuses on the predictions or wisdom of seeing the world. Blake’s sentiments about the expansiveness of vision when you use all your sensorial and imaginative faculties are similar to Greene’s description of noticing. She (2001) explained how “if we attend from our own centres, if we are present as living, perceiving beings, there is always, always more” (p. 16). The presence of the evaluator provides a chance to see the evaluation with eyes wide and senses alive, to be fully present in the work and attentive to its nuances. Being present in the research is not an easy task; work created using the arts does not make meaning in and of itself (Ewing & Hughes, 2008). This principle recognizes skill in knowing how to envision, collect, and listen and attend to the vivid qualities brought forward when working with program data generated through arts-informed inquiry.
**Strong reflexive elements.** This tenet emphasizes the relationship between the researcher and the purpose of the research. Creswell (2003) described the role of reflexivity as the ability of the researcher to locate the self within a research context, to identify his or her inference, participation, and desires. A strong reflexive element helps to situate the researcher within the frame of the research (de Freitas, 2008). In this case, I was situated as an external researcher, who was a graduate student as well as a teacher. These combined roles and my reflective practice of writing in commonplace books provided grounding for this research.

Leavy (2009) identified the utility of engaging in cycles of analysis, by keeping a journal throughout the process. Artists commonly keep sketchbooks and my commonplace book is one of these. It helped me in this research by providing additional dimensions for the report, allowing me to review my decision making, and retracing my work for the meta-evaluation as well as this research. The existence of such a technique also serves to model the importance of reflection for stakeholders and participants, in a way that may enhance the credibility of the evaluator–researcher. My entries demonstrate strong reflexive elements because I was, and continue to be, immersed in discovering new angles that will inform my future work.

I have discovered that interpersonal qualities are required of evaluator. While reflection may not directly be one of these qualities, it has the capacity to enhance all other qualities. A reflexive evaluator can keep the work in perspective, be sensitive to the needs of others, read body language, pick up subtle cues, ask good questions, embrace diversity, and facilitate essential conversations. In this expanded view of evaluation, the
role of reflection is critical and the ability to reflect using arts-informed inquiry as a mechanism adds new possibilities for understanding.

**Audience.** This principle refers to an intentional broadening of research to include people from within and beyond the inquiry process or the scholarly community (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Leavy, 2009; Upitis, 1999). Goals of arts-informed frameworks include accessing, but also being accessible to, multiple and diverse audiences. Audience was conceptualized broadly to include the beneficiaries of the program, teachers and students, as well as the audience for the evaluation. Depending on the evaluation context, these audiences may be the same or they may differ; for example, an audience of the evaluation may be program funders, policy makers or administrators while the program beneficiaries are teachers and students. The arts play a role because audiences become engaged when they are provided with holistic ways of understanding, which offer multiple ways of seeing to include both head and heart (Eisner, 2008a; McNiff, 2008). In this case, the plethora of avenues for engaging in arts-informed inquiry provided opportunities to make the process and representations accessible to multiple audiences.

Also in this case, arts-informed inquiry addressed a necessary expansion of audience while connecting to ideas about knowledge dissemination. McLean (2012) is noted for saying, “we’re seeing increasingly people of all ages, of all income levels coming together around these arts projects, who need a voice, who want to be heard and represented in this dynamic” (author, Leung, W. Globe and Mail, paragraph 3). Quality evaluation work is one way to engage audiences in all stages of the evaluation. Yet, with a dearth of competing textual information, quality alone may not be sufficient. Arts-informed inquiry in program evaluation provides additional ways to define, devise,
approach, and represent a quality evaluation. In this evaluation, the range of art forms and multiple media for artistic exploration generated numerous possibilities in ways that were contextually appropriate and even evocative.

I have discovered that the importance of audience crosses all traditions of research, evaluation, and education. The goal of broadening audiences speaks to scholars in all fields, who are increasingly being asked to have an understanding of audience and expand their methods of dissemination to those outside of scholarly communities (Smithrim, Upitis, Meban, Patteson, 2000; Upitis 1999). The language of knowledge mobilization, transfer, and dissemination are hot terms in education at the moment, and are a key feature of the current project I am working on for this district. Arts-informed inquiry offers possibilities for enriching the exchange of knowledge because it offers audiences something unique, affective, and experiential.

The six principles identified within arts-informed inquiry position it as a mode of scholarship and a method of representation that has potential to inform other contexts. The arts can be used as a tool for opening minds and breaking down barriers by reminding us that the arts have distinct powers to release imagination toward the uncertain and extend understanding about the inquiry process as well as the social phenomena being investigated (M. Greene, 1995; Upitis, 1999). Arts-informed practice allows for “artistically crafting the description or situation so that it can been seen from another angle” (Eisner, 1997, p. 22). Avenues for accessing multiple perspectives are important in evaluative contexts where inquiry is often framed around a question or problem. Possibilities created within the growing diversity of arts-informed research provide inspiration, insights, and opportunities for the field of program evaluation.
Eisner (2002) observed that

… when perspectives on a complex matter have no chance of emerging, they cannot be taken into account. Arts-based research is a way to ensure that science-based research alone does not monopolize how educational practice can be studied or what needs to be done to describe it. (p. 213)

Although I am not advocating for the integration of arts-based research, Eisner’s sentiment could also be applied to the inclusion of arts-informed inquiry in program evaluation. Arts-informed inquiry provides a way of understanding a program and is well suited for systematically evaluating within complex dynamics.

**Expanding What Counts as Knowledge**

Defining “knowledge” is a difficult task that requires a good deal of unpacking of terminology as well as an understanding of the expansion of these terms throughout numerous historical and philosophical shifts. While we cannot travel the vast philosophical and historical schools of thought in this section, I do document key ideas that establish how expansion of the knowledge paradigm has positioned the arts as a legitimate contributor. This is more than a validation for positioning evaluation that uses strategies drawn from the arts. It also reveals a depth of understanding about how and why the arts make unique contributions. Incorporating arts into research draws on more than one semiotic system. As scholars continue to understand more about how the brain works and ways that people engage in learning, we will be able to more fully understand the kinds of contributions possible when diverse forms of engagement and representation are possible. The inclusion of arts-informed inquiry provides recognition of knowledge to which the arts can contribute. When such an approach is conducted, it yields results
differently than other forms. Finley (2005) identified that these possibilities might include: “imagination, community, and communal experience, as well as perceptual, emotional, and sensual awareness all of which contribute to the aesthetic dimensions of arts-based research” (p. 687).

Within this dissertation, the arts are conceived as a form of thinking and knowing that provide an alternative to traditional systems of acquiring knowledge. The arts use multiple and diverse methods for describing, explaining, or generating knowledge. Further cases where evaluation and arts-informed inquiry are brought together may reveal how the arts are an appropriate way to develop knowledge. As Cioran (1990) stated:

All means and methods of knowing are valid: reasoning, intuition, disgust, enthusiasm, lamentation. A vision of the world propped on concepts is no more legitimate than another which proceeds from tears, arguments, or sighs—modalities equally probing and equally vain. (p. 146)

Moving forward, evaluators and researcher know that there are many possible ways to frame how we develop knowledge. This research explores the use of artistic strategies within evaluative inquiry to demonstrate how the arts, as a form of non-propositional knowledge, make contributions to the way we understand participant experiences within a program. In the future, evaluators can explore additional means and methods of knowing.

The arts have the capacity to reveal how people learn, perceive, engage, communicate, and experience. To some, the arts may sound like a vague concept; in this evaluation research, I explored the use of artistic strategies and tools to bring programmatic experiences to life. Using artistic tools within evaluation processes has
potential to create a powerful expression of lived and embodied experience. McNiff (1998) explained how Allen’s seminal work, *Art is a Way of Knowing*, “enlarges the epistemological discourse to include distinctly artistic ways of understanding” (p. 36). Understanding what counts as knowledge has been expanded, so that the arts are now more widely accepted as a legitimate way of making unique contributions.

As a form of evaluative inquiry, artistic processes have the potential to help negotiate meanings about both the program and the evaluation, that are multiple, reflexive, contextual, dialogical, participatory, and creative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eisner, 2008a, 2008b; Finley, 2008). Embracing these qualities is important because it closely aligns with characteristics already present in the field of evaluation (J. Greene, 2001). One consequence of using evaluative inquiry in concert with arts skills and perspectives is that they can develop an opportunity for the researcher to become a functioning member of the inquiry process, to move flexibly within the inquiry, and to discover meanings concurrently with stakeholders in situ. Barone (2001) suggested that researchers need epistemological humility when working with the arts; this humility involves celebrating ambiguity and viewing knowledge and objectivity as “partial, tentative, incomplete, and sometimes even contradictory and originating from multiple vantage points” (pp. 152–153). This kaleidoscopic view is not meant to suggest that artistic forms of knowing lack scientific rigour. Nash (2004) emphasized that rigour does not have to mean rigid, but rigour can focus on being exacting, such that scientific rigour involves structuring inquiry through planning, developing, analyzing, and presenting our research. When using artistic processes, prominence is still placed on systematic processes of interpretation, analysis, and representation with an added dimension that
emphasizes using evocative forms to engage audiences during the process and representation phases of the research. Artistic processes that evoke an aesthetic reaction have a generative potential that can enhance, rather than detract from, scientific rigour (Cole & Knowles, 2008). As Eisner (2002) suggested, “the practice of science is itself an art pervaded by passion, dependent upon imagination, filled with uncertainty, and often motivated by challenge and the joy of the journey” (p. 379). The expansion of knowledge to include artistic forms and processes adds meaning to evaluative inquiry by inspiring different forms of engagement and provoking different insights about programs. This expansion echoes the potential to extend possibilities for evaluative inquiry by bringing together information in ways that offer unique and meaningful insight within the context of program evaluations.
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December 14, 2009

Michelle Searle, PhD Student
Faculty of Education
Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen's University

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-483-09
Title: “Understanding the Potential for Arts-Informed Inquiry in Evaluation”

Dear Michelle:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled “Understanding the Potential for Arts-Informed Inquiry in Evaluation” for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article Q), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB; of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (details available on webpage http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html - Adverse Event Report Form). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures on the Ethics Change Form that can be found at http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html - Research Ethics Change Form. These changes must be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca prior to implementation. Mrs. Irving will forward your request for protocol changes to the appropriate GREB reviewers and / or the GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.c.: Dr. Malcolm Welch, Chair, Unit REB
Dr. Lyn Shulha, Faculty Supervisor
E-REB: c/o Graduate Studies & Bureau of Research, Attn.: Celina Freitas
February 10, 2011

Ms. Michelle Searle
Ph.D. Candidate
Faculty of Education
Duncan McArthur Hall
Queen’s University

GREB ref. #: GEDUC-483-09
Title: “Understanding the Potential for Arts-Informed Inquiry in Evaluation”

Dear Ms. Searle:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB) has reviewed and approved your request for renewal of ethics clearance for the above-named study. This renewal is valid for one year from December 14, 2010. Prior to the next renewal date you will be sent a reminder memo and form to reapply.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB if applicable, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (details available at webpage http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html - Adverse Event Report Form). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures on the Ethics Change Form that can be found at http://www.queensu.ca/ors/researchethics/GeneralREB/forms.html – Research Ethics Change Form. These changes must be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca prior to implementation. Mrs. Irving will forward your request for protocol changes to the appropriate GREB reviewers and / or the GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c.c.: Dr. Lyn Shulha, Supervisor
Dr. Lesly Wade-Woolley, Chair, Unit REB
E-REB: c/o Graduate Studies & Bureau of Research, Attn.: Celina Caswell

JS/gi