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Reclaiming subjecthood : education and the art of quality experience

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Reclaiming subjecthood:
Education and the art of quality experience

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*Abstract**Emily Joy Sullivan*

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Education and the art of quality experience**

This essay draws on writings in education, philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and social work to articulate values for educational practice. It looks at individual development, relationship, and art as three fundamental areas of quality experience and education. Within and across these arenas, three themes repeatedly surface: attention, critical mindedness, and the balance of process and product. The essay ultimately asserts the importance of treating oneself and others as subjects, and advocates for embracing the arts as a key way to realize this overarching value in education.

Key words: Freedom, authenticity, integration, self-love, relation, critical reflection, community, art, subjectivity, experience, attention, empathy, imagination

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Introduction

For several years now, I have been interested in the intersection of education, community, and the arts. I believe in the power of communal creation to both enrich one's overall quality of life and also effect concrete change. Most of all, I believe it is an incredibly powerful way to strengthen people's connections to one another. These beliefs grew from experiences in high school and college in which I discovered that participation in group music-making brought me a new type of joy, connecting me to myself and other people. While living in South Africa and singing indigenous choral music, I experienced this connectedness more powerfully than ever, and learned a word to name it: *Ubuntu*. This southern African word actually encapsulates a whole philosophy that best translates to, "A person is a person through other people." I soon realized I wanted to share this philosophy, and deeply meaningful experiences founded on it, with others, and formulated the goal of opening a school for the arts. A mission to foster *ubuntu* through art has remained central to my sense of vocation ever since.

However, my values, beliefs and assumptions began to be problematized last summer, just a few months before I planned to begin writing an IMP on arts education. For seven weeks, I traveled through India alone, and fundamental existential questions came to the forefront of my mind. Why are we here? How are we separate and connected? What makes us feel fulfilled and happy? What gives life a sense of meaning? I wanted to know what makes life worth living, because my

previous beliefs no longer seemed sufficient. I still believed in *ubuntu*, but I knew some pieces of the puzzle were missing.

While in India, I informally explored my questions through the lenses of different spiritual and philosophical traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Existentialism. These belief systems introduced me to new concepts of self, other, and happiness. Meanwhile, experientially, traveling alone in such an unfamiliar place increased my belief in the importance of spending time alone in order to know and nourish oneself. However, traveling alone also challenged the standard of independence I previously held myself to, as it shattered the illusion that we are capable of near-independence in the modern age. I was reminded of how beholden each of us are to one another, as well as to infrastructure and the natural environment. Somewhat ironically, once I recognized what Brene Brown calls “the myth of self-sufficiency,” I actually felt stronger as an individual (2010, p. 20). Equally significantly, as I claimed both my individuality *and* my interdependence, I felt more able to engage with others and open myself up to new and meaningful connections.

Though these explorations were very personal, I soon stumbled upon a book that helped me see their deep relevance to my teaching practice. Sitting alone in cafés at the foot of the Himalayas, I read *Education and the Significance of Life* by the Indian educational philosopher Jaddu Krishnamurti (1953), and assumptions about my vocation blew open in the face of his initially radical-seeming ideas. Most of all, Krishnamurti’s assertion that it is not adults’ place to mold children to what we think they should be upended my dogged pursuit of ideal educational practices. Was there no answer to the question of what I “should” give or do for children? Was it not my

place to ask this question in the first place? I became aware of my (largely subconscious) belief that if I read, worked, and tried hard enough, I would arrive at some ultimate, universal understanding that would lead me to be a masterful, perfect educator who could give children whatever they need. Now, I was beginning to see how it might not be fair to cling to the idea of “right” answers to these questions, and then force these “shoulds” on children. Instead, I needed to relate to my students—and myself—freely and directly. It was a tall and somewhat vague order, but in a fundamental way I knew I needed to pursue this path. I already believed that children and adults deeply crave open, meaningful interactions with themselves, the environment, and other people; I was beginning to realize that individual realization and freedom needed to be complementary to that goal, and not at odds with it.

As I read and wrote about *Education and the Significance of Life*, I became excited by the thrill of ideas at once novel and resonant. However, I also faced significant fear and discomfort: I was no longer sure why I chose to educate. A new vision was emerging, but it was fuzzy at best. I felt strongly aligned with many of Krishnamurti’s ideas, but I certainly didn’t agree with (nor even understand) all of them. It was important to me to take in as many differing viewpoints and experiences as I could, and to turn a critical eye on all of them. I had taken a huge step forward, but this step made me realize I had even further to go on my journey than I thought.

Thus, although I left New York planning to write an IMP articulating my philosophy of arts education, my needs and goals had shifted by the time I returned two months later. I realized that I needed to continue reaching even deeper into the heart of what Krishnamurti called “the significance of life” in order to clarify my

philosophy of education. I wanted to take the IMP requirement as an opportunity to explore these questions more fully and formally. I wanted to finally dig into my ongoing struggle to understand how we are separate and connected, to attempt to reconcile the tension between individual and relationship that animates the personal sphere and lives at the heart of democracy. Of course, this apparent paradox lives at the heart of education, as well, for education is absolutely integral to democracy. I had gone into education—and progressive education at Bank Street, specifically—in order to contribute to and promote democracy. I wanted to serve young populations and foster their development, both for their own personal fulfillment and for the betterment of a society as a whole. Now, I was more able to examine this commitment and what it truly meant.

Given my newfound interest in individual freedom and fulfillment as the foundation for community, I decided to begin my IMP with an exploration of the individual and his/her development. I needed to ask, *What do I believe every individual has a birthright to pursue, and to be supported in by educators?* Based on what most resonated with me from *Education and the Significance of Life* and a preliminary understanding of Existentialism, I decided I wanted to learn more about freedom, authenticity and integration as goals for individual development and education. I had long believed in the importance of community to democracy and education, but I had been recently reminded of democracy's charge with protecting individual rights as well. I wanted to take this democratic imperative even further, to explore the possibility of individual fulfillment and prosperity that I strongly suspected would *strengthen* the collective, not compromise it.

Furthermore, the themes I was now committed to pursuing were not solely philosophical and abstract; I felt them playing out in my own life. (A feminist adage states, “The personal is political”; I now believe that “The personal is philosophical,” and even, “The personal is professional.”) I began to recognize ways in which I was not as free as I thought, nor were the children I was educating; there was not as much opportunity for choice as I wanted there to be. I also realized that I wanted to be more true to myself—more authentic—as I grappled with doubts about my calling as a teacher and a sense of loss at having abandoned certain parts of myself. And along those lines, in reading about Krishnamurti’s idea of integration, I finally had a word for the deep longing I had always felt for all parts of my self to be honored as meaningful parts of one whole.

I am a human being with a strong international bent, a woman with a fierce commitment to feminism and gender equality, and an artist who feels most alive while creating. I also strongly claim and love my identity as an educator. Yet while teaching, I sometimes experience conflict, especially when I feel these other identities are not being honored and expressed—that my freedom, authenticity, and integration are being compromised. I wondered how I could integrate these parts of myself and bring them into my teaching—or rather, honor the integration that was *already* there, without unnecessarily excising parts of my identity. Further reading and writing on freedom, authenticity, and integration seemed necessary to do these topics justice and understand how they relate to one another to promote individual fulfillment, thereby benefitting myself and my students.

So, freedom, authenticity, and integration were all relevant on multiple levels: to me personally, to me as a teacher, and as aims for the children I would teach. However, I still believed that an enormous part of what makes us human, and what makes our lives fulfilling and meaningful, is our relationships with other people. From observation and experience, I knew how eager most people are to connect with one another: to experience closeness, transcend isolation, and feel that they know and love one another. I repeatedly observed my students' longing to connect socially, and in my personal life I struggled to balance my supposed autonomy with a deep longing for meaningful relationships. I hoped that in moving forward with a better understanding of the individual, I could increase my understanding of relationships and groups. What makes us so eager to connect? What makes these connections healthy or successful? What is the most freeing and fulfilling way to develop one-to-one relationships and bigger communities? To create a philosophy of quality education within a democracy, I had to explore what positive, fulfilling relationships are, and how we foster them.

From this understanding of individual and relationship, I could finally explore my deep, supra-rational belief that art—or perhaps *any* act of creation—fulfills both the need to honor the individual self and to the need to strengthen the connections between individuals. I hoped to draw on psychological research about why humans make art while also using philosophical and educational texts to redefine art as a creative act. I wanted to delve into the ways in which I believed art to be a life-giving, quintessentially human endeavor, engendering full and vital experiences that lie at the heart of what a true “education” would be. And throughout the essay, I would discuss

the implications of my values and beliefs for education and present concrete ideas for the application of theory into practice.

With this project, I attempt to strip away old assumptions about education and life in order to clarify (and, as necessary, change) my beliefs about self, community, and art. I probe existential questions about what makes life meaningful and what purpose we can find for our existence, without expecting to answer them neatly or universally. Ultimately, this project is an *act*, an application of the existential questions that animate it. It is an active continuation of my education: the ongoing life project of becoming a free, authentic, integrated individual within a community through creating something new.

Moreover, this Integrative Master's Project is a personal journey. It is not concerned with producing a perfect, universally applicable product; rather, it directly confronts the existential questions that animate my lived experiences as an educator, artist, and human being. I am no longer trying "to discover the single, monolithic practice that might encompass all the activities of schooling" (Schutz, 1998, p. 391). Instead, I intend to authentically pursue what it is I believe and value. I believe that the questions I ask in the process are fundamentally relevant to education, and that it is my responsibility to ask them for my own benefit and for that of my students. I hope that my work in this IMP will be directly helpful to a broader community through my teaching practice and, one day, when I open a school. First and foremost, though, I ask these questions for myself, in order to live my life more fully and authentically as an individual within the educational community. As educational philosopher Maxine Greene puts it, "A teacher in search of his/her own freedom may

be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own” (as cited in Schutz, 1998, p. 390).

Chapter One

Honoring the individual:

Freedom, authenticity, integration, and self-love

When we are not in conflict with ourselves, we are not in conflict outwardly. It is the inward strife which, projected outwardly, becomes the world conflict.

- J. Krishnamurti, The Significance of Life, p. 79

In this chapter, I explore the nature of freedom, authenticity, and integration as they pertain to individual development. I focus on these concepts because they are prominent in the texts that have recently influenced my thinking and resonate with my previous experience. I seek to better understand these concepts through personal reflection and textual analysis, thereby clarifying my vision for an education that honors the individual self and her subjecthood.

I. Freedom

Freedom has always been a ground assumption of my values, life philosophy, and conception of education. But while traveling alone this summer, I experienced a different kind of freedom—one I did not always experience as positive. I struggled to make even small choices, as I realized that there was no one to tell me what was right—and that, in fact, no one thing *was* objectively, definitively “right.” Then, through gradually exercising more control over my life, “being my own boss” and making decisions about the minutia of the everyday, I found the clarity to make larger decisions about my life back home. Most importantly, I was realizing the ways in

which I have more choice than I often acknowledge, even if I may have less control than I would like. Reading the work of Krishnamurti and learning more about Existentialism helped me place these personal revelations in a broader context of ideas about freedom; in turn, I began to connect these new ideas to my philosophy of education.

Of course, the ideals of freedom have been integral to the United States for centuries, and the word saturates our discourse about the country. Unless one supports a myopic view of education in which learning is so fragmented from life that it is sheerly academic, freedom should be central to education, as well as our system of government. In fact, I believe that freedom should be not only a goal, but also the ground assumption of education: it should be a given that all children are not only “created equal” (equality being prominent in educational discourse today), but also have a basic right to freedom.

But what *is* freedom? In my experience in the United States, we equate freedom with individuals’ political rights; in turn, through government, we create institutions that protect this freedom and improve our lives, but don’t “illegitimately constrain” citizens (Wartenberg, 2008, p. 9). We tend to focus on physical, political, and economic freedom, perhaps in some rough correlation to the vision of “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” exalted in the Declaration of Independence. However, my recent experience and reading has led me to explore deeper philosophical and metaphysical conceptions of human freedom. I have come to believe there is a more essential kind of freedom than the vague, unexamined concept

I held previously. This freedom is comprised of agency, our uniquely human ability to choose.

Freedom as agency: Choice and responsibility

The Greek philosopher and polymath Aristotle reasoned that humans are free because we can initiate events: we can be the “cause” in the “cause-and-effect” reality of our world. Though there are many constraints on what it is possible for us to do, we *can* take action—and we have a significant array of choices as to which actions we take. We are not completely passive and inert, like inanimate objects; we are not mobile yet unable to act, as machines are; we are not even mere animals that operate based on instincts, able to initiate events but not contemplate them (Wartenberg, 2008, p. 10). Only humans possess the self-consciousness and metacognitive abilities that enable *true* choice. We can cast ourselves mentally backward in time to attempt to understand our motives for acting, and forward to imagine their possible effects. For these same reasons, we can ostensibly inhibit ourselves from acting, as well (Laurenson, 2011, p. 118-119). Given these considerations, I have come to think of freedom as not just the absence of external oppression (negative freedom), but also a presence of choice and agency as a process the individual experiences (positive freedom). Lawyer Edwin C. Laurenson writes,

I believe the key to an accurate understanding of choice and freedom is that a decision is never just “being made.” That is, the act of decision always requires someone to actively choose. (2011, p. 118)

I believe this element of the active is absolutely central to freedom. In *Development as Freedom* (1999), philosopher and economist Amartya Sen similarly defines the

word “agent” as “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well” (1999, p. 19). I espouse Sen’s definition because it goes beyond the element of choice I have mentioned to also include a sense of the individual’s consciousness and values.

Moreover, Sen articulates a goal that we increase “our capability to lead the kind of lives we have reason to value”; this is, essentially, how he defines freedom, as “The ability—the substantive freedom—of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have” (Sen, p. 285, 293). He unashamedly acknowledges that values are a huge part of this equation: part of freedom is being able to decide what we value, and act on those values. And perhaps most importantly, Sen argues that freedom is directly valuable *in and of itself*, not merely as a means to other ends—though it is also the means to further increased freedom and prosperity. Thus, for Sen, freedom is both the “principal means” and “primary end” of development (1999, p. 17, 36). Though I believe there are other capacities that are also worth fostering and contribute to development, I agree with Sen that any other goal or positive outcome is largely contingent upon being able to choose it in the first place. Hence, I, too, believe in “the intrinsic importance of freedom” (Sen, 1999, p. 292).

Educational philosopher John Dewey also goes beyond a negative conception of freedom to define it more positively. In *Experience & Education* (1938), he references the tendency to associate freedom with “freedom of movement, or with the external or physical side of activity,” which he points out is actually very connected

to a more internal activity and freedom (p. 61). External freedom alone is not enough:

For freedom from restriction, the negative side, is to be prized only as a means to a freedom which is power: power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen ends into operation. (1938, p. 63-64)

Dewey distinguishes between negative freedom, or a lack of external stricture or oppression, and the positive presence of what he calls power, and which I have called agency. Notably, knowledge is essential to claiming the “powers” Dewey lists; in order to choose our purposes and actions, we must know something of ourselves and the world. This is learned through experience, which is itself education.

However, freedom does not stop with choosing, nor even once an action has been executed. Perhaps most significantly of all, choice entails a tremendous amount of responsibility for the action and its repercussions. Sen states strongly and simply, “Responsibility *requires* freedom” (1999, p. 284). But freedom requires responsibility, as well:

The linkage between freedom and responsibility works both ways. Without the substantive freedom and capability to do something, a person cannot be responsible for doing it. But actually having the freedom and capability does impose on the person the duty to consider whether to do it or not, and this does involve individual responsibility. In this sense, freedom is both necessary and sufficient for responsibility. (Sen, 1999, p. 284)

Responsibility necessarily accompanies choice; it is the logical consequence of being an agent in the world or, as I put it earlier, a “cause” in the “cause-and-effect” reality of this world. Once we have agency over “cause,” we have some responsibility for “effect,” as well.

In turn, because choice is accompanied by responsibility, freedom can be experienced as a burden or even, ironically, a sort of prison. For these reasons, philosophy professor Thomas Wartenberg explains, the Existentialist philosophers assert that although many humans *think* they value their freedom above all else, they are actually often deeply ambivalent toward it (2008, p. 2). In fact, humans frequently act in ways that actually reveal a value of security and comfort more than that of freedom (Wartenberg, 2008, p. 7). Krishnamurti attributes this abnegation of freedom to fear—fear of the responsibility that comes along with choice. Notably, this fear largely explains humans’ relationship to external authority, which is both central to the human condition and extremely relevant to the current state of education.

Freedom and authority

Considering how integral choice and responsibility are to freedom, submission to authority is a main way that human freedom is abridged, or even abnegated. In fact, Krishnamurti argues that *any* time authority—power over another human being—is part of relationship, compulsion is at play (1953, p. 36). I agree that free choice is not possible when this type of power is involved, whether the authority figure is physically compelling, verbally ordering, or simply influencing someone else within a power structure. Similarly, Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau defines freedom as “deciding for oneself what is for one’s own good and not being ruled by

external strictures” (Scholz, 2010, p. 396). Yet these “external strictures” can be difficult or even impossible to disregard when someone has significant power and authority to influence your well-being.

Clearly, the role of authority in abridging freedom has grave implications for education, for adults have a great deal of power over children. Ostensibly, in our social reality, there is good reason for one person having authority over another; someone is granted authority because he or she has greater experience and knowledge, and is thus more able to make educated choices. This is sometimes true; certainly, that is why I feel somewhat comfortable having authority over children and making choices for them. But I believe that authority is often granted with very little basis, in the field of education and elsewhere. And perhaps more perniciously, many of us do not so much actively *choose* to trust authority as blindly *submit* to it. Though it is sometimes necessary to trust external sources and authorities, when we do so we must acknowledge that what we are doing is indeed an act of trust we take of our *own* volition. For children, this is more difficult, given the natural imbalance of power, and experience, between them and adults; I will discuss problem this more later in the chapter.

Most importantly, acts of trust-based deference to authority should not usurp the importance of our own experience, of seeking to know things for ourselves and acting freely based on that knowledge. Personally, I believe that the only things we know for sure come from our own experience and reasoning. Though I believe it is sometimes important to trust external sources for knowledge and even power, I think we currently overuse and abuse this need. I believe that true, free choices, including

decisions to trust external authority, are best made based on personal experience and/or reasoning. Choices made on unexamined deference to authority because of perceived lack of choice, on the other hand, are neither free nor responsible. For example, if I give a student a consequence or punishment simply because my head teacher tells me to, I have not acted freely—either because I blindly trusted her judgment and didn't truly consider the situation, or because I perceived myself as not having choice, even though I disagreed. I have thus not been responsible to the child or upheld her right to be treated well and authentically, but also I have not honored my own reason and experience.

Indeed, it is important that teachers do not engage in blind adherence to authority, but also that we do not require and reward it in our students. This is because these behaviors stunt development of one's own freedom, but also because we can harm others through our insufficiently considered actions. It is not difficult to think of occasions when deference to authority has led to actions that have seriously curtailed individuals' or groups' human rights, and examples are not limited to people in other countries or time periods. In fact, the desire to escape freedom through deference to authority may be a deep-seated human inclination that we have to keep in check. Research suggests that humans are quick to defer to authority, and that they are surprisingly quick to harm others when they are not held individually responsible for their actions (Nussbaum, 2008, p. 12-13). Authority becomes an “out” from the responsibility for one's choice—or even from making the choice in the first place—because one thinks one does not have the ability to choose when in a disempowered, de-individuated state. As a teacher, I have felt this way; I can only imagine how often

children feel disempowered by de-individuation. As one of a sea of young faces in a room full of rules, the child may not have many opportunities to exercise choice: the rules set down by authority do it for her.

Freedom and self-knowledge

What, then, instead of submission to external authority, especially considering how much we rely on it in schools? In order to claim freedom—to make choices and take responsibility for them—what is called for? Krishnamurti and the Existentialists stress the need for an *internal* authority. In fact, Krishnamurti posits self-understanding as the very foundation of freedom, claiming, “Freedom comes only when one understands the ways of the self, the experiencer” (1953, p. 28). This position initially seemed extreme to me, but considered in tandem with the Existentialists’ ideas and all I have come to believe about freedom, it makes a good deal of sense. Self-awareness is central to freedom, because it enables us to shine our consciousness on ourselves, and even on consciousness itself; this enables us to make more informed and honest choices. Again, if one believes that direct experience and reasoning are the most reliable forms knowledge, then it follows that understanding the “self” who has these experiences and thoughts is crucial. In Krishnamurti’s words:

We are not machines to be understood and repaired by experts; we are the result of a long series of influences and accidents, and each one has to unravel and understand for himself the confusion of his own nature. (1953, p. 122)

We must do the work of knowing ourselves, for the understanding it produces, though imperfect and incomplete, brings us as close as we can get to fully free, informed,

responsible choices. Self-knowledge brings us greater honesty and clarity in understanding what we want, believe, and do—and why.

Dewey, too, emphasizes the importance of knowledge from within, not outside. He states clearly, “The alternative to externally imposed inhibition is inhibition through an individual’s own reflection and judgment” (1938, p. 64). Though I am cautious to use the word “inhibition,” I agree with Dewey’s crucial distinction: the individual, internal “inhibition” he values comes not from an internalization of external inhibition, but through one’s own mental processes. Of course, these are, inevitably, largely learned and internalized from others and the environment. Still, if we prioritize the individual *considering* a question or action first, the “inhibition” Dewey advocates is very different from a simple submission to authority or unquestioned replication of Rousseau’s aforementioned “external strictures.”

Furthermore, self-knowledge in turn informs our choices about what we want, believe, and do in the future. Self-knowledge is thus not a mere process of excavation, but one of *creation*. We are not fixed beings from birth, our true natures just waiting to be discovered by sufficient introspection. Though we do come into the world with many predispositions and attributes written in our genes, many of these are not hard and fast restrictions (Powledge, 2011). Moreover, whatever our given inclinations and urges may be, humans’ capacity for executive functioning means that we have a significant degree of self-control. In fact, the most significant element of our freedom is that we may decide much of who we are; once we are adults, especially, we can choose many of our experiences, and in so doing, *we choose*

ourselves. This knowing and choosing the self is a constant process, because humans are dynamic beings: we are constantly in interaction with our environment, influencing ourselves and others and remaking ourselves in every moment.

From consideration of the nature of knowledge and self-knowledge, I have become even more convinced of an epistemological belief that I have gradually espoused since beginning my studies at Bank Street: to “know” is not to uncover something pre-existing and fixed, but rather is a process of constructing or creating understanding. Knowledge does not exist solely in the outside world of objects, but predominantly in the subject—the self. This understanding and value of the individual capacity for knowledge and choice stands in stark contrast to evasion of freedom through submission to authority, which is not a fully alive or moral way to live. In order to be free, fulfilled individuals, knowledge-of-self must trump authority-of-others.

However, my new philosophy of the individual, strongly influenced by Krishnamurti and the Existentialists, is based on consideration of *adult* human beings. One cannot automatically extend this argument to children, who are necessarily dependent for the first years of their lives. Children do not possess the self-knowledge (and other-knowledge) that enables choice and responsibility, though most are born with the capacity for it. How can I reconcile my newfound understanding of freedom-as-choice with the nature of childhood?

Freedom and childhood: “Apprenticeship to freedom”

Children enter the world incredibly dependent. Initially, they can barely communicate, cannot move through space, and cannot feed themselves. Even when

they become more capable of action (i.e. locomotion and speech), children's limited experience and knowledge means they are not able to take care of themselves in even the most basic ways. Though they do have burgeoning social and emotional skills, their physical growth often outstrips their ability to communicate, which requires skills that grow gradually, at different rates, and with significant scaffolding (Rosenthal and Gatt, 2010, p. 226-227). Adults' greater knowledge of the world is often required to keep children physically safe; indeed, it is adults' responsibility to exercise authority over children and make some decisions for them to this end. Even aside from obvious issues of safety, children do not yet have enough understanding to make subtler choices and value judgments that will benefit themselves and others. As philosopher and educator Laurance J. Splitter puts it, they are "not yet equipped to take their place as active citizens, workers, life-partners, etc." (2008, p. 150). Children are not born capable of being their own authority in the way that I advocate for, and thus cannot always exercise choice responsibly.

However, this does not mean that childhood must be an *obstacle* to freedom. Nor should it be a period of complete dependency if we want children to develop into healthy, responsible adults. Rather, childhood can be experienced as a training ground in which to exercise freedom within limits and with less heavy responsibility, while slowly learning the more complex, adult form of freedom in which they will make free choices and take responsibility for them. The French feminist and Existentialist Simone de Beauvoir calls this process "apprenticeship to freedom" (Scholz, 2010, p. 395). In fact, building on the work of de Beauvoir, feminist philosophy professor Sally Scholz argues that the experience of childhood is actually crucial to "the ability

to assume one's freedom," and that freedom is something that is "developmentally achieved" (2010, p. 395). Though humans *are*, in one sense, born free, we are not born able to *exercise* our freedom, nor can we magically obtain that capacity overnight or from someone else: it must be steadily cultivated. Becoming a human being who is able to claim and exercise her freedom requires sustained, purposive effort on the part of the child and those who shepherd her into adulthood. As adults, we have to claim our responsibility for children, making some choices for them, and it is impossible to be valueless in this endeavor. However, if we value children's eventual freedom, we *can* make choices that will best enable them to make their own choices later on, instead of merely replicating what they have internalized.

However, in de Beauvoir's view, adults often make the child an "apprentice" to a solid, stable *identity*, instead of an authentic, free *existence*. Thus, as Scholz puts it, "The child is encouraged to abdicate freedom in exchange for a static identity" (2010, p. 401-2). If we use our influence as adults to inculcate children with the belief that they need to "be" any one specific thing other than their own, dynamic self, we rob them of their freedom. And if we scaffold children into some reified "right" way of life, we are molding them to what *we* want them to be, not providing them with opportunities to exercise choice and thereby learn to be free. This molding is what Krishnamurti warned against, and what led me on this path to redefining my values such that I would increase children's freedom, and not diminish it.

It bears reiterating that an emphasis on individual choice and "apprenticeship to freedom" does not mean that children can do whatever they want, or that there are no responsibilities in childhood, much less in the free adulthood we guide children

into. Scholz makes a salient point when she writes, “One is responsible for creating meaning in the world” (2010, p. 407). Similarly, Krishnamurti asserts, “Freedom does not mean the opportunity for self-gratification or the setting aside of consideration for others” (1953, p. 32). As I will discuss further in the next chapter, we have responsibilities to one another, as well as ourselves, and we need to help children realize their potential and responsibility to themselves and the world, beyond merely choosing personal, in-the-moment desire. Ultimately, I believe childhood should be an end in and of itself, and not something we rob children of; however, it must also be a process of development into a *responsibly* free adulthood.

Implications of freedom for education

Based on reflection and exploration of texts, I have developed a more complete and nuanced conception of freedom as the ability (within limits) to initiate events, choose how to act, and thus to choose who we are. Freedom means that, to some degree, we can choose our own growth, development, and happiness; we can also make choices that will help others in their development and in turn positively influence the broader arena of human “development” Sen writes about, which is also fundamentally about “the process of expanding human freedoms” (1999, p. 36). If full development is our goal for each human being, we must be cognizant of how our choices affect ourselves and others, for freedom also includes taking responsibility for one’s actions and their effects. The distinction between simply being “free” to do whatever one wants and actively making choices and taking responsibility for them is subtle, but critical—especially in the realm of education. Freedom is not a “free-for-all,” especially in light of the considerations of living in a group. However, freedom

does mean making choices for oneself, which in my experience is not a prominent enough part of most children's lives in school.

My new view of freedom has led me to believe that education should give children more choice, as well as a good deal of responsibility for these choices—within well-thought-out parameters and with plenty of reflection on the actions' motivations and outcomes. The line we have to walk as caregivers, of course, is how to make sure these choices and actions overall lead to a child's greater overall freedom, growth, and development; sometimes, we must inhibit a child's choice in order to preserve their well-being or promote their growth. Before children are old enough to truly reason, consider, and reflect on experience, we may have to do much of this thinking for them. This is a big responsibility, and an unavoidable one. Even so, I believe education should rely less on the deference to external authority than most systems do now, and certainly less on the *fear* of authority that is prevalent in many schools, even within adult interactions.

Perhaps most important, I believe education should prioritize children's self-knowledge alongside their self-control. I agree with Dewey that "the creation of power of self-control" is an important task of education, for I do not want children to grow up "at the mercy of impulses into whose formation intelligent judgment has not entered," which would be only "the illusion of freedom" (1938, p. 64-65). This is a critical point, central to both Dewey's philosophy and Bank Street's model of progressive education. However, I want to emphasize that the "individual's own judgment and reflection" should be the basis for this self-control (Dewey, 1938, p. 64-65). I believe the developing human should exercise self-control in service of his

own beliefs and needs, towards developing greater freedom, *not* because of external expectations. Self-control must rest on a firm foundation of self-awareness.

Otherwise, it may be a mere internalization of social mores without an understanding of them, which may unduly inhibit the individual subject's freedom and create individuals who maintain and replicate pre-existing structures without turning a critical lens on them. I believe most classrooms do not give enough attention to the individual and her self-understanding; the sheer number of children in the room tends to enshrine external authority and the needs of group order over individual development.

As a teacher, my immediate take-away from this research so far is to observe children more closely. The best way to scaffold children into self-awareness is to know them as well as I can, through observation, and share these observations with them. Responsive Classroom's language of "noticing" supports this goal (Denton, 2007); skills learned in Bank Street's Observation and Recording course support it as well. Young children may not be yet able to know themselves in a metacognitive, analytical, reflective way, but they can know themselves as experiencers, noticing how they feel and what they want. The teacher can point out her noticings to children, thereby helping them to build self-awareness. All the while, he can ask many questions to prompt the child's thinking and thereby emphasize that this knowledge will ultimately come from *within* the student, not just *outside* herself. Moreover, these discussions can be sites of love. Indeed, it is imperative to me that I exist in genuine, loving relationship with my students, for I believe that this is the most moral and fulfilling way to live with others. But before I turn to the relationship between

self and other, I wish to further explore what I believe individuals have a right to for their own development and fulfillment.

II. Authenticity

When I first read about authenticity in the context of Existentialism, I connected to it powerfully on a personal level. It felt like the picking-up of a thread that has run throughout my experience, as I realized that much of my trajectory in recent years has been a constant striving to become more authentic as an educator and person. As I read more texts affirming the value of authenticity, I was heartened and emboldened in my sense of self, but I also began coming to terms with the many ways in which I was *not* authentic. In my teacher-life, I thought of times when I helped corral young children to pay attention during thirty minutes of whole-group instruction, even though I believed it developmentally inappropriate, simply because it was expected of me. More generally, I could think of innumerable times when I had not spoken or acted according to my beliefs, usually out of a desire to please or be viewed favorably. I knew I needed to probe this issue further, both in order to be a more authentic teacher and to help my students develop their own authenticity.

I had my own deep but unarticulated sense of what “authenticity” meant, but more research was necessary to understand this “profoundly complex concept” (Bessant, 2010, p. 3). As it turned out, it was not just the Existentialists who were concerned with authenticity; indeed, “the holy grail of the authentic self” had been a common area of interest throughout Western philosophy (Splitter, 2008, p. 136, 146). Still, as Carolin Kreber, Monika Klampfleitner, Velda McCune, Sian Bayne and

Miesbeth Knottenbelt point out in “What do you mean by ‘authentic’? A comparative review of the literature on conceptions of authenticity in teaching” (2007), there is “no single definition of authenticity in the literature” (p. 24). Similarly, Laurence J. Splitter says authenticity is “one of those ‘central, common but contestable’ concepts which cry out for continual reflection and (re)examination” (2008, p. 136).

Thankfully, various professors of higher education have done significant work reviewing the literature on authenticity and doing fieldwork exploring educators’ conceptions of the term. For example, Adult Education professors Patricia Cranton and Ellen Carusetta arrived a comprehensive yet clear definition in their article “Perspectives on Authenticity in Teaching” (2004):

Authenticity is a multifaceted concept that includes at least four parts: being genuine, showing consistency between values and actions, relating to others in such a way as to encourage their authenticity, and living a critical life. (p. 7)

The first element the authors list, “being genuine,” aligns with my prior understanding of the term “authenticity” and with its general, colloquial definition. The second component, “consistency between beliefs and actions,” seems to be a clarification and elaboration of *how* one is genuine: one’s “walk” must align with one’s “talk,” so to speak. The third and fourth components of their definition, “Relating to others in such a way as to encourage their authenticity” and “living a critical life,” are powerful ideas that speak to the extension of authenticity beyond the individual sphere. I will use Cranton and Carusetta’s definition as a foundation for clarifying my own definition of authenticity by addressing each of these components throughout this and the following chapter.

But first: What aids and/or prevents us from fulfilling the first two, foundational components of authenticity?

Authenticity and “The dominance of the They”

Although it is obvious how someone above us in a power structure influences our behavior, some Existentialist philosophers contend that our authenticity is compromised by *anyone* who is “other” to us. Even if someone does not have explicit authority over us, they nonetheless have a great impact on how we act and behave. As Wartenberg explains, Existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger’s view is that, “Under the dominance of the They, ‘Everyone is the other, and no one is himself’” (as cited in Wartenberg, 2008, p. 60). I understand this idea in terms of subject and object: according to Heidegger, in society, no one is a subject and everyone is an object, because we are all conscious of others seeing *us* as the “other,” objectifying us and making judgments. The individual thus ends up objectifying herself, and in turn the behavior she engages in based on others’ expectations of her—or even just her *perception* of their expectations of her—is not authentic. Though I do not believe this is the only way that we can interact with one another, I do agree that too much concern about how others view us skews our behavior in inauthentic directions, alienating us from ourselves and curtailing our self-development.

By contrast, existentially authentic behavior is decided upon *independently* of others. An individual who acts authentically does not deliberately and uncritically place herself in accordance with others, nor deliberately act counter to them and their expectations. Rather, she operates based on her own experience and beliefs (Tisdell as cited in Kreber et al., 2007, p. 27). In the process of facing and seeking out reality, the

individual will question and potentially reject external authority and its truths and value judgments, and develop her own internal authority through experience and reflection. And in order to protect against the “They” and maintain one’s genuineness, the definition’s fourth element, “leading a critical life,” is crucial. As Kenneth Bessant puts it, “Authentic comportment... implies an ongoing resolve to act or think in a manner that either questions conventional appearances or disposes one toward it in a critical or reasoned manner” (2010, p. 8).

How might we develop the capacity of authenticity in children, and how can I develop it as a teacher? Given that authenticity is so tied to freedom, it is not surprisingly that it, too, rests on a foundation of self-knowledge.

Authenticity and self-knowledge

Though I touched on the topic of self-knowledge when writing about freedom, it is equally crucial to authenticity, and I wish to delve into it more deeply here. In verity, before one can have self-knowledge, one must have a quality of *openness*, a willingness to pursue self-understanding. It seems to me that humans, with our complex minds and multiple levels of consciousness, cannot act in accordance with our true selves without developing a good understanding of who that “self” is in the first place.

Of course, different cultures and individuals have different ideas of what the “self” is, or whether it even exists at all. Splitter reminds us that “an authentic self” could mean something different than the oft-contested “Romanticist vision of an inner essence”—perhaps something in-between that vision and postmodernism’s “rejection

of the very idea of a unified and underlying self” (2008, p. 135, 146). I am struck by the accessibility of Parker Palmer’s (2004) words on the subject:

Philosophers haggle about what to call this core of our humanity... Thomas Merton called it true self. Buddhists call it original nature or big self. Quakers call it the inner teacher or the inner lights. Hasidic Jews call it a spark of the divine. Humanists call it identity and integrity. In popular parlance, people often call it soul. (p. 32)

Personally, my ideas of selfhood have recently been challenged through exposure to new ways of thinking, and I now admit that the nature of the self is something I cannot “know” in a provable way. However, I do believe in a dynamic, non-absolute, but unique matrix of characteristics, mental processes, memories, and behaviors that one can experience as a somewhat unified “self.” In my definition, when we act authentically, we act in alignment with this “self”—however we personally experience it—and most of all, with our own beliefs. Though everyone will not agree with my view of self and authenticity, it is critical that I claim it in order to identify how it influences my practice; indeed, it was grappling with the idea of “self” that led me to realize I needed to reflect on the needs of the individual before exploring the nature of community and art in education.

In any case, however fixed, whole, or real one believes the “self” is, we each have our own tendencies, preferences, needs, desires, and beliefs that fall in certain patterns, some of which come from “nature” and some of which come from “nurture,” though the interplay between them is much more complicated than mere binarism (Powledge, 2011). It is beneficial to be aware of these patterns and

tendencies in our own lives, as we cannot assume that what is true for another person is true for us. We must ask ourselves what we want, believe, and need, and whether we're applying someone else's template, or our own. I believe we should encourage children to check-in with themselves in this way from early on in their education.

However, this checking-in can be difficult, because it is actually not possible to know ourselves fully. In fact, Heidegger, despite being a prime proponent of authenticity, actually didn't believe we could be fully authentic—just that we could strive to be more so than we usually are. These limitations on our authenticity exist because of the nature of unconsciousness and time. As psychoanalyst Michael Guy Thompson puts it, “My authenticity isn't something I can perfect... because my choices always harbor an element of uncertainty about them and only time will reveal what was intended at the moment I acted on them” (2005, p. 148). In American culture, we sometimes speak and act as if we have complete conscious control over ourselves. But though executive functioning is indeed a valuable strength we humans possess, as Communication Studies professor C. E. McAuley reminds us, there is a good deal of unconscious conditioning that occurs throughout our lives (2010). Ironically, these unexamined habits become a *part* of who we are, yet also *obscure* who we are on a more essential level, because they keep us from examining what we truly want and what is important for us. The degree to which we have patterns, habits, and beliefs that are incredibly powerful and yet below the level of consciousness speaks to both the sense of “self” we need to know and what we must work with in order to act freely and authentically.

Thus, in order to achieve closeness-to-authenticity, we may have to be more intentional about our understanding of subconscious processes. In *The Social Animal* (2011), social sciences columnist David Brooks illuminates how many of our beliefs and choices occur below the level of our consciousness, and thus largely out of our control; he especially emphasizes the importance of emotion and thought working together (which I will discuss later in this chapter). Through understanding the unconscious processes that influence our emotions and choices, we can bring them more in alignment with our conscious selves, and even change some of our conditioning. Again, this shift requires openness, a willingness to try to know oneself and face up to the realities of who we are and want to be. Many people have found psychotherapy to be useful for this purpose (Waumsley and Swartz, 2011), and it would be worth exploring—though outside the scope of this thesis—how to responsibly bring a greater understanding of psychology and therapy into teachers’ practice.

Critical participation: Developing authenticity through reflection and action

Even in the face of all that is unconscious and unknowable about ourselves, perhaps our greatest tool for developing authenticity—for living a life that is more truly our own—is reflection. Tellingly, reflection was a central element of how the teachers in Cranton and Carusetta’s study defined authenticity; they were frequently “critical of or questioning themselves, others, and social norms” (2004, p. 18). Similarly, Kreber and her associates draw on their research to assert that authenticity comes from “critical reflection” (2007, p. 28). Employing a questioning perspective is essential to authenticity, because, as mentioned before, we do not want to merely

“uncritically absorb” what others have said and done, thereby letting the unconscious rule our lives rather than acknowledging and working with it (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 7, 21). In order to make authentic choices, we must gently turn a questioning eye on ourselves, as well as the external world—especially because by the time we are able to be critical and constructive, we have already internalized many external expectations and beliefs.

However, in the process of questioning and noticing ourselves, I believe we must be careful to not overly judge, nor to become so analytical and mind-dominated that the voice of external authority slips in through the back door. Professor of Adult Education J. M. Dirkx reminds us:

In working with our experience, it is important to suspend judgment; become active observers of our own actions, behaviors, emotions, and feelings; and refrain from framing our reaction to our experience in terms of good-bad or right-wrong. (2006, p. 34)

Dirkx’s words are a helpful reminder that to be “critical” need not entail the harsh, judgmental, deficit-model-based criticism we often understand it to mean colloquially. Rather, it entails a way-of-being that consistently questions, and does not accept anything at face value.

In fact, “critical reflection” as these thinkers define it is not an entirely “an analytical, rational, and judgmental process” (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 18). Cranton and Carusetta make a point of saying that their participants didn’t always intend “critical” and “reflective” to mean “rational” and “judgmental”; reflections could be in the form of “feelings,” or “a hunch, intuition, or an insight” (2004, p. 18).

Similarly, Kreber and her colleagues assert that self-knowledge includes “emotional or extra-rational” ways of knowing (2007, p. 28). Dirkx, too, certainly adheres to a belief in supra-rational ways of knowing oneself, and specifically emphasizes the power of imagination in becoming authentic. This is because, for Dirkx, authenticity is not just about the conscious, ego-driven self, and it is therefore important to “connect the conscious self with what is more authentic within oneself” (2006, p. 32). All the literature I read on authenticity and higher education emphasizes going beyond rational ways-of-knowing; if this is true for adults, it is certainly true of children as well.

Thus, as I now understand it, “critical reflection” indicates a form of reflection that is neither a leisurely walk down memory lane nor a process of judgment. Rather, it is a process that involves extensive noticing and questioning in order to arrive at one’s values and beliefs; this process can be both analytical and supra-rational. However, beliefs and values alone do not suffice, for one of the central components of authenticity is congruence of belief and behavior. This connection is crucial to authenticity; both Heidegger and the educator and philosopher Paolo Friere, as well as the educators whose articles I have used here, agree that authenticity involves both action and reflection: it requires not merely *thinking* critically, but actually *participating* in life critically. As Paolo Friere puts it, “To every understanding, sooner or later an action corresponds” (as cited in Watts, Diemer, and Voight, 2011, p. 45). In this sense, authenticity connects strongly to freedom, for it impacts how we act in the world—and how we take responsibility for those actions. The development of “critical reflection” informs how we make choices, take action, and exercise our

existential freedom. And then, to come full circle, we may observe and reflect on our behaviors in order to determine yet again whether we are being authentic, and how to proceed.

Cranton and Carusetta use the phrase “critical participation” for what I have just described: the actions one takes within a context or community based on our internal, authentic reality. The “community” component of the definition is crucial, for in order to participate in life, of course, we must acknowledge other people, which are a huge part of the context in which we exist. Cranton and Carusetta are worth quoting at length in their description of “critical participation”:

We need to know who we are and what we believe and then act on that.

However, this does not mean that we make such decisions in isolation.

Authenticity involves knowing and understanding the collective and carefully, critically determining how we are different and the same from that collective.

(2004, p. 8)

To this clear definition, I would like to add that we must not only determine how we are alike and different from that collective, but also examine how our actions *impact* that collective, balancing what is authentic and growth-giving for us with what is authentic and growth-giving for the group.

Earlier in the chapter, I reported that authenticity was decided on “independently” of others, mainly based on what I had read about Existentialism. Though not untrue, after reading and reflecting more on authenticity as a lived reality, it is clear that this statement is rather incomplete. Authenticity is developed from one’s own lived experience, and must align with one’s sense of self as an individual,

but it never exists in a vacuum. Furthermore, as discussed before, we do need to consider how our actions will impact others. For all the value I place in individual authenticity, a huge component of being authentic is acknowledging that each of us is always part of a web of relationships, and of cause and effect. Our ability to be authentic is inextricably linked with that context, including our actions' effects on others and our very human desire to connect with other people. Authenticity necessarily involves understanding how we are connected, what we want our role to be, and what we want to take and give from others. Critical reflection can happen with others, in dialogue, for dialogue "is nothing less than the ground of our own authenticity: we become who we are ... *as members of this same dialogical community*" (Splitter, 2008, p. 148). I will explore the intersection of authenticity and community in the second chapter.

Finally, it is important to remember that authenticity is a process, a project, and *not* a fixed product. Splitter says that even in the writings of Rousseau, we can find, "if embryonically," the idea that "the authentic person is not so much an object or product as a search or process (project) of ongoing construction" (Splitter, 2008, p. 146). Our subjectivity is never fixed, but is in a constant, dynamic state. Moreover, we can influence and somewhat construct our own experience based on what is authentic to us.

Implications of authenticity for education

Now that I have a clearer understanding of what authenticity is and entails, I am even more sure of my belief that it is important to foster it in education. As Cranton and Carusetta put it, becoming authentic is an "ongoing developmental

process”; it is not a point we reach at some time in the future (2004, p. 19). Children deserve good scaffolding in the skills and processes of becoming more and more themselves. As a teacher, I believe in children’s capacity to evolve and self-determine (to a large degree), and in the power of education to shape the life journey of development. However, I no longer seek to direct it towards one fixed end goal, but towards supporting the individual’s ability to make choices to be the person they want to be, as well as learning to help others feel free to make their own choices. In my own experience, I have often recognized the delicate balance between my pre-existing identity and my agency to choose who I am. I believe all people should be able to claim this paradox and thereby work towards authenticity.

First and foremost—and as already arose as important in my exploration of freedom—I believe that if we wish children to develop into adults who are honest, authentic, and have integrity, we need to rely much less on external authority that works from the top-down and outside-in. In my experience, in schools, children often do things because adults say so, out of fear of reprisal and a desire to be loved. Some educational programs, such as Responsive Classroom, have recognized the problematic nature of this reality, and advocate for, among other things, less general praise and more specific observation (Denton, 2007, p. 98). I now believe that most educators (myself included) spend too much time telling children what to do and influencing them to do what isn’t authentic for them, and not enough time building the children’s skills to question and understand themselves, thereby developing authenticity. Though there are certainly times when we must influence children to behave in ways they wouldn’t choose, placing too much of their motivation in how

we authority figures place value and approval may promote inauthenticity and self-objectification. And if we consistently *tell* children what they need with such assurance that they are not free to question, much less choose, we miss opportunities to *ask* them what they need. We need to encourage children pay attention to their own experience and thereby build the self-knowledge upon which authenticity (and freedom) lie.

Moreover, teachers are often inauthentic in these moments as well—especially if we act based on the expectations of yet another external authority figure rather than our own deeply examined beliefs. It is important for us to model authenticity, just as it is important to model everything we want to help children learn. In my experience, my best teaching is that which is the most earnest and most authentic—whereas insincerity, posturing, and power-plays lead to dissatisfaction and chaos in the classroom.

In valuing authenticity in education, I essentially claim a belief that education should help children to develop self-knowledge and self-respect while also turning a gently critical eye on the world and their own experience. For this reason, I value asking questions over finding answers, for questions open up new areas of knowledge and keep us from complacent acceptance. Alongside the skill of questioning, children should develop their skills of observation—not in a disembodied, clinical, scientific way, but in a way that honors parts of self other than the rational mind. The “reflective critique” Kreber et al. recommend must lie on a bedrock of self-love and subjective experience; it must not turn into detrimental self-objectification, and it must honor all parts of the self (2007, p. 34). In fact, it is crucial to freedom and

authenticity—and frankly, to happiness—that children experience integration between the parts of themselves, not objectification and fragmentation. With freedom and authenticity still in mind, I now turn to the goal of integration.

III. Integration

Integration is a central idea in *Education and the Significance of Life*, and though the term was somewhat new to me, the concept resonated deeply with my experience. In my Bank Street entrance essay and much of my reflective writing since, I have explored ideas about creating connections, not just between people, but also *within* them. Though I did not have the vocabulary then, I now realize I was sussing out my value of integration. I have long cherished the connection between different areas of my selfhood and life, and have experienced how meaningful and joyful these connections can be. In turn, I have also often felt pain due to a sense of fragmentation between different areas of my selfhood, especially when important elements of my identity were not recognized or honored by others. I sense that this longing for wholeness is something experienced by most people, and for this reason, it is very important to my philosophy of education for individual development.

Integration and wholeness

Though many of us are familiar with the term “integration” when it comes to curriculum or school districts, I need to clarify my definition of integration as it refers to the *individual*. Though the verb as we currently use it in education suggests a creation of a connection or unity where one did not exist (i.e. between content areas or children of different racial backgrounds), some people believe in and recognize a

pre-existing, underlying connectivity, or even a unity, in individuals. Palmer calls this a “hidden wholeness” (2004). I, like Palmer and Krishnamurti, believe in this complex, underlying unity. When we consider how parts are connected, we acknowledge what something is in its entirety, and how it works as a whole. Thus, I define integration as a *process* in which elements connect and interrelate to one another to create a meaningful whole. Integration is what comprises the wholeness: *connections*.

Why is wholeness—and the integration of which it consists—a worthy goal in the first place? Parker Palmer believes that “‘being whole’ is a self-evident good” (2004, p. 17). I also believe in the essentially positive nature of wholeness. However, it may be helpful to think of wholeness in relation to other words that carry more weight, and are more commonly used, in our culture: Identity and integrity. Palmer characterizes “integrity” as the interface of integration and what I have described as “authenticity.” We do not always think of wholeness when we think about what it means to have integrity, but the two are closely related. Though my sense of the colloquial understanding of “integrity” has to do with strictly following morals, integrity can also be defined as “the quality or state of being complete or undivided.” Furthermore, the word comes from the Latin “integer,” which means “entire,” “one” or “whole.” Although we often colloquially speak of someone who exhibits integrity as someone who stays true to her morals, it can also reference an individual’s actions being at one with herself and her values.

These authentic actions would rely on significant integration of self, and the sense of identity it brings. As Palmer defines it, our sense identity builds strongly on integration:

Identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer force that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human... (Integrity is) whatever wholeness I am able to find within that nexus as its vectors form and re-form the pattern of my life. (1997, p. 4)

For Palmer, integrity involves the integration of inner and outer selves that are distinct, but not entirely separate; they are connected, and part of one whole.

Conversely, in my experience, feelings of fragmentation are not typically experienced as positive or life-giving. Palmer (2004) describes non-wholeness as a state of people becoming “separated from their own souls” (p. 5); I have experienced it similarly, but in slightly less loaded terms, as a separation from my self. In my experience, fragmentation and inauthenticity occur when forces *within* the self are at odds. To some degree, inner conflict is inevitable, given human beings’ complexity. However, I believe dialogue and connection between these forces can result in a healthy sense of self and greater sense of underlying wholeness.

Wholeness is not a new idea to progressive education in the West. At the Bank Street College of Education, we speak of the “whole child” (“Lucy Sprague Mitchell,” 2001, p. 46), meaning that the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral development are all important parts of the child, because she brings all these parts of herself to school. I agree with this fundamental tenet of Bank Street’s educational philosophy. However, I would like to make an important clarification

between a philosophy of integration and how the “whole child” concept sometimes plays out in practice. I have taught in several schools that *do* honor different parts of the child as important and relevant to school, but do so in a separated way. Each major area of development is given attention, but during separate times, and even spaces: P.E. is a time to be physical, Math is a time to think linearly, and Yard is the children’s main opportunity to be social. Yet, these different components are connected; for example, physical health is incredibly impactful on mental health, as Dewey argues, referencing the Greek’s understanding of “the relation between a sound body and a sound mind” (1939, p. 63). So, with the concept “integration,” I wish to emphasize how these elements *interrelate* and *connect*. Based on that view, more time in the school day would be spent on projects that acknowledge and engage multiple parts of self in an integrated manner. (As I will discuss in Chapter Three, the arts are an excellent way to do this.)

I believe that cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, as well as other components of self, are not separate parts of the whole child. In my view, elements of the self are not akin to puzzle pieces that touch but do not overlap. Rather, they are connected to one another, much as synapses connect neurons in our brains. Whereas a puzzle piece could be excised and thus compromise the whole without directly affecting the other pieces, one neuron is connected to many other neurons, and thus affects the whole in a more direct, multifarious way. Indeed, I have come to conceive of learning as fundamentally comprised of connections, both because of what is known about the brain and because of my own lived experience. Innumerable times, I have watched children make and relish in connections, even

those that seem irrelevant to us task-oriented, compartmentalized adults. Based on a connective, integrated model of self, though it is beneficial to focus on and strength one area of development, it is also crucial to provide experiences that honor and strengthen the connections between them.

Acknowledging the integration of parts does not mean that these elements are indistinct; wholeness does not signify an undifferentiated blob in which the constituent parts are so undifferentiated as to be identical. Of course, there *are* differences between physical abilities and cognitive ones (and between different cognitive abilities!), just as there are meaningful and beneficial differences between my tasks as a teacher and my tasks off the job. But I don't *stop* being a daughter or an artist when I step on school grounds, and likewise I do not stop being a teacher even when I am spending time with friends (much to their chagrin!). As one participant in Cranton and Carusetta's study put it, "The instructor is me, and I'm not two different people" (2004, p. 14). Rather, I experience these as meaningfully interrelated parts of one holistic, if complex, self. Similarly, a child does not stop having feelings or physical needs just because we ask her to focus on a math problem. (Instead of treating these "other" elements as a distraction, we could utilize them more. There is already much being done in this regard, i.e. with kinesthetic learning.) Thus, in my view, wholeness does not merely mean including or valuing all parts. It must also include an acknowledgment of how they are connected—and *that* is integration.

Integration of thought and feeling

In my experience, thought/feeling and mind/body are two of the most persistent and pernicious dualisms in our culture, and in school. Krishnamurti zones in on the former dualism quite a bit, stating:

We may be highly educated, but if we are without deep integration of thought and feeling, our lives are incomplete, contradictory, and torn with many fears; and as long as education does not cultivate an integrated outlook on life, it has very little significance. (1953, p. 11)

Within this rich quote, I find it most salient that Krishnamurti characterizes the separation of thought and feeling as “incomplete, contradictory, and torn”; this suggests that completeness, or wholeness, lies not merely in all parts being present and valued, but in their *connections* being present and valued. And with the words “contradictory” and “torn,” one can hear not just a feeling of lack, but a sense of pain, dissonance, and fragmentation produced by thought and feeling that do not work together. And yet, as neuropsychologist Rick Hanson and neurologist Richard Mendius remind us, “Even seemingly ‘heady’ moral reasoning draws heavily on emotional processing” (Hanson & Mendius, 2009, p. 146). The goal of sheer thought or rationality may be a total illusion.

Political and cultural commentator David Brooks also offers helpful insight on the need for both thought and feeling, meaningfully integrated, in his book *The Social Animal* (2012). Brooks eloquently sums it up:

Reason and emotion are not separate and opposed; reason is nested upon emotion and dependent upon it. Emotion assigns value to things, and reason can only make choices on the basis of those valuations. (2012, p. 21)

Reason alone cannot make choices or decisions; one needs to make value judgments, which, as Brooks and Dirkx reminds us, are reflected in emotions. Emotions can thus be useful information that helps us to act authentically (Dirkx, 2006, p. 31). J. E. Hammershoj, too, affirms the role of emotion in decision-making: “The subliminal self chooses those phenomena that most profoundly affect our emotional sensibility” (2009, p. 553). Of course, emotions can lead us astray, especially if they come from the “unconscious conditioning” Krishnamurti refers to, and so it is valuable that we can often choose to override our emotions’ guidance (Brooks, 2012, p. 21). Still, an integration of thought and feeling enables freedom and authenticity, because it enables us to make stronger, clearer choices. If I value freedom and authenticity, it seems I must value the interplay of thought and emotion, as well—not just the top-down executive functioning that we tend to value so highly in Western culture. Martin Buber puts it poetically when he affirms the value of “the truth which, though supra-rational, does not disown reason but holds it in her lap” (1970/1996, p. 98-99).

Furthermore, there are some obvious, well-documented connections between emotion and thought in learning. For example, emotional intelligence has been found to be “a greater predictor of academic and life success than is IQ” (Goleman as cited in Kessler, 2000, p. xiv). Similarly, Education professor Robert Sylwester asserts, “Emotion is very important to the educative process, because it drives attention, which drives learning and memory” (Sylwester as cited in Kessler, 2000, p. xv).

Emotional well-being is a worthy goal in and of itself, not merely as a means to the end of cognitive performance, but the latest science affirms the interrelationship of the two. It also suggests great educational benefits to be had from honoring this integration.

In advocating for integration of thought and feeling, Krishnamurti distinguishes between mere intellect and true intelligence. This distinction feels salient and useful to me as an educator, for it helps break down the dichotomous thinking that can make feeling seem unintelligent or somehow “less than” thought:

Intellect is thought functioning independently of emotion, whereas intelligence is the capacity to feel as well as to reason; and until we approach life with intelligence, instead of intellect alone, or with emotion alone, no political or educational system in the world can save us from the toils of chaos and destruction. (Krishnamurti, 1953, p. 65)

In reading this affirmation of the place of feeling in intelligence, I began to recognize my own internalized view of reason and “objective,” “hard” science as the best way of knowing. I also began to understand why I experience so much dissonance between my tendencies to both think and feel very deeply: I have internalized a view of thought as more valuable, and thus nurtured my *intellect* more than the *intelligence* that honors emotions and ‘gut reactions.’ Krishnamurti’s distinction could be a useful starting point for me as an educator; I can declare a commitment to nourishing intelligence, not just intellect.

Of course, thought and feeling are not the only aspects of self that need to be considered in contemplating integration; that is just one outstanding example. I can

think of many other dualisms that factor prominently in Western thinking, as well as many schools. Body/mind is a huge one, historically, which is often related to the thought/feeling and male/female dichotomies. In a practical sense, home/school is often a painful fragmentation for children, as well. It is crucial to me that I continue acknowledging and holding, if not resolving, the tension of apparent dualities as I progress as an educator.

Integration and soul

I have realized that wholeness, and the integration that honors it, is an important value for me as an educator. Yet there is more to unpack here, something fundamental to the very idea of wholeness. The more I delved into the idea of wholeness, the more I realized I had entered the realm of the soul. Though I had been unconsciously been trying to keep my spiritual exploration separate from my educational pursuits, the drive to integrate once again led me to acknowledge that my spiritual development is a huge factor in my educational philosophy. In order to explore this somewhat charged territory, I turned to educators Parker Palmer and Rachel Kessler, who not only write about integration, wholeness, and integrity, but also dare to speak of soul in education.

For many educators, it may seem inappropriate or even dangerous to talk about the soul in reference to school. As Kessler (2000) points out, a desire to respect both religious diversity and the separation of church and state has historically made soul a matter of home and church, while school was a cognitive and social venture (p. x). However, this separation hinges on how we define “soul.” At its simplest, Kessler defines soul as one’s “inner life” and the longing “for something more than an

ordinary, material, and fragmented existence (ibid.). Palmer uses similar language to define spirituality as the "diverse ways we answer the heart's longing to be connected to the largeness of life" (1997, p. 2). Without calling it spirituality, Nel Noddings affirms the same thing—"the great human need to be a part of something significant beyond the self" (in Schutz, 1998, p. 374). Both of these definitions ring true to longings I experienced as a child raised in an atheist household; they continue to resonate with my experience. Notably, both refer to a longing for connection with something bigger—which was what led me to India in the first place, and indirectly prompted the trajectory of this project. Similarly, social worker and professor Brene Brown defines spirituality as:

...Recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning, and purpose to our lives. (2010, p. 64)

My understanding of spirituality is still evolving, but Brown's definition comes the closest to mine in its emphasis on connection, and its acknowledgment of a greater power that need not be religious, but could be scientific or philosophical.

Given these definitions, it *is* possible to have soul in school without trampling on the Bill of Rights. In Kessler's years of educating, she has seen that:

Young people have experiences that nourish their spiritual development and *yet are not directly related to... religious dogma*. We can honor the First Amendment without abandoning our children's spiritual development. (2000, p. xiv)

In fact, as Kessler points out, we actually *can't* keep soul out of our classrooms.

Though we may turn a blind eye to it, “Our children continue to bring their souls to school” (2000, p. ix). When integration and soul are left out of formal education, they do not magically disappear from the equation; spirituality and soul, and/or the longing for them, still exist in the child.

Moreover, it is patently harmful to not acknowledge this element of children’s lives. Schools and systems that deny the soul have in many cases already produced what Kessler calls a “spiritual void” in children (2000, p. x). From this feeling of lack and nonfulfillment, dangerous behaviors can arise; Kessler posits lack of soul nourishment as a contributing factor to such tragedies as Columbine. Given this and droves of less-extreme examples, “Educators can no longer pretend that banning spiritual questions from school property is feasible” (2000, p. xi). To the degree that we do, we do a disservice to our students, ourselves, and society. By contrast, in her research, Brown found that spirituality—whether religious or not—was *always* correlated with resilience, or the ability to overcome adversity (2010, p. 64). However uncomfortable with spirituality some of us may be, it is potentially very adaptive, a protective resilience factor as well as a source of meaning and part of full human growth.

As I reflect on my teaching experiences, I can see ways in which soul has not been respected, or even acknowledged, by the educators and administrators that surround me. I can also acknowledge ways in which *I* did or do not honor the soul; this has been especially true whenever I felt that my *own* soul was not being nourished. Whenever I feel that my whole self is honored, some spiritual nourishment

is occurring, and my teaching—and, I believe, the children—benefit from that. I have taught in schools where I felt respected, was given agency, and felt connected to other members of the community. Even though “soul” or “spirit” were not explicitly mentioned, there was an implicit respect and even reverence for children’s humanity, and my own. Conversely, there have been times when I have not felt free to bring my whole or true self into the classroom. In the latter situations, it has in turn been more difficult to listen to and honor children’s true selves, because I have felt constrained, fragmented, even incomplete. I now believe that is crucial for both teachers and students to welcome soul into the classroom.

Kessler cites “deep connection to the self” as the first component of soul (2000, p. 19). In my understanding, “connection to the self” parallels my conception of integration as the internal connections that comprise wholeness. And in fact, as I will discuss in Chapter Two, connections within are the foundation for the connections with others that we so long for.

Implications of integration for education

Unfortunately, as Communications professor Chip McAuley (2010) points out, “Education being something to create a whole person is not what is found at any level of American public education” (p. 2). I, too, have experienced education as neglecting wholeness even while striving for well-roundedness. How can I help right this imbalance now that I am an educator? Palmer (2004) asserts, “As adults, we must achieve a complex integration that spans the contradictions between and inner and outer reality, that supports personal integrity and the common good” (p. 21). But what do *children* need in order to work toward integration?

In some sense, it is ironic that I should even have to ask this question, for integration is quite natural in early childhood. As a dual degree candidate, I have often longed for a way to preserve and extend the sense of freedom, wholeness, and openness young children seem to naturally possess. In *A Hidden Wholeness* (2004), Palmer often looks to his own childhood as a reminder of a time when he was more organically, effortlessly whole. He says, “When ‘true self’ is the topic, children are the best source, because they live so close to their birthright gifts” (2004, p. 31). Again, we hear in this quote “closeness,” the language of connection. Yet in schools, we often pull children away from these gifts, even in elementary school. We provide children with opportunities to do art and music once a week and make them do math for an hour a day, often pulling reason and emotion apart and valuing the former over the latter. Generally, children who have physical gifts are only able to utilize them during certain, limited times of day.

By contrast, in preschool, children are able to choose where they play (or “work,” depending on the school’s philosophy and terminology), and this play is often naturally integrated. In the dramatic play area, especially, an entire young self is engaged, but it is not uncommon to see “math” or “literacy” activities organically blossom into imaginative and physical interactions between Pre-K students. In most early childhood classrooms this behavior is welcomed and encouraged, but at many schools it greatly diminishes as the children age. I believe elementary schools would benefit from maintaining a structure more similar to early childhood classrooms, with more choice, continued use of stations” or “centers,” and greater fluidity in what activity is done at what time for how long. I also believe that free time in the form of

“Yard” or “Recess” should be given more time in the school day, not only because children need more opportunities to be physical and expend energy, but also because these times enable children to exercise their agency as whole beings. The play activities that children create and/or choose--sometimes with thoughtful suggestion or scaffolding by the teacher--engage children physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially.

I believe these suggested structural and scheduling adjustments would preserve and extend some of the earnest, uninhibited, integrated behaviors of early childhood into older years of childhood, while also fostering the abilities of abstraction and reflection. To that end, quiet, independent time is important to soul and wholeness as well; journaling could help promote self-knowledge and spiritual “connection to the self.” In this, it could also promote another incredibly important component of healthy selfhood and subjectivity: self-love.

IV. Self-love

Though I did not initially identify self-love as a crucial component of individual development, I now can't believe I didn't see its importance sooner. Self-love has long been on my radar in the personal sphere, but I began to think about it more deliberately and professionally through reading social worker Brene Brown's book *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010). Brown's research on shame and shame resilience led her to identify characteristics of people who lead lives she calls “Wholehearted”—people who experience fulfillment and enjoyment of life. One of the most central trends Brown found among these people is a practice of self-love; in

fact, she says self-love is even more important than self-knowledge (2010, p. xi). Her definition of “love” is worth quoting at length:

We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness, and affection. Love is not something we give or get; it is something that we nurture and grow, a connection that can only be cultivated between two people when it exists within each one of them—we can only love others as much as we love ourselves. (2010, p. 26)

Like the other concepts I have explored so far, “love” is a process, more a verb than a noun. In discussing how we love other people, Brown emphasizes the importance of being “seen and known,” and of treating one another well in various ways. But how do we apply this to self-love? How do we “honor the spiritual connection” with ourselves? I believe that cultivating our freedom, authenticity, and integration are a huge part of self-love; I will now explore a few other crucial elements of self-love according to Brown.

Practicing self-love

What creates or enables self-love? According to attachment theory (discussed more in the next chapter), we may or may not internalize self-love early on in life. As Hanson and Mendius put it, “The recurring experiences a young child has with her caregivers course through these neural networks, molding them and thus the way the child relates to others and feels about herself” (2009, p. 128-129). As adults, we must always remember the effect our words and actions have upon children, especially

early in childhood. Beyond the incredibly important period of infancy and role of primary attachment figures, teachers are also very influential upon how children view themselves. Children need to know that they belong and are loved “just because,” and feel accepted.

But regardless of what we were (or were not) provided with in the earliest years of development, there is much we can do throughout life to practice self-love. Brown says that actually living a practice of self-love entails "learning how to trust ourselves, to treat ourselves with respect, and to be kind and affectionate toward ourselves" (2010, p. 27). Indeed, when Brown interviewed people who lead lives they found fulfilling, certain themes kept arising. One was self-compassion: the ability to be kind and gentle with oneself. Brown found that these individuals embraced their imperfections and were “slow to judge” themselves (2010, p. 59). Hanson and Mendius, too, speaks to the importance of self-compassion, and defines it as, “simply warmth, concern, and good wishes—just like compassion for another person” (2009, p. 45-46). Overall, self-kindness can be seen as being “warm and understanding” rather than “ignoring” or self-flagellating with criticism (Brown, 2010, p. 59-60). These are the self-attitudes I believe we should advocate for, teach, and model in schools. As teachers, we must not only love children, but also teach them how to love themselves. (This is very similar to Nel Noddings’s beliefs about teachers’ roles as carers, which I will discuss in the following chapter.)

Importantly, self-love is distinct from self-esteem; though the latter is a much more familiar, tossed-about term, I believe the first is more essential. Self-love is unconditional, and based on a value of one’s *inherent* worth and dignity as a human

being, whereas self-esteem is contingent on one's actions and accomplishments. Self-esteem is indeed important; as philosopher and Professor of Education Matt Ferkany argues, self-esteem is "a crucial element of the confidence and motivation children need in order to engage in and achieve educational pursuits" (2008, p. 119). However, I believe it would behoove us as educators to focus more on children's self-love than on self-esteem, for an over-focus on attainments and can lead to negative self-image and perfectionism, as it suggests one's worth is conditional on one's accomplishments.

Eschewing perfectionism

Unfortunately, many of us are quite familiar with the behaviors that get in the way of self-love: perfection, comparison, and self-judgment. Of these traits, perfectionism is what Brown most focuses on most, explaining it as follows:

Perfectionism is, at its core, about trying to earn approval and acceptance.

Most perfectionists were raised being praised for achievement and performance (grade, manners, rule-following, people-pleasing, appearance, sports). Somewhere along the way, we adopt this dangerous and debilitating belief system: I am what I accomplish and how well I accomplish it. Please.

Perform. Perfect... (2010, p. 56)

Perfectionism happens when we think we must achieve "perfection" in order to experience acceptance, which, as mentioned above, is critical to healthy development. I strongly identify with Brown's description on a personal level. When I think back to my own time as a child in and out of school, I can see how a competitive, perfectionistic mindset was encouraged through practices such as numerical grades,

report cards, and even posting reading scores on the wall of the school lobby. I now see how these practices prompted a narrow and hierarchical view of people and how they interact, whereby one compares oneself to others in terms of who is “better” or “worse” at any given task and it seems as though there is not room for everyone to succeed.

Indeed, a big component of perfectionism is the tendency to compare oneself to others in a judgmental way. Brown points out that comparison is counter to self-acceptance: “The comparison mandate becomes this crushing paradox of ‘fit in to stand out!’ It’s not cultivate self-acceptance, belonging, and authenticity; it’s be like everyone else, but better” (2010, p. 95). Indeed, this behavior characterizes much of what I have witnessed in schools. Yet when we do this, we look at each other as located on a hierarchy of the same traits, rather than recognizing the inherent dignity, diversity, and unrepeatability we each possess as individuals. Comparison of this type (as opposed to a healthy recognition of diversity) undermines the values I am embracing in this thesis. Even as an adult, I still struggle with how comparing myself to others and to ideals, as well as competition with myself, has often led me to feel that nothing I do is adequate. I do not want to instill this kind of self-relationship in my students. Ultimately, I agree with Teddy Roosevelt: “comparison is the thief of joy.”

Perfectionism is a liability because it directly hurts us and promotes negative feelings about ourselves, but also because it makes one loath to take risks, because one’s “self-worth is on the line” (Brown, 2010, p. 57). Yet risks and mistakes are how we grow and learn, how innovation happens. A rigid and unrealistic view of how

things “should be” actually ends up limiting our ability to *truly* do our best, or to simply do something new. Still, for those of us who value the ideas of progress and developing to our full potential, we may be loath to let go of the idea of high expectations and always striving to be better. Brown makes an important distinguishing point, though: perfectionism isn’t “healthy achievement and growth” or “striving to be your best”; “it’s a way to protect ourselves from pain through thinking we can control things by making them perfect” in a rigid sense (2010, p. 56). Perfectionism requires a myopic, homogenous view of what quality and fulfillment are, whereby only one or a few idealized outcomes are “perfect.”

Finally, letting go of perfectionism promotes self-love and a sense of soul, but it also connects very strongly back to authenticity and freedom. Narrow, rigid, and unattainable ideas of quality and worth often indicate an unquestioned internalization of external authority. And certainly, they keep us from being as free as I would like us to be, for when we are preoccupied with proving our worth or finding validation from outside, we cannot live up to our potential for, and *right* to, development and fulfillment. Unfortunately, I assimilated the perfectionist mindset all-too-easily, and it is still an ongoing struggle for me to let go of my fear of criticism, perennial comparison of self to others, and deficit thinking for something more healthy. As I ask myself both what *I* would want for children and how to equip them to ask for what they want and believe for *themselves*, I feel increasingly clear that it is important to minimize the tendency toward perfectionism and unhealthy expectations.

Implications of self-love for education

To me, this research indicates that adults should not compare children quantitatively or hierarchically if we want to affirm their sense of inherent self-worth. As teachers, we may perpetuate tendencies toward perfectionism and comparison more than we realize, so we must be aware and reflective about the values we convey through our practice. Moreover, as I will discuss in the next chapter, the need to belong and be accepted is strong, unavoidable, and in many ways adaptive. But considering how this need can lead to an obsessive need to fit-in and perfectionism, it is all the more important to make sure children feel like they belong and are accepted without having to be perfect, and, in my opinion, without having to compete.

Teachers should also be very aware of what self-attitudes they are modeling, even unconsciously: Do we demonstrate a harsh, perfectionistic stance towards ourselves, or do we exhibit self-love? As Brown points out, perfectionism “touches everyone around us. We pass it down to our children, we infect our workplace with impossible expectations, and it’s suffocating for our friends and families” (2010, p. 61). Personally, I know I need to keep this tendency in check, both for myself and to avoid “infecting” my students with it. Instead of modeling self-judgment, adults would ideally exhibit kind, compassionate self-talk.

Indeed, greater self-love among the adults in children’s lives seems to be of dire importance, yet often in short supply. This February, inspired by Brown’s ideas, I implemented an interactive art project whereby residents of my building wrote themselves love letters on handmade paper hearts. It was amazing and saddening how

few people felt they “knew how” to do this. Even with further explanation, people would say, “But I don’t love myself,” or “I’ve never received a love letter. How can I write myself one?” I pointed out that this was exactly why the project was needed, but I also empathized with their struggle—I was facing it myself. Indeed, most of the “love letters” reflected this internal tension, including the poignant, “I don’t love you yet... But I promise I’ll try harder.”

To the degree that I am aiming at any one outcome for education, I dream of schools that would help children develop into adults who have a healthy sense of self-love. Children deserve an education that will help them learn to love themselves, not an education that views them as means to an end, or requires their entire self-worth to be built on performance. As Amartya Sen reminds us, “Human beings are not merely means of production, but also the ends of the exercise” (1999, p. 296). Too often, we objectify children by making them means to other ends, whether it is production, our own goals, our own need to do our job, or even the seemingly noble goal of their own development. Moreover, we teach children to do this to themselves. If we don’t acknowledge them as unique, dynamic subjects, we objectify them and undermine our goals of making them truly free, happy adults. I believe that teaching children self-love and integration, as well as scaffolding the lifelong processes of freedom and authenticity, is our responsibility to our children, the best thing we can do for them.

We cannot ethically continue to provide children with educations in which they do not learn to love themselves. Though self-love is intertwined with freedom, authenticity, and integration, it is perhaps the most important goal of all. I believe any learning without a grounding in self-love is built on a faulty foundation, an insecurity

about self-worth that is distinct from a healthy questioning and coming-to-terms with our facticity. As Brown points out, self-love is an ongoing process, and thus can be developed; it is thus very much the business of education. Self-love is an incredibly important end in and of itself, a positive contributor to academic learning, and a necessary prerequisite to loving others, to which I now turn.

Chapter Two

Beyond individualism: Toward a community of subjects

*Spring overall. But inside us
there's another unity.
Behind each eye here,
one glowing weather.
Every forest branch moves differently
in the breeze, but as they sway
they connect at the roots.
-Rumi, *Birdsong*, p. 35*

Through exploration of freedom, authenticity, integration, and self-love, I now have a greater understanding of the individual self and how we honor and protect her rights. However, I still believe in the primacy of relationship to how we make meaning and find fulfillment. I still believe in *ubuntu*—that “a person is a person through other people”—and in the centrality of community to the pursuit of meaningful well-being. Yet I am still far from understanding how I believe self, other, and group interact. What do I believe is the place of relationship in a fulfilling life in which individual freedom and development are honored? How do self-realization and individual development enable the ideals of *ubuntu* and strengthen the group, and how do respectful, high-quality relations in turn promote individual strength and development? And given the answers to these questions, how should we exist in relationship in schools?

My struggle with the tension between the individual and the group is hardly unfamiliar to democratic life, nor to the history of education. Philosophy of Education

professor Marianna Papastephanou points out, “Pedagogical ideals have revolved around the bipole ‘individual vs. community’ and defined themselves on the basis of the primacy they grant the one or the other pole” (2003, p. 396). Martha Nussbaum, John Dewey, and Paolo Friere are obviously concerned with how education prepares us for group life and to be democratic citizens; meanwhile, Nel Noddings sets a precedent for prioritizing more intimate, caring one-to-one relationships within school. I, too, believe that schools should be responsible for helping children engage with others, both for their own fulfillment and for the greater good. Relationships are an integral part of what makes life worth living, and are crucial to both our survival and our sense of self. If our lives are necessarily relational and social, a high-quality, respectful way of relating is a crucial element of development, education, and democracy.

In this chapter, I use Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* and Nel Noddings’s *The Challenge to Care in Schools* in order to deepen my understanding of one-to-one relationships. I then put Kenneth C. Bessant’s “Authenticity, Community, and Modernity,” as well as various sources exploring the concept of *ubuntu*, in conversation with Buber and Noddings in order to explore how their relational insights extend to groups. Finally, I briefly explore Martha Nussbaum’s ideas about the need to see other human beings as subjects in order to be true democratic citizens; this both helps develop my idea of subjecthood and lays a foundation for exploring art as a way of developing children’s capacity to honor the subjecthood of themselves and others.

Why and how we need each other

Before I delve into the nature of quality interactions and relationships, I feel it is necessary to review why relationship is so important. Though humans are incredibly social, interdependent creatures, this reality can be surprisingly easy to forget in the modern world. Indeed, in my experience, mainstream American culture espouses and encourages an ethic of individualism, including what social worker Brene Brown calls “the myth of self-sufficiency” (2010, p. 20) and what philosopher Martha Nussbaum similarly calls “the myth of total control” (2010, p. x). I have found that the (sometimes implicit) embracing of these myths often compromises my recognition of our mutuality and interdependence—of how much we need one another, as well as how our own actions affect others. So, although it may seem obvious that we humans inevitably exist in relationship, I often need a reminder—and considering how today’s educational climate hyper-focuses on individual academic achievement and fails to give interpersonal connections their due, it is all the more important to suss out how fundamental a need relationship is.

Humans are extremely physically dependent for the first few years of our life; we exhibit a higher level of helplessness and longer period of childhood than any other animal, and require a great deal of physical aid in order to physically survive (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 30). However, our dependence goes beyond food, water, and shelter, for attachment theory shows that secure attachment to a caregiver(s) is integral to healthy development. A now-famous experiment by psychologist Harry Harlow illustrated just how important physical nurturing is to primates:

...Baby rhesus monkeys, raised alone or with same-age peers, preferred a foodless but fuzzy terrycloth surrogate ‘mother’ over a wire-mesh version that freely dispensed meals. He [Harlow] showed that these infants desperately wanted to bond, and that depriving them of physical, emotional, and social attachment could provide near-paralyzing dysfunction. (Dobbs, 2009, p. 64)

Thanks to decades of research, including that by psychoanalyst John Bowlby and developmental psychologist Mary Ainsworth, it is now believed that attachment is a biological instinct, and that bonding in relationship with a caregiver is crucial to social and emotional development in the early years of life and throughout the lifespan (Glaser, 2000, p. 102). These early experiences in close relationships in turn “shape expectancies” about self, other, and relationship; early attachment experience is believed to provide an implicit model for relating later in life (Kobak, et al., p. 333; see also Glaser, 2000, p. 102).

Indeed, after childhood, the need for intimate others does not disappear, and care and love remain very important to us. For example, Erik Erikson posited “intimacy or isolation” as the first stage of adulthood, in which intimacy is posited as absolutely integral to healthy adulthood (see Ataly, 2007 and Erikson, 1950).

Similarly, Nel Noddings reminds us, “At every stage we need to be cared for in the sense that we need to be understood, received, respected, recognized” (1992, p. xi).

We are simply not meant to exist atomistically. Brene Brown puts it well:

We are wired for connection. It’s in our biology. From the time we are born, we need connection to thrive emotionally, physically, spiritually, and intellectually. A decade ago, the idea that we’re ‘wired for connection’ might

have been perceived as touchy-feely or New Age. Today, we know that the need for connection is more than a feeling or a hunch. It's hard science.

Neuroscience, to be exact. (2010, p. 19)

Indeed, psychoneurologist Rick Hanson provides evolutionary explanation for why we love, stating that, "Children evolved to be lovable and parents to be loving, since strong attachments promote survival in the wild" (Hanson & Mendius, 2009, p. 128). Thus, attachment theory supports an understanding of self (I) and relationship-to-other (We) as influencing one another in a constant dynamism, with early physical and emotional dependence laying a foundation for later interdependence.

In addition to shaping our sense of self and other, attachment and relationship have strong implications for how we learn about the outside world of objects. Tronick and Weinberg believe:

The accomplishment of motivated action on the inanimate world, however, depends on the establishment of intersubjective states with others and the mutual construction of meaning. *Thus, the establishment of social relationships is the primary process of development and the understanding of the inanimate world is secondary to it.* (1997, p. 55, emphasis added)

According to Tronick's and Weinberg's line of thinking, relationship is absolutely integral to our development, our sense of self, and our ability to create meaning. In fact, Tronick and Weinberg's view suggests that subjectivity is the foundation for any semblance of objectivity, for learning is socially situated: meanings are not only *constructed* (as opposed to inherent), but *co-constructed* through intersubjectivity. Of course, Lev Vgotsky, a psychologist who is a hugely influential figure in modern

educational theory and at Bank Street in particular, also emphasized “the sociocultural nature of human cognition” (Kozulin, 2004, p. 3), and he “focused on the way a child co-constructs meaning through social interaction” (Mahn, 1999, p. 341). Knowledge itself is inextricably linked with relationship.

Clearly, humans evolved to be strongly connected to intimate others, and current theories of cognition posit the importance of relationship to learning. Furthermore, in the modern world, we are also connected to and dependent upon a great deal of other people beyond family or affinity group. In fact, our interdependence extends beyond the connections within our broader community and country, to the global arena. Even in 1947, the first Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, recognized, “All the nations and peoples are too closely knit together today for any one of them to imagine that it can live apart” (in Nussbaum, 2010, p. 79). Now, in the midst of the information revolution, this is truer than ever. As Martha Nussbaum puts it, “More than at any time in the past, we all depend on people we have never seen, and they depend on us” and none of us “stand outside this global interdependency” (2010, p. 79- 80). This “interdependency” comes with a great deal of responsibility, and there is no denying it.

As human beings, we are inextricably linked to one another. It is thus logical and necessary for education to address the relational and collective in order to prepare children for the realities and demands of adult life—as well as to have positive relationships that provide such fulfillment and deep meaningfulness. In order to develop my beliefs about quality one-to-one, direct relationship, I will first look at Martin Buber’s concept of I-You encounters and then at Nel Noddings’s description

of caring relations. Though I had not heard of Buber before, my research quickly and powerfully pointed me to him; as I began reading articles on non-objectifying relationship, his name arose time and again and it became clear that he was a pivotal figure in understanding human relationship. In order to explore this question in the context of education specifically, I immediately thought of Nel Noddings, who I had heard of at Bank Street and knew was an important thinker in modern education.

I. The “Inner circle”: I-You encounters and caring relations

i. I-You encounters

Martin Buber is a Jewish philosopher whose book *I and Thou* (1970/1996) has been hugely influential on various thinkers throughout the past few decades, as well as on the interfaith, civil rights, and anti-war movements. Though the book’s theological implications are beyond the purview of this thesis, I have nonetheless gained a great deal from Buber’s basic idea of the “I-Thou” encounter (now translated as “I-You”). As the translator, Walter Kaufmann, states in his introduction, *I and Thou* is fundamentally “a book about direct relationships” (1970/1996, p. 15). “Direct relationships” are exactly what I have come to value in moving from the individual to community, and what I seek to understand better through this part of my research.

The first basic premise of *I and Thou* is a distinction between what Buber calls I-You interactions and I-It interactions. In an I-You interaction, one individual encounters another individual as a subject—a living, breathing, dynamic individual. In I-It interactions, one encounters the other as an object—as means to an end. Thus,

to have a true I-You encounter, one cannot have an end goal in mind for which the other person is merely a means (Buber, 1970/1996, p. 63). Buber repeatedly makes clear that true relation happens when we are engaged in an I-You encounter “between subjects”, whereas I-It interactions are not relations, and are characterized by separation and the “distance of objects” (1970/1996, p. 75, 112; Muth, 2009, p. 205). This distinction between I and It is a “fundamental subject-object distinction” (Bessant, 2010, p. 14). Though I-It interactions are necessary in life, I-You encounters are invaluable in that they are characterized by “the genuineness of a meeting which yields the knowing of mutual relationship without the certainty of objective knowledge” (Friedman, 1999, p. 405).

Another crucial characteristic of I-You relations is “betweenness.” In fact, Education Professor Mordechai Gordon says that Buber essentially discovered a new realm, “the realm of between person and person” (2011, p. 208). In I-You interactions, I and You come together to create something new: the space between us. This “betweenness” is more than simply the I or You; it does not live in either individual or “soul” (Friedman, 1999, p. 404-406). Cornelia Muth says:

A ‘real’ meeting is not a matter of your single self or the single other. It is a matter of two or more people creating a common space, the ‘sphere of the interhuman,’ which is another term for a genuine dialogue. The realm of this ‘between’ is revealed when people bring and give themselves to the other and see the other beyond their own image of them. (Muth, 2009, p. 204)

With I-You interactions, the whole truly is greater than the sum of its parts; though it is co-created by the I and the You, it is something new. It truly exists in the between.

Thus, when we interact with someone as a You, we honor their individuality and subjective experience, but we also enable a new realm to be created: one in which we can know one another and the world, making meaning together. However, to do this, we have to be very present and set aside our preconceptions and mental schema:

In order to become truly/fully aware of the other during an encounter, one needs to give up the dogma of one's mentally fixed categories that create the illusion that one knows the other. (Muth, 2009, p. 204)

In an I-You relation, we know directly through encounter, not through concepts; we know authentically and in-the-moment. This is how we know the other, according to Buber: through “a bold swinging into the other which demands the intensest action of one's being to imagine the particular real person in all her wholeness, unity, and uniqueness” (Friedman 1999, p. 408). Though one cannot ever claim to know the totality of another person's experience, one can and should recognize and imagine them as a subject—as their *own* I. The other is thus still inevitably an other, but in the moment of encounter they are a You, not an It.

Importantly, a true I-You “relation” or “encounter” is characterized by reciprocity. Buber states outright:

Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me and I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us... Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity. (1970/1996, p. 67; see also p. 58)

Relation is a two-way street, and for this reason, listening is absolutely central to I-You encounters. An interaction is not a true subject-subject encounter if the Other “never hear(s) you as another I” (Kauffman as cited in Buber, 1970/1996, p. 11). So,

in my understanding, I-You interactions are characterized by a high level of attention or presence—a “readiness to respond with my whole being to the unforeseen and the unique” (Friedman as cited in Muth, 2009, p. 209). In an I-You encounter, co-constructed reality arises between two actively engaged, equal participants.

It would have been more difficult for me to understand or even believe Buber’s idea of the I-You relation if I couldn’t recognize it in my own experience. However, last spring I had an incredibly memorable experience that has stood out in my mind ever since. One Monday morning, at the private school where I was an associate teacher of four-year-olds, children entered the classroom with their caregivers, milling about and executing their routines. For a few minutes, I engaged with five-year-old Jonathan in a way that was palpably different from any experience I could remember.

Jonathan gave my head teacher and I a lot of “trouble”; in other words, his irrepressible energy and drive to interact—his refusal to be contained—made it difficult to control the classroom in the way my head teacher wanted. As she put it, one of us had to be “on him” at all times. I felt deeply conflicted about this approach to Jonathan. I loved him, and I did not believe he should have to be quieted and contained so often; still, he also had the capacity to infuriate and even scare me. I also recognized how his behaviors sometimes got in the way of not just the teachers’ goals, but also the goals and well-being of the children, including Jonathan himself. My attempt to nurture Jonathan and aid his development was an ongoing struggle, and one I rarely felt positive about.

However, on this particular occasion, when Joshua initiated conversation with me, my attention locked in and I became engrossed in listening to him. In fact, even beyond listening receptively, I naturally interacted with Jonathan in a genuine back-and-forth, creating what felt like a totally new space between us. Jonathan told me about his weekend, and I asked questions, as well as offering details about my own weekend; we shared ourselves and our subjecthood. When, after a few minutes, Jonathan ran off to play with a friend, I emerged from the interaction and felt a palpable, physical change in my consciousness.

I believe that the experience I just described was a subject-subject, I-You interaction. Indeed, my subjective experience of those few minutes was markedly different from any other I'd had that year; the entire feeling-tone was unfamiliar and, admittedly, wonderful. For once, I met Jonathan where he was; I listened and responded to what he said and did in the moment—to who he was—without attempting to control him or analyze him into a framework. I didn't attempt to force or persuade him to behave a certain way. For a few minutes, Jonathan was not a mere means to an end—not even my seemingly benevolent goals for his own development and the peace of the classroom. Those goals were temporarily set aside, and this enabled a true connection with Jonathan. I wasn't trying to change him; instead, he and I communed through our uniqueness. As Buber puts it:

Genuine conversation, and therefore every actual fulfillment and relation between men, means acceptance of otherness... Everything depends, as far as human life is concerned, on whether each thinks of the other as the one he is, whether each, that is, with all his desire to influence the other, nevertheless

unreservedly accepts and confirms him in his being this man and in his being made in this particular way. (Buber as cited in Gordon, 2011, p. 207)

In my interpretation, in this passage Buber advocates for seeing the other as subject, affirming that this is integral to recognizing and entering into relation with him/her. Granted, Buber is speaking of an I and You who are equal, which, as I discussed in the first chapter, in many ways adults and children are not. Adults inevitably have a great deal of influence and power over children; there is no way around this reality, and this is why it is of utmost importance to know what I believe and what values and processes I am teaching, consciously or not.

Still, these ideas of non-objectification and acceptance have huge implications for my educational practice, considering how we all—myself included—can be so determined to influence children and mold them into what we deem right. Reading Buber reminds me that how we exist in relationship with the children we teach is more important than any content we teach. The I-You relation could be a paradigm or focusing goal to help me translate my values and theory into practice. Of course, the educational goals of protecting everyone's safety and promoting their well-being are important, and often require acts *other* than entering into I-You relations. As a teacher of multiple children, I cannot honor every child's individual needs all the time. I obviously cannot have I-You moments with each of them all the time, or perhaps even very frequently. In fact, Buber says we cannot always have these interactions all the time, and that we actually need to objectify and engage in I-It relations sometimes (1970/1996, p. 68-69). Still, I could strive to have more I-You interactions in my practice, and to foster them between children, as well. This would require setting

aside my own preconceptions, goals, and need for control in order to actually witness and respond to the child. Certainly, this one relation with Jonathan helped humanize him in my eyes; I also believe that, for those few minutes at least, he felt seen and loved. The I-You encounter strengthened our relationship.

But what made those few minutes different? What enabled me to give such focused, relaxed, complete attention to Jonathan, responding to him naturally instead of reacting? I have already described the general characteristics of I-You encounters, but in digging deeper, I also see the criteria for individual development that I outlined in the first chapter as integral to Buber's concept of quality interactions.

I-You encounters build on individual freedom and authenticity

I-You interactions are characterized by freedom in that they are entered into freely; they cannot be coerced or faked, and a sense of open spontaneity and authenticity animates them. When we relate to someone as a You, Buber says, it is always "anew," and the interaction is "unpredictable, without any possibility of anticipation or prescription" (1970/1996, p. 144). Indeed, I was very open to the interaction with Jonathan; I didn't plan or premeditate it, nor did I shut down or try to control it when it arose. In the spontaneity of the interaction, there was a great deal of freedom, which felt rather different than the control-oriented "choices" and interactions that typically populated my school day. To the best of my knowledge, Jonathan entered the interaction freely and authentically, as did I; because of this, the relation itself was free and authentic.

What was notably *absent* from this and all I-You relations is a sense of controlling or objectifying the other. Normally, I found myself trying to control or at

least contain Jonathan's behavior, essentially objectifying him for a greater end of classroom "peace." But in this relation, I saw Jonathan as a subject, and I thereby helped create a space in which he could be free and authentic with me.

I-You encounters affirm the wholeness of both the I and the You

Furthermore, a sense of individual wholeness is integral to Buber's idea of I-You encounters. Indeed, I-You interactions and I-It interactions are fundamentally different in this regard. Buber states, "The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being" (1970/1996, p. 53-54). This quote suggests that objectification (I-It) necessarily involves fragmentation, whereas an encounter between subjects (I-You) is, by definition, predicated on each subject's wholeness. Though most of what I have read has been frustratingly vague about what it actually means to be whole in I-You interactions, it is worth considering whether one must acknowledge one's parts as interrelated and dynamic, and be willing to bring them to attention to address another human being, in order to have an I-You interaction. I expect that the idea of wholeness as it pertains to the I and the We will be an ongoing exploration throughout my practice, and my life.

In turn, Buber says that seeing someone else as a subject requires seeing, or at least acknowledging, *their* wholeness. Whether or not we can do this has a great impact on how we feel and act toward the individual, according to Buber, for "hatred remains blind by its very nature; one can hate only part of a being" (1970/1996, p.

68). In my understanding, Buber is stating that if we can see (or at least imagine) another's wholeness, we recognize that s/he, too, is a dynamic, complicated human being—one who both suffers and seeks happiness, just as we do. When we exist in this way, Buber seems to be arguing, it is actually impossible to hate. Thus, if educators are invested in helping children develop into kind, loving individuals, a recognition of wholeness in both the I and the You is clearly necessary.

The importance of individual wholeness, freedom, and authenticity in I-You encounters squares with my anecdotal experience, as exemplified in my encounter with Jonathan. When I entered that interaction, I felt well and whole in that my attention was totally present and unified around the interaction. For the moment, nothing was wrong, and nothing other than Joshua occupied my mind. I did feel connected to myself; Rachel Kessler might say I felt connected to my soul. I was able to exist as an authentic individual in relationship because I set aside worries about how I would be judged by my head teacher or the class parents.

Tellingly, I was relating to *myself* as a You, not an It: I was not self-objectifying or judging. I believe this is the main reason why I was able to commune with Joshua and co-create a space between us, a bond where our egos dissolved in the I-You relation. An acknowledgment of how important one's own wellness is to healthy encounters with children has significant implications for the field of education and how we treat teachers and caregivers—how well we “nurture the nurturers,” as Bank Street professor Rena Rice puts it. We teachers cannot expect ourselves to be truly loving caregivers, or to model desirable behaviors, if we are too run-down.

I-You encounters are how we know and love the self and the other

Finally, I-You encounters strengthen both the individual and relationship, because they are how we know both ourselves and one another; they are also one excellent way to *love* each other and ourselves. In this, the I-You encounter reinforces my conception of self and other in constant, potentially mutually beneficial, interaction.

Buber states that we can only know each other through I-You relation. Though we can never claim to know another's whole experience, in the moment of encounter we do know the other: "When we walk our way and encounter a man who comes toward us, walking his way, we know our way only and not his; for his comes to life for Us only in the encounter" (1970/1996, p. 124). In I-You encounter, we are able to experience the other as another subject. Whereas I-It, "objective" knowledge is indirect—it involves fragmenting and categorizing—I-You encounters enable direct knowledge of the other through being present, listening, and interacting (1970/1996, p. 62). As Friedman puts it, we know each other through being present and seen in our "uniqueness" and confirmed by the other (1999, p. 408). Thus, coming into encounter with someone else does not mean losing our sense of self and uniqueness; if anything, it affirms them, while also providing a reminder of our shared humanity.

Furthermore, as we create a space in which to know and be known, we also commit an act of love, based on psychiatrist M. Scott Peck's definition: "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (as cited in hooks, year, p. 4). When entering into an I-You encounter, we create a space for both parties to learn and grow. This can greatly aid us in our

striving to become more human, more free, more authentic, and more ourselves. In these ways, I-You interactions are acts of love.

In examining relationship through *I and Thou*, I have inevitably come full circle back to individual needs and values, for I-You encounters positively impact the individual development. Though I have emphasized a value of wholeness and entering into encounters with a sense of self, integration, and wellness, it is not as though we arrive at interactions fully formed and remain unchanged by them. In fact, self-knowledge can also grow from relation with others:

It is not self-knowledge that constitutes the self and enables it to relate to the world but, on the contrary, it is the self's capacity to enter relations of recognition with others and make commitments that enables the self to achieve self-knowledge. (Ferrara as cited in Bessant, 2010, p. 19)

So, though to some degree I agree that, as Heidegger says, "Only by authentically Being-their-selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another" (as cited in Bessant, 2010, p. 5), "being with one another" also makes us who we are. Relationship is also largely what constitutes us, and we never exist in a self-contained, isolated place outside an environment and context. Existing in relationship is one hugely powerful way that we can become more authentic, as we learn about ourselves; more free, as we become more able to make and claim our own choices; more integrated, as an important longing for connection is filled and our wholeness is honored; and more loving of both self and other, as we experience a way of existing together that treats humans and dynamic subjects with great potential for growth.

Thus, to me, it seems clear that the apparent dichotomy of individual and relationship is not an “either-or,” but a “both-and.” The I and I-You (or We) exist in a continuous, dynamic relationship. Indeed, the idea of the I-You encounter has helped me understand the interactive balance of self and other, of how individual and relationship can be mutually reinforcing rather than at odds. Perhaps most important, engaging in quality interactions and working toward others’ well-being does not require abnegation or sublimation of self. Buber puts it beautifully:

What has to be given up is not the I... the I is indispensable for any relationship, including the highest, which always presupposes an I and You. What has to be given up is not the I but that false drive for self-affirmation which impels man to flee from the unreliable, unsolid, unlasting, unpredictable, dangerous world of relation into the having of things.

(1970/1996, p. 126)

This passage affirms my belief that it is when the individual self feels unfulfilled and unseen, and thus feels a “false drive for self-affirmation,” that more objectifying and dehumanizing ways of interaction prosper, producing either faceless group-think or vicious “individualism” that is actually not good for individuals at all. We do not need to obliterate the I for the We to prosper—we *need to honor every I*. The individual does not have to be sublimated in the name of a greater good; rather, I now believe it is objectification (of both self and other) that must be lessened in order for us to experience meaning and fulfillment.

I will return to Buber later in the chapter in order to explore how we move from one-to-one relationships to community. However, I first want to get more

specific and concrete about what quality interactions look like in daily life, and specifically in the realm of education. Nel Noddings has already done much good work in this arena, so I now turn to her *The Challenge to Care in Schools* in order to explore my role as a potential teacher of caring relationships in school.

ii. Caring relations

In *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, Noddings argues that schools' foremost priority, even as multi-goal institutions, should be care. Noddings states that "the first job of the schools is to care for our children," and that through this being-cared-for, children learn to care (1992, p. 9). (This resonates with attachment theory's idea that our early experiences with caregivers impacts our ability to attach later in life.) Noddings does not merely deem care important; she actually places it at the *center* of schools' ideal purpose, even above intellectual achievement or job-readiness:

I, too, believe that a dedication to full human growth... will not stunt or impede intellectual achievement, but even if it might, I would take the risk if I could produce people who would live nonviolently with each other, sensitively and in harmony with the natural environment, reflectively and serenely with themselves. (1992, p. 12)

Noddings's conception of "full human growth" entails a value of a sort of peacefulness brought about by care.

Noddings posits different kinds of care, including care for ideas, objects, plants, and animals; she thereby uses the idea of care to unify the various arenas of human life she believes we should nourish in education. Still, Noddings makes clear

that she prioritizes the “caring relation,” which she defines as a “connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care” (1992, p. 15). I agree with Noddings’s prioritization of care and “full human growth,” and her belief in the interrelatedness of the two; I also agree that interpersonal care is an incredibly important goal in and of itself, as well as a means to other goals. Like Noddings, I believe that learning to care for others, alongside self-care, should be the central focus of education.

For Noddings, all this means that teachers have a responsibility to directly care for their students. Noddings emphasizes the interrelatedness of having been cared for and being able to care:

The capacity to care may be dependent on adequate experience in being cared for. Even while a child is too young to be a carer, he or she can learn how to be a responsive cared-for. Thus our role as carer is more important than our role as model, but we fill both simultaneously. (1992, p. 22)

Directly giving children the care they need will enable them to care, both because they will have internalized it from our giving (which, according to attachment theory, is necessary for their ability to love), and also because they will have seen it modeled. Adults’ responsibility as carers is thus two-fold, for we are not only giving children the care they need, but also partially determining how able they are to care.

What characterizes a caring relation? Noddings asserts that to be a carer in a given moment requires “engrossment”; this is perhaps the biggest criterion of a caring relation. She quotes philosopher Simone Weil’s eloquent words:

The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this. (As cited in Noddings, 1992, p. 15-16)

Weil's words express the importance of what Noddings calls "motivational displacement," which means that one's own agenda is set aside and replaced by the genuine desire to listen, and perhaps also aid, as we are "we are seized by the needs of another" (Noddings, 1992, p. 15-16). This also squares with Buber's I-You encounters, as attention and wholeness are central to them, as well.

Though "soul emptying" is a poetic and powerful way to conceptualize this way-of-being, I think that Weil's choice of the word "attention" is actually most salient, and the most all-encompassing, familiar, and useful term for my purposes. If we give someone our undivided attention, we are by definition engrossed, setting aside distractions and our own needs, for that moment. In a given moment, if we give someone our undivided attention, suspending judgment, that constitutes caring for them.

What gets in the way of caring relations, and of the focused attention of engrossment and receptivity that engenders them? According to Noddings, one of the main obstacles to genuine, effective caring is the tendency toward methodicization—the "desire to reduce all teaching and learning to one well-defined method" (1992, p. 7). This tendency stands in contrast to relating to someone directly, authentically, and spontaneously, as it precludes the truly receptive listening that is the keystone of both I-You relations and caring relations. Problematically, universalizing undermines an acknowledgment of individual difference and the importance of context. When it

comes to relationship, the same thing will not work or be true in all situations, yet universalizability tries to defy this reality:

Universalizability suggests that who we are, to whom we are related, and how we are situated should have nothing to do with our moral decision making. An ethic of caring rejects this. (Noddings, 1992, p. 21)

Though we all need care—that much *is* universal—Noddings reminds us that care may look very different for different people, and this is why “caring is a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviors” (1992, p. 17). Remembering the specificity and unrepeatability of each individual human is crucial to our capacity for care; again, this resonates with I-You relations and a commitment to treating individuals as subjects, not objects.

Another impediment to attention and care is the drive to control, which is very much related to universalization and methodicization. Of course, healthy self-control—which Dewey advocates for, and which I briefly discussed in Chapter One—can be beneficial to freedom and the formation of respectful relationships. Trying to control *others*, however, is very different; it is simply not totally possible, much less a fair or desirable way of treating other human beings. I believe most control is unethical because it attempts to abridge others’ freedom, their right to choose. Yet unfortunately, Noddings points out, “the pervasive goal is control” in most schools and classrooms (1992, p. 9). Indeed, most of my interactions with Jonathan, I felt the need to control and contain his behavior, whereas when I entered into I-You relation with him, the goal of control had vanished.

In my experience, this goal of control has not changed enough in the past twenty years, even in some “progressive” settings. As a teacher in charge of twenty-plus children at a time, I often feel that I am expected to control the children in order to *make* them do what we deem it important for them to do. (Alternately, somewhat more “progressively,” I am expected to motivate children to *want* to do it.) This abridges children’s freedom, objectifying them and their experience in the name of our goals.

Yet, in fact, it does feel that control is necessary in these situations, given the conditions and the outcomes that are expected. At the very least, bringing over a dozen young children together in a space with only one or two adults requires external control in order to maintain a basic sense of safety; beyond this, we also control what children study and how, when they make transitions, how they converse, and myriad other aspects of their lives. I frequently feel ethically uncomfortable with the extent of control that seems to be required in the classroom in order to fulfill the many developmental and academic goals we have for children. I often hit a wall when I realize both how difficult it is to “make” someone do something and how much I *don’t want* to treat children this way, don’t want to objectify them. Clearly, the drive to control makes it difficult to have the ideal sorts of caring relations Noddings presents, not to mention I-You interactions.

Though Noddings does not put it this way, I see methodicization, universalizability and control as being fundamentally about objectification, which is often antithetical to caring relations. When we attempt to find one great answer and apply it blindly to everyone, we cannot possibly be seeing individual subjects in all

their complexity, depth, and dynamism. Instead, they become means to the end of our goal—even, ironically, our goal of their development! We do not witness the genuine reality of our students, or respond to it, when we objectify them and their experience in service of our own ideas and goals. So, objectification dishonors the individual values I explored in the first chapter; moreover, my own experience and Noddings's and Buber's writing tell me it is a recipe for unhealthy, unfulfilling relationships. The strength of a dyad or group is contingent upon true recognition of the individual; caring relations, like I-You encounters, are based upon this recognition.

Indeed, Noddings' idea of quality relations very much builds upon and resonates with Buber's, especially in its emphasis on total attention. However, Noddings's framework may be more appropriate and attainable for my educational goals than Buber's is, because as a teacher and adult, my relationship to young students is inevitably unequal; I can and should engage in more relations in which I am the "carer." Still, my idea of what I will call "quality interactions," based on an amalgam of Buber and Noddings, prioritizes the standard of attention and non-objectification they *both* espouse. Moreover, I believe we can still embrace I-You interactions as a central goal for children as they grow into adulthood. Perhaps in *our* interactions with children we are more able to provide model caring relations, whereas we are more able to foster and promote I-You encounters between the *children*.

Implications of quality interactions for education

My greater understanding of one-to-one relationships has huge implications

for my educational practice. I now want to focus more on what each individual child needs and what her experience is as a human subject, and less on what she is doing that makes her an object in the way of other goals. This will require a sizeable, general shift in attitude and a repeated, concerted effort. It is all the more important that I make this shift, because my responsibility as carer is two-fold: when we act as carers are not only directly giving children the care they need, but also partially determining how able they are to care by dint of the example we provide. This is a huge responsibility, and one I believe most educators are not able to sufficiently fulfill in their current environments, given all the other expectations placed on them.

Indeed, I believe certain structural changes would have to take place to most schools in order to make them more conducive to true care; mainly, I believe class sizes and/or student-teacher ratios need to be much lower than is commonly the case. It is already difficult to maintain safety and relative order as the only teacher in a classroom of twenty or thirty children; it is near-impossible to both do so and also give children the caring, one-to-one attention they deserve. When I open a school, it will be one of my top priorities to have smaller, and perhaps more fluid, groupings of children.

However, even in more traditional, larger classes, we *can* take steps to model caring and I-You relations for children, scaffolding their ability to enter into them and creating a standard and expectations for how they relate to one another. Simple protocols such as reminding children about eye contact, or having a child repeat back what she heard her friend say can help create habits of attentive care in relations. To this end, further research into and implementation of Non-Violent Communication

methods would be very beneficial to this end.

Although I cannot have I-You encounters (such as the one I had with Jonathan) all the time, I can strive to focus and unify my attention around individual children more often, in order to truly listen to and see them. Meanwhile, I can also set a goal of helping equip children to be able to enter into attentive, respectful, I-You encounters with one another. Indeed, creating a standard of respectful, quality interactions through modeling and teaching them is crucial to building any bigger community. So far, based on *I and Thou* and *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, attention and non-objectification, and the listening, knowing, and loving they enable, seem to be the central elements of quality interactions. But what does this, as well as all I learned in Chapter One, imply for our shift to the group, to communities and democracies?

II. The “Outer circle”: Community and democracy

Thus far, I have discussed how we can connect directly in dyads. Now, I move from what I have called “quality interactions” into the realm of the group, examining what others have said about community and how my values for individuals and one-to-one relationships can transfer into “quality community.” My strongest philosophical association with community is the idea of *ubuntu* that so captured me while living in South Africa several years ago, and so this is where I will begin. Admittedly, *ubuntu* is not a static or monolithic concept, and I cannot speak or write with authority on what it definitively “is.” However, I can look into how different

southern Africans understand *ubuntu*, and identify what about the idea resonates with my developing philosophy of education.

i. *Ubuntu*: A philosophy of communal life

As mentioned in the introduction, *ubuntu* is a Southern African philosophy that loosely translates to “a human is a human being because of other human beings,” or “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Letseka, 2011, p. 48). Colloquially, within South Africa, I most often heard it phrased, “a person is a person through other people.” At the most basic level, this statement asserts the fundamental reality of human interdependence. Yet *ubuntu* is much more than a recognition of the logistical, necessary interconnection between organisms; it is a philosophy of *how* the interconnectedness of humanity works.

As the philosopher M. O. Eze points out in “What is African Communitarianism? Against consensus as a regulative ideal” (2008), some people think *ubuntu* and other forms of African communitarianism exhibit “a priority of the community over the individual” (p. 386). But Eze also reminds us that others understand—and live—the philosophy differently, and argues that a more nuanced understanding that balances the individual and community is truer to the spirit of *ubuntu*. First and foremost, Eze argues that neither community nor individual pre-exists the other, nor should one take precedence over, much less subsume, the other:

To argue that the community pre-exists the individual is to argue that we can indeed have a community without a person for the community is necessarily constituted by persons. And to argue that an individual pre-exists the

community is ontologically contradictory for a person is necessarily a social subjective. (Eze, 2008, p. 389)

It is not merely the group that molds individuals, for the individual constitutes and influences the group as well. Though simple, this establishes a foundation for understanding the individual and the group as inseparable and potentially balanceable, diminishing some of the “either-or” charge and countering the very human tendency to make one or the other paramount. Individuals and the group inform and change one another in a constant dialectic.

For this reason, Eze explains, we shouldn't confuse an ethic of *ubuntu* with the idea of *simunye*, or “we are one,” in which subject and object are “fused... into one” (2008, p. 396). In keeping subject and object as two, Eze clarifies *ubuntu* as a philosophy that is decidedly *not* about “falling into the ‘they.’” In terms of subject and object and self and other, we can say that *ubuntu* is not:

...A possessive ideology, in which we simply become a ‘photocopy’ image of the other. Indeed, this fusion of the subject suppresses the *other* whose uniqueness informs, educates, and enriches me... my humanity indeed flourishes through other person's unique subjectivity and this is what it means to say that ‘I am a person through another person.’ (2008, p. 396)

Rightly, Eze points out that this “fusion” “suppresses,” violating the individuality of one or both parties. But it also runs counter to the goal of relationship, which by definition exists *between two or more* entities; if subject and object fuse into one, relationship has in fact disappeared. Thus, a valuation of relationship and interconnectedness within a group does not necessitate a value of dependence or

merging, but quite the opposite: it by definition necessarily affirms *two different subjects* relating.

Eze's clarification makes it clear that within an ethic of *ubuntu*, we must value and promote others' subjectivity and sense of self, while also acknowledging, as philosopher Martha Nussbaum does, that they are still distinct from us—still the "other" in some sense (2008, p. 20). Eze writes of philosophy professor Dirk Louw:

Louw has offered us an understanding of ubuntu that best describes this unity in diversity: To be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity in others in its infinite variety of content and from... [by which]... a human being is a human being through the *otherness* of human beings. (Eze 2008, p. 396, emphasis added)

The addition of otherness is huge here. It asserts that it is not through becoming caught up in mass subjectivity that we develop, find fulfillment, and become fully human; it is through interacting with otherness and seeing how it interacts with the self. Though "otherness" is often experienced or described negatively, an acknowledgement that we are all "other" from one another to some degree is healthy and necessary. Individual identity does not compromise community, but actually constitutes it.

Thus, though some may think *ubuntu* entails a prioritization of the group, in fact, the type of *ubuntu* put forth by Eze is characterized by a deep value for the inherent humanity of each individual. As educator and philosopher Moetseki Letseka points out, *ubuntu* is really about human dignity and morality, as well as "deep rootedness in community"; one begets the other, for the fact of our interdependence

necessitates a philosophy that honors each individual's dignity, and a value of each human's dignity necessitates a practice that cares for others. This forms an "interactive ethic in which our humanity is shaped by our interaction with others as co-dependent beings" (Letseka, 2011, p. 48). In this, *ubuntu* very much resonates with Buber's and Noddings's standards for respecting and caring for the individual. Philosophy professor Thaddeus Metz, too, asserts that "ubuntu is fundamentally a matter of reverence of human life" (in Letseka, p. 57). Again, note that this is distinct from a reverence for group identity or well-being, or for consensus or mass subjectivity. Rather, it reminds us that if we value one human life, we must value humanity, and if we value humanity, we must value the individual human being. One is a manifestation of the other. As Eze puts it,

The identity or subjectivity of the individual and the community are mutually constitutive and hence none is supreme... the individual's subjectivity is not solely determined by the community but co-substantively constituted insofar as the individual is also imbued with self-determination and remains the highest value in community. (2008, p. 388)

It seems that *ubuntu* takes a reverence for the individual human and the reality of human interdependence, and builds what Letseka called an "interactive ethic" of group life upon them.

Importantly, in this understanding of *ubuntu*, diversity is honored. As mentioned above, alterity is an integral, positive part of coming together. It is largely through knowing and loving those who are "other," who are different or simply are not ourselves, that we become more fully human. Jabu Sindane puts it, "*Ubuntu*

inspires us to expose ourselves to others, to encounter the difference of their humanness so as to enrich our own” (as cited in Letseka, 2011, p. 54). *Ubuntu*'s grounding in dignity leaves room for us to affirm both the similarities and differences between us, and this can help us move away from hierarchy and homogeneity, and toward a true ethic of equality. Thus the lived philosophy of *ubuntu* is one of unity in diversity, whereby we can value both subjectivity and intersubjectivity—for the two are inextricably linked—rather than a collapse into simplistic mass subjectivity. Within this framework, solidarity does not mean uniformity; it means a strong united front on what most matters: honoring human life, including our diversity.

Though *ubuntu* has clarified how interconnectedness needn't sacrifice individual selfhood or subjectivity, it still lives in the realm of the theoretical and philosophical. What would a community animated by this philosophy, and the other values I have espoused, look like? What do other thinkers have to say about community? And is more required than the recognition of others' humanity and uniqueness as emphasized by Buber, Noddings, and *ubuntu*?

II. Quality community: Care, common purpose, and critical-mindedness

In exploring the shift from dyad to group, the tension between “self” and “other” only seems to intensify. At least since the time of Plato, people have debated whether the community or the individual “takes precedence over the other in terms of origin, needs, moral values, responsibilities, etc,” and different answers have been given (Markova, 1997, p. 4). And yet, these entities, and the belief systems that

determine how much one value or another is given, are not mutually exclusive.

According to psychology professor Ivana Markova, individualism, collectivism, and communitarianism have not only existed, but often *co*-existed, for centuries, though individualism is more recent (Markova, 1997, p. 3, 4, 6). Different permutations and combinations of these values persist, and as Markova points out, this question continues to lie directly at the heart of the social sciences and humanity itself:

In fact, one can say without exaggeration that the whole of history of both humankind and the social sciences has something to do with the relationships between the individual and the community being viewed in terms of cooperation, competition, opposition, complementarity, mutuality and so on. (1997, p. 7)

Essentially, Markova asserts that this question of how individuals interrelate is as old as humans themselves, and there are varying ways to answer it, which often coexist.

Noddings's concerns in this balancing act, framed in terms of liberalism by education professor Aaron Schutz, are the same as mine:

If liberalism fails because it promotes a society of atomistic individuals with protected rights and few communal connections, however, she [Nel Noddings] thinks communitarianism is equally dangerous for the opposite reason.

Communitarian models threaten to create societies where the individual is lost in a mass subjectivity. (Schutz, 1998, p. 374)

Schutz crisply articulates the problems at either end of the group/individual value spectrum. At one extreme lurks grotesque individualism and a world in which we rarely care for or connect to one another, thereby losing what I believe is our

birthright and deep desire to connect. Yet at the other extreme, what Schutz calls communitarianism could cause us to become "lost in mass subjectivity," or as Heidegger put it, "fall into the 'they,'" thereby losing the freedom and sense of identity that I *also* believe are our birthright.

Indeed, there are many real-life examples of why we need to be careful that communitarianism doesn't reach a point where "the consciousness of the individual, the self and personal identity meant nothing," as Markova says happened "during the soviet regime" (1997, p. 4-5). However, Markova makes a useful distinction: group life that negates the individual is what she would call "Marxist collectivism." A discussion of Marxism is beyond the purview of this thesis, but a salient point here is that this manner of group life is not the only way of countering atomistic individualism; it is very much distinct from true community, which Markova says is "more inclusive," and requires a "strong sense of morality and of responsibility for self and others" and places "stress on the agency and identity of individuals" (1997, p. 11). Markova's definition recalls some of the individual values I articulated in the first chapter, while also seeming to potentially preserve an ethic of care. But what is the role of care in community?

In the article "Caring in schools is not enough" (1998), Aaron Schutz argues that the move from dyad to group *cannot* be sustained by care alone. This is because, in the relations Buber and Noddings describe, there can be no third party; the I-you or caring relation is "utterly exclusive—it has room only for two" (Schutz, 1998, p. 384). Indeed, both Noddings and philosopher Hannah Arendt admit that "one can only care for an individual, not a group"; for this reason, according to Schutz, "caring

as a practice tends to avoid the issue of groups, of any kind of coherent collective, almost entirely” (1998, p. 387, 375). This is untenable, because some form of group life cannot be avoided.

Though I agree with Schultz that I-You relations alone cannot sustain or support community, I certainly do not believe that they are antithetical to relations within a group. Rather, I believe that care is the foundation on which other criteria must lie. While the actual act of caring as Buber and Noddings describe it may be difficult or counterproductive in a setting in which twenty people come together, dyadic relationships between these people, built at other times, could create a web of strong connections upon which the community can be built. As Noddings puts it, "when people have loving regard for one another, they can engage in constructive conflict—although it is by no means easy, even then” (in Schutz, 1998, p. 390). Similarly, I would assert that it is only with trust and knowledge of one another that comes from the strong care potentially found in dyadic relationships that we can feel secure enough—that is, known and loved enough—to do the true work of critical thinking, constructing, and problem solving. We need to feel somewhat safe in order to take risks, and this may be especially true of children, who are dependent, have less experience and power, and thus have even greater need to feel safe in their environment. For these reasons, I believe that care is not irrelevant to community, but rather is the very backbone around which its flesh may grow.

Still, like Schutz, I believe that true community is constituted by more than just care or I-You relations. Even Noddings expresses doubt as to whether care alone can be the “center” of community that Buber says is needed; certainly Schutz does

(1998, p. 375). Importantly, Schutz—building on philosopher Hannah Arendt—believes community needs “shared project(s).” For this reason, one of his main problems with the idea of care as a potential center of community is that care is actually about *individual* projects; we “empty our soul” of its own contents in order to respond to another individual’s projects and problems (1998, p. 378). In this, care cannot be a basis for community, which must possess an “in between” created by a “common project” or “common issues” (Arendt as cited in Schutz, 1998, p. 387). It seems that unlike the “betweenness” described by Buber and Noddings, this betweenness does not come solely from a total presence of both parties, but from a commonality of purpose and action.

Indeed, though I will list several defining criteria for true or “authentic” community, what I have most come away with in my research on and experience with community is the need for, and merit of, a sense of common purpose or goal. I believe this characteristic may be what most differentiates quality community experiences from what I have called “quality relations,” which are characterized by being so present to the other as to forgo any goal other than that presence and care. In community, I believe, the “common center” needs to be a somewhat more specific goal for improving our experience and living life to the fullest, though no less undergirded by dignity and respect for others. Because we cannot really listen and give our full attention to more than one person at a time, something else must focus and unite us.

Working from a sense of common purpose and other criteria, Kenneth Bessant’s article “Authenticity, Community, and Modernity” (2010) goes a long way

toward articulating what I believe is a very thoughtful, functional definition of “authentic community.” Bessant asserts:

The notion of authentic community stands as a fundamental expression of common life, common will, and common agency. Such a community is neither a simple collective of individuals or separate acts, nor is it ontologically independent of its co-producers. (Bessant, 2010, p. 2)

Notably, Bessant identifies not only the admittedly vague “common life,” but also “common will” and “common agency,” as the central, defining elements of authentic community. In this, he does not only articulate community as commonality—which could easily slide into “mass subjectivity,” homogenization, or exclusion—but a solidarity that is meaningfully, purposefully formed through collective will and action. Similarly, theologian Jürgen Moltmann asserts that “a free society is therefore not a collection of private, free individuals. It is a community in solidarity...” (2012, p. 17). For community to be authentic and meaningful, its constituents must share a common goal, and the solidarity formed through acting toward it. I believe applying this criterion to my definition of “community” helps affirm a way of group life that is both more fulfilling and more potentially inclusive than that of groups of people unified solely by geographic proximity, affinity, or even identity politics. Whether it be passing the ERA, singing world music, or creating a classroom community where everyone feels safe, a common purpose provides meaningful cause for people to come together, and continues to connect them throughout the process of reaching their goals for leading a good life.

Moreover, establishing common purpose and action as a core characteristic of community furthers the goals of freedom and authenticity, as well. “Will” and “agency” involve choice and responsibility, the twin characteristics of freedom. Sometimes, individual wills may clash within a group; indeed, when we make decisions together, we may be forced to confront others’ desires, how our actions affect one another. Even while having a goal in common—for example, to come together and sing world music—there could be many elements that are disagreed upon; part of being free in community is being able to express your views. But when we do make communal choices and actions, both the process and the product can be extraordinary. In solidarity with other human beings, one’s capacity to effect change is even greater, which means one’s freedom is greater as well.

I also believe that community has the potential to be very freeing in that it fills a deep need for group life and belonging. In this, it can be a transcendence of what Existentialism calls “facticity,” or our limitations, for it may free us from the sense of being trapped in our own isolated existence. In a community that unites around a purposeful action, we may experience a sense of communion through shared reality; as Moltmann puts it, “People become free beyond the frontiers of their own lives, and the outcome of this mutual participation is shared life” (2012, p. 16). The true sense of shared reality we experience when in community may feel like transcendence of our limitations through experiencing something bigger than ourselves, which is a spiritual longing many of us, including children, harbor (Kessler, 2000, p. 17). Like dyadic relationships, community can help us feel less alone or trapped in our own

separate subjectivity, and in my experience, this can be very liberating—so long as we don't lose ourselves entirely.

Furthermore, authentic community is necessarily contingent and built upon the authenticity of its individual constituents. Bessant says there is an "...intimate linkage between authentic self-being and authentic relationships with others... the co-construction of authentic community rests on the 'existence' of individuals who resolutely resist the trivialities of the public world and who pursue genuine communal (self-other) relations" (2010, p. 5). Bessant invokes not only the genuineness authenticity entails, but also the crucial piece of critical-mindedness. Members of an authentic community leave nothing beyond question; this is what distinguishes the public from the truly communal. In disparaging the "public," Bessant seems to allude to the "They" Heidegger and other Existentialists feared us abnegating our freedom and authenticity to (Bessant, 2010, p 4). "Genuine communal" life requires a critical eye toward public opinion and the "common," which I interpret to mean the status quo and largely unchallenged elements of society, such as mass media. So, another defining component of "authentic community" for Bessant is critical-mindedness. I agree, and believe that everything in a community, except a baseline assumption of each human's inherent dignity, should be open to question through discussion and dialogue.

Of course, in addition to critical-mindedness, the element of genuineness or "being oneself" is also essential to any authentic community. This is a distinction Brown makes when discussing how to feel the belonging we need without simply seeking approval in the wrong ways: we need to maintain our own authenticity (2010,

p. 50-51). And to come back to what constitutes freedom in community, the transcendence we feel when we are not only united around a common goal but also are being our authentic selves in the process is central. Indeed, Moltmann's idea of free community is such:

Intersubjective relationships are called free if they are marked by mutual respect and by friendliness on both sides. If I know that I am respected and loved, then I feel free, because I can come out of my shell and behave as I really am. (2012, p. 16)

In this statement, I hear how freedom, authenticity and a sense of belonging to community are tied together: feeling of trust enables one not only to be free to choose, but to be authentic and accepted for who we are, which is perhaps the most important thing to us. Through interpersonal trust and security, we find a form of freedom: *the freedom to be authentic* while still being loved and accepted by the group, which, again, is a deep evolutionary need.

In sum, I believe that if communities are built on a foundation of dignity and care within which its members can be authentic, this creates an atmosphere in which it is safe to question, and which is also pregnant with the sense of meaning derived from common purpose and action. Clearly, this is a very different way of being together than the mere melding into the "they" that is such a strong possibility given our deep need to belong. Rather, the vision of quality community I am creating is one characterized by communal commitment to respect for humanity, the meaningfulness of shared purpose and action, and the value of questioning. I would thus embrace a model of community that is what Bessant calls a "'unity' premised on diversity and

struggle” (2010, p. 8). In this model, though we have common goal and purpose, we also embrace messiness, difference, and disagreement. Ultimately, Bessant affirms “the essential nature of difference and struggle in community life—‘[t]he conflict of the opposites is a gathering, rooted in togetherness’” (2010, p. 7). As in the ethic of *ubuntu*, it is our distinctness as individuals, as well as our commonality, that constitutes community.

Implications of ubuntu and “quality community” for education

What do these clarified values for community mean for how we educate youth? As previously discussed, young children are not fully equipped to exercise their freedom, may not be able to uphold a standard of everyone’s dignity and care, and, though curious, are not automatically critical, questioning thinkers. Indeed, it is perhaps for these reasons that children rarely get to choose what communities they are part of. However, this is all the more reason why education and schools need to promote these capacities, in order to be sites of apprenticeship to caring, purposeful, critical community as well as, as de Beauvoir put it, “apprenticeship to freedom” (as cited in Scholz, 2010, p. 395).

In reflecting on my last three years of teaching experience, I realize that the Responsive Classroom method provides many practices that could effect the community values I have articulated. Though I do not wish to adhere to any one method, and though, like any program, it can be misapplied or executed inauthentically, I do believe the approach is undergirded by an ethos of dignity and care and offers practices that, with tweaking, promote our common humanity and the formation of true communities. Most of all, the “Hopes and Dreams” and “Rule

Creation” guidelines go a long way to respecting individual children, helping them have more say in their communities.

The “Hopes and Dreams” curriculum asks children what they most hope to learn or accomplish throughout the school year; after several group discussions about the Hopes and Dreams, the children illustrate themselves achieving this. In my experience, even at age four, children can articulate a “hope and dream” for themselves, from “I hope to draw a giraffe” to “I want to learn to read.” This process helps children articulate a desire and a vision for themselves and their experience. Though the goals are formulated individually, the teacher could also work to emphasize the commonality of children’s goals, in addition to their distinctness. Sometimes many children have the exact same goal; in third grade, for example, I have seen many children dream to either learn to write in cursive or finish a particular typing program. These children could be encouraged or supported in working together toward their common goal. In middle and high school, this could be logically extended to a policy of allowing children to start new clubs based on common interest but also common goals. And even between goals that are somewhat different, the teacher can scaffold discussion that highlights the similarities: For example, “Zoe wants to read more Piggy and Gerald books and Mack hopes to start chapter books, but both of them are really excited about reading and dream of growing as readers this year.” Language such as this emphasizes the unity and diversity that characterize true community.

In turn, in Responsive Classroom these goals are connected to rules, providing a foundation of guidelines for how to be a safe, constructive community. Rule-setting

is framed by asking, “How can we help make sure everyone here can reach her hope and dream?” I believe this connection between aims and guidelines is the strongest component of RC, as it reminds us to be intentional in how we interact and why we come together. In creating rules, children authentically begin the process of thinking about what is required to reach individual and communal goals, and how we can show respect for one another. To emphasize the *common* goals of the classroom, the teacher gets children thinking more broadly in terms of the environment that is needed for all these goals to be reached. To emphasize the commonality, the teacher could point out, “Do we all want to be treated nicely? What does that look like?” or “Do we all want to feel safe at school? What makes you feel safe at school?”

Furthermore, Responsive Classroom advises teachers to refer clearly and firmly to the rules when giving children reminders; I believe including reminders about *why* these rules were created would further emphasize our common goals as a classroom community. For example, instead of “No going up the slide, Lunga!”, a teacher might say, “Remember that we only go *down* the slide when we’re at school, so we can all stay safe here.” Emphasizing the rationale behind rules for community life not only reminds children of why the rules exist, but also reinforces that we all do have common goals, even if we each also have some aims that contradict, as well.

Another way to increase children’s “apprenticeship” to collective decision-making is to give them more say in Morning Meeting. In my work with third graders, instead of always choosing the greeting and activity, I often take suggestions and/or offer several choices, and then have them vote. My intention is to give them more choice and influence over their own experience, while also learning to recognize and

respect how other community members' wishes may differ. Furthermore, we often debrief after the greeting, share, or activity, asking the children how they think these interactive experiences went, and what could make them better next time. In this way, the children collectively practice critical thinking and dialogue about their community itself, and its interactions and customs.

These community experiences can take the form of different participant structures, potentially offering the dyadic connections I believe must be maintained alongside whole-group interactions. For example, one head teacher I work with does a partner share on Mondays, whereby the children share about their weekend in pairs, and then report back to the whole group. I believe this practice strengthens dyadic connections between individual children who might not have interacted much otherwise, thereby fortifying the overall community.

Furthermore, I believe children should be provided opportunities to form groups, in order to not only participate in but also actually create community. This happens organically in many Pre-K settings, especially during choice time in which children who have a shared goal to work in blocks work together toward that goal, while also negotiating the fact that their individual visions may differ. Authentic communities can thus occur around who wants to play what, and the teacher can aid and scaffold this- how to make sure care and respect and individual liberties are still respected. Already, by elementary school, choice time is often absent and recess—if even that exists—becomes the only unstructured time during which children can create their own games and communities. Overall, my research on quality community suggests that more unstructured time should be included in the school day, both in

order to provide more individual choice and to leave room for children to come to their own common goal and work toward it. For example, in one fourth-fifth grade classroom in which I student-taught, a group of students worked together to create a diorama of an apartment complex. However, the only reason why this was possible was that the students had “Choice Time” twice a week. In my current setting, there is no indoor unstructured time for children to come together, and I believe this is a shortcoming of how well we prepare them to truly construct communities.

Also, within Social Studies curricula, the idea of community can be explored explicitly through discussion and action when children do or neighborhood studies. At Bank Street College for Children, a teacher of 6/7s I worked with framed their study of neighborhoods in terms of, “What do people need to have a good life?” This got children thinking and talking about everything from basic needs as food and shelter to the question of whether worship is a “need” to where people come together to play. Eventually, the children created their own miniature neighborhood, determining what part of the neighborhood they wanted to contribute. This could become an even more communal project if children who had the same interest, i.e. to build and run the community’s school, were encouraged to work together toward the goal of creating the community’s school. Certainly, in not only studying neighborhoods but also making their own, these children were thinking more critically and intentionally about community than I had ever been asked to in grade school.

Finally, and more broadly, the school itself should be a site of intention and purposiveness; parents and teachers can only truly come together in a community in

which the overall goal is to educate children well if they have choice and agency in which schools they affiliate with, and some shared values and goals in terms of what education means to them. Too many parents have little choice in where their child goes to school, and even many teachers, in the current economic and educational climate, are not matched with teams of people that share their values and goals. This may account for the dearth of a sense of community reported in many schools, and it certainly adversely affects our ability to model and teach authentic community to our children. This is partly why I have long dreamed of opening a community school, because in many ways plugging into a pre-existing group seems insufficient.

Finally, embracing a philosophy of *ubuntu* and determining a set of criteria for “quality community” has obvious implications for democracy, which also concerns itself with individual/group tension. Democracy is a logical next step, as it is yet another ring removed from the “inner circle” of close family and friends, extending to people we don’t know. In modern democracy, we collectively make decisions, or elect representatives to make decisions, that affect people we will never meet or truly “encounter,” as Buber put it. Though an analysis of democracy is beyond the purview of this thesis, the topic cannot be ignored. I will now briefly touch on the implications of what I have said so far for democracy as Martha Nussbaum understands it, clarifying my ideas about subjecthood in the process.

iii. Democracy and the responsibility to honor others' subjecthood

Letseka aptly defines democracy as “a social order that is marked by the existence of freedoms and rights for individuals to exercise choice” (2011, p. 49).

Indeed, the ability to exercise agency to influence our own and others' lives is foundational to the delicate promise of democracy, in which we vote to collectively effect actions that impact other citizens' lives, or to elect representatives who will ostensibly effect these changes. In this, a citizen needs to consider not just what she wants and needs, but also what is good for others. This sense of individuals' responsibility to one another, and education's role in claiming this responsibility, is philosopher Martha Nussbaum's concern in her speech "Education for profit, education for freedom" (2008).

In a parallel to Noddings's prioritization of learning to care in schools, Nussbaum prioritizes the learning of responsible democratic citizenry. In my understanding, this means understanding one's responsibility to others and to furthering everyone's human development, not just one's own. Nussbaum states that education for human development must:

...Promote the human development of its students. And it must, second, promote the students' understanding of the goals of human development for all, as goals inherent in the very idea of a decent minimally just society— in such a way that when they are empowered to make political choices, they will foster these capabilities for all, not only for themselves. (2008, p. 11)

Similarly to how Noddings argues that we must both care for children and teach them to care— goals that are distinct, yet inextricably linked—Nussbaum articulates a two-fold responsibility to promote children's development as well as teaching them to understand and value the development of others. For Nussbaum, this development is intrinsically linked with democracy; it is what democracy is for.

Furthermore, much of what was important for individual development, as I articulated in Chapter One, is also beneficial to democracy in Nussbaum's paradigm. For example, Nussbaum argues, "cultivated capacities for critical thinking and reflection are crucial in keeping democracies alive and wide awake" (2008, p. 10). A critical lens and reflective outlook is beneficial not only to pursue truth, develop self-awareness, and claim one's own authenticity, but also for participation in democracy, in order to be a responsible member of the group who works towards others' well-being, as well as his or her own.

But how do we do this seemingly two-fold work of promoting the "human development" of both ourselves and others (Nussbaum, 2008, p. 11)? Nussbaum's main point, it seems to me, is this: *It is of utmost importance that we see others as subjects if we are to participate in democracy.* Nussbaum speaks eloquently about our ability to see other people as subjects, rather than objects, and how this ability is required for democracy to flourish. As Nussbaum points out, this seeing-others-as-subjects is a skill that must be developed:

Learning to see another human being not as a thing but as a full person is not an automatic achievement: it must be promoted by an education that refines the ability to think about what the inner world of another may be like—and also to understand why one can never fully grasp that inner world, why any person is always to a certain extent dark to any other. (2008, p. 20)

What Nussbaum says is powerful—and somewhat scary. We have to hold others as subjects in our mind and imagine their interiority, and yet we must always remember that we don't, *can't*, actually know their experience.

What is necessary to develop this ability? Nussbaum points out that while the ability to view others as subjects must be cultivated, two of this capacity's building blocks, compassion and empathy, are fairly natural to humans. She reminds us, "This ability to feel concern and to respond with sympathy and imaginative perspective is a deep part of our evolutionary heritage" (2010, p. 36). However, we must learn by example in order to develop these skills. In fact, we might say that these capabilities for concern and sympathy are only "natural" in the sense that language is: we are born with the capacity, but it must be developed. As with language, we absorb compassion and empathy receptively, and then eventually are able to offer them, thanks to internalized example. (This is very similar to what Noddings argued about care.) For these reasons, a significant part of development should be learning to see others as subjects, and to treat them as such.

I believe that all too often, we objectify one another instead of treating one another as subjects. Unfortunately, children may learn this from adults, often in the form of being objectified by them; as Noddings puts it, "Children are too often valued only for their achievement such that they become resources" (1992, p. 13). As discussed earlier in the chapter, I personally recognize how I am sometimes guilty of this in the classroom. Children become objectified or even dehumanized when the goals of maintaining control and producing academic work are paramount; their needs become annoyances, because they are in the way of our goals. Meanwhile, children do not learn how to respect their own subjecthood experience or that of others because it has not been made the ethos of the classroom. As Nussbaum makes clear, the implications of this standard of care reach even farther than how

fulfilling our one-to-one relationships, determining how we treat other people within our democracy, or even throughout the world.

In fact, though the practice of care alone does not quite unite my philosophy across both dyadic relationships and groups, the ability to view others as subjects does. Though we cannot care for people we don't know and never meet, at least not in the deep, lived way Noddings and Buber mean, we can conceive of them as subjects, giving them another form of care by remembering and honoring their subjecthood.

In fact, a value of subjecthood characterizes my philosophy for individual education as well, for the right to claim freedom, act authentically, and to have a positive and holistic self-outlook all have to do with honoring subjecthood. In prioritizing every individual's fundamental humanity, I do not just affirm a simple right to life, or even inner potential or inherent goodness. Rather, what I most believe we need to reclaim—and which seems downright radical in a society and educational climate obsessed with outcomes—is our right to subjecthood, to our unique, lived, dynamic experience as individuals, in relationships, and in communities. I believe reclaiming our own subjecthood and honoring others' is more than a democratic guideline: it is something we need to remember at every level of life. We need to learn to do it when we come together in groups, difficult though it is; when we meet someone face-to-face in a quality relation, vulnerable though it is; and equally importantly, we need to remember not to objectify ourselves.

Much like Nussbaum, I believe art is a key process by which we can achieve this seeing and honoring of every human's subjecthood, including our own. Next, I

will explore my definition of art and how it can realize the educational values I have articulated.

Chapter 3

Redefining Art:

Quality experience, expressivity, and imagination

“Choosing what you want to do, and when to do it, is an act of creation.” - Fortune cookie

Even as I have explored my broader philosophy of self, relationship, and community, art has remained at the heart of what I longed to understand about how to lead a meaningful life—and education’s role in that endeavor. In this chapter, I build heavily on John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s *Finding Flow*, as well as a few other authors, in order to flesh out my vision of art as a dynamic, integrated process that can describe a variety of optimal experiences, and to argue for why this should be at the core of educational values. I then explore what the fine arts in particular have to offer, using Denis Dutton’s *The Art Instinct* to clarify my definition of the fine arts and Martha Nussbaum’s *Not For Profit* to understand how they benefit community and democracy. Finally, I will propose a curriculum centered on musical theatre, briefly outlining how it would fulfill the values I have espoused.

I. An expanded definition of art: Dewey’s *Art as Experience*

In attempting to redefine art for myself and examine its connection to education, I turned to Dewey’s *Art as Experience* (1934). In the text, Dewey defines art as a quality of action, a quality that characterizes a certain type of experience.

According to philosophy professor Casey Haskins in “Dewey’s *Art as Experience*: The tension between Aesthetics and Aestheticism” (1992), *Art as Experience* “remains the most sustained defense in English language philosophy of the view that art and life are, in some sense, a unity” (p. 217). In this quote, Haskins conveys not only how important the book is, but also the kernel of its thesis, in simplified form: art is life, not something separate from it. Again, this is because it is a type of experience. Indeed, a theory of experience is the keystone of Dewey’s overall philosophy, and so before delving into what he says about art, I will briefly review his definition of experience in general, as put forth in *Experience and Education* (1938) as well as in *Art as Experience*.

Dewey’s two central criteria of experience are interaction and continuity. The principle of interaction has to do with organism and environment. Dewey reminds us that “no creature lives merely under its skin”; rather, “the career and destiny of a living being are bound up with interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way” (1934, p. 13). Experience of some kind is always occurring, because interaction is always occurring (Dewey, 1934, p. 35). In this paradigm, the self is an active agent, but never in isolation, and always in interaction. Dewey thus viewed the self as “something *in* the world, as something which participates in the continuous push and pull of the natural order as one part of that order among others” (Haskins, 1992, p. 223). This principle resonates with my goals for the reconciliation of individual and group in that it honors individual agency while also recognizing the interconnection and interdependence of all things.

The second criteria, continuity, is concerned with the unfolding of experience in time, acknowledging how each and every experience impacts the self and environment—*and thus future experience also*. Dewey asserts, “every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one [person] who acts and undergoes,” but also, “...every experience both takes up something from those [experiences] which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (1938, p. 35). Self and environment are constantly impacting one another bi-directionally (interaction); so, too, are experiences ever impacting one another, albeit more linearly, through time (continuity).

Importantly, Dewey further distinguishes between experience and “*an* experience.” The latter occurs when experience “runs its course to fulfillment” (Dewey, 1934, p. 35). Dewey calls this “consummatory experience” (Haskins, 1992, p. 223). This consummation is contingent on honoring continuity, whereby “the past is carried into the present so as to expand and deepen the content of the latter” (Dewey, 1934, p. 24). Indeed, Dewey is very concerned with how moments are connected to one another; only when this connection exists is there true experience, “total integral experiences that are intrinsically worthwhile” (1934, p. 37).

From this conception of high-quality experience—“*an* experience”—Dewey forms his definition of art. However, while Dewey clearly makes a case for “art” as encompassing much more than just the fine arts, it is unclear how his “art” differs from other forms of experience. Is what Dewey calls “art” a more specific category than that of *all* consummatory experiences? Or does he simply mean it as a synonym for experience? Part of this confusion derives from the fact that, as Haskins points

out, Dewey shifts between two different definitions of art throughout *Art as Experience*:

In some places he uses it, conventionally enough, to refer to the products and processes of the fine arts specifically. Yet in others he uses it, more broadly, to refer to a dimension of *action in general*, whether in the fine arts or elsewhere, in which experience attains its full developmental potential, becoming in Dewey's idiom "consummatory." In this broader usage, art is human experience at its most intense and most developed: art just is life at its fullest. (1992, p. 218)

It is hard to argue with this beautiful latter definition, which resonates with my overarching goal of quality, meaningful life experience. However, it is also impossible to ignore the ambiguity in Dewey's use of the term "art." Why should we refer to these two things with the same word? How and why is "consummatory experience" similar enough to what we colloquially call "art" to merit the same name, even as it describes a much broader and in some ways more essential category of experience?

Haskins helps some, explaining, "...not only fine or high art, but all forms of human work and play, make some claim to being valued as sources of the imaginative and sensuousness fulfillments modern culture has come to associate with the normative word 'art'" (1992, p. 219). But more essential, I think, is Dewey's emphasis on ends, means, and how they relate to valuation and quality of experience. Dewey asserts a need to think of art more as an experiential *process* of creating, rather than only as a *product* that is created. As he puts it, "the actual work of art is

what the product does with and in experience” (Dewey, 1934, p. 3). At first blush, this may seem to be only a slight broadening in how we conceptualize the fine arts—i.e., the art is in the making of the painting, not just the painting itself. But in verity, this is about Dewey’s fundamental beliefs and goals regarding experience itself, and its implications sweep far beyond the fine arts disciplines. Dewey emphasizes the fundamental importance of process being its own goal, not just the means to some other end:

Wherever conditions are such as to prevent the act of production from being an experience in which the whole creature is alive and in which he possesses his living through enjoyment, the product will lack something of being esthetic. No matter how useful it is for special and limited ends, it will not be useful in the ultimate degree—that of contributing directly and liberally to an expanding and enriched life. The story of the severance and final sharp opposition of the useful and the fine is the history of that industrial development through which so much of production has become a form of postponed living and so much of consumption a superimposed enjoyment of the fruits of the labor of others. (1934, p. 27)

Dewey asserts that even if something is valuable or useful in its instrumentality towards “special and limited ends,” it also needs to be worthwhile in and of itself, in how it directly produces high-quality experience. For Dewey, this is being wholly “alive.” However, he also says this is how we often define what is “fine”: having to do with actions that are intrinsically and esthetically pleasing. He also affirms “the unconquerable impulses towards experiences enjoyable in themselves” (as cited in

Tan, 1999, p. 108). It is human and natural to desire directly satisfying, “fine” experience. Moreover, the disconnect between production and consumption—relatively recent in human history—has led us to what Dewey believes is a lesser, “postponed” living and false, “superimposed” enjoyment.

However, Dewey is *not* making a facile argument for a value of the “fine” replacing a value of the “useful.” Rather, he asserts that the two need not be separate in the first place -- and in fact, aims to undercut the very duality of ends and means themselves. This reunification is based on Dewey’s beliefs about experience: its continuous nature in turn explains “the underlying continuity of means and ends” (Haskins, 1992, p. 228). Because of continuity, any “end” or “product” will in turn simply become means or process, because it the material of future experience.

Haskins sums it up incredibly well:

Although we prize consummatory experience for itself or value it ‘intrinsically,’ this does not preclude its being valuable ‘instrumentally’ as well, insofar as present consummatory experience will always, given the developmental nature of experience itself, serve as an enabling condition for future consummations. (Haskins, 1992, p. 224)

Dewey is not saying that we should abandon all goals in order to single-mindedly pursue pleasurable processes with no organized purpose. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey devotes a chapter to clarifying the difference between impulses and purposes. Though purposes start with sheer impulses, it is observation and understanding the significance of our possible actions that transforms them into intelligent purposes; Dewey says, “overemphasis upon activity as an end, instead of

upon *intelligent activity*, leads to identification of freedom with immediate execution of impulses and desires” (1938, p. 69). The reality is that we humans do desire for experiences and things that require planning and long-term work in order to be achieved. As Dewey says, “Wishes are empty castles in the air unless they are translated into the means by which they may be realized” (1938, p. 70). Though process is important—certainly more so than we give it credit for in modern society, in my opinion—product is not irrelevant. It is also human and natural to desire to produce something. But the excellent, high-quality nature of experience that merits the word “art” is characterized by a goal that is not an end divorced from or dominant over the process that enables it.

So, in *Art as Experience*, Dewey refutes the idea that only process or intrinsic value matters, because such a view would be predicated on the very division between means and ends that undergirds modern ideas of valuation, and which Dewey eschews (Haskins, 1992, p. 226). Ultimately, as Haskins explains, “An experience, or activity, that has the quality of art is at once, under that description, both a means and an end; it is valuable both in itself and for how it leads to further experience” (1992, p. 225). This is a crucial distinction: When we call something “art,” we are recognizing that it is an end in and of itself, yes—but we also acknowledge that it is the means of future experience, as explained in Dewey’s principle of continuity.

In light of the importance of the underlying unity of means and ends, it becomes clearer what fine art in particular has to offer. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey explains how the fine arts are usually prime examples of the underlying unity of means and ends. In art, Dewey says, the means are not separate, are not “*mere*

means” (1934, p. 197). In fact, for this reason, they are not even called “means,” but rather, “media”:

...Not all means are media. There are two kinds of means. One kind is external to that which is accomplished; the other kind is taken up into the consequences produced and remains immanent in them... The toil of a laborer is too often only an antecedent to the wage he receives, as consumption of gasoline is merely a means to transportation. The means cease to act when the ‘end’ is reached.... But the moment we say ‘media,’ we refer to means that are incorporated in the outcome. Even bricks and mortar become a part of the house they are employed to build; they are not mere means to its erection.

Colors *are* the painting; tones are the music. (1934, p. 197)

In this passage, Dewey aptly describes the nature of the fine arts, contrasting them to daily activities that are often plagued by a divorce of ends and means. Whereas gasoline is merely a way to make a car run, notes (or “tones”) are not merely a way to get to a finished piece of music; they *are* the music. It is often advised that we focus on “the journey, not the destination”; with the fine arts, the notes, words, movements, and images are both the journey *and* the destination.

But although the continuity of means and ends is especially pronounced in the fine arts, Dewey makes it clear that this “underlying unity” is not *limited* to the fine arts. He writes,

The difference between external and intrinsic operations runs through all affairs of life. One student studies to pass an examination, to get a promotion. To another, the means, the activity of learning, is completely one with what

results from it. The consequence, instruction, illumination, is one with the process. (1934, p. 197-198)

I have certainly experienced the difference between these types of experience. Even in the process of writing this thesis, there have been times when I was moved forward by sheer curiosity and joy in the material itself; at others, I felt motivated only by the need to finish, wanting to have the product in-hand without feeling connected to the work itself. In these latter experiences, my consciousness is fragmented, and the overall emotional state is much less positive. Personally, I want my students to feel more of the former and less of the latter, but so much of our modern experience is fragmented and objectified, and schools are no exception. In “What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education” (2002), Art and Education professor Elliot Eisner does an excellent job of describing the problem with current educational climate, identifying an obsession with sureness and the need to “control and predict”—much as Brene Brown discusses in her work (Eisner, 2002, p. 7). Eisner writes, “We live at a time that puts a premium on the measurement of outcomes, on the ability to predict them, and on the need to be absolutely clear about what we want to accomplish” (2002, p. 6). Similarly, educational philosopher Maxine Greene describes the objectification of children quite well, and bluntly, in the essay “Art and Imagination”: “Young people find themselves described as ‘human resources’ rather than as persons who are centers of choice and evaluation” (Greene, 1995, p. 124).

Indeed, in my experience, our society is full of perspectives, policies, and practices that encourage a view of school predominantly as a means to an end: get

good grades, get into college, make money, get a “good job,” become a productive member of society by contributing economically. Although these are not inherently unworthy goals, I worry that in the process of trying to ensure children learn enough to pass tests and (ostensibly) obtain jobs and material security, we may be disenfranchising them of the “pursuit of happiness,” and the creativity and *true* productivity, that is their birthright.

Psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has made studying these more positively productive states his life-work. His theory of “flow” describes quality experience and even unity of means and ends, giving the phenomenon more shape and detail. I will now outline the idea of flow, put it in dialogue with Dewey, and discuss the implications of the two works for educational practice.

II. “Flow”: The psychology of optimal experience

In *Finding Flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*, psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi revisits his earlier research on high-quality experience, re-framing it more explicitly in terms of its implications for how to lead an excellent, fulfilling life. Based on what he observed in years of studies and interviews, Csikszentmihalyi describes the characteristics of optimal experience as a state of “flow.” Flow is characterized by “complete immersion” in an activity in which one is an active agent, but also feels calm and in harmony—a sense of “being in the zone” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29). It involves an extremely focused yet non-self-conscious quality of attention that also features a “give-and-take” with the

activity itself and the environment. In states of full flow, all other distractions and thoughts—even hunger—are forgotten (Whelan, 1999, p. 1).

Mark Strand, former poet laureate of the United States, describes his flow experience as being, “...right in the work, you lose your sense of time, you’re completely enraptured, you’re completely caught up in what you’re doing...” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 62). Flow is characterized by an active, energetic flow between self and environment. Csikszentmihalyi describes it:

Self-consciousness disappears, yet one feels stronger than usual. The sense of time is distorted: hours seem to pass by in minutes. When a person’s *entire being* is stretched in the functioning of body and mind, whatever one does becomes worth doing *for its own sake*; living becomes its own justification. (1997, p. 31-32, emphasis added)

In the above excerpt, one can hear the language of integration: A person in flow is existing, acting, as his/her *whole* self; it is the absence of fragmentation that gives this brand of experience its “flowing” feeling. This is one of many attributes that align flow with the values I have articulated.

What are the criteria that enable such a spectacular state of consciousness to emerge? Most simply, in flow situations, the level challenge is high, but one’s relevant skill-level is high as well (1997, p. 31, 118). On the other hand, if the challenge-level of an activity is not high enough, one becomes bored or apathetic; alternately, if challenge is high enough that it outstrips one’s skills (or perceived skills), anxiety is experienced (1997, p. 31). In a situation in which both elements are high, however, we become extremely interested and involved in the activity, driven

by desire to figure out or achieve something that is challenging but not unmanageable. This focuses our attention more intensely, and we are thereby able to exist at the forefront of a problem or activity—and our experience itself. In this state, we use our intelligence and ability to its potential, often in order to uncover or create something new—as do the extraordinary writers, physicists, social scientists and others that Csikszentmihalyi interviews in *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention* (1996), which builds on both his “flow” theory and thirty years of research on creativity.

Another crucial characteristic of “flow activities,” as Csikszentmihalyi calls them, is that they have clear goals (1997, p. 29). Why, according to Csikszentmihalyi, is goal-orientation necessary?

...Intentions, goals and motivations are also manifestations of psychic negentropy. They focus psychic energy, establish priorities, and thus create order in consciousness. Without them mental processes become random, and feelings tend to deteriorate rapidly. (1997, p. 22).

As a psychologist, Csikszentmihalyi thinks of goal-orientation in terms of “psychic energy” and “order,” or “negentropy” rather than “entropy.” Throughout *Finding Flow*, Csikszentmihalyi indicates a belief that psychological order is what we need and want, that it is what we experience as positive and meaningful. Motivation orders and organizes attention, and is important to positively experiencing life. Goal-orientation can add to our sense of order, enabling a forward-moving trajectory even as we are immersed in the process itself. It thus increases quality-of-experience.

However, a clarifying point must be made: these goals must be logical, organic parts of the activity itself—*and the process of working toward the goal must be an end in and of itself as well*. As Csikszentmihalyi explains it,

In order to experience flow, it helps to have clear goals—not because it is achieving the goals that is necessarily important, but because without a goal it is difficult to concentrate and avoid distractions. Thus a mountain climber sets as her goal to reach the summit not because she has some deep desire to reach it, but because the goal makes the experience of climbing possible. If it were not for the summit, the climb would become pointless ambling that leaves one restless and apathetic. (1997, p. 137)

By contrast, if *all* the climber desired was to be at the top—and not to do the actual climbing—she would not enjoy her experience as much, nor would it be as meaningful. On the other hand, without a milestone (such as reaching the top of the mountain) to work towards, her stream of experience would be undifferentiated and likely also not very meaningful; it would be characterized by experience, but not any discrete experiences. So, goal-orientation is important, but it must not subsume or become divorced from experience itself. As Samuel Whelan from the Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University points out, “Human beings have long pondered the nature of happiness and whether happiness is compatible with the pursuit of ambitious goals” (1999, p. 1). Csikszentmihalyi’s research suggests that meaningful happiness and the “pursuit” of goals are not only compatible, but also integrally, profoundly intertwined.

Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi repeatedly makes a point of stating that the brand of fulfillment he researches is very distinct from the type of happiness that comes from passive leisure, i.e. the pleasure we might experience while laying on a beach. He points out that this latter, fleeting type of happiness “is very vulnerable and dependent on favorable external circumstances” (1992, p. 32). By contrast, “the happiness that follows flow is of our own making, and it leads to increasing complexity and growth in consciousness” (Csikszentmihalyi 1992, p. 32). It is important to note that we employ our agency when in flow, rather than waiting for circumstance to smile on us. In fact, throughout *Finding Flow*, Csikszentmihalyi refers to quality life in terms of “growth in consciousness” and “complexity”; these are part of the overarching goal of living “in fullness, without waste of time and potential, expressing one’s uniqueness, yet participating intimately in the complexity of the cosmos” (1997, p. 2). I, too, have this as a goal for myself and my students, and Csikszentmihalyi’s research suggests that doing meaningful, motivated activity—“finding flow”—is the way to do this.

Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi’s findings resonate incredibly well with Dewey’s philosophy. Perhaps most strikingly, flow is characterized by the unity of ends and means that is central to Dewey’s conception of experience and art. Csikszentmihalyi describes this as *autotelic*, whereby “an autotelic activity is one we do for its own sake because to experience it is the main goal” (1997, p. 117). Whereas an exotelic activity is motivated by an outside goal, making our experience the means to a separate, external outcome, autotelic activity is its *own* end. Csikszentmihalyi also uses “autotelic” as a term to describe a person, and has found that people who are overall more autotelic are also more concentrated, have higher self esteem, and find

their activities more meaningful (1997, p. 117). In general, autotelic “flow” seems to describe that state I have referred to as “subjecthood” or “subjectivity,” as opposed to the objectification of one’s own experience. It is a high-quality subjecthood in which one is not self-objectifying, yet *is* very much engaged with the objective environment, and in this it is also incredibly akin to Dewey’s vision for experience. Flow is neither 100% self-directed or totally a factor of external whims; it is a product of both agency and environment. It is thus about *interaction*, one of the main tenet’s of Dewey’s philosophy of experience, art, and education.

Another similarity between these two thinkers’ ideas is the element of interaction. Much as Dewey outlined with experience, flow entails a give-and-take, a balance of self and environment; flow may mean wanting to do what you’re doing and being immersed in it, but it’s not a sheerly internal subjectivity or an ethic of simply doing what you want all the time with no regard to the environment. Rather, it is an interaction between the self and what it encounters or seeks out in the environment. Csikszentmihalyi emphasizes that flow is not just about internal subjective experience: it is about responding to and interacting with the environment, which was central for Dewey (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p 66). Csikszentmihalyi refers to the psychologist Abraham Maslow, who interviewed and observed “self-actualizing” individuals and found that optimal experiences “involved a consistency between self and environment; he referred to this as harmony between ‘inner requiredness’ and ‘outer requiredness,’ or between ‘I want’ and ‘I must’” (1997, p 138). Things arise in the environment that present prompts, problems, or “must”s, but this is both the nature of the world and a crucial element of flow. Csikszentmihalyi

and Maslow emphasize the symbiosis or “harmony” (1997, p. 138) of the inner and outer, the subjective and objective. This is a critical clarification for my work, for this essay has been very focused on the subject and valuing the subjective over the objective. Though I do still believe that the subjective merits more valuation and attention, especially given how devalued it often is in the current educational climate, I can now appreciate that a respect for the subjective must not edge out objective conditions or actions. Subjecthood is not just about subjectivity, but is about honoring and balancing the subjective and objective in order to have a full experience as an individual human within the context of a complex, interconnected world.

Finally, Csikszentmihalyi says flow is the means to the end of developing more skills, a “magnet for learning,” because it encourages and enables one to take on challenges and learn new things in the process (1997, p. 33). I believe flow (and Dewey’s “art”) is a worthy educational goal as an end in and of itself, because it provides individuals with feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction, and with the optimal experience that I believe all (or most) humans seek. But we can also value flow in education as the means to the end of new knowledge and the innovation it enables, for flow is often integral to the creation of new technology, works of art, ideas, etc. that benefit humankind. As Csikszentmihalyi shows throughout *Creativity*, flow is found in what we traditionally consider the arts disciplines, but it is also integral to the sciences and social sciences. Finding a cure for cancer, writing an opera, and understanding the history of the American south all benefit from—perhaps even *depend* on—flow, at least according to Csikszentmihalyi. If we desire innovation,

scientific progress, and technology that will improve the quality of life and state of the world, the ability to find flow is indispensable.

Of course, to have “flow” as a goal for *every* moment of experience is unrealistic. However, Csikszentmihalyi and Dewey both indicate that while not all experience can be “flow” or Experience with a capital “E,” much more of it could be. How might we enable children to have more experiences characterized by flow and/or the “art as experience” Dewey describes?

Implications of Experience and flow for education

There are myriad activities in which children can experience flow. Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi indicates that we can experience flow in almost any activity, if we approach it in the right way and if the skill- and challenge-level are comparably high. He states, “Even the most routine tasks... become more rewarding if we approach them with the care it would take to make a work of art” (1997, p. 127). (Note that Csikszentmihalyi uses the language of art to describe high-quality, creative experience, very much in line with Dewey.) However, some activities are generally more conducive to flow than others, and it seems wise to scaffold children’s ability to put themselves in flow by encouraging activities that lend themselves to it more—“namely, mental work and active leisure” (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, p. 120). For example, in Csikszentmihalyi’s research, television was rarely a source of flow, whereas artistic experiences and sports often produced it, as did scientific pursuits and other creative problem-solving. This provides further support for engaging children in fine arts activities, but also in any activities that are at the child’s “zone of

proximal development,” or “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vgotsky as cited in Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003, p. 40). Attention to this “ZPD” is a hallmark of progressive pedagogy.

Moreover, given the importance of high skill and high challenge to states of flow, educators should help children develop discipline and learn to invest time in acquiring the skills that can enable them to have optimal experiences. This discipline-of-consciousness of course requires self-control, which is central to Dewey’s concept of education; he states in *Experience and Education*, “The ideal aim of education is the production of power of self-control” (1938, p. 64). And according to Csikszentmihalyi:

Instead of waiting for an external stimulus to challenge or grab our attention, we must learn to concentrate it more less at will. This ability is related to interest by a feedback loop of mutual causation and reinforcement. If you are interested in something you will focus on it, and if you focus attention on anything, it is likely that you will become interested in it. (1997, pp. 127-128)

Agency and self-control are crucial, but more specifically, Csikszentmihalyi makes it clear that *attention* is central to this equation. Meditation and mindfulness practice are valuable tools for directing our attention. Even aside from beneficial spiritual connections and benefits to overall well-being, meditation can help train and discipline the mind so that we can use it more to our will. Several groups are already

exploring the benefits of mindfulness in schools, and promoting it. This would be a worthy area of further research, and of incorporation into practice.

Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi writes that most of us actually find it quite difficult to use our leisure time in a way that is satisfying, and that learning how to do so would significantly improve quality-of-life (1997, p. 65). This finding provides further justification for providing children with sufficient free play or “choice time.” For those schools that have yard time or choice time at all, these are the only times in the school day when children get to choose what to do with themselves and their time. It is precious time in which to practice and experiment with what they find satisfying, discovering what brings them joy or “flow,” both as its own end and so that they are more able to do this in the future. We need to support this as educators. On one hand, we do need to provide children with some support in using their unstructured time, so they do not become overwhelmed and default to passive leisure in the way Csikszentmihalyi describes. On the other hand, if we provide too much structure or too few choices, children will not learn how to use leisure time on their own (which is exactly the problem Csikszentmihalyi identifies). So, when a child says she is “bored” during yard time, I can make suggestions based on her interests, skills, and what I think will appropriately challenge her. I can ask her questions about the sort of activities she enjoys, and provide new experiences and materials that build on these proclivities.

Finally, a commitment to claiming one’s responsibility for others as part of one’s freedom, and to caring for others, must continue to be a priority alongside pursuing flow or Experience. Csikszentmihalyi cautions that it is possible to

experience flow behind a gun or while developing the atomic bomb. As a form of energy, flow is not inherently good or bad; it is a matter of *how* we use the potential of flow. For this reason, Csikszentmihalyi reminds us, “enjoying what one does is not sufficient reason for doing it.” (1997, p. 139-140). Valuing flow does not give us license to pursue thoughtless individualism or to abandon ethical consideration, because, as discussed earlier, our actions affect others’ well-being as well as our own. Thus, “in creating a good life it is not enough to strive for enjoyable goals, but also to choose goals that will reduce the sum of total entropy in the world” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 140). I believe this “greater good” should always be a part of our concern as educators.

Dewey’s and Csikszentmihalyi’s work has helped solidify my sense of “art” as a meaningful entity beyond just the fine arts, one that describes a particular way of being in the world that constitutes high-quality experience. However, I still believe there is something special about the “fine arts” -- that, as Greene writes, that “the informed engagements with the several arts is the most likely mode of releasing our students’ (or any person’s) imaginative capacity and giving it play” (1995, p. 125). What makes the fine arts especially suited to high-quality experience? What do they alone have to offer education and experience?

III. “The arts”: Expressivity, Imagination, and Empathy

Dewey’s and Csikszentmihalyi’s work has helped me solidify my sense of “art” as a meaningful entity beyond just the “fine arts,” a definition of art as a particular way of doing- and being-in-the-world. However, I still believe that the arts

are especially well-suited to high-quality experience, and that they are instrumental in developing valuable capacities. Surely, the arts can be instrumental in teaching many discrete, specific skills and concepts, including some that are conventionally valued in the modern educational climate. Maxine Greene writes,

The neglect of the arts by those who identified the goals in Goals 2000 helped justify an administrative focus on the manageable, the predictable, and the measurable. While there have been efforts to include the arts in the official statements of national educational goals, the arguments have cohered with the arguments for education geared to economic competitiveness, technological mastery, and the like. (1995, p. 123-124)

Though the ways in which the arts foster capacities in math, science, and other typically-valued, quantifiable disciplines is interesting and valuable, I too am wary of the use of arts to foster “competitiveness” and “technical mastery.” I am more interested in what makes the arts valuable to us in and of itself, as well as how they build the capacities that I have articulated as important, such as freedom and community. Thus, I will first suss out what characterizes the arts, using Denis Dutton’s *The Art Instinct* and focusing those most-characteristic elements that strengthen one’s ability to be a free, authentic, integrated, and loving individual in communion with others. I will also use Maxine Greene and Martha Nussbaum to understand how the arts benefit community and democracy. I then briefly explore how this research implicates an educational practice that makes musical theater more central to the curriculum.

What are “The arts”?

What do we mean when we refer to “the arts”? In my experience, we use the term to refer to the processes and products of certain disciplines—usually music, dance, visual art, theater, and creative writing. But why? What do these experiences have in common with one another, and not with other entities? In *The Art Instinct*, philosopher Denis Dutton uses evolutionary psychology to understand why humans make art; in the process, of course, he must define the entity he is referring to as “art.” Dutton says that art is “a field of activities, objects, and experience that appears naturally in human life,” and that his definition of art is characterized by “persistent cross-culturally identified patterns of behavior and discourse: the making, experiencing, and assessing of works of art” (2010, p. 50-51). Dutton asserts that the drive to experience and create art is fundamentally human, and that though it is characterized by uniqueness, its broad strokes are found across all cultures. More specifically, Dutton identifies twelve “cluster criteria” that characterize the arts. While not all twelve criteria need always be present, most need to be, and some, such as “imaginative experience,” are near-indispensable (2010, p. 61-62). I will now explore the features that I believe are most distinctive to the arts, most conducive to the values I have articulated, and most needed in modern education.

“For its own sake”: Art is autotelic and open-ended

Notably, the first of Dutton’s twelve criteria is that art provides “direct pleasure,” by which he means not only sensory pleasure, but an overall sense of the object or activity being worthwhile “for its own sake” (2010, p. 52). He asserts, “the art object... is valued as a source of immediate experiential pleasure in itself, and not

necessarily for its utility in producing something else that is either useful or pleasurable” (ibid.). Dutton’s “experiential pleasure” resonates with Dewey and Csikszentmihalyi, for whom, respectively, unity of ends and means and autotelic activity emerged as central values of a broader definition of “art” or “optimal experience.” It makes sense that we would describe a broader swath of activity with a word, “art,” usually reserved for creative processes and products in theater, dance, music, visual art, and creative writing. These latter entities, which we colloquially dub “the arts,” typically possess this quality of being “for their own sake.”

A related criterion is what Dutton calls the “open-endedness” of art. Paraphrasing the British philosopher R. G. Collingwood, he explains the difference between art and craft: “The craftsman knows in advance what the product will look like,” and the work of craft is always toward a specific end, a “preconceived” final product (2010, p. 227). With art, on the other hand, “the artist does *not* have... precise foreknowledge of the end state—the finished art work—when he starts out” (ibid., emphasis added). When creating art, you cannot know exactly how you want the product to look or sound from the beginning. This is because any art product is born of the process itself, dynamically unfolding in time. It comes out of the interaction of the self with the environment, and with the burgeoning project itself. In the arts, the product does not determine the process; if anything, it is the other way around.

Art and Education professor Elliot Eisner makes a similar point about means and ends in “What can education learn from the arts about the practice of education?” (2002). He writes:

In Western models of rational decision making, the formulation of aims, goals, objectives or standards is a critical act; virtually all else that follows depends upon the belief that one must have clearly defined ends. Once ends are conceptualized, means are formulated, then implemented, and then outcomes are evaluated. (p. 10)

But as Eisner goes on to argue, this is often not how the world actually works, even outside the arts. He explains, “Our inclination to control and predict is, at a practical level, understandable, but it also exacts a price; we tend to do the things we know how to predict and control” (2002, p. 11). If we are too focused on measurable ends and means that are only meant to get us there, we limit ourselves and miss opportunities. And perhaps most egregiously, we do not learn to appreciate healthy doubt and ambiguity; we tighten up rather than “opening oneself to the uncertain.” (Eisner, 2002, p. 11).

By contrast, Eisner asserts, means and ends in the arts are much more flexible: In the arts, ends may follow means. One may act and the act may itself suggest ends, ends that did not precede the act, but follow it. In this process ends shift; the work yields clues that one pursues. In a sense, one surrenders to what the work process suggests. This process of shifting aims while doing the work at hand is what Dewey called “flexible purposing,” which “is not rigidly attached to predefined aims when the possibility of better ones emerges.” (2002, p. 10)

One of Eisner’s main points is that the arts’ flexibility and responsiveness when it comes to ends and means have a lot to lend the practice of education. The fine arts

certainly “cannot be cranked out according to routine or plan” (Dutton, 2010, p. 229), and in this, they contradict the ethos and lived reality of most modern schools. To make schools more open-ended and through the fine arts would be radical indeed.

The two above criteria of direct pleasure and open-endedness are perhaps the two most essential based on the broader definition of art I explored earlier, but they also characterize many entities other than just the arts. What makes the arts truly distinctive? Skill, style, and several other criteria are all relevant (Dutton, 2010, p. 53), but I believe *emotional saturation* and *imaginative experience* are the most characteristic criteria of the arts—and the most connected to my educational values.

“Emotional saturation”: Art expresses and communicates emotion

Dutton describes works of art as “shot through with emotion,” and writes that “emotional saturation... seems to be readily understood and accepted by audiences for art everywhere... this ready acceptance of emotion as coextensive with art, intrinsic to it, appears to be a bedrock fact of human nature and the nature of art” (2010, p. 56, 122). Indeed, expressivity is one of the most characteristic, powerful elements of art; Collingwood considered the expression of emotion “central to the great historical arts as they have come down to us” (2010, p. 228).

However, it is not enough to say that the arts are emotional, or even that they are expressive. What exactly do they do with emotion? *How* do they express? Again building on Collingwood, Dutton writes, “The artist... probes the content of human emotional life with an eye toward articulating, or making clear, a unique emotion, an individual feeling” (2010, p. 228). This “articulating” is more than the mere

“inciting” of emotion; it is meaningfully distinct from manipulating the audience into feeling an emotion. For example, art is “not simply acting out a Shakespearean part of an audience,” but rather, “trying to discover what is in the soul of Lady Macbeth” (ibid.). It is at least partly an earnest exploration of the world. We thus might say that art is not about the inciting of emotion, or even just the representation of it, but rather the *exploration* of it, which is then expressed in that it is made accessible to others through the medium of the art work.

An illustrative counter-example is that of sport, for as Dutton clarifies, even though sports are very emotional, they are not expressive in the way that art is. Rather, “winning and losing is the principal source of emotion, which is not *expressed*, as it is in artistic works, but rather *incited* in crowds by a real-world sporting outcome” (2010, p. 62, emphasis added). Indeed, the process of playing a sport is not one of exploring meaning or conveying emotions through symbols, gestures, and sensory information; it is one of moves taken toward a very clear end: making a goal (or run, basket, etc.) and ultimately winning the game. While many experiences in life feature heightened emotion, the arts involve an exploration and communication of emotional salience in a way that most other experiences do not.

Given the devaluation of emotion and non-rational ways of knowing I discussed in Chapter One, the arts could provide a much-needed opportunity for children to express themselves, explore emotional meanings, and learn to honor others’ expressivity. In my experience, our longing for meaning, and the meanings sought, are not solely intellectual or rational. They animate our whole beings; they carry emotional import. Making and taking in art is an incredibly powerful tool for

making sense of, and communicating, the lived, emotional experience of being human. For this reason, I believe we owe children the opportunity to interact with the processes and products of the arts.

However, the brand of expression found in the arts is meaningfully distinct from the communication of emotional import that occurs when we have a direct, quality interaction. This is because of the element of imagination, and how it intertwines with emotion.

“Imaginative experience”: Art creates possibility

“Imaginative experience” is another of Dutton’s criteria, and he writes that it is “perhaps the most important” of all of them (2010, p. 58). He asserts, “Objects of art essentially provide an imaginative experience for both producers and audiences” (2010, p. 58). When we take in novels, dances, symphonies, etc., entire imagined worlds are offered up for us to enter into. These worlds overlap with and emerge from, yet are distinct from, our own. Art may refer to and comment on reality, while also creating entirely new possibilities for us to chew on. And creating art requires just as much or more imagination. As Dutton puts it, “The costumed dance by firelight, with its intense unity of purpose among the performers, possesses an imaginative element quite beyond the group exercise of factory workers” (2010, p. 58). To return to the earlier example, sports are not imaginative experiences in the way a “costumed dance by firelight” is. Though the game has its own structure and rules, it is not a created world that explores reality through a medium and communicates relationships and potential meanings. Though sports have audiences

and constitute entertainment, they are not “offered up for imaginative contemplation” in the way that artworks are (Dutton, 2010, p. 63). Furthermore, the game is, in many ways, firmly rooted in the real world: “*who actually wins the game*, not in imagination, but in reality, remains the overwhelming issue” for participants and fans (Dutton, 2010, p. 62).

Still, the capacity to imagine is not solely the purview of the arts: it pervades life itself. Although some of us associate imagination with the fanciful and impossible, it is actually integral to envisioning what *is* possible, but not yet reality. This is one educational philosopher Maxine Greene’s main tenets: imagination “opens windows in the *actual*, discloses new perspectives, sheds a kind of light” (1995, p. 36, emphasis added). In this, it “enlarges experience” (Greene, 1995, p. 36). Similarly, literary scholar Joseph Carroll argues that someone reading a novel “is not escaping from reality; he is escaping from an impoverished reality into the larger world of healthy human possibility...” (as cited in Dutton, 2010, p. 123). When we imagine, we do not control, predict, and plan, but neither do we passively wait for change or completely withdraw from the world. *We create possibility in our minds*. One has to be able to imagine things being different or better before they can actually become that way. In this context, a rejection of the tyranny of the rational, objective, and provable is not just about honoring individual subjectivity; it’s about allowing for the ambiguity, open-endedness, and possibility that are necessary for actualizing different possibilities out in the world. Imagination is required in order to change and create objective reality.

So, unless we wish children to merely replicate our society's pre-existing structures, it is essential that we cultivate their imaginations. Nussbaum asserts, "In a successful school, children will come to see that imagination is required to deal with anything that lies 'beyond the scope of direct physical response.'" And this would include pretty much everything that matters: a conversation with a friend, a study of economic transactions, a scientific experiment. (2010, p. 103)

In addition to the activities Nussbaum lists, imagining possibility is essential to authentic community. Greene asserts that community requires imagination, because communities should be constantly envisioning and re-creating—should be "a community of beginners, moved to imagine what might be if they took action together" (Greene, 1995, p. 40). Moreover, community is supra-rational, imaginative, creative:

Community cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict. Like freedom, it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common; they have to find ways to make intersubjective sense. Again, it ought to be a space infused by the kind of imaginative awareness that enables those involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their group's becoming. (1995, p. 39)

As humans, we are dynamic, always in-progress, and so our communities must be as well. But this dynamic, authentic community requires capacities beyond "rational formulation," and certainly cannot be rightfully achieved from the external authority

of “edict.” Community requires us to employ our imagination of what could be and our agency to realize it, while always recognizing that the process is never truly finished. Ultimately, “lack of imagination results in an incapacity to create or even participate in what might be called community” (Greene, 1995, p. 37).

In the end, we need imagination for almost everything. However, as Greene writes, the development of the capacity to imagine, “will not, cannot, happen automatically or ‘naturally’” (1995, p. 125). Greene believes that “the informed engagements with the several arts is the most likely mode of releasing our students’ (or any person’s) imaginative capacity and giving it play” (1995, p. 125). The pervasive importance of imagination is yet another reason to make the fine arts more central to education. However, Martha Nussbaum focuses on another reason: imagination’s importance to empathy in particular.

“Narrative imagination”: Art builds empathy

Emotion and imagination are central to the arts, and are also closely intertwined. This first became evident to me in reading Nussbaum’s *Not for Profit* (2010), in which she asserts that the arts and humanities build the capacity for empathy and imagination. Nussbaum reminds us that art is a primary way we imagine others’ experiences and emotions, and thus develop empathy. She writes, “Through the imagination we are able to have a kind of insight into the experience of another group or person that it is very difficult to attain in daily life—particularly when our world has constructed sharp separations between groups, and suspicions that make any encounter difficult” (2008, p. 20). She calls this capacity “narrative imagination,” defining it as “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the

shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have" (2008, p. 12). Imagination helps us enter the perspective of someone who is "other" to us, and thus empathize with them. Similarly, Greene writes of imagination as "the cognitive capacity that permits us to give credence to alternative realities, to grasp another's world" (Holzer, 2007, p. 8), or what I call their subjecthood. Martin Buber, too, recognized the element of "imagining the real" in art, saying "imagining which puts us in touch with what is other than ourselves" (Friedman, 1999, p. 409).

Nussbaum reminds us that narrative imagination is accessed and strengthened through the arts. She writes of our relationship to other human beings, "it is an achievement to see a soul in that body, and this achievement is supported by poetry and the arts, which ask us to wonder about the inner world of that shape we see—and, too, to wonder about ourselves and our own depths" (2010, p. 102). In the arts, others' subjecthood are opened up to us through the alchemy of expression and imagination, enabling perspective and empathy as we build both our self- and other-knowledge. We thereby become more attuned to the both the particular and the universal, and ultimately feeling a deeper connection to humanity itself.

Moreover, Nussbaum points out that theater and literature, in particular, enables "participatory experience of the stigmatized position," more than information or statistics alone can (2010, p. 107). I would argue that it is enacting and performing drama, most of all, that accomplishes this "participatory experience," for we do not just take in and imagine, but also experience a character on somatically, trying on his

beings and doings. Through the process of drama, we move even beyond listening to another's experience, and closer to living it.

Narrative imagination is one of the most important capacities the arts help develop. This is because it increases our ability to enter direct, caring relationship, but also our ability to participate in broader communities and democracy itself.

Nussbaum asserts that we need to help “develop students’ capacity to see the world from the viewpoint of other people” in order for them to exercise their freedom responsibly and thus make democracy functional (2010, p. 45). Imagination is integral to enabling us to imagine and connect to other's interior realities, and to envisioning possibilities for action and creating a different reality. Imagination, expressivity, and empathy are not selfish, indulgent capacities. It is no coincidence that they are central to the arts, for they are central to what it means to be *human*.

Implications of the arts for practice

A deepened understanding of the arts and the capacities they build supports my long-held belief that the arts should have a prominent place in education. More specifically, I believe that schools should include both aesthetic education and art-making. For aesthetic education, further research and education from the Lincoln Center Institute would be beneficial. However, I am most concerned with providing children opportunities in creating art together, both because it is inherently a valuable experience, and because it is a metaphor and training ground for working together to create our world, our democracy. I believe that a curriculum with communal creation of musical theater at its center would build the capacities I have outlined.

I imagine that such a school would still have classrooms and discrete classes, but a good proportion of the day would be spent working toward the goal of performing a musical theater piece. In the first half of the year, the children could study, rehearse, and perform a pre-existing musical; in the second half, having built their understanding and capability, members of the school community would write their own short musical. Pre-school children would have less, and highly-scaffolded participation, but as the children get older and build independence and capabilities, they would spend more and more time on the production. The children would work together across different ages, and ideally, caregivers and community members would be involved as well.

A good deal of content, as well as many concrete skills, would be developed through working to create a musical theater production. Children could learn scientific principles and math skills when building sets and manning lights; their learning could be prompted by authentic needs and fostered by the processes of inquiry. *What is the measurement of the length of this piece of wood? How can we build this platform to support our weight but still be light enough to move between scenes? What colors can we mix to light the stage in purple for that scene?* Social studies and literature figure strongly into understanding the scripts and stories of musical theater. For example, teachers and children might ask, *What are the themes explored in Annie? What was New York like in the 1930s, so that we can understand and represent this setting and story to its fullest?* Children would still have strong literacy programs in their classrooms, but engagement with the texts and rhythms of language in music would reinforce these learnings. Indeed, virtually all the academic

content areas are implicated in musical theater, in which a story and its entire world is recreated for the audience using so many media. Furthermore, practical or vocational skills such as sewing and carpentry, of which I have seen very little in most schools, would be a huge part of the curriculum. I believe that would be very beneficial.

But most importantly, the creating musical dramas could strengthen the participants' sense of self and community through developing the capacities I have outlined. With so many opportunities for choice and consequences, albeit within the safer space of drama, children could be "apprentices to freedom." When trying on other characters' identities and writing in their own unique voice they would develop self-knowledge and authenticity. The arts' integration of body and mind, and thought and emotion, could increase children's sense of wholeness, and those children with strengths and interests other than logico-mathematical and verbal intelligences typically valued in school could shine. And self-love can develop as we help children feel healthy pride in what they create, making sure to help them treat themselves with compassion when the inevitable frustrations of art-making arise.

In terms of relationship and community, musical theater lends itself to interacting in a variety of structures, including dyads, small groups, and large groups—all of which have their own benefits. Furthermore, the process and product of creating a performance would be a meaningful purpose, which is so important to authentic community. Throughout, it would be important to make sure that the many roles in the process are valued, so that hierarchy and competition do not overshadow the sense of *ubuntu*—of a child being both an individual and part of a community through working with others. All these benefits are in addition to the increased

capacity for expression, imagination, empathy, and narrative imagination that I discussed earlier in the chapter—and, last but certainly not least, the “flow,” direct pleasure, and inherent worthwhileness that art often bestows.

The idea I have briefly outlined is very different from what exists in most schools today, and it would be a significant, radical shift from the dominant paradigm. It is, as Eisner exhorts us to work toward, “a view of education that differs in fundamental ways from the one that now prevails” (2010, p. 4). With the firm philosophical grounding and clarification of values this Integrative Master’s Project has provided, my next step as an educator will be to create this musical theatre curriculum, researching and workshopping in order to develop a sustainable program.

Conclusion

At the outset of this project, I sought to understand what enables us to have high-quality experience and lead lives we find fulfilling. I focused on the arenas of individual development, quality relationship, and art in order to determine my values and beliefs so that I could be a more purposeful, responsible, and loving educator. My values in fact turned out to be processes as well—capacities that enable us to claim our own subjecthood rather than being merely, as Amartya Sen called it, “the means of production” (1999, p. 296). Indeed, as I researched in pursuit of my educational philosophy, it became clear that subjecthood was my primary concern across different structures of individuality and interaction. I also realized that a value of subjectivity was also implicated in my belief that an obsession with rationality and provable results was suffocating modern education—and that this was why the arts could help us reclaim the unique dynamism and humanity of each individual. I realized I was hoping to work against objectification—not just of others, but also of ourselves, our world, and perhaps most of all, experience itself.

Three themes repeatedly resurfaced in my research. These themes suggest essential, integral elements of quality experience, and thus have great bearing on quality education. One of the most important recurring ideas was that of attention. Though it was not initially a point of focus in discussing the individual, it came to the forefront in studying quality interactions, as both Buber and Noddings made clear that engrossment was essential to caring relations. When it came to “flow,” a focused, fully-present state of mind was the main defining characteristic of what Csikszentmihalyi called “optimal experience.” In reflecting back on individual

development, I can see that attention-to-the-self is implicated in the level of noticing and questioning required for the capacities of freedom, authenticity, integration, and self-love. Thus, from this body of research, it seems that total, present engagement—with self, other, environment, and experience itself—lies at the heart of leading a meaningful, high-quality life. This is a type of experience we should try to provide children access to, but it is also a capacity we should help them build. For this reason, a huge implication of my research is the value of integrating mindfulness and meditation into schools. This will be one of my next future areas of research.

Critical-mindedness also emerged as important. Being critical through a practice of questioning is crucial to living authentically and exercising our freedom as individuals, as we cannot make truly free choices and take responsibility for them unless we question and consider our actions. In turn, critical-mindedness is also integral to free, authentic relations and community, as well. The importance of questioning curiously and critically implicates inquiry-based curriculum, which has become a more prominent educational trend recently. Further research into Paolo Friere's philosophy and methods of critical consciousness would also help me develop my understanding of this integral capacity. And certainly, the arts are well-suited to build the capacity to question, for works of art shine a light on experience, provide new perspectives, and pose questions to, for, and with us.

Finally, balance of process and purpose is an integral thread throughout my findings. In my research I learned that freedom, authenticity, integration, and self-love are all processes, not fixed identities or states; that being a good carer and community member is essentially about *how* we relate to one another; and that most

people's optimal experiences are defined by being actively engrossed in a process one finds valuable for its own sake, not solely for the product. Importantly, valuing process does not mean we eschew goals—goals and purpose are important to both “authentic community” and “flow.” However, the goal should be integrally related to and emergent from the process itself. Thus, valuing subjecthood and lessening objectification is also about valuing process and not just product—a pillar of progressive education, and especially early childhood education, as I learned them at Bank Street.

A value of re-integration of process and product strongly implicates the arts as an integral component of a high-quality education. Many people find the arts valuable and enjoyable for their own sake, and the nature of art is such that, as I discussed in reference to Dewey, the process and product are very connected. However, we do have to be conscientious in the attitude we bring to the arts, for it is possible to make them disproportionately focused on product. If we do this, we torque them into something that does not qualify as art in Dewey's more fundamental sense, and does not square with my value of non-objectified experience.

I now believe my role as a teacher is to help children have high-quality experience characterized by agency and meaning. I seek to help them learn to strike a balance between active, non-objectified engagement and the equally crucial, complementary capacity to turn a critical lens on experience, leaving nothing beyond question. I want to educate children for dynamic subjecthood, which includes interaction between our subjective interiority and the objective world around us. Importantly, though, it also includes the subjecthood of other human beings, and so I

also educate to help children learn to claim respect and care as a foundation for purposive, life-giving activity in community with others.

Ultimately, my idea of “reclaiming subjecthood” in education is not solely about subjectivity; it is a vision for a way-of-being and doing that pervades throughout life. As Dewey put it, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself” (as cited in “Pioneers in Our Field,” 2000, p. 1). Education should help children develop as meaning-makers, giving them opportunities to choose and create the world while also being responsive to the reality of what exists out-there, in-the-world. To me, learning to live life to the fullest entails reclaiming experience that is valuable in and of itself—and, indeed, the right to seek out what that is and means for us individually. A century ago, Rose Schneiderman asserted:

What the woman who labors wants is the right to live, not simply exist—the right to life as the rich woman has the right to life, and the sun and music and art... The worker must have bread, but she must have roses, too. (As cited in Eisenstein, 1983, p. 32)

Educators have a responsibility to make sure that all children have access to not only the ability to obtain “bread,” but also the capacity to appreciate “roses.” We need to honor children’s longing for meaning and beauty, and help them learn to not only subsist, but to truly live. We should facilitate a child’s ability to notice the world around her—from her own emotions, to a friend’s laugh, to a delicate line of Arabic script inscribed in a brownstone she passes every day. We can scaffold her questioning how a bicycle works, or why some people don’t have a place to sleep at night. We might encourage her delighted engrossment in solving a math problem or

playing a Bach invention; we might join her in marveling at the sunlight streaming through her fingers, rendering them transparent and luminous. Such lived moments cannot be quantified. They are invaluable. Of course, we must also empower her to act on these observations, questions, and values, urge her to employ agency and self-control to work towards her vision of a fair, beautiful world. To do so, we ourselves have to model these capacities, create an environment in which children can explore and discover, and provide opportunities for expression and connection. Equally importantly, we must closely observe and listen to what the child has to say, witnessing and honoring her own unique, unrepeatable perspective.

I believe that providing children with experiences in the arts—approached in a way consonant with a broader, yet more essential definition of “art” as quality, non-objectified experience—is a wonderful way to realize these educational values. Elliot Eisner wrote, “What we can do is to generate other visions of education, other values to guide its realization, other assumptions on which a more generous conception of the practice of schooling can be built” (2002, p. 8). This is what I have done in this Integrative Master’s Project: articulated my values and built visions upon them. I believe that an education based on the ideas I have espoused here would enable children to love themselves, others, and life itself. What goal is more worthy than these?

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