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Student Expressions of Aesthetic Learning Experiences

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Jodie L. Wilson

June 2021

Advisor: P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

Aesthetic learning experiences are grounded in qualities influenced by the arts: perceptive, sensorial, imaginative, and creative. While the concept of aesthetic experience has been applied broadly within education, student expressions of such experiences have been neglected. This poses a problem of equity both ethically in that the suppression of student voice is perpetuated and pragmatically in that the range and form of aesthetic learning expressed by students is insufficiently attended to and acted upon.

Theoretically guided by John Dewey's explications of an aesthetic experience and conceptually supported by three interpretive frames—Eisner's dimensions of schooling, Uhrmacher et al.'s instructional arc, and Uhrmacher's aesthetic themes of education—this research qualitatively explored K-8 student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences at one rural school in the western U.S. via the following research question: What are student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences? Additionally, I addressed three sub-questions: 1) What are the teacher's intentions in creating conditions for aesthetic learning experiences?, 2) How are these intentions enacted in the classroom?, and 3) How do students respond to aesthetic learning experiences—that is, what do students say, do, and create?

My research employed an educational criticism and connoisseurship approach to perceive, disclose, and appraise qualities inherent in student aesthetic learning experiences through three sources of data: classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and

curricular, pedagogical, visual, and community artifacts. The findings from this inquiry suggest that student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences materialized across three focal points—music, place, and composition—and were influenced by the teacher’s intentions to cultivate a love of learning within her students. From these findings, I consider four anticipatory frameworks and their implications for diverse contexts: savoring inefficiency, constructing ordinary imaginaries, sense-making and space-making in the curriculum, and becoming in place with others.

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This dissertation owes an unrequitable debt to the scholarship of ELLIOT W. EISNER who once said: "Universities, of all institutions, should be places where one is able ... to work at the edge of incompetence." If Eisner's words ring true, I can count the last 6 years an unequivocal success!

J.L.W.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“The standards were drafted by experts and teachers from across the country and are designed to ensure students are prepared for today’s entry-level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs. The new standards also provide a way for teachers to measure student progress throughout the school year and ensure that students are on the pathway to success in their academic careers.”

~Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2018. “What Parents Should Know.” Public domain.

“Now there is nothing wrong with learning how to earn a living, but the process is not synonymous with being educated.”

~Elliot W. Eisner, Educating Artistic Vision

“Education must ritually take place in a democratic context; democracy must ritually resort to educational processes. Ends alone must never be used to justify the means; all means must be justified in their own right, with moral principles outweighing all others.”

~John I. Goodlad, In Praise of Education

This inquiry pertains to *student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences*. In a larger sense, it also pertains to the perception of qualities in educational contexts and the meanings we assign to them; a compelling and accessible aspiration I believe to be deserving of exploration and scrutiny. Aesthetic learning experiences can be defined as those experiences grounded in the heightened perceptive, imaginative, creative, and sensorial qualities of everyday educational experience. My central aim for this study is to illuminate the qualities and forms of student experience derived via aesthetically situated curriculum and pedagogy. My second goal is to invite the educational community into the *what* and *why* of this particular form of educational experience: What meaning do students and teachers derive from aesthetically informed experience, and why does it matter to them? Why should it matter to others? Speaking directly to the second question, my third aim is to extend an ethical, coherent, and impactful appraisal that resonates beyond the scope of the inquiry to other educational contexts. These goals are particularly salient because they address two foundational and interconnected realms of education—learning and teaching—and focus the nexus of experience, and particularly, *student aesthetic experience*, within each. Keeping these aims in mind, why study student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences?

The rationale for the present inquiry aims to: 1) intervene in a problem of equity regarding the continued neglect of student voice and experience in educational research, particularly that of rural students, 2) explore and extend knowledge and meaning regarding the range, qualities, and forms of aesthetic learning expressed by students, which has been under researched and often disregarded in the literature, 3) critique industrial education practice and its structures—efficiency, rationality, and uniformity—by illuminating

perspectives of individuality, creativity, affective vitality, and divergence, 4) elevate conceptions of knowledge and experience in the literature beyond what can be quantitatively measured and compared to include those derived from sensorial, felt, perceptive experiences, and 5) illuminate possibilities for engaged learning vis-à-vis aesthetic methods. This last point concerning student engagement is particularly salient given the current COVID-19 pandemic. UNESCO reports that over 60 million teachers' and 1.5 billion students' day-to-day lives were and continue to be disrupted by school closures around the world. In the United States alone, some estimates report that nearly 3 million students, many of them from a variety of marginalized subgroups, are *completely missing* from school systems (in-person and online) since the pandemic began (Bellwether Education Partners, 2020).

Guided by John Dewey's (1934) aesthetic theory, I pursued my research through an educational criticism and connoisseurship approach (Eisner, 1985b, 2017) using three interpretive frames designed to explore the possibilities of aesthetic learning experiences, and ultimately, what students make of them. I crafted an educational criticism generated by data from multiple observations and interviews of rural K-8 teachers and their students. Additionally, I curated a selection of relevant pedagogical, curricular, and aesthetic artifacts to invite added interpretation and meaning to the inquiry through visual imagery.

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to key theories of aesthetics offered by influential classical and contemporary thinkers. Next, I outline three arguments foundational to my study: 1) aesthetic qualities and experiences have been undervalued in education, 2) the language we choose in describing educational matters is significant, and 3) student perceptions of their educational experiences, particularly aesthetic experiences, has been devalued. Then, I situate the current inquiry within the broader curriculum field and offer

implications of a prior research study. I conclude with the purpose statement and research questions, methodological overview, and organization of the dissertation.

Key Conceptions of Aesthetics

I begin by affirming that conceptions of aesthetics are as fluid as they are varied (Adorno, 1984; Brand & Korsmeyer, 1995; Broudy, 1972; Cooper, 1997; Dewey, 1934; hooks, 1995; Li, 2010; Read, 1974; Saito, 2007; Winchester, 2002). Aesthetics as a field is imbued with immense historical and contemporary depth and can be approached through multiple philosophical points of entrée. Although the term ‘aesthetics’ is attributed in the modern era to German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762), who instigated the formal study of aesthetics as a branch of philosophical inquiry in *Aesthetica* (1750-1758), expositions on the nature of aesthetics have extended from both western and eastern traditions of art, beauty, and judgment advanced over millennia. Derived from the classical Greek meaning ‘capable of sensory perception’ (Higgins, 1996), aesthetics is not bound to a universal tradition or axiomatic paradigm (Cahn & Meskin, 2008). Nevertheless, for the purpose of introducing my study, I wish to briefly illuminate key areas of western thought that have influenced general conceptions of aesthetics.

The classical roots of aesthetics originate with Athenian philosopher Plato (Cooper, 1997) who argued that Beauty is objectively separated from experience. In the dialogue *Symposium* (ca. 385 BCE), Plato argued that what one perceives to be beautiful is compared against the ideal and singular form of Beauty and not based on one’s own (or others’) ephemeral and subjective judgments of whether or not it is beautiful. Beauty, noted Plato, is “an everlasting loveliness which neither comes nor goes, which neither flowers nor fades, for

such beauty is the same on every hand, the same then as now..." (Joyce, 1961, p. 562). In the quest for this ideal form, one can come to know Truth, the ultimate aim of life. A second key concept attributed to Plato's ideas on aesthetics is that of mimesis, or imitation (Cooper). Since Beauty exists in ideal forms, material representations—including poetry, dance, music, paintings—are essentially a copy of the ideal. Plato held that such representations may delight and give pleasure, however, as they function mimetically, and thus subordinately to forms, they remain incapable of procuring 'true' knowledge. Aristotle, Plato's student, disagreed with him in key areas. He believed that true forms could also exist locally in addition to ideally with his analysis of poetry in *Poetics* (ca. 330 BCE) being the most influential. Aristotle disagreed with Plato's deep suspicion of emotion as a harbinger of Truth and saw experiences derived from the arts as capable of leading to beauty and truth through the expression of universal emotions.

Key conceptions of aesthetics in the modern era have also extended and refuted the ideas of Plato in significant ways. Scottish philosopher and empiricist David Hume (1711-1776), whose fourth dissertation *Of the Standard of Taste* (1757) directly addressed matters of aesthetic judgment, argued that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, located not outside human experience in an ideal form, but within the mind. Judgments of beauty are subjective according to the immense variety of "sentiments"—or feelings—of man:

Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.... To seek real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an inquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or the real bitter. (Hume, 1904, p. 234)

And yet, as Hume convincingly established, there remains a certain standard of taste that bears the mark of perpetuity: "The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate,

government, religion, and language have not been able to obscure his glory” (p. 237). Hume, drawing on de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, argued that some beholders—or critics—are essentially superior to others and can apply a universal standard of taste by practicing discernment, delicacy, and comparison, and by releasing prejudices among other qualities.

The considerable influence of the German aesthetic tradition of the 18th century was epitomized by the work of philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who extended Hume’s emphasis on the subjectivity and universality of aesthetic judgement. In *Critique of Judgment* (1790), in which he distinguished four characteristics—or ‘moments’—comprising a ‘pure’, (untethered to emotion) judgment of the beautiful, Kant centered not a Platonic single, unwavering conception of beauty, but like Hume, located such judgments within the structure of the mind. Kant noted that for a pure judgment of taste to exist, two conditions must coincide: 1) a judgment of beauty that is universal and precedes emotion, and 2) a state of disinterestedness, similar to a state of impartiality. Regarding the second condition, Kant (1790/1987) argued:

Everyone has to admit that if a judgment about beauty is mingled with the least interest then it is very partial and not a pure judgment of taste. In order to play the judge in matters of taste, we must not be in the least biased in favor of the thing’s existence but must be wholly indifferent about it. (p. 45)

Although the tremendous fecundity of Kant’s theories on aesthetics cannot be ignored, Kant’s legitimization of cognition over emotion, as well as his interest in disinterest, has elicited considerable debate that continues to influence current lines of discourse, including the detachment of philosophical aesthetics with context, for example, or the privileging of “fine art” over “folk art” or “crafts.”

It is also critical to acknowledge key influences in the field of aesthetics derived from non-western perspectives. heather ahtone (2012) advocated for an Indigenous aesthetic

conjoining materiality, metaphor, and reciprocity through the expression of traditional native practices. Chinese aesthetician Zehou Li (2010) noted that the earliest applications of art in pre-Confucian China originated with “the tradition of rites and music” (p. 29) with the overall goal of shaping emotion rather than imitating life. Japanese scholar Yuriko Saito (2007) rejects Kant’s disinterestedness by aiming to remove the special, elitist connotation of aesthetics and replace it with an analysis of how the trivial and mundane aspects of everyday aesthetics advance broader social, political, and environmental consequences. Prominent poet and essayist Ana Castillo (2014) conceptualized a Chicana feminist aesthetics she termed “Xicanisma” in her book *Massacre of the Dreamers*. These ideas and others are attended to in Chapter Two with greater detail.

Yet another conceptualization offered by American philosopher John Dewey, and one to which this inquiry theoretically aligns, locates aesthetics not from within the constraints of beauty, taste, or judgment, but rather via a “detour” (1934, p. 4) of transactional experience between the objective qualities of our natural world and our subjective internal qualities. Here, Dewey’s purpose was to emphasize the holistic and perceptual nature of aesthetic experience by maneuvering away from detachment and either-or dualisms to “restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experiences that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience” (p. 3). Dewey distinguished ordinary experience from *an experience*, emphasizing incoherence and indistinction in the former, and unity and consummation in the latter: “That which distinguishes an experience as esthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close” (p. 56). This form of

elevated experience, imbued with aesthetic qualities like heightened perceptivity, vitality, and emotion, provides a set of criteria for which interpretations of ‘ordinary’ versus ‘aesthetic’ experience can be made. Dewey’s explication of aesthetic experience is particularly germane for this inquiry because it locates the immediacy and significance of aesthetic experience within everyday experiences— including those had by students within their classrooms.

At this point, having briefly introduced key classical and modern conceptions of aesthetics originating from both within and outside the western philosophical tradition, I would like to reiterate that the critical work of this inquiry rests on the following epistemological assumptions: 1) the enrichment of educational experience via aesthetic qualities and aesthetically informed means has been undervalued, 2) the language we choose to use in describing educational consequences is significant, and 3) the forms, complexity, and vitality of K-12 student experience has been neglected. These assumptions alone are not meant to be exhortative or to admonish current outcomes-focused education, and certainly my aim is not to suggest they act as a panacea. However, these arguments *are* an attempt to de-pathologize meaning derived from the senses, protest the current profusion of educational discourse that adulterates standardization, and reveal fresh possibilities for student learning engendered by the epistemological diversity aesthetically informed experience can afford. I turn now to a more detailed analysis of these rationales in the following three sections.

The Undervaluing of Aesthetic Qualities and Experience in Education

Aesthetic Experience in Education

As aesthetic experience within educational contexts is central to this study, it is necessary to examine several conceptions from educational scholars, beginning with the notion of qualities of experience. Elliot W. Eisner considered qualities to be foundational to any experience and its subsequent meaning: “Qualities are candidates for experience. Experience is what we achieve as those qualities come to be known” (2017, p. 21). Eisner’s use of the term ‘candidates’ is not to be overlooked: what students experience is a result of the particular environmental conditions they are afforded to perceive. He suggested that these qualities are located within the features of our everyday, qualitatively experienced world—not only *what* we encounter, but how we *perceive* what we encounter. Thus, students’ repertoires of potential meaning can only be secured through their ability to perceive the various qualities of their experience. One avenue through which the types of qualities Eisner describes can be known is by aesthetic means—primarily via the senses. In this way, the perception of aesthetic qualities and their attendant meanings function as a pathway toward aesthetic knowledge (Eisner, 1985a, 1988, 1994, 2002, 2017). A second correlation to be gleaned from Eisner (2002) is understanding aesthetic experience through its antipodal term “anesthetic” (p. 81) which refers to qualities that numb through the suppression of feeling and the dulling of the senses.

From Maxine Greene’s (1978, 1995, 2001) point of view, aesthetic experience centers the role of the individual by drawing a distinction between deliberate—which she termed “faithful”—and ordinary perception. One may be presented with aesthetic qualities, Greene noted, but unless one’s own experience and therefore meanings are secured and intentional

distinctions are made as a result, ‘true’ aesthetic experience cannot be secured. Aesthetic experience relies on the imagination as a vehicle in opening individual consciousness toward critical perspectives, an “uncoupling from the ordinary” to embark on “imaginative adventures in meaning” (Greene, 2001, p. 67). For Greene, aesthetic education is “a process of initiating persons into faithful perceiving, a means of empowering them to accomplish the task from their own standpoints, against the backdrop of their own awareness” (p. 45).

Other influential conceptions germane to aesthetic experience in education include Ralph Smith’s (2006) notion of reflective percipience that centers aesthetic education through a humanities orientation to understanding our world, E. F. Kaelin’s (1989) defense of aesthetic experience as wholly integral to the general education curriculum, not just the art curriculum, and Harry Broudy’s (1972) understanding of aesthetic experience as a composite of perception and imagination, or “aesthetic image” (p. 28) that functions to ultimately enlarge societal virtues. Dwayne Huebner (1999) asserted that education should maintain, in addition to scientific responsibility, a sense of “aesthetic responsibility” for reflecting “meaning, beauty, truth, vitality, and promise” (p. 172). Finally, Sir Herbert Read (1974) boldly declared art as the basis for education through the cultivation of aesthetic qualities of imagination, perception, and expression.

The Neglect of Aesthetic Qualities and Experience

Despite considerable theoretical and practical grounding, the significance of aesthetic experience has yet to be fully released into autonomous flight across stratifications of the current educational landscape. Instead, aesthetic experience remains neglected, variously tethered in subservience to student achievement, used as a justification for a utilitarian purview of the arts in education, or as a prop to ‘enhance’ curricula to placate ubiquitous

demands to teach ‘the whole child.’ Twenty years ago, Eisner noted that aesthetic qualities and experience are distinguished by their intrinsic value and should be afforded a certain “pride of place” (Eisner, 1998, p. 13) in the general curriculum. Questioning the value of a utilitarian approach to arts education, he argued:

We do the arts no service when we try to make their case by touting their contributions to other fields. When such contributions become priorities, the arts become handmaidens to ends that are not distinctively artistic and, in the process, undermine the value of art’s unique contributions to the education of the young. (p. 15)

In alignment with Eisner’s argument, Harvard Project Zero, a leading innovative arts organization, similarly warned about the precarious connection between arts curricula and academic achievement:

If the arts are given a role in our schools because people believe the arts cause academic improvement, then the arts will quickly lose their position if academic improvement does not result, or if the arts are shown to be less effective than the 3Rs in promoting literacy and numeracy. Instrumental claims for the arts are a double-edged sword. (Hetland & Winner, 2001)

Despite these warnings, research linking the arts and student achievement outcomes continues to flourish (Carney, Weltsek, Hall, & Brinn, 2016; Catterall, 1998; Gullatt, 2007; LaMotte, 2018; Pepler, Powell, Thompson, & Catterall, 2014; Rabkin & Redmond, 2006; Robinson, 2013).

Aesthetic qualities and experience have also been used as a type of curricular artifice. One example is the addition of art to the popular STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) model of education (Rhode Island School of Design, 2010). The move from STEM to STEAM (adding in the ‘A’ for art) while well-intentioned, nevertheless continues to position art and aesthetics as an ‘add-on’ to science and does little to further its intrinsic value and unique contributions. Congruent to the demotion of aesthetic qualities in K-12

education is the neglect of aesthetically derived knowledge, both for the teacher as well as her students. We have come to equate “evidence-based” or “research-based” practice in education with scientifically derived, rather than aesthetically derived, methods. Rigor has replaced resonance.

The Significance of Language in Education

The words we choose in describing educational matters, and their attendant meanings, are of great consequence. My intentional use of the phrase *student expressions*¹ rather than student outcomes reflects not only a critical acknowledgment of the importance of educational language, but more importantly, it affirms the increasingly palpable consequences of such language for students and teachers. Expressions also honors student diversity by attending to a wide range of forms of understanding, not only those manifested in some predetermined end result, but experientially derived meanings which lie along the variegated continuum of individual learning. Because my research is influenced by thinking derived from the arts, my intentional use of the term ‘expressions’ rather than ‘outcomes’ connotes a rejection of scientifically based discourse that aligns with what Dwayne Huebner (1999) so cogently noted: “To use only scientific knowledge to think about teaching is to assume that the teaching situation can be more or less standardized” (p. 25). Each of above points are elaborated in greater detail in the following sections.

The centrality of language and its communion with meaning has long been advanced by numerous theorists. Cultural anthropologist Edward Sapir (1964) affirmed the centrality

¹ I wish to gratefully acknowledge Professors P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Deron Boyles, Christy McConnell, Bradley Conrad, and Benjamin Ingman. Their comments and suggestions pushed my thinking regarding the meaning and use of “expressions” and “outcomes.”

of referential language in culture, arguing that not only does language and its unique structures, imbued with symbolism, shape how our world is experienced, language also informs the interpretations we ascribe to our experience. Sapir wrote:

...It is generally difficult to make a complete divorce between objective reality and our linguistic symbols of reference to it; and things, qualities, and events are on the whole felt to be what they are called. For the normal person, every experience is saturated with verbalism...It is this constant interplay between language and experience which removes language from the cold status of such purely and simply symbolic systems as mathematical symbolism or flag signaling. (p. 9)

Given the above affirmations of the centrality of language, the argument I wish to extend for a focus on *educational* language illuminates symbolic assumptions and their attendant meanings that may otherwise be overlooked as commonplace.

Language Influenced by the Arts

The first argument I wish to advance for the use of student *expressions* of aesthetic learning experiences advocates a conscious recovery of language influenced by an educational purview rooted in the arts. There is of course nothing inherently wrong with terms like outcomes, results, and objectives; however, the provenance of such discourse resides in efficiency-based assumptions to which the current study does not ascribe. The intentional use of expressions in this inquiry seeks a deliberate move away from this saturated lexicon toward a more equitable distribution—one influenced by the arts rather than the scientific-technical.

Expressions Attends to the Particulars of Knowledge

My intentional use of student expressions honors, in Eisner's words, "the roads to knowing that are many" (1985a, p. 24). As philosopher Susanne Langer (1953) noted, a nondiscursive or presentational form of knowledge, one that is intuitive, expressive, and *felt*,

is no less important a pathway to meaning than is one that relies on more traditional discursive forms. Eisner (1985b) articulated this point well in his explication of the null curriculum, or that which schools do not teach (p. 97). Often, the null curriculum implies a specific content area or curricular focus that is deemphasized or even absent from the curriculum (music or the Holocaust, for example), however, Eisner (1985b) initiated an expanded view of the null curriculum, one that also includes neglected or absent forms of cognition:

Not only does the neglect or absence from school programs of nondiscursive forms of knowing skew what can be known and expressed in schools; it also biases the criteria through which human competence and intelligence are appraised. When we look at school curricula with an eye toward the full range of intellectual processes that human beings can exercise, it quickly becomes apparent that only a slender range of those processes is emphasized. (p. 99)

The “full range of intellectual processes” that Eisner speaks of are directly affected by what students are afforded to perceive. The neglect of aesthetic modes of knowing subverts possibilities for deepened and complex forms of knowledge—the subtleties that can shade experience with richness and depth. For example, I may know that sorrow means grief or sadness, however, I feel *a particular kind of sorrow* when I listen to Henryk Górecki’s expression of it in his Symphony No. 3. Expressions relies on differentiations of knowledge that can be made in, through, and amongst the particulars of life.

Expressions as Anathema to Efficiency

Thus far I have presented two arguments—one, that expressions reflects an educational purview rooted in the arts, and two, that expressions attends to the particulars of knowledge. Third, I wish to develop the argument that the intentional use of the term *expressions* represents a rejection of the utilitarian model of education (Bresler, 1998; Logsdon & Boyles, 2012) historically aligned with the social efficiency movement in education.

Logsdon and Boyles argued: “The utilitarian view defines student success in terms of projected economic indicators in an a priori assumption about what the future world will (necessarily) hold” (p. 407). Associated with Franklin Bobbitt’s *The Curriculum* (1918), the social efficiency model is predicated the application of systematic principles aimed toward the efficient ‘manufacture’ of students who can be taught skills in the least wasteful manner that will ultimately serve the greater social good (Flinders & Thornton, 2017). The best kinds of educational experiences, according to Bobbitt, were not found within the immediate context of the student and her community, but out in the larger “world of affairs” (Bobbitt, 1918, p. 11). The kind of efficiency advocated by Bobbitt is necessarily contingent upon control, and yet, as Elizabeth Vallance (1991) reminded us:

Education happens in classrooms in ways we can never fully predict, and it depends on many viable educators can never fully control—even including whether the students are well nourished or have access to books in their homes. Given that many educational decisions must be made spontaneously and must reflect the sensitivities and predispositions of teachers, any efforts to systematize the variables in education will be limited by those uncontrollable factors. And given this, it follows that research efforts in education (including curriculum studies) must reflect a perspective that admits this state of affairs and is willing to work with it. (p. 157)

A close correlate to systematization is measurement. Eisner noted that this connection historically extends from the paradigm of *scientism*: “the belief that everything that exists can be understood through the same methods, that there is only one legitimate way to verify knowledge of the world, and that unless something can be quantified it cannot be truly understood or known” (1985b, p. 27). In order for scientism to be effectively enacted, measurement of comparable data is required. This ideology and its structures of comparison, control through scripted curriculum, and high-stakes accountability measures has persisted in

public education, resulting in a deleterious conflation of uniformity with equity (Milner, 2013).

Expressions Honors a Spectrum of Student Ontologies

Finally, utilizing *expressions* accounts for students both as they are in the present moment with variegated intellectual, spiritual, physical, creative, and emotional potentialities. It represents students who have the courage and support to embark on the noble and often difficult struggle of finding a space of their own within the educational enterprise; to “open windows to alternative realities” (Greene, 2001, p. 44) on their own terms and through their own paths. A persistent gaze toward the narrow spectrum of student ontologies created in a standards-based framework of teaching and learning necessitates an equally persistent gaze on measurement—how well are students meeting the standard? How do we know? What is to be ‘done’ with students who are failing to meet the standard? However, what is often subjugated, rather ironically, is *variance*—students whose abilities, experiences, and preferred forms of learning lie sequestered outside the tightly prescribed norms and boundaries of standards-based models of education.

While this emphasis on individual subjectivities may overreach, if it is indeed the case that a significant number of students may be struggling to ‘measure up’ in an educational climate rife with prescriptive and data-driven measures of success within narrow linguistic-mathematically privileged educational systems, then such an existentially tinged rationale may indeed have merit. Thus far, I have presented two concepts foundational to this study: 1) aesthetic experience can abide amongst the backdrop of everyday matters, including classroom life, and 2) the language we use in describing and evaluating educational matters is

of critical importance. I now turn to a third and final rationale for the study that centers student experience.

The Neglect of the Forms, Complexities, and Vitality of K-12 Student Experience

Despite a few notable and penetrating exceptions (Barone, 1989, 2001; Jackson, 1990; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Pope, 2001) the forms, complexities, and vitalities of K-12 student experience within classrooms remain neglected. This research will draw upon the competence of students (Lahman, 2008) to understand and elevate student perspectives of their learning experiences, particularly those that are aesthetically derived. Within the current outcomes-centered model of education, standards are positioned at the fore and invariably, there will be some students who will not meet the standard and others who will exceed it. One concern with standards, or “benchmarks” as Giroux (1988) reminded us, is that they create hierarchies that homogenize students and neglect to consider individual experience. Further, a persistent gaze toward meeting standards necessitates an equally persistent gaze on student measurement—how well are students meeting the standard? How do we know? What is to be done with students who are failing to meet the standard? This inquiry’s focus on the ‘received’ (Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017) or ‘experienced’ (Barone, 1980) curriculum—that is, what students make of their educational experience—reflects my intention to reveal the consequential forms and vitality of students’ aesthetic learning experiences within the context of everyday classroom life.

Situating My Inquiry Within the Broader Curriculum Field

A review of the curriculum field, often subsumed by the larger education field but nevertheless omnipresent, reveals social, economic, and political motivations that have driven the field forward and at other times have produced stagnation. Whatever the contextual factors, curriculum continues to occupy a place at the very fore of all critical educational endeavors because it constitutes the “stuff of schooling”, touching perennial issues concerning what should be taught and why, to what is not taught and why, to the factors that create the school environment (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Eisner noted that “curriculum provides frames for reading the world” (2002, p. 85) and together with Vallance considered five nonequivalent frames that they noted as “conflicting” purposes: curriculum as academic rationalism, curriculum as social reconstruction, curriculum as self-actualization, curriculum-making as technology, and curriculum as the development of cognitive processes (Eisner & Vallance, 1973). J. Wesley Null’s comprehensive survey (2017) delineated six philosophically and pragmatically discrete curriculum “traditions”: liberal, systematic, existentialist, radical, pragmatic, and deliberative. Pinar et al. (2004) organized their understanding of curriculum not as traditions but as historical and contemporary discourses or “texts”, including autobiographical, racial, phenomenological, theological, gender, aesthetic, and postmodern, among others. Flinders and Thornton (2017) placed closeness to enduring curriculum themes and questions—curriculum’s “pivotal works”—rather than comprehensiveness, at the center of analysis in their popular curriculum reader. Other scholars such as Wayne Au et al. (2016) challenged the idea of a master narrative within the field by drawing attention to both visible and invisible omissions, noting that “the history of

the field of curriculum studies, at least as told by the textbooks, is mainly a story of White men in the academy” (p. 4).

I believe the current inquiry’s rationale aligns most closely to Eisner and Vallance’s curriculum frame of self-actualization in that it seeks to emphasize students’ individual capacities for satisfaction and personal meaning-making in an enlivened and engaging context “in which individuals discover and develop their own unique identities” (p. 105), rather than by focusing on an efficient movement toward predetermined outcomes. This inquiry also supports Pinar et al.’s, (2004) argument that one way curriculum can be identified is as aesthetic text, meaning “to understand the role of imagination in the development of the intellect, to cultivate the capacity to know aesthetically, and to comprehend the teacher and his or her work as inherently aesthetic” (p. 604).

This inquiry also implies alignment with democratic ideas that support a broadening, rather than narrowing of the curriculum (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Eisner, 1994, 2002; Jerald, 2006; Pinar & Grumet, 2014), including the right of students to seek out and engage with a wide range of ideas (Dewey, 1916; Apple & Beane, 1995). Additionally, this inquiry honours the lineage of curriculum scholarship by individual researchers and authors in the field whose ideas and work originate from humanities-based perspectives, including Eisner’s (2005) expanded view of forms of representation and cognition, Maxine Greene’s (1988, 1995) view of aesthetic education as the development of imagination toward self-awareness and freedom, as well as others who have provided considerable support for reimagining schools and curriculum from aesthetics and arts-based perspectives.

Implications of Prior Research for the Current Inquiry

In 2017-2018, a co-researcher and I engaged in an IRB-approved research study aimed at understanding the implementation of the aesthetic themes of education, or CRISPA (Uhrmacher, 2009), and their impact on the intentions and pedagogical practices for a high school English teacher and his students (Saxe & Wilson, in press). Using an educational criticism and connoisseurship approach, we asked: 1) What are the intentions and practices of a high school teacher as he teaches English, and 2) What are the intentions and practices of the same teacher as he teaches English incorporating CRISPA? Our findings revealed themes of the teacher's complementary social justice curriculum (Moroye, 2009), tensions and diversions he negotiated between the prescribed AP curriculum and his beliefs, and the capacity of CRISPA to enhance the expression of his beliefs regarding the importance of teaching for social justice. Our findings also lent support to the literature that links aesthetics to social justice pedagogy (Costigan, 2013; Sleeter, 2014) and delineated implications for educators seeking to enhance their pedagogical practice vis-à-vis the aesthetic themes of education.

This experience gained from this prior study proffered both methodological and practical implications for the current inquiry. First, we employed an educational connoisseurship and criticism approach that afforded me sustained experience with both the general and specific structures of this method prior to undertaking my dissertation research. Second, I gained experience structuring a qualitative inquiry, negotiating informed consent and assent, generating data through observations and interviews, appraising data through several cycles of annotations, and crafting an educational criticism based on the evidence from the data. Because the prior research study was conducted jointly, it had the added

advantage of a second researcher to appraise and annotate the data. Although the current inquiry is solely my own work, I did rely on this co-researcher as a peer reviewer during the appraisal process for this dissertation, which was immensely helpful. Finally, the findings informed my personal beliefs regarding the relationship between the aesthetic themes of education and the complementary curriculum, an idea I address in more detail in Chapter Four.

Purpose and Research Questions

Analyses of modes of educational experience have historically focused on experiences derived from behavioristic (Tyler, 1949; Taba, 1962; Hunter, 1982/2004), or more recently, constructivist models (Bruner, 1966, 1977; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Several recent studies have specifically explored aesthetically oriented teaching processes and methods (Meng & Uhrmacher, 2014; Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2009, 2018; Uhrmacher, 2009, Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Conrad, 2016). What remains insufficiently addressed, however, is an understanding of student experiences of aesthetic learning experiences, particularly within the context of K-12 education. Therefore, the purpose of this inquiry is to describe, interpret, and appraise K-12 student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences through an educational criticism and connoisseurship method (Eisner, 2017; Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017). *Aesthetic learning experiences*, as conceptualized for the purposes of this study, are those experiences grounded in qualities influenced by the arts—perceptive, sensorial, imaginative, and creative. *Student expressions* of such experiences implies both value in what individual students make of aesthetic learning experiences, as well as an outward manifestation of the internal force that carries forward in growth (Dewey, 1934). Further, this inquiry will attempt to ameliorate a deficiency in the

literature regarding aesthetic learning experiences and what meanings students ascribe to them by advancing the scholarly knowledge base of aesthetically based modes of teaching and learning.

This study explores the following central research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018): What are student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences?

Additionally, three subquestions are addressed:

- 1. What are the teacher's intentions in creating conditions for aesthetic learning experiences?**
- 2. How are these intentions enacted in the classroom?**
- 3. How do students respond to aesthetic learning experiences—that is, what do students say, do, and create?**

Methodological Overview

This research employs an educational criticism and connoisseurship approach (Eisner, 2017) to empirically describe, interpret, and appraise the qualities, structures, and forms of student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. As a method of inquiry specifically designed to attend to the perception of qualities and the meanings assigned to them, educational criticism and connoisseurship relies on both the appreciation of qualities (connoisseurship) as well as their disclosure in a public form (criticism). I observed one K-2 rural teacher and her students to explore and understand student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. The data used to compose my educational criticism rely primarily on naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) methods of researching qualitative classroom

phenomena including extended direct observation, interviews with teachers and students, and artifact generation.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The primary task of this chapter was to philosophically and pragmatically center the current inquiry, provide a rationale, and illuminate key terms and their meanings (see Appendix A for a glossary). I placed additional emphasis on a preliminary argument for my intended research through an examination of three key assumptions: 1) the enrichment of educational experience via aesthetic qualities and aesthetically informed means has been undervalued, 2) the language we choose to use in describing educational consequences is significant, and 3) the forms, complexity, and vitality of K-12 student experience has been neglected. Chapter Two provides a review of the empirical literature organized in four parts: aesthetics generally, including temporal, philosophical, and contextual applications; aesthetic education and learning, including curriculum and pedagogy. Chapter Three theoretically locates the inquiry within Dewey's philosophy of aesthetic experience and provides an in-depth examination of my methodology, lenses of ethical practice, and my positionality as a researcher. Three interpretive frames that constitute the conceptual foci of this study—Eisner's dimensions of schooling (1988, 2017), the instructional arc (Uhrmacher, et al., 2017,) and the aesthetic themes of education (Uhrmacher, 2009)—are addressed in greater detail. Chapter Four presents my educational criticism representing this inquiry's findings materialized across three focal points: music, geography, and composition. I also include selected plates to invite added meaning and interpretation through visual imagery. In Chapter Five, I highlight four

anticipatory frameworks that gesture toward possibilities for other educational contexts and provide a preliminary groundwork for an aesthetic pedagogy of place.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the first chapter, I briefly reviewed key conceptions of aesthetics and provided a rationale for exploring student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. In Chapter Two, I attempt to venerate aesthetics' dual forms of diversity and distinctness through a three-fold presentation of the literature: 1) aesthetics as temporality, 2) aesthetics as discourse, and 3) aesthetics and education. My rationale for structuring the review in this manner primarily stems from my desire to both remain critical and abstain from a presumption of dominance—and therefore implied value—of a singular aesthetic tradition (e.g., philosophical or continental aesthetics). My reading of the field yields distinct historical, philosophical, and contemporary viewpoints, and yet the reader may notice I have chosen to highlight some authors while others—equally significant—remain unmentioned. Any such omissions are my own and result from my emerging understandings of the field. Because the work of this study is grounded within understandings of aesthetic experience *specifically within the context of K-12 education*, I aim to provide an in-depth organization and summary of relevant prior research on aesthetic education, including models, curriculum, and pedagogy. Finally, I highlight an underexamined area within the literature regarding aesthetic learning experiences and conclude with selected critiques of aesthetic education and curriculum.

Aesthetics as Temporality

“...the arrow of time cannot be replaced or set aside; even our claims for invariance must seek constant features of style or subject *through* time’s passage.”

~Stephen J. Gould, *The Lying Stones of Marrakech*

Philosophy has had much to say concerning art and aesthetics. Aesthetics as it refers to art, taste, judgment, and beauty has prospered through the perpetuity of time well before the intellectual flourishing of the Age of Reason. Many discussions on ancient conceptions of aesthetics originate with Athenian philosopher Plato (427-347 BCE), whose dialogues in *The Republic* (ca. 380 B.C.E.) and *Symposium* (ca. 385-370 B.C.E.) reflect the most comprehensive and influential of all treatments of art and beauty respectively (Cooper, 1997). In the modern era, the German aesthetic tradition produced some of the most well-known and highly regarded conceptions of aesthetics, as well as notable extensions by philosophers Hannah Arendt (1993) and Theodor Adorno (1984). European schools of thought, including Critical Theory, existentialism, and postmodernism, have also used aesthetic ideas to provoke and disrupt political and social ideologies and the structures that work to sustain them (Benjamin, 1935/2008; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Derrida, 2016; Foucault, 2010; Sartre, 1993). The purpose of this section is to plot a sequence of influential analyses coupled with an acknowledgment that aesthetics is indeed fortified by its sinuous imprecision.

Ancient Writings on Aesthetics

In *The Republic*, Plato linked art with the senses, thereby condemning it as a way to understand ourselves and our larger world. “The whole art of imitation,” noted Socrates in Book X, “is busy about a work which is far removed from the truth.... thus the art of imitation is the inferior mistress of an inferior friend, and the parent of an inferior progeny” (Cahn & Meskin, 2008). Glaucon questioned whether this inferiority also extended from the eye to the ear, as in the case of poetry, to which Socrates answered in the affirmative: the art of poetry feeds the passionate, “unthinking part” of man, one divorced from reason and therefore truth. Plato’s student, Aristotle, assumes a decidedly divergent stance in *Poetics* (ca. 335 B.C.E.). He established the natural character of mimesis—first, man is, by nature, an “imitative creature” that in fact learns by imitation (Cahn & Meskin, p. 42), and second, art can represent not only that which happens in real life, but also the highest and best forms of it arouse ubiquitous emotions like fear and pity. Aristotle even went so far as to classify poetry “of graver import than history, since its states are of the nature of universals, whereas those of history are singulars” (Cahn & Meskin, p. 46).

The German Aesthetic Tradition: Immanuel Kant

The study of aesthetics as a formal discipline in the second half of the 18th century was revived not only by the Age of Reason’s preoccupation with the natural world and our ability to cognitively apprehend and make sense of it, but also by a commencement of renewed interest in art (Kristeller, 1978). The influence of the German aesthetic tradition was and is considerable, beginning with Baumgarten who initiated aesthetics as a study of sense cognition in his two-volume treatise, *Aesthetica* (1758), and later by the immense presence of Immanuel Kant. Drawing from the Greek *aesthesis*, meaning perception, the

German aesthetic tradition was concerned primarily with sense perception, taste, and judgment, and its connection (or not) to knowledge—not with a theory of art specifically (Hammermeister, 2002).

The achievement of securing a foundation for a comprehensive philosophy of aesthetics belongs to Immanuel Kant (Hammermeister, 2002) and the seminal conclusion to his philosophical oeuvre— *Critique of Judgment* (1790/1987). Kant established a complex theory of aesthetic judgment, or taste (meaning a judgment of an object's beauty, such as an artwork), that relies on four moments: disinterested pleasure (feeling), universality, purposiveness, and subjectivity (Higgins, 1996). Kant's theories directly substantiated the importance of aesthetics and several of its associated dimensions, including imagination. However, by directly conjoining aesthetic judgment with feeling, and thus diminutively situating it below reason, Kant devalued art as a pathway to cognition:

If we wish to discern whether anything is beautiful or not, we do not refer the representation of it to the Object by means of understanding with a view to cognition.... The judgment of taste therefore is not a cognitive judgment, and so not logical, but is aesthetic— (Cahn & Meskin, 2008, p. 131)

Kant's reiterations that aesthetic judgments are not cognitive have provided fertile ground for both convergent and divergent pathways—Langer (1942, 1953, 1957), Goodman (1968), Schiller (1795/1954), Heidegger (Young, 2001), Adorno (1984), and Marcuse (1978), for example.

Twentieth Century Aesthetics

Contemporary writers have compelled aesthetics from tightly prescribed boundaries toward more critical perspectives. Postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida (2016) extended the Platonic conception of mimesis by arguing that art is an imitative system of signs for which each sign, or signifier, has an opposite. Thus, the signs of beauty and truth can be

‘deconstructed’ by provoking ‘la différance,’ the liminal space between oppositional signifiers. More specifically, by attending to the importance of the more influential signifier, hierarchies can begin to fall, destabilizing previously accepted ‘truths’. By deconstructing signs, virtually limitless opportunities arise where supposed endpoints remain untethered, and no meanings are proffered. For Derrida, any sense of universality in aesthetic philosophy, such as a standard of beauty or art, or a central tenet or theme, is necessarily incomplete and exclusionary, and should be rejected.

Jacques Rancière, influenced by Schiller, Kant, and others, brought together politics and aesthetics, although he would disagree even with this notion, as he believes the political is always manifested through what he terms “the aesthetic revolution.” According to Rancière (2003), two principles form the nexus of the aesthetic revolution: equality and anonymity:

To begin with, then, the aesthetic revolution is the idea that everything is material for art, so that art is no longer governed by its subject, by what it speaks of: art can show and speak of everything in the same manner. In this sense, the aesthetic revolution is an extension to infinity of the realm of language, of poetry. It is the affirmation that poems are everywhere, that paintings are everywhere. So, it is also the development of a whole series of forms of perception which allow us to see the beautiful everywhere. This implies a great anonymisation of the beautiful. (p. 205)

Rancière’s ideas attempted to liberate the subject from art and reject any attempt to define and systematize art through prescriptive rules or via privileged ontologies.

Aesthetics as Discourses

“Aesthetics then is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming. It is not organic.”

~bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*

Discussion occurs not only among those that can speak the loudest from privilege, but also among those who feel compelled to speak from long-standing histories of marginalization or oppression, and aesthetic discourses are no exception. This includes conversations not only between humans but also conversations with our natural world. I wish to note that the discourses presented below were selected to illustrate diversity of thought and certainly do not imply comprehensiveness. Second, I acknowledge that conversations are fluid, situated in evolving cultural (Hall, 1996), social (Bakhtin, 1981), and political (Giroux, 1988) contexts. Third, aesthetic discourses emerge through individual and collective power (Ball, 2013) supported by emphasis on discursive practices (Pinar et al., 2004).

Environmental Aesthetics & Ecoaesthetics

Environmental aesthetics, a relatively new term in contemporary critical philosophy, presumes an appreciation for the natural world. Unlike traditional aesthetic discourse, which typically relies on Western philosophies of art and beauty, environmental aesthetics seeks a move beyond the world of art to the land (Leopold, 1949) in order to engender conversations between humans and the environment in a variety of forms (Carlson, 2018). It is important to note that the Western notion of environmental aesthetics both overlaps and differs from a related term, that of Eastern ecoaesthetics, in that the former emphasizes

relationships between the human and non-human world, while the latter generally emphasizes appreciation for phenomena in our natural world (Carlson, 2017).

The influential writings of Arnold Berleant (1991, 1997, 2005, 2010, 2012, 2016) are critical to the dialogue on Western environmental aesthetics in several ways. First, Berleant argued that the environment, or landscape, is a holistic concept inherently infused with subjective aesthetic value—both positive and negative. This could range from the clothes we wear, to the design of our private and public spaces, to a national or state park. Second, as the title of one of his more well-known texts suggests, we live *in* the landscape, not as detached observers, but as present, active creators (Berleant, 2016). Third, like Dewey, Berleant insists on a conception of aesthetics that permeates all aspects of the landscape: “Aesthetic values—values inherent in experience—are what the arts confront, but they are found nowhere more sharply than in the environment” (Berleant, 1997, p. 11).

Conceptions of environmental aesthetics have challenged the application of the appreciation of formal qualities (as in line, color, shape, in the artworld) to the environment. Allen Carlson emphasized this (2000, 2017) in his discussion on the fallibility of a formalist orientation to aesthetic appreciation of the environment: “this tradition grants aesthetic relevance only to landscapes that are classically scenic” (2017, p. 120). This is a problem, noted Carlson, because what we appreciate tends to become what we value. Natural environments that (seem) to lack “beautiful” or “picturesque” qualities are accordingly afforded little value. Carlson proposes a natural environmental model that centers the application of knowledge of various natural environments that will in turn provide the necessary foci for aesthetic appreciation and experience (Carlson, 2000).

It is important to note that influential discussions on aesthetics located from outside the western canon have prospered. As one exemplar among many, Japanese philosopher Yuriko Saito (1950-) has written prolifically on environmental aesthetics as well as the Japanese aesthetic tradition, drawing a rich blend of the two fields to conceive an overarching theory she terms *everyday aesthetics*. One central aim of everyday aesthetics is to reveal an explicit connection between the seemingly trivial and mundane aesthetic judgments of our everyday lives and broader political, social, moral, and environmental consequences. Saiko's delineation removes the 'special,' 'elevated,' 'dramatic,' and 'significant' status of aesthetic experience, emphasizing the critical importance of "any reactions we form toward the sensuous and/or design qualities of any object, phenomenon, or activity" (2007, p. 9).

Wholly rejecting Kant's attitude of disinterest, Saiko (2007) argued:

What I am proposing is to adopt a similar strategy to define the realm of the aesthetic by including not only such aesthetic experiences of art, however broadly defined, but also those responses that propel us toward everyday decision and actions, without any accompanying contemplative appreciation. (p. 11)

Chinese aestheticians have generated significant contributions to the field of ecological aesthetics, or ecoaesthetics. Chinese scholar Xiangzhan Cheng (2013) pointed to unity of the human and natural world and developed a model of critical ecological aesthetics comprised of four 'keystones': aesthetic engagement, or '*shen-mei*,' ecological ethics; ecological knowledge; and biodiversity. According to Cheng, ecological aesthetics repudiates any division between the human and non-human world, placing the development of ecological ethics at its core. Ecological ethics is predicated on a form of ecohumanism that combines a human-to-world orientation with a "radical ecology," or an "outward concentric expansion of a benevolent heart" (Cheng, 2013, p. 227) that confirms the independent, intrinsic value

of any aspect of the non-human world. Another prominent Chinese aesthetician, Zehou Li (2010), noted that the earliest applications of art in pre-Confucian China originated with “the tradition of rites and music” (p. 29). Discussing the popular perception that Western art represents (as in mimesis) while Chinese art expresses (as in individual feeling), Li was quite clear in his opposition:

The purpose of “music” in ancient China was not to express the inner, subjective emotions of the individual. On the contrary, it was to present the universal laws of the external world.... Chinese art, literature, and aesthetics cannot be said to be either representational or expressive: rather, Chinese art takes the molding of the emotions as its goal. (p. 28-29)

Feminist Aesthetics

Writings on feminist aesthetics generally presume that conceptions of art, beauty, culture, and aesthetics are gendered (Battersby, 1989; Brand & Korsmeyer, 1995; Korsmeyer, 1993; Man, 2016) and historically situated within a spectrum of misogyny. In her classic text *Le deuxième sexe (The Second Sex)*, continental philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) examined the biological, sexual, social, and economic complexities through which women have functioned as “Other” from men:

What singularly defines the situation of woman, is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness. (de Beauvoir, 1949/2010, p. 17)

That men are privileged with a “sovereign consciousness” reflects the ways in which women experience themselves subjectively in the world, de Beauvoir argued, not as unique beings asserting their own freedom but in subservience toward the emancipation of the “One.”

De Beauvoir’s contributions have provided foundational sustenance for several philosophies of feminist aesthetics offered by twentieth-century scholars who have provided

extensive inquiries on conceptions of artist and artistry, embedded patriarchy within aesthetics, and gendered aesthetics. In *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, Christine Battersby traced the etymology and cultural connotations of genius and illustrated the ways in which the artistic, literary, and cultural achievements of women have been othered and even totally excluded through patriarchal categorizations of genius. Beginning with a critique of the ideals of the “Romantic myth” (p. 106) that elevated the role of (male) emotion, imagination, and creativity, Battersby (1989) posited a dual dilemma women artists have historically been forced to traverse:

The genius was a male—full of ‘virile’ energy—who *transcended* his biology: if the male genius was ‘feminine’ this merely proved his cultural superiority.... A woman who created was faced with a double bind: either to surrender her sexuality (becoming not *masculine*, but a surrogate *male*), or to be *feminine* and *female*, and hence to fail to count as a genius. (p. 3)

Battersby’s call towards a feminist aesthetics requires “tracing new patterns of inheritance” (p. 169) that seek to uncover the myriad ways in which women artists have historically been subjugated through the dominant narrative of male genius, thereby elevating their individual and collective power. She noted: “Feminist aesthetics can only move forward if we look further at what women in our society need from art, and whether or not the records of artistic achievement fairly reflect women’s tastes and values” (p. 154).

Similar to Battersby’s argument that women have been excluded from the genus of genius, Mary Devereaux’s (2005) survey of feminist aesthetics presumes at its outset “the fact of patriarchy”² (p. 648), the resistance to which she positioned as a key aim of feminism. Patriarchy is a system of oppression whereby women—either explicitly, implicitly, or both—

² In *Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers, and the Gendered Spectator* (1995), Devereaux explored in detail one manifestation of “the fact of patriarchy”—specifically the “male gaze”—and how it oppresses women, and to a different extent, men, in cultural, social, and political media.

must “depend upon men not only for status and privilege, but for their very identity” (Devereaux, 1995, p. 122). Devereaux delineated three major areas that encompass feminist aesthetic critique: 1) the underrepresentation and exclusion of women in larger art field, 2) the ways in which women are represented in art and other cultural media, and 3) the neglect of feminism within broader philosophical theories, including contemporary writings on aesthetics. Devereaux’s analysis culminates in a look toward the future of feminist aesthetics with an ironic turning back: including re-storying the history of aesthetics to more fully include the work of eminent women artists as well as exploring the nature and impact of evolutionary biology on standards of beauty.

Conceptions of feminist aesthetics have also challenged axiomatic assumptions and claims regarding the supposed universality of ‘human’ nature. Carolyn Korsmeyer (1995, 2004, 2011) has written extensively on the ways in which conceptions of aesthetics are fundamentally gendered, meaning “a hidden skew in connotation or import such that the idea in question pertains most centrally to males, or in certain cases to females” (2004, p. 12). Korsmeyer noted three modes of gendering as they function within aesthetics: 1) practical, as in the case of exclusionary policies and practices toward women, 2) conceptual, involving our orientations to aesthetic ideas, and 3) cultural, or norms and roles that occupy power over aesthetic judgment (2004). Regarding the second mode of gendering, the conceptual, Korsmeyer (1995) argued against adherence on a “common human nature” (p. 49) by attempting to dismantle the supposed ‘universality’ of David Hume’s *Of the Standard of Taste* (1757, #6). Of Hume’s argument she critically noted:

If Hume were to both acknowledge philosophically the gender differences he subscribes to and rely as heavily on uniform human nature as he does to stabilize differences of taste and valuation, the result would be a concept of “human nature” that is obviously so riven with differences as to recommend

abandonment of the pretense to any uniform constitution in human nature at all. (p. 62)

The experiences of White Anglo and European women—varied as they may be—have arguably centered contemporary feminist writings on aesthetics by peripheralizing other voices, particularly women of color. Prominent poet and essayist Ana Castillo conceptualized a Chicana feminist aesthetics she termed “Xicanisma” in her book *Massacre of the Dreamers* (2014). Castillo wrote:

The basic premise of Xicanisma is to reconsider behavior long seen as inherent in the Mexic Amerindian women’s character, such as, patience, perseverance, industriousness, loyalty to one’s clan, and commitment to our children. Contrary to those who don’t understand feminism, we do not reject these virtues....as we redefine (not categorically reject) our roles within our families, communities at large, and dominant society, our conscientización helps us to be self-confident and assertive regarding the pursuing of our needs and desires. (p. 37)

Conscientización, or looking within, is key to Castillo’s cultural framework, as women must actively look within and experience themselves in their communities as strong, independent women (Castillo, 2014).

Other feminist scholars have further extended the considerable complexity and nuance within cultural conceptions of the ideal feminine form. As one example, Eva Kit Wah Man (2016) analyzed dimensions of corporeality in a wide-ranging philosophical and cultural analysis in her collection of essays, *Bodies in China*. Man noted how ancient Chinese philosophies and representations of beauty and aesthetics as they developed from Confucian, Dao, and Ming dynasties to more contemporary representations that ascribe to western ideals, can be understood according to their political, economic, and cultural contexts. Perhaps most informative is Man’s analysis of the ideal feminine form in Chinese tradition contrasted with the realities of women’s bodies. She noted:

...with man as the speaking subject in the Chinese patriarchal system, male imaginations (especially those represented by the literati) construct the ideal and the aesthetic quality in woman as the projection of their wishes or regrets and of the various forms of their fantasies. (p. 113)

Like Castillo, Man stressed a rejection of the Cartesian dualism that has served to subjugate the female body below the male mind.

Black Aesthetics

The literature on Black aesthetics supports cultural, philosophical, and oppositional testimonies (Crawford, 2011; Gayle, Jr., 1972, 2009; hooks, 1990, 1995; Locke, 1925; Taylor, 2016; Winchester, 2002) that align with both the promotion of Black expressions of and socio-political struggles in a racialized world. In *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (2016), Paul C. Taylor defined black aesthetics as “the practice of using art, criticism, or analysis to explore the role that expressive objects and practices play in creating and understanding black life-worlds” (p. 12). Tracing its diverse lineage, Taylor noted two contours of the Black aesthetics heritage: one manifested in practices, as in the expression of art occurring across time both within the African continent and in the diaspora, and the other manifested in more contemporary traditions characterized by influential cultural achievements. According to Taylor, one such tradition was the New Negro movement instigated by philosopher and cultural critic Alain Locke. Widely considered to be the central figure of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, Locke elevated individual expression of the Black American aesthetic in his landmark anthology of Black literature and art titled *The New Negro* (1925). Locke saw manifestations of the Black aesthetics as a turn away from racialization and toward a liberating channel for furthering democracy. He saw aesthetics, and Black aesthetics in particular, as a way to both affirm individual Black identity and express and promote increased cross-cultural knowledge and social consciousness.

Adding further testimony of the inextricability of Black aesthetics and politics, bell hooks advocated for an “aesthetic of blackness” (hooks, 1995, p. 65) “that seeks to uncover and restore links between art and revolutionary politics, particularly black liberation struggle, while offering an expansive critical foundation for aesthetic evaluation” (p. 71). hooks’ conjoining of the aesthetic and the political is meant to further opposition to both Black essentialism and White supremacy and cultural colonization. Critical of the “fundamentally essentialist” (p. 68) Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 70s, hooks noted that Black artistic expressions were expected to be handmaidens of conformity to a larger political revolution:

Rather than serving as a catalyst promoting diverse artistic expression, the Black Arts Movement began to dismiss all forms of cultural production by African Americans that did not conform to movement criteria. Often this led to aesthetic judgments that did not allow for recognition of multiple black experience or the complexity of black life. (p. 68)

hooks’ restoration of aesthetics with the Black liberation struggle engages themes of resistance against racism and other structures of White dominance as well as celebration of agency and empowerment through critical interrogation, or what hooks terms “learning to see” (p. 71).

hooks’ call for a disentangling of the homogeneity of the Black aesthetic stands in contrast to another critical perspective, that of literary critic Addison Gayle Jr. In his landmark text *The Black Aesthetic* (1972), Gayle Jr. argued that the aims of the Black Arts Movement were fundamentally oppositional to larger society, and White society in particular. “The serious Black artist today is at war with the society as few have been,” (1972, p. xvii) wrote Gayle, Jr. “The Black Aesthetic then is a corrective—a means of helping black people

out of the polluted mainstream of Americanism, and offering logical, reasoned arguments as to why he should not desire to the ranks of a Norman Mailer or a William Styron” (p. xviii).

Indigenous Aesthetics

Moving away from the term ‘ethno-aesthetics,’ which has served to homogenize non-White aesthetic perspectives and practices (Leuthold, 1998), Indigenous aesthetics emphasizes the embodied and relational consummation of art with the vibrancy and immediacy of Indigenous realities. Leuthold critically noted what he saw as the differences between Western and Indigenous orientations to knowledge:

The divorce of spirituality, beauty, and ethics from aesthetics contrasts with the continued interrelationship of these in indigenous aesthetics. Underlying differences in assumptions about aesthetic value reveal larger patterns of difference between indigenous and Western ways of thinking. While Western thought is largely analytic, attempting to separate and reduce experience into its constituent parts for the purpose of mechanistic understanding, native thought is primarily synthetic, involving a search for and appreciation of the connections between categories of experience. (p. 190)

heather ahtone (2012) extended Leuthold’s orientation to Indigenous epistemology to emphasize more ontological concerns. She wrote:

Every time an Indigenous artist creates an object that reflects concepts rooted within her culture, this same artist is perpetuating that culture one more day as an act of self-determination...While every effort of political and religious assaults has been made historically to subdue these same cultures, their survival can be partially attributed to the continued production of visual and performance art. (p. 73)

ahtone advocated for an Indigenous aesthetic consisting of 1) materiality, or the reflection of contextual realities such as place and language, 2) metaphor/symbolism, elevating the value of symbol in meaning, and 3) reciprocity. Regarding this last dimension, ahtone sought to uphold the essential role of gratitude inherent to Indigenous aesthetics through the expression of traditional values and practices. She noted: “When Indigenous people actively

practice, participate, and perpetuate their cultures, this is the most basic form of gratitude to those ancestors who made the effort to carry the culture into the future, into our present” (p. 82).

Self-determination as a vital characteristic Indigenous aesthetics was thoroughly explored in Teresa McCarty’s eloquent ethnography on the struggles and triumphs of a community seeking to implement and sustain Indigenous education, *A Place to Be Navajo* (2002). McCarty meticulously explored the materiality of “local meanings” (p. 12) and how they work to “reclaim and privilege local narratives of experience” (p. 148). Privileging local narratives through aesthetic expression is also explored in Patricia Marroquin Norby’s (2015) poignant aesthetic analysis of the meaning of her grandmother’s red sweater, or rebozo, and her great-grandfather’s apple tree. Using these examples and others as a tool for visual analysis, Norby noted how individual creative acts are really stories of survival, “foreground[ing] endless possibilities for decolonizing practices that draw upon collective indigenous histories, family stories, and aesthetic expressions” (p. 37). Taken together, the three preceding examples affirm not only a vibrant conception of Indigenous aesthetics distinct to time and place, but they also sustain Indigenous aesthetic expressions as a discourse in opposition to systems of colonization (Scudeler & Norby, 2015).

In the preceding section I have attempted to present aesthetic dialogues that embody not only the elegant complexity of philosophical thought, but also the diversity and significance of the contextual realities that constitute its contested landscapes. In the concluding section, I invite aesthetics into the constellation of education—for if education’s radiating asterism is experiencing qualities within our subjective world, then aesthetic considerations surely must play a part.

Aesthetics & Education

“The absence of attention to the aesthetic in the school curriculum is an absence of opportunities to cultivate the sensibilities. It is an absence of the refinement of our consciousness, for it is through our sensibilities that our consciousness is secured.”

~*Elliot W. Eisner, The Kind of Schools We Need: Personal Essays*

In the third and final section of my review, I highlight theories and practices of aesthetics as they have manifested both generally and specifically within scholarly landscape of education. I introduce this section with a brief survey of ideas regarding the aims of education as well as a look at teaching and learning generally in order to historically locate aesthetics’ lineage within pedagogy and curriculum. Next, I review relevant prior literature within three areas: major proponents of aesthetics, models of aesthetic education, and aesthetic curriculum.

Aims of Education

A plethora of opinions have been, and will continue to be, ubiquitously articulated and enacted within education, one of the defining hallmarks of American democracy. From fundamental debates over whom should be educated and how, to the degree to which national and local standards should be enacted, if at all, to the introduction of a legislative bill to abolish the U.S. Department of Education altogether (Massie, 2017), the diversity of educational discourse undoubtedly impacts society in numerous ways. However, despite these differences, most educational stakeholders agree that one of the major aims of education is to advance knowledge.

The theories of several prominent educational philosophers have provided important historical roots that continue to influence current thinking and practices regarding the purposes of education. Whitehead (1929/1957) argued that the primary aim of education should be to stimulate and guide students' development "beyond the passive reception of the ideas of others" (p. 47), guarding against the transmission of 'dead' knowledge through fresh and 'alive' forms of knowledge that can be tested empirically. Dewey (1938) stipulated that the purpose of education should be continuity in growth of the learner achieved through educative—as contrasted with miseducative—experience. That is, the transactive experiences of the learner with her environment enable further education. In contrast to Dewey's emphasis on individual growth, Adler (1982) advocated for "the best education for the best" (p. 7) in his manifesto designed to promote equal quality of liberal education with the same objectives for all students. Adler maintained that only by undergoing the vital and transcendent process of "helping students to become educated human beings" (p. 10)—including personal development, development as a citizen, and preparation to contribute to the economy—can schools be successful. Goodlad (1997) resoundly rejected Adler's economic emphasis and positioned the aim of education as an "unavoidably moral endeavor" (p. 12) holistically aimed toward the enhancement of a democracy-driven, rather than economy-driven, society. Similar to the centrality of morality offered by Goodlad, Noddings (2005) argued for an alternative approach to the aim of education, one that elevates an ethic of caring predicated on responsibility rather than accountability. Regardless of differences in paradigms, explications of the purposes of education consistently position the advancement of student learning through engaging experiences at the epicenter of the education narrative.

A Look at Theories of Learning and Teaching

Any theory on teaching necessarily makes assumptions about learning. Israel Scheffler (1968) noted that teaching was a “goal-oriented activity” that “requires us to reveal our reasons to the student, and by so doing, to submit them to his evaluation and criticism” (p. 17). B. Othanel Smith (1960) noted that we must move beyond regarding teaching as a body of knowledge or merely as an occupation; instead, we should begin to examine teaching in a “third sense” (p. 12) in which we explore teaching as “a system of actions intended to induce learning” (p. 13). In their subsequent influential work known as *The Standard Thesis*, Scheffler and Smith set forth a conception of teaching using three criteria: intentionality, reasonableness, and restrictions of manner. Thomas Green (1968), while acknowledging that teaching can be challenging to define, nevertheless provided a useful topology—or continuum—of teaching that included two key areas—knowledge and beliefs and behavior and conduct. He theorized teaching as occurring within these two domains across a continuum that included intimidation at one end and instructing and propagandizing on the other. He concluded that the “region of intelligence” (p. 56) occurs within the middle of the continuum and that all activities located on the extreme, outermost points should be considered outside the region of intelligence and therefore outside the realm of teaching. From the foundational work of Scheffler and Smith to more current conceptions, it is useful to consider three modes of teaching in more depth.

Behaviorist influences on modes of teaching, rooted in the work of B. F. Skinner (1938), are manifested predominantly by behavioral objectives and outcomes designed to alter student behavior in a specific way that can be observed, measured, and ultimately replicated. Student outcomes and learning are determined in advance from a prescriptive,

step-by-step lesson plan that includes several predetermined areas of instruction. Behaviorist leanings can also be felt in Ralph W. Tyler's (1949) highly influential 'rationale' in which he suggests "four fundamental questions" for developing any plan of instruction: 1) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?, 2) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?, 3) How can these educational experiences be organized?, and 4) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (p. 1). Madeline Hunter's (1982) popular Direct Instruction Model (p. 47), which includes a predetermined objective, anticipatory set, teaching with input and modeling, guided practice with modeling, independent practice, and closure, also typifies a behaviorist mode of teaching.

Historically in education, a swing of the pendulum in one direction necessitates an equal force in the opposite direction, and thus out of behaviorist influences on teaching grew constructivist modes and methods. Influenced by the work of such giants as Swiss genetic epistemologist Jean Piaget (1971) and American psychologist Jerome Bruner (1966), constructivist modes of teaching aim to be more student-centered than behaviorist modes, value multiple points of view, recognize that students develop along a continuum of growth (readiness), and emphasize that knowledge is actively constructed by the learner. According to Brooks and Brooks (1993), a constructivist mode of teaching relinquishes some aspects of teacher control, allowing students the opportunity to search rather than follow, and actively construct "new understandings of relationships and phenomena in our world" (p. 5). Additionally, Brooks and Brooks argue, constructivist teaching can be characterized by an emphasis on inquiry, dialogue, discovery, peer and group learning, and discussion.

Constructivist modes of teaching have been popularized by, among others, a 'backward design' framework (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

A third relatively underexplored area in the literature, and one to which aesthetic education conceptually aligns, is that of a perceptual mode of teaching. Uhrmacher, Conrad, and Moroye (2013) defined the perceptual mode as an “artistic endeavor that relies on creativity and the engagement of the senses” (p. 2) both for the teacher and his or her students. Drawing on the aesthetic theories of Dewey, Eisner, and Oliver, Uhrmacher et al. explored a perceptual lesson planning process using an analytic framework of intentions, process, product, and outcomes. They found that a perceptual mode of lesson planning and teaching emphasized teacher and student creativity and meaning-making, intrinsic motivation and reward, and allowed space for unintended consequences, or what Eisner termed “expressive outcomes”.

Major Proponents of Aesthetic Education

Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (1954) represents an archetype of aesthetic education in that he explicitly and comprehensively conjoined an individual's highest effectuation—morality—with aesthetic education. Arguing that freedom is ultimately secured through beauty, not the reverse, Schiller elevated the role of art, which he proclaimed the “daughter of freedom” (Schiller, 1954, p. 26). Schiller's conception of beauty is distinct in that he proposes a “play impulse” (p. 74) as a representation of the “aesthetic condition” of the mind, of which he posited to be “the highest reality”:

Every other exercise gives the mind some particular aptitude, but also sets it in return a particular limitation; the aesthetic alone lead to the unlimited.... the aesthetic alone is a whole in itself, as it combines in itself all the conditions of its origin and of its continued existence. (Twenty-second letter, p. 103)

Crediting the influence of Schiller, and still further compelling aesthetic education into unequivocal significance, British historian and art critic Sir Herbert Read (1974) drew on Jungian psychology to place growth—and that achieved through aesthetic expression specifically—at the heart of the purpose of education. Read’s (1960) ideas were influential for several reasons: 1) he boldly advocated for the broad capacity of the arts—not works of art specifically—as a means of societal amelioration, and 2) he argued against determinism, firmly centering the arts in education at a time when the purpose of education was seen in light of industrial and technical aims. For Read, art was “the economy of feeling” (Read, 1931, p. 39)—a dominating, all-permeating way of life whose influence could be felt by even the youngest of students (Read, 1974). Substantiating Dewey’s emphasis on growth, Read affirmed that a particular form—aesthetic growth—is fundamental. He argued:

the general purpose of education is to foster the growth of what is individual in each human being, at the same time harmonizing the individuality thus educated with the organic unity of the social group to which the individual belongs...in this process aesthetic education is fundamental. (p. 8)

Other proponents have emphasized the attributes of imagination, feeling, and empowerment inherent to aesthetic education. Elliot W. Eisner was perhaps the most widely influential contemporary scholar to advocate for the transformative role of the arts in learning, curriculum, and research (Eisner, 1972, 1985a, 1985b, 2002, 2017; Uhrmacher & Matthews, 2005). Beginning in the 1960s, when scientific principles in education were beginning to be sanctioned in earnest, Eisner initiated an alternative path, one that advocated for framing education using artistic sensibilities. He shared Dewey’s view that interaction with qualities of our world makes aesthetic forms of experience possible, and consistently argued for a conception of education that served to both refine the senses and enlarge the imagination:

In the arts, imagination is given license to fly. In many—perhaps most—academic fields, reality, so to speak, imposes its factual face. Little time and attention are given to matters of imagination. Yet inventive scholarship depends upon imagination, not to mention the delights that imaginative processes make possible. In schools we tend to emphasize facticity, correctness, linearity, concreteness.... We often fail to nurture a human capacity that is absolutely central to cultural development. (Eisner, 2002, p. 198)

According to Eisner, students should be afforded a variety of ways to broaden their intellectual capacities—such as imagination—through multiple forms of representation, or “the devices that humans use to make public conceptions that are privately held” (Eisner, 1994, p. 39). These forms—essays, theatre, dance, music, science, paintings, and so on—are made public through the senses. Eisner also believed that teaching could be regarded as an art as well as a powerful source of aesthetic experience for both teachers and their students (Eisner, 1985b).

The considerable role of feeling in aesthetic education was brought to the fore by Harry Broudy (1972), who presented a rejection of the Platonic devaluation of emotion when he argued that aesthetic education’s central aim should be the “training of imaginative perception” to “broaden and differentiate the [student’s] repertoire of feeling” (p. 57). “Life is rich,” noted Broudy, “when the repertory of feelings is large and the discrimination among them fine... aesthetic experience does its work in the domain of feeling, to enlighten us about the nature of feeling” (p. 58). Broudy’s vision of “enlightened cherishing” that connected feeling with aesthetic perception and experience and ultimately, with the expansion of a moral society, was something he envisioned for all students across the curriculum.

The influence of Maxine Greene’s work on aesthetic education is exemplified through her collection of seminal essays, *Variations on a Blue Guitar* (2001). Greene centered the role of the individual in aesthetic theory by drawing a distinction between deliberate—

which she terms “faithful”— and ordinary perception. One may be presented with aesthetic qualities, as Greene noted, but unless one’s own experience and meanings are secured and individual distinctions are made as a result, ‘true’ aesthetic experience cannot be achieved. Greene argues that “aesthetic education is a process of initiating persons into faithful perceiving, a means of empowering them to accomplish the task from their own standpoints, against the backdrop of their own awareness” (p. 45).

Educating the Senses: Student-Centered Models of Aesthetic Education

Several influential models of aesthetic education have been successfully applied nationally as well as internationally, notably Rudolph Steiner’s Waldorf schools (Steiner, 1955; Uhrmacher, 1991b, 1993, 1995) and Reggio Emilia schools (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Hewett, 2001). Perhaps the most numerically prolific model was conceptualized by Maria Montessori (1912), who placed the experience of children at the center of education. She believed that education must center sensorial development in an environment where, in Pestalozzian fashion, young children may freely explore and engage with materials (which she termed ‘work’—not ‘play’) according to their own desires and without interruption. Today this link appears manifest, yet Montessori’s approach was nearly inconceivable amidst the backdrop of the early twentieth century. Observing an abundance of measurement of the senses, yet an ironic lack of cultivation, which indeed reverberates with relevancy even today, Montessori is clear: “The education of the senses must be of the greatest pedagogical interest” (Montessori, 1912, p. 215). Montessori opened her first early childhood school in 1907 in Italy, and since that time, Montessori’s ideas have endured considerable influence, albeit with varying degrees of fidelity to her original methods and

conception. Her approaches were later influential to a number of theorists, including genetic epistemologist Jean Piaget.

Much of Montessori's approach can be traced to her writings on beauty. Here, her distinctive ideas repudiated any expression of artificiality; the classroom is carefully prepared and student materials are appropriately sized and deliberately placed to structure an environment that will allow for the emergence of the student's natural curiosities and expressions of creativity. Her emphasis on beauty found in its natural forms—from the graceful curves of the written word to the glorious red of the budding rose—is unique to education in that she the central art of the educator is to acculturate the child to forms of beauty through refining of senses. By learning to perceive discriminations among forms of beauty, the child engenders an inward refinement that carries forward in heightened intellectual and spiritual development. Montessori (1912) explained it this way:

It is very much as if, while we are looking absent-mindedly at the shore of a lake, an artist should suddenly say to us—'How beautiful the curve is that the shore makes there under the shade of that cliff.' At his words, the view which we have been observing almost unconsciously, is impressed upon our minds as if it had been illuminated by a sudden ray of sunshine, and we experience the joy of having crystallized an impression which we had before only imperfectly felt. And such is our duty toward the child: to give a ray of light and to go on our way. (p. 115)

Aesthetic education has also been applied to the general curriculum in the United States. One such model was the Aesthetic Education Program, established in 1967 by the Central Midwestern Regional Educational Laboratory (CEMREL) of St. Louis, Missouri. CEMREL and the Aesthetic Education Program received substantial federal and private funding to fulfill specific aims: 1) to design elementary curricula that facilitated perception through the development of the senses, 2) to develop training for teachers to accompany the curricula, 3) to promote the importance of aesthetic education for students, and 4) to build

support for the concept while implementing aesthetic education is as many schools as possible (Madeja, 1977, p. xv). Extensive efforts were undertaken to develop, test, evaluate, and eventually implement aesthetic curriculum at several U.S. schools during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. CEMREL and the Aesthetic Education Program also engaged in scholarly research and presentations, hosting several national arts education conferences and compiling a multi-volume yearbook on research in arts and aesthetic education (CEMREL, 1977, 1978, 1979).

Other models for aesthetic education in schools centered the importance of developing students' visual perception, including those initiated by Edmund Burke Feldman (1970, 1972, 1994, 1996) and Kurt Rowland (1964, 1965, 1976). In *Becoming Human Through Art: Aesthetic Experience in the School*, Feldman promotes a holistic aesthetic mode of learning that "unites all the features of experience by endowing them with a single, pervasive quality" (Feldman, 1970, p. 85). One way to achieve this, noted Feldman, was to apply principles of art criticism to aesthetic education: description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Goodwin, Demetrius, & Uhrmacher (2019) argued for renewed attention toward Rowland's ideas regarding an aesthetic education model based on visual literacy and delineated ways in which his ideas remain relevant for contemporary education, including seeing, responding, and connecting to the environment through the use of visual forms.

Aesthetic Curriculum

Similar to aesthetics, the field of curriculum enjoys various shadings to illuminate its depth, including the explicit, implicit, and null curricula (Eisner, 1985b), the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968/1990), the curriculum shadow (Uhrmacher, 1997), and the complementary curriculum (Moroye, 2009). Each of the forementioned orientations to

curriculum could be supplemented in various ways by aesthetic ideas, however, aesthetic curriculum can also be considered a stand-alone orientation encompassing one or a combination of the following: using aesthetics to understand, teach, and/or study curriculum. For example, the Uhrmacher and Wilson (in press) encyclopedia entry on aesthetics mentions several writers who have attended to aesthetic aspects of the curriculum using a variety of modes.

Several education scholars have offered influential conceptions of curriculum that have explicitly linked aesthetics and curriculum, demonstrating how aesthetics can be untethered from philosophical constraints and integrated, or even elevated, in the pragmatic space of the classroom. David Wong's (2000) research extended Dewey's philosophy of aesthetic experience to explore how teachers might leverage aesthetic perspectives in order to create compelling and motivating learning experiences for their students. Wong considered anticipation—which he defines as “the tension in the dramatic line that connects the ‘what if’ to ‘what is’” (p. 208) —as a key aesthetic construct that teachers may draw on to unite the dual attributes of possibility and action for their students. Wong linked three forms of anticipation—focus, contingency, and emotions—and highlighted how they manifest as motivating factors in aesthetic education, arguing that aesthetic anticipatory experiences are intrinsically motivating for students because they encourage an emphasis on imagination, non-verbal forms, and attention to evocative materials and feelings. P. Bruce Uhrmacher's research (2009) drew on Dewey's philosophies in *Art as Experience* (1934) along with research conducted with the Aesthetic Education Institute of Colorado. He delineated six aesthetic themes of education (also known as CRIPSA) that will concomitantly serve as an interpretive frame to answer the research questions of this study. By attending to the facets of

connections, risk-taking, imagination, sensory experience, perceptivity, and active engagement in the classroom, Uhrmacher argued that teachers can evoke conditions for their students to have aesthetic learning experiences. Consequences of such experiences for students may include joy, an increase in episodic memories and perceptual knowledge, and value in personal meaning-making. Margaret Macintyre Latta's (2001) application of aesthetic ideas to the middle school curriculum endeavored to blur the boundaries of teaching, learning, and researching toward the possibilities of play in the classroom. By deliberating choosing to enact practices in their classroom from this aesthetic space, Latta theorized that teachers may expose the complexity and vitality in the "living shape" of curriculum (p. 89). Susan Stinson's (1988, 2016) research and practice in aesthetic embodied curriculum, specifically dance education, examines the potential for aesthetic education in schools. Stinson proposed a three-part framework as a heuristic to invoke teacher and student empowerment: appreciation for beauty, connection to personal experience, and connection to social realms, including shared forms of oppression. Finally, Uhrmacher, Conrad, and Moroye (2013) conceptually explored aesthetics and lesson planning, arguing that teachers should consider lesson planning from perceptual perspectives as an alternative to constructivist and behaviorist modes. They posited that the process of perceptual lesson planning may lead to "teachers' and students' engagement of the senses, creativity, and imagination" (p. 15), in addition to engendering intrinsic motivation and reward.

As in other dimensions of education (e.g., testing and accountability policies and practices), curriculum has functioned as a politically contested landscape (Wahlström, 2018). Madeleine Grumet linked the often-paradoxical worlds of teaching with the disruptive potentiality of aesthetic experience. In her book *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching*, Grumet

(1988) theoretically and autobiographically explored the art of teaching, particularly how women experience tensions as they simultaneously inhabit contradictory worlds of public pedagogy and private mothering. She argued that women must discover their own silent spaces and express them if they are to work toward action and freedom through aesthetic practices that reveal, in her term, “estrangement” (similar to Dewey’s notion of perception), or the ability to see and constitute experience in new ways. Grumet postulated that certain characteristics of aesthetic experience can be applied metaphorically to teaching: it is voluntary, spatially and temporally bound, free from utilitarian ends, expresses knowledge about feeling that is coupled with action—not reassurance, resists social and political conventions, and is formed in dialogue (p. 82). She further theorized that although pedagogy is imbued with aesthetic experience, structural, temporal, and evaluative impositions actually negate the ability of women to work communally toward aesthetic ideals.

Other research conjoining aesthetics with contestation in education include Conrad, Moroye, and Uhrmacher’s (2015) study aesthetic learning experiences have the potential to function as a disruption—either technically, culturally, or ontologically—for reconsidering the intentions and goals of curriculum, and for shaping new ideas and practice. Arthur Costigan’s (2013) longitudinal study of the political engagement of preservice urban educators found that an aesthetic education framework disrupted neoliberal practices and allowed novice teachers to “reclaim a culturally critical stance” (p. 116). Uhrmacher, Conrad, and Lindquist (2010) proposed an “aesthetic-transformative” model of curriculum implementation to promote attainment of connections through aesthetic capital.

It is important to note that aesthetics’ influence has extended to the mathematics and science curriculum. Nathalie Sinclair (2004, 2009) addressed the significance of non-

cognitive experience in mathematics education, suggesting that affect and power are uniquely tied to a conception of aesthetics that is obvious to art, but less discernable to mathematics. Shane Cavanaugh (2014) drew on Deweyan aesthetics to create a pedagogical framework for engendering what she refers to as the “scientific sublime”: an emphasis on the content’s big ideas, the use of metaphor and visualization, highlighting the sublime, and modeling a sublime sensibility. Mark Girod (2008) conceptually explored aesthetic understanding in the elementary school science curriculum, pointing to the transformative, compelling, and empowering nature of aesthetic understanding to promote both formal and informal learning.

Lastly, aesthetics has also been heuristically used to study traditional and non-traditional orientations to curriculum (see e.g., Barone, 2000, 2001; Eisner, 1985b, 1986, 2002, 2017). Elizabeth Vallance (1991) conceptualized a form of aesthetic inquiry characterized by the study of aesthetic qualities of the curriculum, meaning “certain qualities and principles that shape our reaction to the situation...patterns, balances or imbalances, rhythms, discordant notes, any experiential qualities that color our judgment of the situation” (p. 160). Vallance emphasized that aesthetic inquiry into the ‘underside’ of curriculum allows for unanticipated aesthetic responses like surprise or disdain. Rita Irwin (2003) proposes the perception of beauty to enact an “aesthetic unfolding of in/sights” in the curriculum, which she defines as the in-between space where aesthetic understanding and things worth seeing converge, where knowledge through the senses reveals both possibility and limitation. Richard Shusterman (2000, 2008) drew on the theories of several key philosophers, including pragmatists Dewey and Rorty, to propose a pragmatic restoration of the curriculum of the body. Critical of Baumgarten’s divorce of the body from

aesthetic knowing, Shusterman argued for a philosophy of “somaesthetics” that provides for expanded knowledge of self and others:

Improved perception of our somatic feelings not only gives us greater knowledge of ourselves but also enable greater somatic skill, facility, and range of movement that can afford our sensory organs greater scope in giving us knowledge of the world. Besides augmenting our own possibilities of pleasure such improved somatic functioning and awareness can give us greater power in performing virtuous acts for the benefit of others, since all action somehow depends on the efficacy of our bodily instrument. (p. 126)

In *Hogan Dreams* (2004), Donald Blumenfeld-Jones used aesthetic inquiry to evaluate a Navajo curriculum development project. Through aesthetically based responses to the work of the project, including a five-part artistic composition of poems, songs, and autobiographical reflections, Blumenfeld-Jones illuminated themes of power, geography, weather, voice, and dreams. Of his experience in aesthetic inquiry, he wrote: “Art making and art receiving have roles to play which cannot be fulfilled by other modes of evaluation inquiry and that those involved with evaluation inquiry practice are all the poorer for not taking advantage of this approach” (p. 367).

Selected Critiques of Aesthetic Education & Curriculum

The first critique of aesthetic education and curriculum emerges through the philosophies of essentialism (see e.g., Bagley’s 1912 “plea for the definite”), which espouse the virtues of a cultural transmission of common knowledge, and to a lesser but similar extent, perennialism (Adler, 1982), which advocates for a set of universal and enduring truths. Adherents to essentialism value a “back-to-basics” approach in which knowledge through the senses is deemphasized while students are simultaneously encouraged to acquire a universal and primarily intellectual repertoire of common knowledge that privileges the

content areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and history. The application of essentialism is contemporarily expressed through the popularity of cultural literacy curriculum models such as core knowledge (Hirsch, 1987; Hirsch, et al., 2002), the proliferation and wide adoption of outcomes-based curriculum design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), as well as political movements such as the Common Core State Standards, that continue to contribute to an overall teleological narrative in education.

A second critique of aesthetic education and curriculum resides within the manifestation of technocratic educational ideals typified by the current focus and proliferation of standardized objectives, curriculum, and testing. While passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 marked the beginning of a new era of standardization, a focus on testing narrow common educational objectives continues to materialize at the expense of an enlarged, sensorial, and imaginative curriculum that prioritizes individual student ontologies.

A third tension resides within conceptualizations and use of ‘the arts’ in education. As one example, Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) argued that “the arts don’t do anything”:

This ability to demonstrate what the arts do - whether it is to improve achievement or to make us better human beings - has become the holy grail of arts advocacy. Yet, as advocates continue to narrowly tailor arguments in terms of effects, we have woven a straitjacket that has impaired our ability to mobilize alternative ways of conceptualizing what we mean by “the arts” and what role the practices associated with the term might play in education. (p. 213)

He goes on to say:

My intention is to illuminate and interrupt how the concept of the arts shapes the way we think and talk about these practices in order to provoke a different way of thinking, one that perhaps requires that we abandon the concept altogether. (p. 215)

The outcomes-focused use of the arts in education that Gaztambide-Fernández cautions against resonates in prevalent pedagogical approaches that elevate critical and justice orientations to education. Culturally responsive and relevant teaching (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014), trauma-informed pedagogy (Morgan, et al., 2015), anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro, 2000), and antiracist pedagogy (Kendi, 2019) do not explicitly feature principles of aesthetic education or curriculum in their frameworks but often adumbrate the transformative effects of the arts—thus relegating them to a narrow utilitarian role in effectuating the ultimate aims of these pedagogies (see e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Summary

In this literature review, I outlined three dimensions of prior scholarly literature and research germane to the present inquiry: 1) aesthetics as temporality, 2) aesthetics as discourses, and 3) aesthetics and education. First, in aesthetics as temporality, I illustrated the chronology of aesthetics, tracing its classic and contemporary heritages. My second theme, aesthetics as discourses, reviewed key dialogues sustained by a robustness and diversity of scholarly inquiry. My third theme, aesthetics and education, focused on ideas from major proponents of aesthetics within education, models of aesthetic education, and aesthetic curriculum. Particularly in the last section, aesthetic curriculum, I attempted to highlight a gap in the literature regarding student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences, such that many studies have relied on teacher-centric, rather than student-centric, inquiries. I also presented a brief section regarding selected critiques of aesthetic orientations. Collectively,

this review suggests that aesthetic experience can be conceived broadly and lends support for the enactment of aesthetic education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This study qualitatively explores student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences within a K-8 rural U.S. public school using an educational criticism and connoisseurship (Eisner, 2017) method of inquiry. In this chapter, I describe and analyze the assumptions and structure of educational criticism and connoisseurship. Next, I discuss the theoretical frame for my study, Dewey's philosophy of *an* experience, which locates the potential for aesthetic experience within the nexus of everyday experience. I provide an analysis of three interpretive frames that conceptually guided my inquiry: 1) Eisner's dimensions of schooling (Eisner, 2017), 2) the instructional arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017), and 3) the aesthetic themes of education (Uhrmacher, 2009). because my inquiry involved K-12 students as participants, I describe my ethical responsibilities within three key areas: 1) qualitative research generally, 2) educational criticism and connoisseurship specifically, and 3) research with children and adolescent participants. Then, I describe the study site, participants, data generation and appraisal, and limitations of the study. I conclude with a summary of my positionality and representing (writing) plan.

Method of Inquiry: Educational Criticism and Connoisseurship

The purpose of this inquiry is to describe, interpret, and appraise K-12 student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences through an educational criticism and

connoisseurship method explore and represent the subtleties and complexities of student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences as they materialize within the ecology of the classroom. I employed an educational criticism and connoisseurship (Eisner, 1985, 2017) research method aligned with this inquiry's purpose to answer my research questions.

Educational criticism and connoisseurship is a qualitative approach to empirical inquiry originally conceptualized by education scholar and pedagogue Elliot W. Eisner that attends to the perception and disclosure of educational qualities for the ultimate aim of school improvement (Eisner, 2017). Eisner elaborated further regarding the purpose of the method:

The task of the educational critic is to perform a mysterious feat well: to transform the qualities of a painting, play, novel, poem, classroom or school, or act of teaching and learning into a public form that illuminates, interprets, and appraises the qualities that have been experienced. (p. 86)

Educational criticism and connoisseurship harmonizes particularly well with the aims of my study, which are to explore student expression of aesthetic learning experiences within K-12 classrooms and provide anticipatory frameworks for teachers and others who are interested in aesthetically derived curriculum, pedagogy, and learning.

Two central aspects encapsulate this method: *connoisseurship*, the largely private art of “the appreciation of qualities” (Eisner, 2017, p. 66), and *criticism*, the act of public disclosure of those qualities in a form that not only conveys nuance but allows the reader to engage vicariously. As such, the connoisseur attempts to craft descriptions of an environment with the ultimate aim of enhancing and improving educational experience. Criticism functions as a tool for the connoisseur to artfully describe, interpret, and evaluate themes, tensions, complexities, and nuances of educational environments.

The method of educational criticism and connoisseurship draws on the rich wellspring of qualitative inquiry in which inductive considerations (open-ended questions and data generation) precede *a priori* considerations (hypotheses and data collection). It is a method fundamentally situated within an interpretivist paradigm of qualitative research (Eisner, 2017) characterized by naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an homage to Dewey, Eisner noted that the first ideal of educational criticism and connoisseurship is that it conduces to growth, or in other words, leads to “constructive, not destructive, results” (Eisner, p. 117). Other epistemological assumptions of this method include:

1. There are multiple ways in which the world can be known: Artists, writers, and dancers, as well as scientists, have important things to communicate about the world.
2. Human knowledge is a constructed form of experience and therefore a reflection of mind as well as nature: Knowledge is made, not simply discovered.
3. The forms through which humans represent their conception of the world have a major influence on what they are able to say about it.
4. The selection of a form through which the world is to be represented not only influences what we can say, it also influences what we are likely to experience.
5. Educational inquiry will be more complete and informative as we increase the range of ways we describe, interpret, and evaluate the educational world. (Eisner, p. 7-8)

Structure of Educational Criticism and Connoisseurship

Educational criticism and connoisseurship is structured according to four dimensions—description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics—that, as Eisner (2017) suggested, are holistic, non-sequential, and non-prescriptive (p. 88). The fundamental constitution of educational criticism and connoisseurship lies in the conjoining of description and interpretation with appraisal, providing several themes with which to understand the complexities of an educational context.

Description. Description provides the essential foundation of educational criticism and connoisseurship. Uhrmacher et al. (2017) emphasized the importance evoking ‘in the moment’ immersion of the educational situation for the reader:

The aim of description is to help readers see and hear what the critic has experienced. It seeks to engage readers by allowing them to situate themselves in relation to that experience. Description provides an account of events and situations experienced firsthand. In order to capture such experiences, the critic’s use of description is often expressive in character. (p. 37)

The goal of description is to narratively portray a vivid rendering that will “enable readers to get a feel for the place or process and, where possible and appropriate, for the experience of those who occupy the situation” (Eisner, 2017, p. 89). It must enable the reader to feel, see, hear—and even smell—as if one were actually present. The emphasis in description lies not only in perceiving, but also coming to know through the deliberate and selective use of visual imagery, “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6), metaphor, juxtaposition, and other elucidative applications of the narrative form. The functions of description are to provide multiple interpretations based on truths, rather than Truth, as well as to provide credibility for the overall criticism through an engaging, finely detailed, and highly “particularized” (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 40) narrative.

Interpretation. Rendering vivid the subtleties of what has been observed, or, what may have been obscured by virtue of visibility, requires an explaining counterpart. Eisner (2017) put it this way:

If description can be thought of as giving an account *of*, interpretation can be regarded as accounting *for*. Educational critics are interested not only in making vivid what they have experienced, but in explaining its meaning; this goal frequently requires putting what has been described in a context in which its antecedent factors can be identified. It also means illuminating the potential

consequences of practices observed and providing reasons that account for what has been seen. (p. 95)

Interpretation involves explicating description by illuminating meanings, exploring consequences, and providing a discussion of the significance of educational events.

Evaluation. Creating value judgments is essential to the evaluative dimension of educational criticism. As Eisner cogently noted, “there can be no claim about the state of education without a conception of what is educationally virtuous” (Eisner, 2017, p. 100). Further, Uhrmacher, et al. (2017) emphasized that the educational critic asks: “What is of value here, both for those involved and for the educational enterprise generally speaking?” (p. 50).

Valuing comprises a significant form of connoisseurship that combines knowledge of a domain or context with knowledge of specific criteria that enable judgments of the exemplary, virtuous, or idiosyncratic. Important, too, is the notion of multiple value judgments rather than a singular framework in order to aid perception and expand meaning (Uhrmacher et al.). The worth of what a connoisseur conveys about specific educational contexts is directly dependent on the flexibility of the value judgments she describes.

Thematics. Here, the educational critic focuses on deriving themes, or “pervasive qualities” (Eisner, 1997, p. 104) from the data that portray a larger, more generalizable story that “extends beyond the situation itself” (p. 103). In a well-crafted educational criticism, multiple themes should be delineated that provide the reader with a sense of the summary qualities of the classroom, environment, or school, along with how these may be pushed beyond the immediate context. Stated differently, while the evaluative dimension provides the basis for appraisal of the specific educational environment, thematics allows for the generalization of findings that extend beyond immediate settings and participants to other contexts.

Theoretical Lens: Dewey's Philosophy of Aesthetic Experience

“It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does not occur in a vacuum.”

~John Dewey, *Experience and Education*

Like the rhizomatous purple iris, John Dewey's philosophies spread broadly and burrow deeply (Breault & Breault, 2014; Dewey, 1916, 1922, 1929, 1934, 1938, 1990; Fallace, 2011; Jackson, 1998; Garrison, 1994, 1997; Garrison, Neubert, & Reich, 2012; Uhrmacher, 2009). I highlight here a significant dimension of his influential corpus: experience generally, and aesthetic experience, in particular. As a pragmatist, Dewey was deeply concerned with experience—not as exists objectively, but as it was manifested in the everyday experiences of the individual. Experience, according to Dewey, is comprised of a transaction between the individual and her environment based on the “intimately connected” (1938, p. 51) principles of interaction and continuity—interaction meaning experience occurring via social processes and continuity meaning experience conducing toward further understanding. Jim Garrison (1994) writes:

In *Experience and Nature* Dewey declared (1925/1981): “Experience is not a veil that shuts man off from nature... but rather a growing progressive self-disclosure of nature itself” (p. 5). Experience for Dewey was simply what happened when human beings *actively participated in transactions* with other natural existences. It was not something we have by being passive positivistic spectators of nature. (p. 9)

These foundational principles are no less significant in conceptualizing aesthetic experience. In fact, as Dewey acknowledged in *Art as Experience* (1934), the central problem of experience is “recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living” (p. 10). For Dewey, the separation of aesthetics from the qualities of everyday

experience was so inconceivable that “even a crude experience, if authentically an experience, is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of esthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience” (p. 11). Dewey noted several other essential characteristics intrinsic to an aesthetic experience—it is organized and has a form, it is imbued with vitality, imagination, emotion, and tension, and it is grounded in aesthetic perception—meaning an active reconstruction of knowledge through the senses. Dewey’s unification of the subjective and the objective via an active transaction rather than a detached spectatorship, as well as his resolute conjoining of aesthetic experience with the experienced life, sustains the central aim of my study—to explore aesthetic learning experiences within the context of K-12 classrooms.

Three Interpretive Frames

I employed three interpretive frames for this inquiry: 1) Eisner’s Dimensions of Schooling (Eisner, 1998, 2017), 2) The Instructional Arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017), and 3) the Aesthetic Themes of Education (Uhrmacher, 2009). Taken together, these tools complement the theoretical foundation of this study by supporting Dewey’s philosophy of interaction between the student and her environment. When viewed independently, they provide an interconnected pathway that supports the overarching purpose of my research—to explore student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. These three frames also allow for explicit attention toward students’ aesthetic learning experiences that are specifically guided by the teacher’s intended and operational curricula.

Eisner's Dimensions of Schooling

In a classic article on the critical need for an ecological systems model in educational research, psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1976) noted that the educational environment is “conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of structures each contained within the next” (p. 5). These structures are: 1) the micro-system, including the student’s interactions in her immediate setting, such as the classroom; 2) the meso-system, or the interactions of her major settings, such as school and home, or within social groups, 3) the exo-system, including her local communities, and 4) the macro-system, including all the major cultural, social, economic, and educational institutions and ideologies that influence the interactions and settings of previous structures. Bronfenbrenner suggested that when each structure is considered contextually, both independently and in reciprocal relationships with other structures, educational research secures “ecological validity” (p. 7), or fidelity according to the “natural” setting of the student. This is important because, as Bronfenbrenner pointed out, a major fallacy of any educational research is to suppose that these structures are unalterable and discrete: “If you wish to understand the relation between the learner and some aspect of the environment, try to budge the one and see what happens to the other” (p. 6).

I take Bronfenbrenner’s quip with solemnity; I believe it helps to concretely justify the significance of my first interpretive frame—Eisner’s Dimensions of Schooling (1988, 2017). In congruence with Bronfenbrenner’s ideas, Eisner (2000) noted that “one of the most important ideas to emerge during the last 50 years is the recognition of the ecological character of schooling” (p. 355). In the mid-1980s, Eisner and his team investigated four California high schools, concluding that each exhibited to some degree what he termed

“structurally fragmented character” (p. 24). According to Eisner, this fragmented character was typified by school environments organized into discrete blocks of time in which hundreds of high school students moved mechanically from place to place, teachers who were “sequestered” within their classrooms, talking with other adults only minimally, and students who had little control over what, why, or how they learned. In response to teachers and students regarding the impact of such an environment, Eisner concluded that the best educational structure for school improvement is one that is interactive rather than isolationist. “Schools are robust institutions that are like large gyroscopes. Push them to one side and they remain at that angle, but only briefly” (p. 355). What Eisner meant is that an overreliance on one aspect of schooling—a proliferation of testing procedures and practices, for example—is manifested in the neglect and insufficiency of other equally important aspects. There cannot be an effect to one ‘orbit’ of the educational system without corresponding effects on the others, upsetting the balance of the entire system.

Consequently, Eisner proposed an ecological model for researchers to consider when attending to the inherently relational nature of schooling: 1) the pedagogical; 2) the evaluative; 3) the structural; 4) the curricular; and 5) the intentional (1988, p. 25). The pedagogical dimension refers to how the curriculum is enacted by the teacher, including the quality of teaching and its unique nuances: the specific “genres” of teaching and their corresponding “styles” (2017, p. 78). The evaluative dimension attends to the impact of testing and grading assumptions, practices, and consequences, both for the teacher and her students. The structural dimension refers to how a school or classroom is organized, including the division of time, class periods, grade and age levels, and other criteria. The curricular dimension is focused upon “the content and goals and the activities employed to

engage students in it” (p. 75). The intentional dimension addresses the “the goals or aims that are formulated for the school or a classroom” (p. 73).

Given this inquiry’s focus on the aesthetic, I incorporated a sixth dimension—the aesthetic—which Uhrmacher noted to be “the kinds and quality of materials used in the classroom or school as well as the physical arrangement of materials” (1991b, p. 18). The incorporation of an aesthetic dimension into the ecology of the school aided my discernment of specific aesthetic features of the classroom and school environment—or those things that were uniquely tied to the places they are made. When viewed collectively, these six dimensions acted as a framework for describing, interpreting, and appraising the interdependent nature of the classroom and outdoor setting and its impact on students and teachers.

The Instructional Arc

The second interpretive frame that I applied to my interpretations is The Instructional Arc (Uhrmacher et al., 2017, p. 25). The Arc (Figure 1) explicitly draws attention to three interrelated aspects of the curriculum: the intended (similar to Eisner’s intentional dimension), the operational (what actually happens), and the received (what students “take away” from the experience). The Instructional Arc is pertinent to this study for two reasons: 1) the research questions are formulated through the lens of the arc, and 2) data are interpreted with a particular focus on the received, or experienced (Barone, 1979), curriculum. Although my research intends to illuminate one aspect of the Arc, Uhrmacher noted that “one needs to know the aims of goals of a school or of a teacher before jumping to the results”. Thus, I attended to the Arc holistically, exploring how each aspect of curriculum—intended, operational, and received—directly and indirectly informs the others.

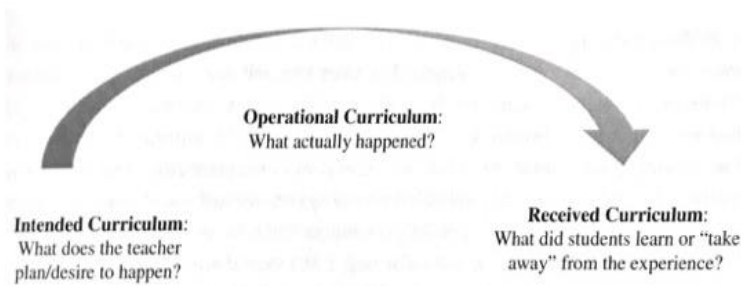


Figure 1
The Instructional Arc

The Aesthetic Themes of Education (CRISPA)

While the previous two frames provide methodological and curricular lenses for broadly seeing educational phenomena, the third interpretive frame of my inquiry intends to support those qualities specific to aesthetic learning experiences. Conceived of by Uhrmacher (2009), the six aesthetic themes of education (also known by the acronym CRISPA) are: connections, risk-taking, imagination, sensory experience, perceptivity, and active engagement (see also Moroye & Uhrmacher, 2010; Uhrmacher et al., 2013; Conrad et al., 2015). One function of CRISPA is to provide teachers with useful distinctions the means for teachers to overlay their existing curriculum and pedagogy with enriching experiences informed by the arts.

The first aesthetic theme, *connections*, is characterized by relationships between the student and her environment (Uhrmacher, 2009). The manner in which students actively engage with ideas, literature, media, or other materials in a learning environment (Conrad et al., 2015) can manifest through intellectual, personal, sensorial, or social connections (McConnell, Conrad, & Uhrmacher, 2020). Teachers who can facilitate these connections

encourage genuine and prolonged engagement in the classroom. The second theme, *risk-taking*, refers to opportunities for students to new things, “a venture into the unknown” (Uhrmacher, 2009, p. 624). Creating an environment that invites students to remain open to new possibilities and ways of seeing may increase the likelihood of their learning experiences becoming meaningful. Also, research focused on risk-taking suggests that these experiences may increase students’ cognitive development, as well as their creativity, self-motivation, and interest in subject matter, such as science (Uhrmacher & Bunn, 2011). Conrad et al. (2015) described the concept of *imagination*, the third theme, as concerned with the manipulation of qualities or ideas:

Imagination may be intuitive, in which a person has a sudden insight; fanciful, in which a person combines unexpected elements such as with a dancing tree; interactive, in which a person works with materials to yield a product; or mimetic, in which a person mirrors or mimics the creative work of another. (p. 5)

Imagination refers to mostly inward activities that can be communicated outwardly through expressions of creativity (McConnell et al., 2020) *Sensory experience* refers the use of one’s senses to experience an object or place. A sensory-rich learning environment fosters aesthetic experiences by inviting students to engage in sensory interactions that aim to investigate subtle qualities in objects and places (Conrad et al., 2015). The fifth theme, *perceptivity*, relates to sensory experiences in which a student develops a more nuanced understanding of an object or place through their senses. This involves closely examining subtle qualities that may normally go unnoticed in order to re-see for the purpose of perceiving something new (Uhrmacher, 2009; Conrad et al., 2015). The final aesthetic theme of education is *active engagement*, which necessitates student agency and active participation in the learning process (Conrad et al., 2015). Teachers who collaborate with students and integrate physical activity, choices, and/or personal meaning can cultivate a learning

environment abundant in meaningful learning experiences. Concerning potential outcomes of applying the aesthetic themes, Uhrmacher (2009) argued:

The more a teacher is able to encourage a classroom community that embraces these themes, the more likely it will be that the students, and the teacher, grow from the experience.... It is these experiences that seem to support deep engagement as well as memory retention, an increase in knowledge, student satisfaction, meaning making and creativity. (p. 632)

Taken together, these three interpretive frames—the dimensions of schooling, the instructional arc, and the aesthetic themes of education (CRISPA)—serve as complementary lenses, suggesting the perception not of glittering truths, but of variegated spectra that overlap across student and teacher experience within an ecological model of education. I turn now to the research questions for this inquiry and well as a detailed description of this inquiry's methodology.

Research Questions

I addressed the following central (Creswell & Poth, 2018) research question in this inquiry: What are student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences?

Additionally, I asked the following sub-questions:

- 1. What are the teacher's intentions in creating conditions for aesthetic learning experiences?**
- 2. How are these intentions enacted in the classroom?**
- 3. How do students respond to aesthetic learning experiences—that is, what do students say, do, and create?**

The first question centers the intentions of the teacher, the second question aims to understand the degree of congruence between intentions and applications, and the third seeks to capture student perceptions of processes inherent to aesthetic learning experiences.

Research Site: Alpine School

The qualitative data from this study were generated from Alpine School, a rural public school located in the western U.S. serving approximately forty culturally and linguistically diverse K-8 students. My original intentions for this inquiry were to study four school sites within the U.S., however, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, schools across the country, including those I had secured permission to visit, were abruptly closed in mid-March 2020. A description of these school sites and their inclusion or exclusion status in my study are provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1
School Site Demographics and Inclusion/Exclusion in the Inquiry

School Site	Setting	Description	Included/Excluded
#1: Alpine School	Rural, western U.S.	Public school serving approximately 40 K-8 students.	Included. Permission received.
#2: Glenn Oaks School	Suburban, eastern U.S.	Parochial private school serving approximately 500 K-8 students.	Not included due to limited data generation. Permission received.
#3: Jackson High School	Urban, western U.S.	Public high school serving approximately 1,300 students in grades 9-12.	Not included but intended prior to Covid-19. Permission received.

#4: Maroon Valley School	Urban, western U.S.	Independent school serving approximately 400 K-8 students.	Not included but intended prior to Covid-19. Permission received.
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Note. All school site names are pseudonyms.

As shown in Table 3.2, the nationwide school closures significantly precluded my access to data generation. For example, I was conducting field observations at Glenn Oaks School, a private parochial school in the eastern U.S., when it closed March 12, 2020 due to an executive order from the governor. Similarly, I had completed the IRB process to conduct research at Jackson High School when my application was delayed in the spring of 2020. After several additional delays, my application was moved to the summer 2020 review cycle and was ultimately rescinded in June of 2020. I made attempts to offer alternative methods of research at Jackson High School, including inquiring as to whether I could conduct video observations instead of in-person observations and possibly return in the Fall. However, each of these attempts were ultimately rejected by the district’s research team. At Maroon Valley School, I had secured permission from both the administration and two teachers to visit during April 2020. This school was closed as well in the spring. While these setbacks were beyond my control, I *was* able to engage in sustained and in-depth research—including 80 hours of observation, 17 interviews, generation of over 500 photographs and documents—at Alpine School in January 2020, just prior to its closure six weeks later.

Table 3.2
Timeline of Significant Events and Their Outcomes in Negotiating Participant Access

Date	Significant Event(s)	Outcome
July 29, 2019	Submitted my signed research package to the University of Denver Institutional Review Board (IRB) for expedited review.	

September 23, 2019	Received approval from the University of Denver IRB to conduct my study and to begin contacting school sites regarding possible participation in the study.	
October 2019-February 2020	Negotiated site access with the principal of Glenn Oaks School.	I answered many questions via email, phone, and a conference call with the principal and other administrators. I sent multiple documents the school requested, including my observation protocols and parent and student consent and assent forms.
October 29, 2019	Received permission from Alpine School's principal to conduct research.	Arrangements were made with the teacher to conduct observations January, 2020.
January 12-25, 2020	Collected data at Alpine School.	Data were included in the current study.
February 1, 2020	Received permission from the principal of Glenn Oaks School to conduct research.	Scheduled data generation with the teacher for mid-March, 2020.
February 15, 2020	Submitted application to Washington School District External Research Review Board to conduct research at Jackson High School.	Scheduled data generation with the teacher for early April, 2020.
February 18, 2020	Received permission from administration to conduct research at Maroon Valley School.	
February 26, 2020	Received permission from two teachers at Maroon Valley School.	Scheduled data generation with the teachers for late-April to early-May, 2020.
March 8-11, 2020	Collected data at Glenn Oaks School. School was closed on March 11, 2020 due to an Executive Order from the Governor.	Data were not included in the present study due to limited observation time. One interview was conducted with the teacher. Student interviews were scheduled to take place on March 13, 2020.
Mid-March, 2020	In-person learning was suspended in 48 U.S. states for the remainder of the 2019-	Data generation at Glenn Oaks School, Jackson High School, and Maroon Valley School was postponed indefinitely.

	2020 school year due to Covid-19.	
April 13, 2020	Received notice from Washington School District External Research Review Board that all district research projects through the 2019-2020 school year are suspended. Received notice that my application was moved to the summer review cycle for the 2020-2021 school year.	
June 26, 2020	Received notice from Washington School District External Research Review Board that my approval was rescinded for the 2020-2021 school year due to public health guidelines, student learning loss, and limited staff.	I proposed amendments to data generation methods, including video observation only and social distancing.
July 7, 2020	Proposed amendments to the study were denied by the Washington School District External Research Review Board.	Data generation at Jackson High School did not take place.

Participant Sampling

I employed *purposeful sampling* (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002) to seek diverse cases aligned with my framework (see Figure 3) that intentionally served to broaden conceptions and assumptions of student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. As I envision both a practitioner and researcher audience for this inquiry, I focused specifically on knowledge for an audience concerned with aesthetic learning experiences within general education. My intention was to illuminate one aspect of educational experience for a majority of students in the United States, which most frequently occurs within the context of a

‘regular’ school without a specific arts-centered aim. More practically, students may have neither the opportunity, nor the desire, nor the resources to attend schools with an arts-centered approach or embedded arts programming.

The Aesthetic Education Institute of Colorado. I invited teachers to participate in the study via email (see Appendix C) using a list comprised of 221 Aesthetic Education Institute of Colorado (AEIC) attendees from 2015-2019. The AEIC, also known as the Institute for Creative Teaching, is a nationally recognized, week-long intensive of professional development training in the theory and practice of arts integration. Held annually during the summer, participants from a variety of disciplines engage in collaborations with master teaching artists and others to learn innovative techniques for integrating arts-based pedagogical practices into everyday teaching and learning. This list was provided to me by the Education Director of Think 360 Arts for Learning, a nonprofit organization that is responsible for organizing and implementing the AEIC. I have a prior working relationship with the Education Director as well as the Executive Director of the organization, both of whom assisted me in gaining access to the email list of past AEIC attendees. My intention in using this list was to draw from a specific pool of participants who had the common experience of attending the AEIC, who were familiar with the aesthetic themes of education, and who considered their teaching to be aesthetically oriented.

Recruitment. During the first round of participant recruitment, I sent individual emails to 112 AEIC attendees on September 30, 2019. From the 112 emails, I received 4 responses. In the second round of participant recruitment, I sent individual emails to 64 teachers on October 23, 2019 and received 7 responses. I did not send emails to 45 AEIC

participants from the original list of 221 because they taught or worked at arts-centered schools, including those with explicit arts-centered aims. At that point, I scheduled phone conversations and in-person site visits. I used the diversity of school sites and ease of access as additional criteria to further narrow participants. I employed the following selection criteria as a filter for inclusion in this inquiry:

1. K-12 teachers and their students within the United States;
2. General education teachers (i.e., teachers whose primary responsibility is *not* art education);
3. Public, private, magnet, or charter schools;
4. Schools that are *not* specifically arts- or aesthetics-centered nor have explicit arts-centered aims;
5. Diversity of teachers, students, and/or classrooms. This included school/community contextual factors, such as student mobility rate, whether the school serves a marginalized or racialized community; teacher contextual factors, such as gender, race, ethnicity, number of years teaching; and student contextual factors, including gender, race, ethnicity, or linguistic diversity;
6. Approval from school site and/or district.

Participants and demographics. This inquiry was conducted in January of the 2019-2020 school year primarily within the K-2 classroom of Ms. Ethel, a teacher for over twenty years at Alpine School. While Ms. Ethel considers herself to be White, her mother is Japanese, and this culture is important to her and reflects in both subtle and significant ways in the classroom. Ms. Tia, the assistant teacher, is a middle-aged Korean female, and Ms. Leigh, the

co-teacher, is a White female in her 20s. Students in her multiage classroom included a proportionate mix of both boys and girls who ranged in age from five to eight years old. Student demographics were not provided to me, however, based on my observations, approximately 25% of the students interviewed were students of color, primarily African American and Hispanic students. The socioeconomic range of the students' families seemed quite broad; Alpine School Principal Tori confirmed this to be true in our interview. She noted that although some students' families were in fact quite wealthy, most students were from working class families. Although I noticed at lunch that several students qualified for free and reduced lunch, however, exact student demographic data were not provided to me. Linguistic diversity was also present—I heard students conversing with each other in Spanish and daily formal Spanish instruction was provided for all students by Ms. Carmen, who was a native speaker.

In addition to invited consent and assent from Ms. Ethel and her K-2 students, I also received permission from Principal Tori to send individual child assent letters home with every student in the school (approximately 40 students total) as well as informed consent parental/guardian consent letters. I received 25 parental consent letters (over 60% of the school), however, I was unable to secure all 25 student assent letters due to students' absences and scheduling issues. Some students did verbally decline to participate even though their parents had provided consent, and I fully respected and honored these decisions. Ultimately, I was able to interview 15 students (37% of the school) over the course of fieldwork: nine K-2 students, three grade 3-5 students, and three grade 6-8 students (Table 3.3). In addition to Ms. Ethel, the primary teacher participant in this inquiry, I negotiated and received informed consent from five other teachers and staff members at

Alpine School: one co-teacher and one classroom aide in Ms. Ethel’s K-2 classroom, the grade 6-8 teacher, the art teacher, and the school principal (Table 3.4). To reiterate, all student participants provided individual informed assent and parental/guardian informed consent prior to participating in this study, and each adult participant provided informed consent.

Table 3.3
Interviews Conducted with Alpine School Students

Student	Gender	Classroom
Ava	Female	K-2
Melony	Female	K-2
Quinn	Female	K-2
Maddie	Female	K-2
Stella	Female	K-2
Teagan	Female	K-2
Kelsey	Male	K-2
Hudson	Male	K-2
Antonio	Male	K-2
Gia	Male	3-5
Elliot	Male	3-5
Casey	Male	3-5
Esther	Female	6-8
Doris	Female	6-8
Gavin	Male	6-8

Table 3.4
Interviews Conducted with Alpine School Teachers & Faculty

Teacher/Faculty	Gender	Position
Ms. Ethel	Female	K-2 Teacher
Ms. Leigh	Female	K-2 Co-Teacher
Ms. Tia	Female	K-2 Teacher’s Aide
Ms. Carole	Female	Grade 6-8 Teacher
Ms. Anne	Female	Art Teacher
Ms. Tori	Female	Principal

Data Generation

In order to answer the research questions that guide my inquiry, and in congruence with the method of educational criticism and connoisseurship, I generated and appraised three primary sources of data: 1) classroom observations, 2) teacher interviews and student focus group interviews, and 3) artifacts (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5
Alignment of Research Questions, Data Sources, and Method

Research Questions	Data Sources	Method
Central: What are student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences?	Observations Interviews Artifacts	Educational Criticism & Connoisseurship (Eisner, 2017)
Subquestion 1: What are the teacher’s intentions in creating conditions for aesthetic learning experiences?	Interviews Artifacts	
Subquestion 2: How are these intentions enacted in the classroom?	Observations Artifacts	
Subquestion 3: How do students respond to aesthetic learning experiences—that is, what do students say, do, and create?	Observations Interviews Artifacts	

Observations. Naturalistic observations (Dunn, 2005) of the classroom and participants were the primary method of data generation for my inquiry and provided important contextual shading for both teacher and student interviews. I conducted approximately 80

hours of observation in Ms. Ethel's classroom and at Alpine School during two weeks in January 2020. My observations were recorded in pencil in a small dark blue string-bound notebook and were time-sampled to reveal temporal and situational nuance. Generally, I arrived at the school each day about 7:45 a.m. and stayed for about thirty minutes after school, or until about 3:30 p.m. I lived in Alpine for the duration of my observations as the sole guest at the lodge, returning home only on the weekends. Being in place assisted me in perceiving subtle but significant aspects of the community. This also permitted me the pragmatic space to speak informally with members of the community in an unhurried manner as well as uninterrupted time to walk and observe the community and surrounding geography. Once I began to perceive The Forest and its significance to the students and teachers as an emergent theme in the data, I returned to Alpine for a second time in July 2020 for one week. During that time, I conducted 40 additional hours observation as well as several additional informal interviews. A second goal was delightfully realized when I discovered, after some amount of digging in the dirt under a layer of pine needles, the elusive pink crystals and pinecones (see Plates for Connected Geographies). Previously buried under several feet of snow, the crystals and pinecones were just as the students had described them to me during my visit in January.

Through the process of "epistemic seeing" (Eisner, 2017, p. 68) and using my three interpretive frames as a filter, my intention was to perceive students' expressions of their aesthetic learning experiences, including what they say, do, and create. I was also interested in exploring Ms. Ethel's intentions for her students and how these were operationalized, or enacted, in the classroom. I utilized a semi-structured observation lens (Appendix G) as a guide designed to capture a variety of observational activities filtered through my study's

three interpretive frames. These foci included: the aesthetic themes of education (CRISPA), the dimensions of schooling, the instructional arc (with a focus on the received curriculum or what students seem to be making of their classroom experiences), episodic vignettes, sensory descriptions, multi-sensory descriptions, etc. (Uhrmacher et al., p. 30).

I endeavored at the outset of this inquiry to maintain a participant-observer stance (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012). I did not expect the students and teachers to interact with me during the observations, however I welcomed full participation in classroom experiences when I was encouraged to do so by the teacher or students and did not create a distraction. This dance became easier as fieldwork progressed. However, a participant-observer stance conflicted with my intended deontological and relational ethical frameworks such that I found it difficult to apply an ethics of reciprocity and care in the fullest and most beneficial sense. This tension is discussed in more detail at the conclusion of Chapter Four.

Teacher interviews. In order to better understand the intentional and operational curriculum involved with aesthetic modes of teaching and the aesthetic themes, I conducted two interviews with Ms. Ethel lasting approximately 40 minutes each. These interviews took place outside of instructional time (after school) in Ms. Ethel's classroom. The full interview protocol was given to Ms. Ethel prior to the interviews to encourage reflection and to answer any questions. While interviewing, I was interested in revealing her beliefs about aesthetic learning experiences as well as her intentions for her aesthetically influenced curriculum during the lesson planning process. In addition to Ms. Ethel, the primary teacher participant of this research, I conducted an additional five interviews with other Alpine teachers as well as the principal to glean knowledge regarding the school culture, community, intentions, and values.

Student focus group interviews. To answer the third research question regarding student perceptions of their experiences, and to promote participation and discussion, I conducted six student focus group interviews (Clark, 2011; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) with 2-6 students at a time lasting from approximately 20-30 minutes with younger children to approximately 30-40 minutes with older children. Student recruitment for the focus group interviews was based on parent consent and student assent, teacher recommendations, and my observations. My justification for interviewing student participants according to a focus group format was threefold. First, I wished to ensure safety precautions for both the children and I, and a group format provides the structure to meet this requirement. Second, our world is a social one, permeated by speech and interaction with others (Bakhtin, 1981), and focus groups mimic the authentically diverse and spontaneous nature and patterns of human discourse. Finally, and in a more pragmatic sense, students may be more apt to share their knowledge and understandings, big or small, in a shared space of discourse, and I certainly found this to be true. Peer groups were a significant factor in provoking other questions, clarifying and summarizing thoughts, and ameliorating power imbalances between interviewer and interviewees.

The focus group interviews took place in open areas within and around the school that were easily visible to others. At the suggestion of the teacher, the grade K-2 focus group interview took place outside of the classroom at a round table in a foyer that was in full view of a second classroom. The grade 3-5 focus interview was an impromptu walking interview at the suggestion of the students that began in the art room and meandered through the new building. The grade 6-8 focus group interview began in the cafeteria after lunch but ended in Ms. Ethel's classroom—a comfortable space for the students to remember and reflect.

Interviews occurred after a period of initial classroom observation in order to provide me with contextual foundation. Students had the option to participate during a time that was convenient for them and did not coincide with instructional time nor any other previously scheduled activity. Specific days and times were contingent on the students' schedules and confirmed with the teacher and the principal. Other bits and pieces of data that made their way into my criticism were gleaned from informal conversations with students at recess, at lunch, or while skiing.

Only students who completed and submitted both student assent and parent consent forms were considered for participation in focus group interviews. Students' right to not participate in the inquiry was fully honored. As an example, a sixth-grade boy had provided me with both student assent and parental consent forms, yet his body language and intentional avoidance of me conveyed a clear sign and I did not approach him for an interview.

Table 3.6
Harmony of Research and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Teacher Interview Questions	Student Interview Questions
Central: What are student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences?	Interview Two	K-3, 4-6, Middle School Protocols
Subquestion 1: What are the teacher's intentions in creating conditions for aesthetic learning experiences?	Interview One Interview Three	

Subquestion 2: How are these intentions enacted in the classroom?

Interview Three

Subquestion 3: How do students respond to aesthetic learning experiences—that is, what do students say, do, and create?

Interview Two

K-3, 4-6, Middle School Protocols

Artifacts. The third and final source of data were artifacts—those tangible items that “frequently reveal what people cannot or will not say” (Eisner, 2017, p. 184). Saldaña (2016) recommended that analysis of artifacts and other realia should function as a type of “organic inquiry” (p. 65) wherein the researcher considers holistic impressions of the educational environment, asking “What is the first and general impression I get about this environment, and what details within it led me to that impression?” (p. 61). As artifacts function as a type of “visual discourse” (Clarke, 2005), I utilized the qualities of perception, curiosity, and imagination to curate a selection of thematically coded artifacts consisting of photographs, student work, classroom realia, etc. with the central aim of considering “the reciprocal relationships between observations, interviews, and artifacts” (Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017). Neither students nor teachers were asked to create or provide anything additional to the products, lesson plans, visual, or other artifacts created and provided during the course of regular classroom instruction.

Data Appraisal

Because educational connoisseurship and criticism method is an arts-based method that prioritizes a liberal and subjective application of perceptivity and creativity, and because

I viewed the work of data appraisal as a process of artistry, it felt natural and appropriate for me to begin by immersing myself in the words and work of artists. I paid particular attention to several contemporary artists whose work I appreciate and who have made audio recordings describing their art and creative process. I listened to the words of these artists as I read through large sections of generated data, exploring and pondering through freewriting (Leavy, 2015) with the following concepts:

subtlety
beauty
perception
cathedra
connectedness
preservation
composing
momentum
time
conservation
annihilation
visceral
space
pressure
attention
overlay
control
heat
joy
permanence

Thus, my analytic process for data appraisal began not with recording or reviewing analytic memos for the systematic development of insight or understanding per se (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), but by experimenting conceptually with fluid, open-ended, and generative auditory-verbal constructions aligned with what Janesick (2011) described as “informed hunches, intuition, and serendipitous occurrences” (p. 148). I refer to these experimentations as *idiosyncratic annotations* to reflect my individual preferences as a researcher in approaching data appraisal.

Observations. Consistent with educational criticism and connoisseurship methods for interpreting and appraising data, observational data from my field notebook were examined early and iteratively in the research process. That is, I read aloud, transcribed, and annotated (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) observational descriptions. In contrast with data collection, the concept of data *annotation* takes its cue from the humanities rather than the social sciences and presupposes that data should be examined and narrated for key focal points and interrelated parts as they inform the larger picture and contribute to overall meaning-making (Uhrmacher et al.). In order to practically facilitate this process, I photocopied and bound each page of my notebook onto larger legal-size paper and annotated sections of observational data in several cycles by writing notes in the margins.

During the first cycle of appraisal, I focused holistically on the dataset by narrating global annotations (Uhrmacher et al.) that “discern important contours of the situation and experiences for those involved” (p. 57). These data revealed annotations of *student engagement, community, and care*. During the second cycle, I annotated observational data by applying this inquiry’s prefigured heuristics: 1) the theoretical lens of Dewey’s philosophy of aesthetic experience, and 2) the interpretive frames, including Eisner’s Dimensions of Schooling, the instructional arc, and the aesthetic themes. This cycle using prefigured annotations revealed the following themes: *imagination, perceptivity, risk-taking, engaged sensory experience, connections through aesthetic focus, unity, aesthetic communication, aesthetic rituals, complementary curriculum, joy, and care through pedagogy and structure*. During the third cycle of appraisal, I focused on pattern-finding annotations that elucidated more nuanced and contoured meanings within the dataset (Uhrmacher, et al., 2017, Uhrmacher, personal communication). These within-criticism pattern-finding annotations included: *kinds and quality of classroom materials, teacher*

values (implicit and explicit), student independence, music and song, time, outside environment, inside environment, eco-mindedness, children's influences, student engagement, skiing, snow, ecological curriculum, trees, eating routines, place, student interactions and relationships with nature - The Forest, sounds (from within and outside) and school as community.

Student Focus Group Interviews and Teacher and Staff Interviews. As described in Tables 3.3 and 3.4 above, a total of twenty-one students, teachers, and staff participated in formal, audio-recorded interviews. Interview data from my voice recorder were uploaded into Otter.ai., a web-based transcription program. I read through each transcript several times as it played aloud to correct errors and ensure overall accuracy. During the initial cycle of appraisal, I narrated the following global annotations: *school and classroom culture, places and forms of students' aesthetic engagement, The Forest, and reverence for childhood.* Similar to my data appraisal process for observations, in the second cycle I focused on applying my theoretical and interpretive frames to perceive meaning. These prefigured annotations included: *risk-taking, sensory experience, active engagement (curriculum & the natural world), student satisfaction, school intentions, teacher intentions, and school culture.* And for the third cycle, I focused on narrating pattern-finding annotations: *The Forest, care, creativity, classroom projects, Outdoor Education program, independence, risk taking, love of learning, eco-mindedness, art-making, mindful eating, imagination, student enjoyment, play, and community.*

Within one focal point, connected geographies, I utilized the method of poetic transcription (Burdick, 2011; Glesne, 1997) to illuminate the voices and feelings of the student participants by deemphasizing the academic language genre through which students were represented. Specifically, I combined meaningful phrases from student and teacher interviews augmented with my own words generated from observational and interview data

(Butler-Kisber, 2002, 2004, 2010). Using close reading, I then selected the most salient words within a specific annotation, in this case, *The Forest*, and used rhythm and imagery to apply portions of excerpted text within poetic inquiry. Figure 2 below presents excerpts from student and teacher transcripts with key words and phrases highlighted to demonstrate this process.

Elliot (5th grade): It's just like you're out in the wild. You're not in like...**you're not in boundaries. You're not near here. All the man-made stuff is like plastic and metal** and **you're gonna feel wood. You're out there in mud.** **And it's kind of fun to get dirty.** It's really fun in the summer because you can **play capture the flag**—that's the main game—and you can jump around, and **you can play in the bushes and hide.** Yeah, it's like you're in nature it's like you're not playing with **man-made stuff.** You can let out your energy better because **there's a distance you can go.**

Doris (8th grade): It's just kind of like **a different area than the playground.** There's wild branches and stuff. You can make like **forts** with the **logs.** **It was a big deal when we were in kindergarten** too—building forts and selling things for crystals.

Quinn (2nd grade): So the **crystals** are like money. So we collect stuff in **the forest** to bring all up to there so we buy stuff. There's like **crystals** in our place. And there's a certain amount of **crystals** that they have to give us to get the **pinecones.**

Ethel (K-2 Teacher): The woods there though. It's just like a such a special enchanted **forest** for the kids. And I hear from kids who have graduated from

here **they still remember** the games they played. And there's these pink—I **don't know how they got here**—but these **pink crystals** all over. They're quartz crystals. Since I've been here—17 years—they've been using those as currency in the woods. They set up stores...**There's this one girl** actually, **she's at Stanford now**. And she would pretend like she was a horse out here and **she just became that horse** and [she makes neighing sounds] you know? I feel like **they're free**. Yeah, **they're free** and they just...**they just let it go**.

Figure 2

Excerpts from Student and Teacher Transcripts with Key Words and Phrases Highlighted

Artifacts. Artifacts represented a significant line of data generation for this inquiry; I relied on these data extensively not only to recall specific details but to represent rich descriptions of the spaces and places of this inquiry. IRB approval for the current inquiry was predicated on absolutely no visual documentation of the students themselves and this mandated exclusion of students' physical bodies from the visual data figured for me as both an impediment and a virtue. Although I compensated by writing detailed descriptions of students' physical selves in my observation notebook, I was compelled to look in the details of the classroom to document students' spiritual selves, or their individual "mark" in the places and spaces of the inquiry. To my surprise (and I hate to admit that it *was* a surprise), the presence of students was omnipresent and rather easily perceived once I was able to push beyond the disappointment of not being able to photograph them.

Nearly 500 artifacts, including photographs, maps, newspapers, and one origami crane, were numbered and annotated using an Excel spreadsheet. I also printed the

photographs so that I could physically manipulate groups of images. I applied the same appraisal strategies as I did with my observation and interview data; that is, I narrated global, prefigured, and pattern-finding annotations. Global annotations included: *artifacts made by students/artifacts made by others, in-classroom realia/outside of classroom realia (school, town, physical environment, etc.), place, and historical narratives*. Next, I narrated prefigured annotations of *curriculum, classroom materials, communication intended for the students, communication intended by the students, perceptivity, and connection to the outdoors, imaginative engagement*. Finally, I focused on emergent pattern-finding annotations by physically manipulating groups of artifacts arranged by perspective, theme, and content: *students' perspectives and messages, visitor's perspectives, trees, snow, musical instruments, play area materials, community, rocks, ecological caring, imagination, teacher-created and informal curriculum, student art, and natural and man-made*.

Photographs can be read like any other text yet speak to meaning in a way unlike any other genre. In her book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag (1977) wrote:

Photographs are, of course, artifacts. But their appeal is that they also seem, in a world littered with photographic relics, to have the status of found objects—unpremeditated slices of the world. Thus, they trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and magic of the real. They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of information. (p. 69)

Sontag's astute juxtaposition speaks to both the great joy I found in photographing “unpremeditated slices of the world” during fieldwork and also the great regret that I could not find a viable way to communicate this dialectic within my heavily language-based criticism other than by including selected photographs as plates (see Chapter Four), which I ultimately found to be inadequate. I look forward to resolving this tension in part by learning more about methodologies that incorporate the use of visual imagery and by engaging in future inquiries in which visual data can elevate to center stage in the educational criticism.

Artifacts *created in the moment* also informed my appraisal. As one example, a 4th-grade student folded an origami paper crane during an interview and proudly presented it to me at the conclusion of our conversation. Pondering this spontaneously created artifact and holding it in my hands, turning it over and over again to perceive the overlap in its lines and angles, informed my subsequent thinking around the final focal point represented in Chapter Four: imbricated forming.

Categorical Annotations

I combined the annotations from each of the three lines of data (observations, interviews, and artifacts) into interrelated categories that contributed to the overall coherence of the larger criticism. These categorical annotations were *student engagement through music and composition, inside and outside spaces and places, imagination, care, temporal rhythms, connections, and school structure*. These annotations, in turn, comprised the “focal points” that organized Chapter Four: rhythm and ritual (music), connected geographies (place), and imbricated forming (composition). Categorical annotations subsequently informed my anticipatory frameworks: savoring inefficiency, constructing ordinary imaginaries, sense-making and space-making, and becoming in place with others.

The Wisdom of Peer Review and Annotation

I relied on the deep wisdom of peer reviewers who were instrumental in assisting me to augment my perceptions of and reflect on this inquiry’s data. Two peer reviewers who were especially skilled in music—one is a practicing musician of over 40 years, and one is a music educator with several years’ experience—read through extensive sections of my interpretations within rhythm and ritual and offered both confirmations of my perceptions as well as criticism. As one example, the musician aided in my renderings of distinct sounds,

including musical notation and representation, and the music educator encouraged me to think about music as not just a distinct form, but also a *personally felt* form for the students. As I am not fortunate to have a strong background in music, their combined connoisseurship was immensely valuable. Another peer reviewer experienced in the method of educational connoisseurship and criticism, and with several years' classroom teaching experience, read and annotated a clean copy of my entire observation field notebook. Her astute appraisal not only led to significant corroborations with my own annotations but also *dissenting annotations* (Uhrmacher, personal communication) that encouraged me to reconsider and reappraise the emphasis I was placing on community. Her push toward *relationality* informed my thinking and subsequent delineation of the anticipatory framework of becoming in place with others (see Chapter Five).

Data Confidentiality

I established a comprehensive data management plan with a system of checks and controls to mitigate potential data security risks and to secure the confidentiality of both the participants and collected data. For example, I brought my observation notebook and voice recorder to and from the school each day—no data was left at the school or was otherwise out of my possession. During my visits to the school, I kept my observation notebook and voice recorder with me at all times. Children were, of course, naturally curious about what I was writing in my notebook each day, and I tried to remain open and answer their questions honestly. I answered that I was writing about all the great things they were learning and doing, including how they were using their senses to learn and how they were being creative.

One student, Maddie, asked if she could write in my notebook, so I turned to a clean page and she seemed content to sketch a few shapes with her colored pencils.

Upon returning home, I stored all data and consent forms in a locked cabinet in my office. Pseudonyms were utilized for both the research participants as well as the school site when discussing, writing, presenting, or publishing any data from the study. The historically significant and quite well-known reputation of the local geography surrounding the school necessitated the omission of a portion of my data—what I term *null annotations*. In a sense, I felt like I was intentionally divorcing a meaningful part of my data, and I address this critical moment further at the conclusion of Chapter Four. This was unfortunate because being able to represent this identifying aspect of the community and school could perhaps have added an additional layer of knowledge and authenticity to this inquiry’s findings. Nevertheless, I adhered with as much fidelity as possible to the confidentiality and ethical requirements I proposed in my IRB documents, masking the school site, participants, and the community as well as I could.

I took a proactive approach to data management that involved explicit data management strategies to ensure that data are accurate, relevant, timely, and complete for the purposes of this inquiry. Both the photocopy of my observation notebook used for annotation and the original “clean copy” were stored in a locked cabinet. All interview data were transcribed using a web-based product, Otter.ai, and stored on a password-protected computer using a password-protected login. Generated artifacts were examined, photographed for appraisal, and returned to the teacher or student. Nearly 500 digital images, several maps and newspapers, and one origami paper crane were numbered, described, and catalogued in a password-protected Excel spreadsheet and stored on a

password-protected computer with a password-protected external hard drive. Digital images were also printed out to aid in physical manipulation during annotation and appraisal. Once transcribed, all interview notes, observation field notes, audio recordings, physical artifacts, and any other potentially identifiable data will be stored in a locked cabinet for a minimum of three years, until 2023, per the University of Denver's IRB requirements.

An N of 1 and Generalization

One barrier imposed on qualitative research is the idea that only generalizations vis-à-vis controlled (meaning random and with as little variance as possible) samples derived from a larger, representative subsets “count.” Eisner (1981) challenged this view by asking what can be pragmatically derived from a single case in qualitative studies. He answered this way: “Generalization is possible because of the belief that the general resides in the particular and because what one learns from a particular, one applies to other situations subsequently encountered” (p. 7). Eisner sees generalizing from the particular as a distinctly human trait that touches all aspects of experience. Thus, there is much to be gleaned from an N of 1 and the particulars of experience have much to contribute to our everyday generalizations from one context to another in the form of skills, images, and/or ideas (Eisner, 2017). In fact, as Eisner noted, “direct contact with the qualitative world is one of our most important sources of generalization” (2017, p. 202).

Qualitative researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985) called into question the competence of generalization to the field and proposed a new term—transferability—to ameliorate this inadequacy. Critical of the power of transferability to make any significant departure from tradition, Donmoyer (1990) proposed an alternate conceptualization of

generalization that relies on the process of experiential learning enacted through Piaget's schema theory. He suggested three specific contributions of single case studies: accessibility, seeing through the researcher's lens, and decreased defensiveness (p. 64). Other arts-based researchers have advanced the ideas of resonance (Leavy, 2015), generativity (Barone & Eisner, 2012), and aesthetic efficacy (Teman & Saldaña, 2019). Several single case studies have produced considerable influence beyond their original context including Lawrence Lightfoot's (1983) *The Good High School*, Sizer's (1984/2004) *Horace's Compromise*, Peshkin's (1986) *God's Choice*, Barone's (1989) *Ways of Being at Risk: The Case of Billy Charles Barnett*, and McCarty's (2002) *A Place to be Navajo*.

Ethical Responsibilities

Research conducted within schools and classrooms, regardless of its form and purpose, necessitates a clearly defined strategy for ethical engagement. In this section, I discuss my responsibilities across four broad categories of ethical practice: procedural, situational, relational, and exiting (Tracy, 2010). I further refine my examination through the use of three overlapping lenses relevant to my study: 1) ethical practice within the qualitative paradigm generally, 2) ethical practice within educational criticism specifically, and 3) ethical practice with children and adolescent participants (see Figure 3). Procedural ethics attends to the principles of respect, beneficence, and avoidance of harm as established by The Belmont Report (NIH, 1979/2017) and enacted by federally funded institutional review boards. Situational ethics points to an ecological orientation (Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017) to ethical practice that is guided by a contextual sensitivity toward the ever-evolving connections inherently rooted in fieldwork. Relational ethics (Ellis, 2007; Tracy, 2010)

describes a way of mindful being with others that is caring, open, and non-judgmental (Uhrmacher et al.) with a focus not on extracting data from participants, but rather on cultivating collaborative partnerships that endure even after research has concluded. Finally, exiting ethics encompasses more than graciously leaving a research site, it necessitates an intentional future-oriented look toward “how to best present the research so as to avoid unjust or unintended consequences” (Tracy, p. 847). I now turn to a more specific discussion of how these categories of ethical practice—procedural, situational, relational, and exiting—were approached and enacted with fidelity through three interrelated lenses.

Ethical considerations of qualitative inquiry. Dissatisfied with the residue of positivist terminology being applied to qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered new discourse over thirty years ago that reflected the aims of a naturalistic qualitative paradigm. They suggested four criteria—credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability—when considering the overall trustworthiness of research. The criterion of confirmability has particular relevance for this study because it necessitates attention to the etic or “seeing about” perspective—that my interpretations are not shaped by my own interests, biases, and motivations, but by the participants’ unique ways of being in the world. These interpretations are formed throughout periods of prolonged and persistent observation in the field where the researcher comes to intimately know and “smell the school” she is in (Uhrmacher, personal communication, attributed to Eisner).

Creswell (2013) suggested that ethical issues in qualitative research arise throughout all phases of the research inquiry: prior to conducting the qualitative study, in the beginning moments, during data generation and appraisal, in representing data, and in publishing data. As emphasized by Creswell, I addressed these issues in part by consulting a variety of ethical

standards for qualitative research; seeking consent, and for student participants, assent; building trust and maintaining confidentiality; and reporting alternative perspectives.

Ethical considerations of educational criticism and connoisseurship. Flinders (1986) argued that the traditional social science-informed procedural ethics of informed consent, avoiding harm, and respect for persons are inadequate to the aims of educational criticism, which are, in part, to provide “both a penetrating and compassionate” (p. 8) account of what one has seen to a broad audience that is based on a foundation of extensive and meaningful field relationships with participants. Due to these unique characteristics, Flinders proposed extending these criteria to include reciprocity, avoidance of wrong, and fair treatment.

Given the emergent and unpredictable nature of qualitative inquiry, some scholars have questioned whether informed consent can indeed be achieved (Eisner, 2017; Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; Flinders, 1986; Uhrmacher et al., 2017). Since educational criticism tends to rely on a relational framework, Flinders (1986) suggested educational critics enact reciprocity as a means of honoring the give-and-take nature of the research process. From a procedural ethics standpoint, I did not conduct any research without prior consent from my dissertation committee, the University of Denver’s Institutional Review Board, the district or schools’ research review boards, the school site administrator, and the participants. However, acting from Flinders’ notion of *reciprocity* in addition to informed consent required that I broaden my view of procedural ethics to include attending to participants’ ongoing needs throughout my study. I attempted this move from procedural ethics to relational and situational ethics in part by maintaining an interested, flexible, and non-judgmental stance in interviews, encouraging reflection, engaging in appropriate self-disclosure, and seeking to understand rather than elicit.

Reciprocity also extends into exiting ethics, and I considered ways in which my criticism renders the participants, the school, and the community in a candidly positive light free from labels and other limiting discourse that reinforces discrimination and othering. In addition, I intentionally sought, and did, find ways to provide service to the communities of which I was a part of, even if only temporarily (Eder & Fingerson, 2011). As one small practical example, I learned that recycling was important to the students and the overall ethos of the school, so I saved my recyclables each day and brought them to the classroom's recycling bin.

Concurrent with reciprocity is Flinders' second criterion *avoidance of wrong*. Flinders delineated this as the notion that participants must never be treated as a means to an end, rather, they are to be regarded as "ends in themselves" (1986, p. 6). I provided assistance in the classroom and participated in appropriate self-disclosure during my interactions with participants. Finally, in attending to the dimension of exiting ethics, I avoided wronging participants by asking clarifying questions and encouraging their responses.

Flinders' third criterion, *fair treatment*, offers a more nuanced ethical position than avoidance of wrong in that it "combines principles of reciprocity and beneficence. First, it requires educational critics to make clear their purpose for using any [private] information and second, it requires critics to consider the emotional as well as intellectual impact of their work" (1986, p. 9). I attempted to satisfy the guideline of fair treatment by avoiding the disclosure of sensitive or potentially identifying information in my criticism (see the Critical Moments section in Chapter Four). Eisner's (2017) admonition frequently attended my thoughts during data generation: "in a good educational criticism...the people described become real, and even if no one else can identify the situations or people studied, those

studied *can* [emphasis added]; hence, the potential for pain as well as elation is always there” (p. 221).

Ethical considerations of conducting research with children and adolescent

participants. The focus of my inquiry was on the received curriculum of the instructional arc (Uhrmacher, et al., 2017) and exploring what students make of aesthetic learning experiences. Conducting ethical research with children and adolescent participants necessitated an additional layer of researcher responsibility, responsiveness, and flexibility. Procedural ethics aims to provide legal protection to minors by requiring parental consent for participation in research. For example, the most recent guidance from the American Educational Research Association Code of Ethics (AERA, 2011) stipulates three standards when seeking informed consent with children: 13.04(a) seeking parental consent, 13.04(b) seeking children’s assent, and 13.04(c) obtaining consent from an institutional review board or other authorized body knowledgeable in research ethics. Once informed consent (see Appendix I) was obtained from a parent or other legally authorized guardian, I invited student assent by constructing letters for the student participants comprised of developmentally friendly language aimed at making clear their right to choose to participate in my inquiry (see Appendices J and K). Students took this decision more seriously than I had anticipated—for example, one first-grade girl wanted to “talk first and then maybe I’ll sign your paper.” After speaking with me and subsequently watching a student focus group interview with her peers from the periphery, she ultimately made the choice to participate. Another student, a sixth-grade boy, declined to participate immediately and seemed wary of my presence throughout my time at the school. I honored his choice by waving a friendly “hello” whenever our paths crossed and keeping my distance so as not to make him feel

more uncomfortable. Parents, too, received these informed consent letters with sincerity. One father spoke with me privately after school and reminded me of his daughter's choice not to have any pictures of her work taken. Once I received student assent, I continued to monitor children's assent in practice by closely attending to their non-verbal (proximity, eye contact, general demeanor) and verbal responses toward me throughout the various contexts of my research: schools, outdoors, and the community (Fargas-Malet, et al., 2010).

Lahman (2008) suggested that although children are *always* othered in research, the inherent power imbalances can be minimized by adhering to the following guidelines: 1) attending to ethical considerations, 2) maintaining a reflexive stance, 3) developing intersubjectivity, 4) utilizing innovative methods, 5) seeing and treating children as experts, and 6) being with children. These guidelines were particularly relevant to my study because they provided the theoretical basis for my relational and situational actions within the field with regard to the participants. Lahman posited that the image of the “competent yet vulnerable child may be held simultaneously as a way of considering the unique position of children” (p. 285). I agreed with her framing of competence and vulnerability and found it to be salient for the current inquiry. While I believe that children are fully competent constructors of their own “webs of significance” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5), it is also necessary to acknowledge, as Lahman reminded us, that children inhabit a primarily inferior position in relation to adults—literally, in both physical size and age, as well as in power, status, legal rights, etc.

The combination of children's unique developmental and social positioning required deliberate attempts to reduce the power dynamic between myself as the researcher and the child participants throughout the entirety of the research process. I affirmed the competence

of the student participants (Danby, Ewing, & Thorpe, 2011) by inquiring about and respecting students' cultural norms, giving them the choice of how and where to express themselves, asking clarifying questions at key intervals to solicit opportunities to both confirm and dispute interpretations of their experience, provided opportunities for self-reflection during interviewing (Simpson & Quigley, 2016), and represented students using their own language (Eder & Fingerson, 2011).

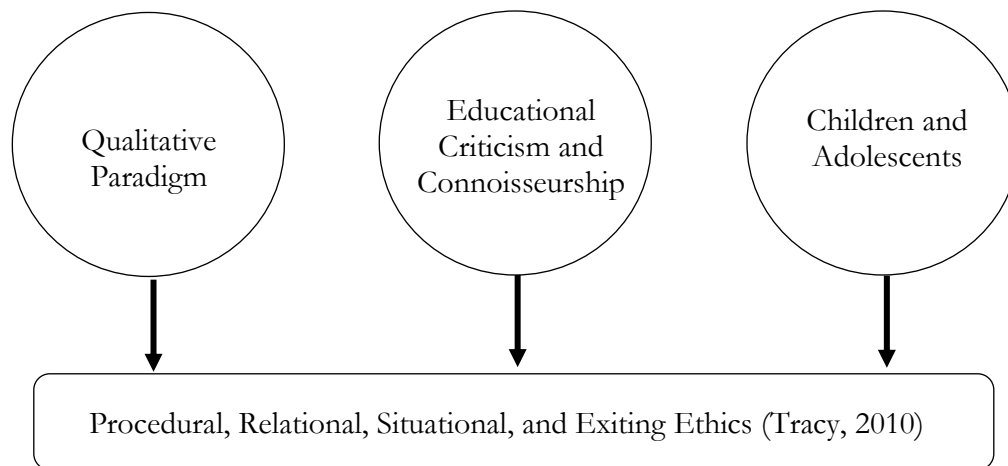


Figure 3
Three Lenses of Ethical Practice Applied in This Inquiry

Credibility

Eisner eschews the term “validity” in favor of “credibility” as it manifests within three areas: structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy (Eisner, 2017, p. 110). First, in structural corroboration, multiple lines of data are examined for their repeated occurrences and overall contribution to the whole. It is as if one were painting a carefully designed picture, with each attendant piece integrating with and informing the overall composition. Consensual validation refers to readers’ perceptions of and prior

knowledge about an educational situation and whether what the educational critic is presenting is indeed trustworthy. In the case of the current study, this would include teachers, administrators, and others interested in the educational enterprise, and more specifically in the implications of aesthetically informed classroom experiences for both teachers and students. Finally, referential adequacy is secured through “the expansion of perception and the enlargement of understanding” (Eisner, p. 113). In this regard, an educational critic must hone complexity and broaden nuance.

One concern of rendering an educational criticism implicates the presence of disconfirming evidence—what role will these types of data play, and to what degree? What is to be done about structural *contradictions* in lieu of corroborations? According to Eisner, these questions are fundamentally a concern of ethics:

...it is both prudent and important to consider those alternative interpretations and appraisals that one considers reasonably credible. There is no measure for determining such credibility; it too is a matter of judgment. The issue is one of fairness, of considering reasonable alternative interpretations. It does not mean relinquishing one’s own view. (Eisner, 2017, p. 111)

I acknowledge this dual deliberation of maintaining my unique perceptions as a connoisseur while allowing space for contradictory evidence. I actively considered alternative interpretations in both the data appraisal and representation phases of my inquiry through frequent reflection throughout the appraisal process (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). These complexities, contradictions, and aporias are presented at the conclusion of Chapter Four and are intended to represent what remains unreconciled.

Trustworthiness. I approached the concept of trustworthiness through a variety of ways. First, I conducted my inquiry with methodological integrity, adhering to the dimensions of description, interpretation, thematics, and evaluation. Second, I generated three overlapping

lines of data—observations, interviews, and artifacts—and thoughtfully considered how each informs the other. Finally, I incorporated peer de-briefers from within and outside my community of practice who acted as “friendly critical informants” (Fine, 1994) to raise questions about my descriptions and interpretations.

Significance and Limitations of the Inquiry

An exploratory inquiry into student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences is significant for several reasons. First, enlarging conceptions regarding such learning experiences may help to illuminate new understandings and possible contributions to the scholarly literature and research regarding teaching and learning. Second, this study is unique in that it attends to both the forms and quality of students’ aesthetic learning experiences and how they are manifested through the intentions and conditions created by their teacher. Finally, this research may serve to influence or even improve the pedagogical practices of educators seeking to explore meaningful aspects of their own creative teaching process, including promoting student engagement and meaning making through an aesthetically based framework of enacting curriculum.

Despite the potential contributions of the research there are limitations worth noting. First, this study examines the experiences of one teacher and her students. As each classroom is qualitatively imbued with both similarity and distinction, it would be of tremendous value to understand aesthetic learning experiences as they function within diverse ecologies. Further research would benefit from the inclusion of diverse teacher and student participants (e.g., racially, ethnically, and neuro diverse populations) to homage the

diverse and tentative space that lies between exploring and appraising aesthetic learning experiences.

Second, the temporality of this inquiry naturally precluded me from illuminating any of the more enduring, yet equally significant, implications of aesthetic learning experiences. As Tom Barone (2001) noted in *Touching Eternity: The Enduring Outcomes of Teaching*, “Is it a mere cliché to suggest that a teacher who is responsible for the continued growth of even one ex-student has succeeded immeasurably? Or that, in such a fashion, a teacher has truly touched eternity?” (p. 148). I believe that an understanding of continued *aesthetic* growth can be included here; the questions amplified by Barone are ones I believe to be worth examining.

Third, the focus of my study resided within classroom-based experiences. This contextual limitation precluded me from shedding light on aesthetic learning experiences that occur *outside* of the classroom, perhaps within a school garden or after-school setting. I justify my research within classrooms largely as a connoisseur of such a context, but also due to the more practical concerns of data generation and appraisal. These are indeed unfortunate limitations and ones I hope to address in future research.

Fourth, this inquiry must consider threats to reliability and credibility. The possibility of researcher bias is present in any study and must be considered as a limitation to my inquiry. I have an interest in the aesthetic themes, as well as a prior working relationship with several researchers in the field. The interpretation and appraisal of the data was undoubtedly influenced by my years of experience as a teacher and by my identities and experiences as a cisgender, White, middle-class female. The term researcher subjectivity, however, connotes a more nuanced reading of researcher bias. It is important to note that within the method of

educational connoisseurship and criticism, subjectivity is actually considered a virtue rather than a limitation. This is addressed in greater detail in the section on researcher positionality below. Second, the teacher participant recruited for this study also had an interest in the aesthetic themes, as well as prior aesthetically oriented teaching experiences. It is possible that she felt pressure to convey positive rather than negative perceptions of the aesthetic themes and aesthetic learning experiences in general. Likewise, and despite by best efforts, students may have felt obligated to participate in the study and give similarly positive responses to their learning experiences based on the teacher's and my position of power.

Researcher Positionality

Peshkin (2000) observed that acts of personal interpretation spark the very genesis of the research process, continuing to kindle and spread, ultimately saturating data appraisals with self. Asserting that mere acknowledgments of researcher orientations are insufficient, Peshkin advocated for a formal, intentional exploration of subjectivity—which he defines as a “garment that cannot be removed”—in order to “disclose to readers where self and subject become joined” (1988, p. 17). Eisner (2017) agreed: “As one’s ability to take different perspectives grows, what is considered relevant shifts. The data one seeks change. The interpretation that is appropriate alters” (p. 49).

Other scholars such as Barone (1992) have questioned researchers’ resolute adherence to the language of subjectivity, arguing that “following the failure of the objectivists to maintain the viability of their epistemology, the concept of subjectivity has been likewise drained of its usefulness and no longer has any meaning. Subjectivity, I feel obliged to report, is also dead” (p. 25). Barone supported his line of thinking by suggesting

that subjectivity necessarily is joined with objectivity and thus cannot be sustained alone. Therefore, once one half of the binary dies, Barone argued, the other dies with it, invoking Saussure's semiotics to support his claim. He further critiqued Peshkin's ideas discussed above as insufficient for the postmodern world, noting that "if *all* knowledge is mind dependent and/or culturally contextual, the *no* text is *not* subjective" (p. 29).

Cahnmann-Taylor (2018) likewise acknowledged the expansive influence of the postmodern orientation while taking a more moderate position than that of Barone in her discussion of subjectivity as being intimately tied to responsibilities to the community. The first of four guiding principles for arts-based research practice, subjectivity and the public good, offers a frame of reference in answer to Peshkin's (1988) warning that "untamed subjectivity mutes the emic voice" (Cahnmann-Taylor, p. 21). She implored researchers to consider how our multiple truths and interpretations might advance the public good, that is, "luring oneself and others into seeing self-other connections that expand multiplicity and complexity" (Cahnmann-Taylor, p. 248).

While I grasp Barone's convincing logic and ensuing argument, I feel (as a less epistemologically advanced novice researcher) that his position is ultimately ineffective for my research because educational criticism and connoisseurship obligates an awareness of subjectivity. Instead, I chose to follow the advice of Peshkin to actively seek out and name my subjective I's because I presently cannot uncouple and abandon subjectivity as a germane term to inquiry as Barone seems to have already done. I will also seek a defensible answer to Cahnmann-Taylor's relevant question concerning subjectivity and the public good: "What does this story—one's own and/or that told on behalf of others' lived experiences—add to commitments to expand perceptions of what *is* in order to explore what *might be*?" (2018, p.

249). These answers are addressed in Chapter Five. What follows is an initial investigation toward actively seeking my subjectivity along with an acute awareness that parts of my subjective self cannot be predetermined and therefore remained dormant until contextually activated by the research process. When my subjectivity *did* become kindled into awareness, I made a record of it in my research journal as close to the moment as I could for later reflection.

My first subjective I is extremely present to me and arises from my years of experience as a classroom teacher, and to a lesser extent, my work as a clinical field supervisor and adjunct professor in Utah and here at the University of Denver. This teacher-focused lens allows me to perceive and anticipate the nuances of pedagogical moves with a reasonable degree of clarity. I feel comfortable in the classroom and enjoy watching teachers teach. It will be difficult for me obscure this lens; in a study I co-conducted last Fall focusing on both teacher and student outcomes of aesthetic learning experiences (see Chapter One), I noted in my reflective memos how at various times I was “caught up” in the fantastic teaching I was witnessing and neglected to attend to how students were responding to their educational experiences. Fortunately, my co-researcher was in the classroom observing at the same time and we were able to divide our data generation efforts, supplementing where one of us was lacking. This teacher-centered lens also precludes me from noticing other contextual factors that may influence student outcomes beyond the control of the teacher such as larger structural, political, and cultural influences that affect learning within the classroom. This is a concern given that 1) the purpose of my dissertation study is to explore student expressions, and 2) I will be gathering data alone. Obscuring this lens will of course

be impossible for me to do, however, I actively sought the input of critical readers who provided context for larger structures at work.

My second subjective I is more subtle and reflects my belief in the transformative power of education. I believe that each child has the right to be seen and heard for who they uniquely are, and that education can and should be an empowering experience for each student individually as well as for groups of students collectively. In my own experience as a student, I was fortunate to have the caring support of many teachers who encouraged me and allowed me to make mistakes and learn from them in the process of growing into my potential. At the same time, I remember being sensitive toward differences between myself and my peers. I remember feeling flushed with anger when witnessing the bullying and teasing of students based on their physical appearance and their abilities, and I recall the acute feelings of empathy I had toward students who were living in poverty. This particular lens may preclude me from seeing systemic hegemony, racism, sexism, and other limiting structures within the classroom that may obscure some students from transformational educational experiences. In order to address this subjectivity, as well as to encourage reflexivity, I kept a researcher journal (Janesick, 1999) in the same vein as Lahman (2008), who noted her biases toward the “Joeys” of the classroom, or certain students who may present as archetypes for our othering. Reflecting on my assumptions and biases toward specific students from my past educational landscape was both helpful and, perhaps in some small way, palliative. I appreciated the care and sincerity with which Lahman approached her own “othering” of Joey and I hope to follow her example in future inquiries that explore student experience.

Representing the Educational Criticism

As an educational critic, I endeavored to write joyfully and ekphrastically with an eye toward a coherent and concise *representing* (Eisner, 2002, 2017; Langer, 1953; Leavy, 2015) of the significance and complexity of student expression of aesthetic experiences. Criticism is not simply a translation of what was observed, as Eisner notes, but a rendering of perception:

...every act of criticism is a reconstruction. The reconstruction takes the form of an argued narrative, supported by evidence that is never incontestable; there will *always* be alternative interpretations.... even qualities described in any critical account are not necessarily either all that could have been described or those that other critics might have described. In short, selection is always at work in both the perception and the critical portrayal of what has been seen. (p. 86)

It is this consummation of perception with response that both reveals and propels toward something new: new perceptions, new questions, new entanglements, new possibilities. As such, one of the penultimate goals for this inquiry was to represent my criticism and its focal points as one interpretation among many possibilities while seeking to simultaneously move outside of my research and provide a defensible answer to the “so what?” question.

Crafting an educational criticism requires a “warmly critical” stance (Uhrmacher, 1991b) open to more the subtle and mutable aspects of the research process. I cultivated this orientation by narrating three focal points derived from my findings that created apertures through which student expressions of aesthetic learning expressions were materialized. Next, I curated four anticipatory frameworks (Uhrmacher et al., 2017) with an eye toward selecting and revealing multiple lines of meaning that “raise fresh questions” instead of timeworn answers (Eisner, 2013, p. 13). These forms of connoisseurship served two primary functions: 1) to allow for deepened perception of the uniqueness and subtlety of contextual themes, and 2) to provide a means for selecting and connecting inferences from the contextual

sample of my data that can then be imagined to other teaching and learning contexts by those interested in improving education.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The findings from this empirical inquiry explore student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. Aesthetic learning experiences are grounded in qualities influenced by the arts: perceptive, sensorial, imaginative, and creative. Represented directly from data generated via observations, interviews, and artifacts, the findings are organized into focal points that materialize student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences through the following three themes: *rhythm and ritual (music)*, *connected geographies (place)*, and *imbricated forming (composition)*. Chapter Four begins with a narrative that situates the community of Alpine and its deeply treasured eponymous school. Although the findings appropriately begin in Ms. Ethel's K-2 classroom, the primary site of this inquiry, these data significantly detach from the classroom space to meander and inhabit other spaces and places meaningful for the student participants: the art room, The Forest, and the natural geography surrounding the school. I conclude Chapter Four by describing the inquiry's critical moments and providing a selection of plates complementary to the focal points to invite further meaning.

The overall purpose of my study is exploratory in nature and therefore the aim of my educational criticism is to suggest vibrant possibilities rather than stagnant conclusions. Thus, the findings of this inquiry suggest the following:

RQ 1: What are student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences?

Student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences consisted of personally felt and publicly communicated symbolic forms that illuminated how students perceived, engaged with, and made sense of their world. Aesthetic learning experiences functioned as a medium for student expressions and engendered themes of active engagement, imagination, dialogue, visual and aural perceptivity through embodied and engaged sensory experience, personal and social connections, and interactions with the natural world. Student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences materialized through three focal points in particular: rhythm and ritual (music), connected geographies (place), and imbricated forming (composition).

In response to this inquiry's finding of place alluded to in the preceding paragraph, I suggest that place was unintentionally yet problematically sublimated in my original research question. To attempt a move toward amelioration of this deficiency, I propose a revision that includes *where* are student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. For the students of this inquiry, student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences were untethered from the classroom and inhabited other meaningful spaces and places, including the art room, The Forest, and the natural environment of the school context.

RQ 2: What are the teacher's intentions in creating conditions for aesthetic learning experiences?

Ms. Ethel's overarching pedagogical intention was to cultivate an intrinsic love of learning within a physically and psychically safe environment for her students that was informed by her larger ethos of caring. She also desired for her students to become comfortable taking risks, to persist in "making a good thing," and to love and appreciate the earth.

RQ 3: How are these intentions enacted in the classroom?

Ms. Ethel's intentions for aesthetic learning experiences unfolded within the classroom through three primary ways: 1) through her complementary curriculum of ecological care, which centered both the living other (her students) and the natural world, 2) by instituting specific pedagogical practices that provided conditions for aesthetic learning experiences that centered the aesthetic themes, and 3) using concepts from the sciences and social studies as a genesis for aesthetic learning experiences.

RQ 4: How do students respond to aesthetic learning experiences—that is, what do students say, do, and create?

Students responded to aesthetic learning experiences through a variety of personally felt and publicly communicated expressions. They engaged in dialogue with peers, found joy and social connection through imaginative play in *The Forest*, learned to form things well to create a map of the continents, improvised rhythms on the drums, attended to their inner landscapes by listening carefully to the bell, made connections with aesthetic features of their local landscape, learned aural discrimination by singing with the mbira, applied technical skill in imagining and sculpting clay vessels, and much more.

Welcome to Alpine

Summer visitors to the mountain town of Alpine³ know immediately when they have arrived. Several carved stone statues crafted by local artisans, a cheerful gift shop on the left, and an art museum on the right greet travelers from many origins. Discarded roadside monoliths function as sentries of stone that recall the town's prosperous mining days long

³ All names, including those of students, are pseudonyms. Key landmarks have been altered slightly for confidentiality while still preserving their original character.

ago. Golden asters form a flower blanket alongside the only paved road in town. Most visitors arrive driving jeeps and pickups while more adventure-seeking return guests tow open-bed trailers with off-road vehicles for exploring the rough terrain. There are no stoplights in Alpine, no sidewalks, no curb and gutter. A copy of a hand-drawn map of the town can be easily acquired at the coffee shop and features colorful pictures drawn by the town's children reminding visitors of wilderness etiquette and the importance of respecting "Alpine's Manners": *keep quiet (a little sound goes a long way), isolated areas may look uninhabited, but it may be someone's yard (don't be that guy!), Alpine is cell-phone free (the nearest emergency services are over an hour away by car), hydrate excessively (you are at high altitude), and use a topo map (it's all uphill from here).*

A small, century-old church that has been well-cared for over the years has served the spiritual needs of several Christian faiths. Its mocha wooden steps foreground a gleaming white exterior framed by an apt forest green trim. A diamond stained-glass window serves as the town eye, scrutinizing all who enter with careful fastidiousness. In contrast with the tidy prominence of the church where "all are welcome," the more casual summer visitor may neglect to notice an alternative aesthetic: a squat yellow DEAD END sign, tucked discreetly under a towering sub-Alpine fir. Freshly liberated from the constraints of snow, it proudly reveals a constellation of Grateful Dead stickers from major tours—colorful Jerry Bears, Steelies, Bertha, the Terrapin Station turtles, San Francisco, Philadelphia, New York.

Further on up the road about 50 yards or so, visitors from many miles—road-weary motorcyclists, hardened backpackers, wealthy suburbanites—are lured to the only restaurant in town. Staffed by five local teenagers wearing Santa Cruz trucker hats, the heady scent of smoking meat engulfs Beanie's BBQ, kindling the presence of local dogs—all of whom

curiously seem to be named Brisket. A roughly carved wooden box with a small gold lock next to the outdoor cash register solicits visitors for donations to the town school. Two enormous, commercial-grade meat smokers radiate heat in all directions, their tall chimneys protruding from black bellies stuffed to the brim with pulled pork, tray-sized slabs of brisket, franks, salmon, and brats. An adjacent 8-foot-tall alabaster sculpture cradles two dusty children within its C-shaped curve licking continuously melting mint chocolate chip ice cream cones. The buzzing and squeaking of two red-throated hummingbirds zipping and dipping into lush baskets of fireball red geraniums can be heard amongst the pleasant chatter of families and friends enjoying their lunch outdoors on one of several wooden picnic tables.

Just around the corner from Beanie's BBQ, past the local lodge where guests can borrow a quintessential red canoe, summer visitors to Alpine enjoy a warm afternoon on Moose Lake. A family of seven embodies the picture of summertime joy as they compete chest-deep in a game of water volleyball; on shore, an older couple admires the view of the majestic peaks surrounding the lake with binoculars. A mother, camouflaged behind an enormous red sunhat, is reading a paperback from her equally red folding chair as her two teenage daughters wobble a standup paddleboard across the lake. Although decent fishing is possible here, a florescent green algae bloom is beginning to spread in some parts, blocking the light and starving the fish. Contingent on the hatching, anglers will find greater success on the nearby river with either a caddis or rainbow warrior fly, which gets stocked every spring and offers some of the most scenic trout fishing around.

Up on the ridgelines of the towering peaks that embrace the valley on nearly every side, tourists with greater than average stamina test their legs and lungs against one of the dozens of high-altitude hiking trails. *If you take Raspberry Trail, be sure to come down on the first*

washout, not the second—that will take you another 8 miles towards McClary Pass, cautions Jeff, a local handyman and volunteer firefighter for the town. *Run-off is good this year*, Clay, the town's mountain guide, tells me. *But you have to turn around at the road to Levinson Pass*. Earlier in the spring, an avalanche has rendered the already treacherous road completely impassable—the forest service has yet to clear it.

Dolomite Creek neatly bisects the town from north to south, flowing into the Blackfoot River to the west and Moose Lake to the east (Plate 15, 16). The shallow creek stretches over twenty feet wide, dancing vigorously in the resplendent summer sun. After lunch at Beanie's, a group of children discard their dirty sandals and wobble barefoot across the bubbling creek bed. One girl bends over tucked-up knees, improvising a shallow dam with sticks and smooth stones. Groups of deer, and rarely, moose or elk, can be spotted in the evening hours at the creek, enjoying a cold drink.

Alpine calls to mind a sense of rugged independence, and perhaps the feelings of beautiful escapism that bathe the town is part of what attracts people here—locals and visitors alike. The kind of tucked-away place you dare not share with acquaintances, beckoning you to imagine life as it should be and not as it were...

However, I am not a summer visitor.

Driving at night into Alpine in January, the snow-packed road to town is illuminated only by the glow from a waning gibbous moon and the headlights from my car. Here, alone in the forest and smothered by evening's heavy blackness, I am acutely aware of the remoteness of the area, including the NO SERVICE warning that glows on the screen of my cell phone. A familiar path unfolds, yet the same stone faces, once detailed with clearly defined eyes, nose, and mouth in the summer, now emerge from obfuscation of inky

blackness—a curve here, a ghostly angle there—as if cut from huge drifts of snow, not several tons of rock. The road follows the river, curling icily toward the church, its 10 front steps now rendered invisible. The once watchful diamond eye of the church now slumbers, contented with the weight of winter and the peaceful knowledge that noisy and nosy visitors must wait until summer.

The two oblong meat smokers in front of Beanie's BBQ—officially closed for the season nearly three months ago—repose like black submarines in an ocean of snow. Only the very tip tops of their hulls breach the surface. Tall chimneys now reveal short frozen periscopes, anonymously surveying a seemingly empty landscape devoid of any people. I continue walking away from the lodge where I remain the sole guest. The red canoe has long since been buried under several feet of snow. *Preserve Our Trees, No Flyers Please* admonishes a faded green sticker affixed to the front a frosty metal mailbox, one in a grouping of eight. Moose Lake hovers frozen still, suspended in a lavender-grey expanse of snow ringed with towering Ponderosa pines. With only the sound of the wary magpie announcing my travels and my boots crunching atop the snow, I make my way toward the center of town, pausing at Dolomite Creek bridge.

The creek now languishes with syrupy torpidity. Like a child who has just drug her finger through the fluffy white frosting of a cake, the snow atop the creek slathers about in long soft waves. I inhale the piercing air, feeling it travel first to deep within my belly and then jolting upward through my sinuses. A trace of the sweet smell of gasoline lingers and the low rumble of snowmobiles in the distance signal that arrivals have begun—it is nearly time. After pausing a few more moments, I turn to my right and face the hill. The school lies just out of view, but I know it is there—the cathedra of the town (Plate 17). The place about

which parents, whose children have long since grown and moved away, can remark with a contented sigh, *the best gift we ever gave 'em*. Twin flashes of red lights travel steadily upward, dispersing the periwinkle dim as a small yellow school bus makes its way to the top of the hill where forty-two students slowly make their way inside.

Ms. Ethel's K-2 Classroom: A Place of Care and Juxtaposition

There are big trees in a forest at our school captions a first-grade student's watercolor painting hung on the wall. His sentiment captures the current scene perfectly: I am sitting in a classroom at a school in the middle of a forest. A prominent visual rhythm saturates Ms. Ethel's multiage K-2 classroom: vibrant teals and greens animate the beat, musical instruments of all genres scatter about, setting both the literal and metaphorical tempo, and groupings of eclectic handmade items, both by teacher and by student, provide the meter, dividing and organizing space. Clearly, this is a classroom of life and sound and pattern. The wood floor is original to the building and nearly 110 years old, its pine planks bearing the deep scratches, divots, and color variations of heavy use by many students across time. If you stand near the center of the room and listen carefully, it is not difficult to hear echoes of children's footsteps and conversations from very long ago floating in and up and through its constant creaks and groans. This is a classroom that is never empty.

A sense of care for the living ribbons its way gracefully through this 40-foot long by 30-foot wide space. One of the more striking features of this classroom is the amount of living plants—seventeen exactly:

three potted ones on the piano top,

four tall one with mauve-green leaves under the windows,

two in the reading corner,

four on the desk (including two succulents),
one on the Peace Table,
two on bookshelves,
and one aloe plant on the round table near the wall.

A sense of juxtaposition, of glorious contradiction and contrast, can be felt within this classroom after only a few days. This energy, although more subliminal, nevertheless rolls in distinct waves: old and new, past and future—both sit side by side, contented and unfrenetic. The children newest to formal schooling attend the old building while the older children attend the new. Clouded glass jars of dead insect specimens intermingle with children’s brightly colored sketches of native animals. Cups of lush grapes and a few errant raspberries await consumption next to locked shadow boxes of faded dried plants. A black and white photograph of students from the 1910 school year sitting on the very same wooden steps not 10 feet away (captioned “What YOU looked like 100 years ago”) is stapled to a bulletin board adjacent to town newspaper clippings featuring student columns from current year. Curiously, and perhaps not coincidentally, the teacher in the class photograph from 1910 bears much more than a just passing resemblance to Ms. Ethel (“What YOUR TEACHER looked like 100 years ago”). A formica tray displaying glittering minerals and labeled “Specimens From The Desert,” occupies a shelf near a glass door that offers expansive views of a cold, snow-blanketed forest and mountains.

Growing Up in Ms. Ethel’s Classroom

On this particular morning, a soft child-sized grey couch with two square pillows and a navy fleece blanket doubles as a comfortable bed for Hudson, whose family welcomed a new baby sister to their home three days ago. Neither Ms. Ethel, the lead teacher, nor Ms. Leigh and

Ms. Tia, the assistant teachers, nor even his classmates, disturb Hudson as he sleeps peacefully through the entire morning's learning, blanket tucked under his chin, bare toes protruding, oblivious to all. (Excerpted from field notes, January 22)

Care for the living also extends to the classroom's primary occupants—between fourteen and nineteen K-2 students, depending on the day. A contingent of five regularly homeschooled children is under a special arrangement with the school to attend Ms. Ethel's class a couple of days during the week. A relatively even mix of both boys and girls attend Ms. Ethel's K-2 each day, with girls numbering slightly more. When students arrive for the school day (some by bus and others by foot, four-wheeler, or snowmobile), they first enter a spacious foyer area lined on three sides with wooden cubbies for clothing and shoes. Each cubby displays the student's artwork and a self-scribed name tag hangs above their corresponding individual and private space.

From the foyer, students enter their classroom through a teal blue wooden door that closes only in the summertime during tourist season. *Their* classroom is inviting, developmentally appropriate, and spacious. Rows of long icicles firmly attached to the roof line filter natural light that softly illuminates the room through the many rectangular windows. As in many early childhood classrooms, children will find the usual base ten blocks in the math corner, a large rug for circle time in the center of the room, a long whiteboard attached to the wall, a stack of student journals in the writing center, low bookshelves filled with all kinds of books in the reading corner, a high frequency "Word Wall", several kid-sized tables and chairs, and coffee cans filled with pencils and colored pencils. Small metal tins hold erasers.

What children will *not* find, however, are nametags on tables, markers, Chromebooks/iPads (the school maintains a strict policy of no electronics/cell phones), or anything branded with Crayola. It is indeed rare to enter an early childhood classroom devoid of this ubiquitous name. Instead, students encounter communal tables and supplies, Lyra Farb-Riesen colored pencils, teacher-created curriculum accompanied by everyday, found pedagogical materials, reusable worksheets, cloth workmats for mathematical reasoning, and *The People Who Hugged the Trees*. *Their* classroom is not commodified by Pearson, Saxon, or Mc-Graw Hill but by *Growing Up WILD*—a curriculum designed to “build on children’s sense of wonder about nature and invite them to explore wildlife and the world around them” (Council for Environmental Education, 2012). There is no commercially produced reference poster on the wall cheerfully outlining the five parts of a friendly letter but there is a large, matted poster of Thoreau’s quote: *The world is but a canvas to our imagination*.

Students understand that this is *their* space, and *their* presence is not only seen and heard but also felt. In some classrooms (sadly, even some schools), the *feeling* of children is diminished—a sense of occupation rather than inhabitation prevails. This is not the case in Ms. Ethel’s classroom. Tiny hidden insects created from metallic chenille pipe cleaners peek through the leaves of the classroom’s many living plants and several student paintings are proudly displayed and hung in glass frames throughout the room. When disagreements arise, students understand that any issues will be talked through at The Peace Table without shame, shame, or exclusion from the group. Students know their peers well and see each other frequently outside of school. They have been gathered in this room, *their* room, growing up together, for nearly three years already—an eternity in the life of a child.

Ms. Ethel's Intentions In Creating Conditions for Aesthetic Learning Experiences

For Ms. Ethel, teaching toward aesthetic learning begins with envisaging the early childhood classroom as a place where students feel a sense of security and an intrinsic desire for learning can develop and flourish:

You know, I really just want them to love to learn. That's really my goal—to feel safe in the classroom and to become somebody who wants to learn. It's not always having a teacher to teach you, but to want to learn yourself. Just the love of learning.

Feeling physically and psychically safe in a classroom environment that nurtures a love of learning can only be enacted within a moral educational environment (Dewey, 1909; Greene, 1978) that fosters and sustains care by centering the living other (Noddings, 2005). Ms. Ethel's larger pedagogical intentions of care through centering her students also reveal a second premise that centers the broader living world of which her students are a part:

I try to teach them to appreciate and love nature and the earth, rather than, 'oh my gosh, climate change, and it's so scary!' I think first you need to love something before you can want to protect it or want to take care of it.

Ms. Ethel's intentions toward cultivating care for aesthetic appreciation of the natural world echo Leopold's (1949) admonition that "we can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in" (p. 214). Conservationist Rachel Carson wrote in *The Sense of Wonder*:

A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unailing antidote against the boredom and

disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength. (1956, p. 42)

Viewed holistically, Ms. Ethel's intentions comprise a complementary curriculum of ecological care. Moroye (2009) defined the complementary curriculum as the "manifestation of a teacher's wholeness or completeness of his or her integrity" (p. 805) representing "the kind of experiences teachers provide for students, as well as in the pedagogical premises and practices that result from the teacher's beliefs" (p. 791). Ecological care refers to "the system of caring relationships at work in a classroom, which stem from and promote an ethic of care encompassing three central areas: care for self, care for others near and far (human and nonhuman), and care for plants, animals, and the earth (Moroye & Ingman, 2013, p. 599).

Ms. Ethel's integrity to her complementary curriculum of ecological care enables the experiences students encounter in her classroom to unfold with authenticity. Over the course of my visit, students were actively engaged in making eco-bricks for a gardening project. This process involved stuffing as much non-recyclable plastic as possible into collected plastic water bottles to give the bottle strength similar to that of a brick. With tremendous excitement reflecting in her voice and body, first-grade student Melony explained to me that in the spring, they will stack the eco-bricks end-to-end in long rectangular rows to create a perimeter for their school vegetable garden. Care for classroom materials also figures prominently in Ms. Ethel's classroom—I once observed Ms. Ethel promptly retrieve a bent paper clip that a student had thrown in the trash. After admonishing the student for wasting, she molded the paper clip back to its original form and then placed it on her desk for later use. Ethel also delights in sharing stories of her collections with the children, like bottlecaps she finds on the ground at baseball games, and how she feels she is helping the Earth by engaging in this practice. Her ethic of caring

reflects the larger aims of the school and, in turn, is recognized and felt as an affective force by Alpine's students. When I asked a group of 8th-grade students what they thought is the most important thing for visitors to know about the school they all unanimously agreed:

Alpine is really caring—like a small family.

Ms. Ethel's Understanding of the Aesthetic Themes of Education

Ethel's deeply held pedagogical beliefs and intentions influence her conceptualization and understandings of the aesthetic themes of education (CRISPA) and their function:

What I understand CRISPA to be is just using all different types of arts and education.

Visual arts, drama, movement, singing, just using all the different types of senses and allowing students to feel safe so that they can take risks as well. Just a rich, engaging education

that allows all learners to be a part and comfortable in the classroom. Using the arts and learning is so important because I think that it's a way that kids can express themselves.

And I think that if they start early with whatever it is, whether it be singing, or painting, or acting, or you know, dancing, I think it's good for them to start early, knowing that everybody

does everything differently and so they don't have to do it a specific way. I think as they get older, and if they are thrown into it, they become more uncomfortable with it and not sure of

themselves. So I think when we can give them the safe space to be creative and express

themselves through these different ways, then it makes them feel more competent in general as

a person.

When I asked about the significance of the aesthetic themes to her practice, she referenced two themes in particular as starting points—connections and risk taking—while emphasizing an overall integrated perspective:

Connection is such an important part of learning. You need to have some sort of connection in order grow—in all different aspects of life really. And risk taking, too. I don't feel like I do a lot of risk taking in my class; I feel like what I'm doing is I'm trying to prepare them for risk taking in the future. Because I think that at this age to become competent allows you to take more risks as you get older. And I think that's really important for an individual's education and for society, for a people, to be able to take risks in things they believe in and to go for it and not to be scared about that. So I don't think there's one [aesthetic theme] or the other that's more important—I see them holistically.

Ms. Ethel's conjoining of the aesthetic themes with growth aligns with Dewey's (1938) conceptualization of growth as the "exemplification of the principle of continuity" which provides one criterion (the other being interaction) for the value of educative experience within everyday life—in this case, the K-2 classroom. For Ms. Ethel's students, the value of such experience affectively resides in their engaged anticipation, motivation, and satisfaction. When I asked how her students respond to aesthetic learning experiences, she said:

They're excited—they can't wait. They asked me, you know, when they come in, 'oh, when are we going to do this? Are we going to work on our maps today? Are we going to work on this today?' And then once we're in the classroom, I feel like you can see it sometimes and it does seem like it's chaotic when it's happening, but the kids are all engaged, and they're talking to each other about what they're doing. I mean, they're having fun while they're learning and you can just see it. I mean, it never happens really when I'm the one talking in front of them, right? It's when they're actively engaged in what they're doing.

Rather than specific outcomes or standards, Ms. Ethel's lesson planning process for aesthetic learning begins with project-based *ideas* from the social studies and the sciences which she finds more accessible for the senses:

Usually, I start with an idea. So as an example, as we did continents. So I started with, okay, I want to teach about the continents here, and I want to teach about every continent. And so then for each continent I set aside a certain amount of time, and then I decided on a final project for each continent. So for Asia, we ended up concentrating on Japan, and we did a scroll. And then on the scroll there was a map of Japan, there was some Kanji writing, there was the flag. We wrote a haiku poem. So they had this final product that they could take home and that probably took us, you know, four to six weeks. And then with Australia, we studied the adaptation of the animals, and in Europe we made castles. So it's really based around science and social studies. I also try to incorporate movement or some sort of hands-on visual arts.

A Student's Typical Day

The temporal rhythm of the school day created by Ms. Ethel's intentions of care and her complementary ecological caring curriculum finds students moving through the school day at a rather unhurried pace. This reality is primarily enabled through the dimensions of structure, pedagogy, and curriculum: learning time is organized into general, rather than discrete blocks of time, Ms. Ethel's teaching is relaxed in both disposition and pace, and the curriculum seems to acquiesce to the needs of children rather than the children to the needs of the curriculum. Students begin a typical morning by storing their snow clothing in the foyer, donning inside shoes, and then gathering in a circle on the map rug for "rise and shine," a time for formal greeting and connection through discussion and song. Music is an

ingrained part of the K-2 school day; students are fortunate to have a teacher who both appreciates music and has a high level of musical skill. Ms. Ethel incorporates a variety of instruments in the classroom for student use during the day (Plates 5-9) and they also attend a formal music class located in the music room downstairs. On Friday mornings, the entire school—approximately forty students and seven staff members—attend an All-School Meeting, or ASM, in the cafeteria. Chairs are pushed together in a semi-circle and discussion is held regarding matters of concern for the entire student body. During one ASM I attended, the grade 6-8 teacher, Ms. Carole, gave a presentation to the school introducing students and staff to the upcoming school musical, *Really Rosie*. She played selections from the score and discussed which students may want to try out for specific roles. At another ASM, the principal led the staff and student body on an impromptu walk and talk outside through town because of her “concern” for the “tension” she felt from students as they arrived at school that particular morning. “All of us are like one big family,” she explained as we crunched through the snow.

After the ASM, students return to their classrooms in either the new building for grade 3-8 students or the old building for grade K-2 students. For K-2 students, math, writing, and language arts are taught in the morning and the entire school convenes in the cafeteria for lunch. After lunch, students go outside to play on either the playground (which remains half-buried by snow) or in The Forest. A list posted by the cafeteria door displays which students are and are not required by their parents to wear a helmet when sledding. Recess is confined not by a fence but by natural landmarks—*see that big tree over there?* Maddie points. *We can't go past that.* After approximately 30 minutes of outside time, students are called by their teachers back to their classroom by either a handheld bell or by voice. Snow

clothing is removed and the afternoon commences with Spanish, social studies, and science. The Spanish teacher, Ms. Carmen, arrives with large posters of monsters with feeling words written in Spanish underneath and the entire lesson is sung in Spanish only. For science, Ms. Leigh has brought several different types of shells for the students to observe at the map rug. Students take turns holding the large peach and white conch shell to their ear and listen to the sounds of the ocean with great concentration. *Jodie, do you want a turn?* asks Stella, handing me the shell. I nod and press the shell over my ear. Ms. Tia tells the students about eating octopus and squid regularly as a child growing up in Korea, and a discussion ensues amongst the children about food from the sea. Later that afternoon, students engage in a painting project where they create sea creatures using only their hands. Ms. Leigh shows the students how to paint their hands and then press firmly onto the paper, her fingers are the fish tail and fins. Antonio, a second-grade boy, excitedly shows the other students how to make a puffer fish by painting his knuckles with brown paint and then pressing them repeatedly on the construction paper. He takes a colored pencil and draws small black points above each knuckle print. *Look—you can make the spikes!* he says. Science is followed by a lengthy block of time, 30 minutes, for mindful eating during snack, during which students and teachers eat and converse together quietly in the classroom. *We usually do mindful eating in the spring and fall at Dolomite Creek*, Ms. Leigh tells me. *We touch the food, we smell the food, and we taste the food. We want them to chew it slowly and pay attention to their eating.* Suddenly, an emergency arises and the three astonished teachers quickly circle up in tense conversation: one student has brought a snack loaded with artificial ingredients and sugar. *I can't believe he brought that to school!* says Ms. Tia, her face the picture of genuine astonishment. *It's the last thing he needs right now!* whispers Ms. Ethel through clenched teeth. *I'll talk to his mom.* After snack time has

passed, along with my shame of what I send my own kids to school with for snack, the school day ends in much the same the way it began—in the foyer with students retrieving their snow clothes. School is dismissed calmly at 3:00 p.m. each day and is marked by casual and friendly conversations between the teachers and parents taking place in the foyer.

I. Rhythm and Ritual



The Good Morning Song

It is 8:00 a.m. and time for “rise and shine” in Ms. Ethel’s classroom. Twelve children sit unusually still on the oval world map rug, neither rising nor shining, their eyelids heavy with sleep. The Forest, too, is slow to wake up this particular morning. The velvety softness of early morning light seeps between the icicles and through the classroom windows, battling against the harsh buzzing artificial light of the classroom, triumphantly dictating hushed tones among students and teachers and signaling a somewhat lethargic start to the school day. The classroom’s outside door reveals the transitory magpie perched on the brown wood railing, feathers fluffed up against the cold, its beady black eyes focused intently on the goings-on within the classroom, watching and waiting, watching and waiting.

Ms. Ethel, a teacher in this very room for nearly twenty years, sits cross-legged on the floor alongside her students, her hip-length curly black hair tied into a loose bun. Today she wears glasses, a calf-length black wool skirt, a black sweatshirt over a long-sleeved shirt, delicate silver earrings, and several intertwining silver and leather bracelets on both wrists.

She is neither short nor tall, has kind dark eyes, imbues the space around her with a peaceful energy, and speaks in a calm, measured way with elongated vowels and clear tones that makes me suspect she is a good singer. Ms. Ethel identifies as White but experiences tension between this identity and her Japanese heritage. The classroom teaching team also includes Ms. Tia, who is a middle-aged Korean woman, and one co-teacher, Ms. Leigh, who is the youngest of the three teachers and is a White female. While each teacher has a distinctive classroom management style—Ms. Tia is quite firm and direct with the students while Ms. Leigh is more easygoing and Ms. Ethel hovers somewhere in between—all three appear to have a harmonious pedagogical relationship and this synchronicity operationalizes as a give-and-take rhythm amongst the three teachers. Each has specific teaching responsibilities and each is respected by the students. However, when all three are circulating in the room together, Ms. Ethel is clearly the authority figure and executes the bulk of the teaching and decision-making.

Nestled within Ms. Ethel's lap and perched on its end is what appears to be a large black bowl ringed around the rim with shiny copper bottlecaps. Several children are engaged in quiet discussion regarding the morning's show-not-tell offerings when one conversation in particular rises with urgency above the rest. Casey, a tiny boy who uses hearing aids, rockets his hand upward, intent on negotiating his day for show and tell.

Yes, my love, murmurs Ms. Ethel with obvious affection.

I have show not tell today, but I don't really think I should do it today cause it's not my day, he says.

What's your day? Ms. Ethel inquires, raising her black eyebrows above the thin silver rim of her glasses.

My day? Uh... I don't know.

Monday! His day's Monday!—interrupt several children simultaneously.

I never—but I never brought it that day! he protests, his brown eyes wide with acute indignation.

Ok, just bring it tomorrow, ok? says Ms. Ethel gently.

His face relaxes and he nods, seemingly satisfied. The morning carries on. Show-not-tell represents a significant daily routine for the students. During this time, they make public their interests, cultural traditions, and cherished memories, revealing meanings and experiences significant to them. On each child's special day, the item is hidden, usually within a backpack or behind the back, and the other children must ask questions and make guesses about what the item is. These questions from child to child are often personal and highly relevant, reflecting the knowledge of children who spend meaningful time together inside and outside of the classroom. After several rounds of questioning, what is hidden is revealed and passed around the circle. Children handle each object with extreme care and continue to ask questions based on what they are now observing closely in the palm of their hand. Show-not-tell also illuminates one of Ms. Ethel's core values. In a letter to parents, she requests that show-not-tell items brought to school be either from nature or handmade by the child. With a slight alteration to a familiar routine beloved by many young students, Ms. Ethel fosters not only social connections among her students but also the ability to notice and perceive subtle qualities.

A faint melodic sound rises from the mbira in Ms. Ethel's lap and begins to texture the classroom air (Plates 1-3). The deliberate carefulness with which she transitions from discussion to song is exquisite. Without any verbal cues, relying only on dynamics, the

children naturally bring their discussions to a close. Students in this classroom are not told to stop talking and be quiet. Listening patiently to her students, honoring their voices, Ms. Ethel slowly plays several measures of a 4/4 introduction from *piano* to *mezzo forte* and then to *forte*. A focus spreads over the oval circle of children as each head and every pair of eyes turns toward Ms. Ethel, the building energy within the room propelling them in and forward.

1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4 Ms. Ethel begins to sing as the children join in.

Uno-dos-tres-quatro, uno-dos-tres-quatro, uno-dos-tres-quatro, uno-dos-tres-quatro.

Next, they sing in French—

Un-deux-trois-quatre, un-deux-trois-quatre, un-deux-trois-quatre, un-deux-trois-quatre.

Then, in Japanese—

一二三四 一二三四 一二三四 一二三四 (*ichi, ni, san, shi*)

Korean—

하나두세네 하나두세네 하나두세네 하나두세네 (*hana, du, se, ne*)

and finally, Mandarin—

一二三四 一二三四 一二三四 一二三四 (*yi, er, san, si*)

“Make sure you’re sitting up straight,” says Ms. Ethel pleasantly, sitting even straighter. “And if you can, put a smile on your face.”

Good morning dear Earth,

Good morning dear sun, the children sing, raising their arms above their heads to form a circle.

Good morning dear snow, their fingers wiggle down the ground.

And flowers every one, arms spread wide.

Good morning dear beasties, the children make a fist with one hand and gently stroke the top of it with the other hand, as if petting one of the many beasts of The Forest.

And all the birds in the trees.

Good morning to you and to me,

Good morning to you and me.

Good morning to you and me.

The Mbira

The specific aesthetic qualities of the instrument, the mbira, directly influenced the structure and form of expression for students. Though the unique sound of the mbira is elusive to unfamiliar ears, its materiality can be felt with familiar immediacy by all. In *The Soul of Mbira* (1978), ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner wrote:

The problem of describing Shona mbira music and illustrating the music with notation is a considerable one, for there is something unique about the quality and the effect of a live performance of mbira music that defies description. The mbira's sound has a special presence; one feels the music as much as one hears it. Its sound is penetrating and warm at the same time, immediately capturing the environment of the listeners and drawing them into its mood. When the keys of the mbira are struck, they ring on in the gourd resonator with rich and sonorous tones... There is, in fact, no satisfactory analogy for conveying its quality to one who has not heard mbira music performed. (p. 52)

A distinct type of lamellaphone, or “thumb piano,” the mbira⁴ descends from the Kalimba family of ancient African musical instruments from which there are 16 known variations (Tracey, 2013). Indigenous to the Shona people of Zimbabwe, the complex traditions of mbira music are passed down both by sound and by voice, from teacher to student, generation to generation. The majority of mbira consist of 24 or 28 keys often forged by hand and attached to a wooden board secured to the inside of a large, hollowed-

⁴ Mbira is known by other names, including *Mbira dzavadzimu*—Mbira of the ancestral spirits, *Mbria huru*—great Mbira, and *Shona Mbria*. For continuity, I will use the commonly referenced name of mbira.

out gourd (see Plates 1-3). Ms. Ethel's particular mbira consists of a wooden soundboard with 25 thin metal keys attached to three registers: two on the left and one on the right. A round finger hole located in the bottom right corner of the soundboard helps to stabilize the mbira as she plays. The soundboard is held in place inside of a black gourd resonator called a *deze* with a type of reed stick or *mutsigo*. Four bottle caps attached below the left registers, as well as bottle caps strung with thin metal pieces around the rim of the *deze*, serve as vibrators that amplify the sound—lending the mbira its distinctive buzzing. She plucks the ends of keys of the left registers downward with her left thumb, and for those located on the right register, she plucks upward with her right index finger. The advanced age of Ms. Ethel's mbira contributes greatly to its beauty in appearance and sound—the subtle dimples in the rick black smoothness of the *deze*, the coppery-silver flecks of the tarnished bottlecaps—all combine with melodic tones to create a dreamy, swishy harmony that invites a sense of communal feeling.

Ms. Ethel has been learning—not playing—the mbira for over twenty years. Her distinction is a significant one because being a student of mbira entails a journey of continual study rather than simply achieving a particular level of competency. Critical too are the teachers of mbira, who can assume both spirit and human forms: the former providing encouragement and promptings and the latter working either indirectly (observation only) or directly (teaching by method) with the mbira student (Berliner, 1978). Ms. Ethel explains simply that she has had many mbira teachers, with the main one being Musekiwa Chingodza, an internationally known Zimbabwean mbira player who has undertaken several tours in North America.

Chemutengure and Contested Landscapes

Back at the rug, the children remain seated in a circle and continue together in song accompanied by Ms. Ethel and her mbira:

Chemu-ten-gure! Ms. Ethel calls out, her voice resounding clear and firm with perfect pitch.

Chemu-teng-ure! the children respond, with increasing vigor in their voices.

The Good Morning Song concludes after Ms. Ethel and her students proceed to orate several verses of song in the Shona language, asking the spirits to bless this gathering, their harmonious refrains now literally rising and shining from the circle, like the “bright radiation of the breaking of day” (Mallarmé, 2007, p. 189), enveloping the classroom space with a unifying joy.

Like many religious and cultural traditions, mbira music of Zimbabwe can trace sites of contestation within its lineage. In the second half of the nineteenth century, one outcome of the arrival of Christian missionaries from Europe and the ensuing colonization of what was then known as Southern Rhodesia was the suppression and even outright prohibition on making and performing “pagan” mbira music (Jones, 2008). Matiure (2008) noted that *Chemutengure*, a traditional Shona folk song meaning “that which carries,” refers to the wagon wheels of White colonizers: “When the whites came to Africa they used horse drawn wagons to travel from one place to another, especially the Boer track. They used to employ black men to drive the horses, [what] we the Shona call *kutyaira ngoro*” (p. 19). The implied meaning of the song is pride in the rhythms of one’s work—in this case, the daily repetitions of wagon-driving (Matiure). *Chemutengure*, Ms. Ethel reminds me, is also symbolic of moving forward. When the Zimbabwean people fought for their independence from Britain in the

1970s, popular political slogans at the time included “Forward with the Struggle” and “Forward with the Past” (Jones, 2008).

The symbolic connotations of rhythmically moving forward hold particular valence within education, as teachers and students continually imagine themselves in a state of perpetual forward momentum—striving toward objectives, curriculum projects, the next big test, or simply to the end of the term or grade level—all while the years pass quickly but the days remain long. When I inquired about implications of her mbira playing for her students, Ms. Ethel paused for a long while, contemplating her response.

Well, it's interesting. There is a girl who's in eighth grade now here, and I had her for half of her second-grade year. I was teaching art this year, just filling in, and she told me that one of her favorite times was just being in my classroom and singing with the mbira. And could I play. Because every morning we do Rise and Shine at eight o'clock. And so, she's like, 'can you please bring the mbira and play?' She said that was one of her favorite memories of her schooling—it touched me so much.

Of further significance regarding Ms. Ethel’s mbira playing is her participation in restorying (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2006) a cultural narrative that has traditionally excluded participation from women. Because of the country’s patriarchal social structure and practices, as well as the fact that mbira playing is often a key component in sacred religious ceremonies which men traditionally lead, women in Zimbabwe have negotiated complex challenges toward the reclamation of their power within musical and performance space (Chitando & Mateveke, 2012; Kyker, 2014; Turino, 2000). Indeed, as Korsmeyer (2004) noted: “music, which has presented some of the most tenacious barriers to women participants, elucidates subtleties about concepts of artistic sensibility, emotion, and

subjectivity” (p. 60). Although Ms. Ethel has certainly not faced these same challenges as a female mbira player in the U.S., by working in and through these sites of contestation, she impacts the kinds of experiences that unfold for her students. While her students do not yet understand the contested lineage of the mbira, nor does Ms. Ethel think of her mbira playing in these terms, a woman playing an instrument which has traditionally occupied the sole province of men functions as an emancipatory practice and allows *all* her students to imagine themselves as musicians.

Interlude: An impromptu music performance organized composed and performed by the students in Ms. Ethel's K-2 class in which eight-year-old Asher with new red Nikes hunches over safety scissors and snips small inexact rectangles from a piece of thick green paper he cuts and stacks cuts and stacks he takes a pencil from the cup and carefully scratches on each one beaming with satisfaction Asher shuffles over to Melody who is busy clinking chairs together one-by-one in neat rows she accepts the tickets and assigns him a new task *do you want a ticket?* Asher asks extending his arm toward me I nod and take my place on a blue plastic chair in the audience the six-inch wooden dais at the front of the room just under the whiteboard is a grand stage

abruptly like a scene from Cage's *Musicircus*

there is sound all around big sounds of piano plink plunk BONG! ukulele marimba bells mbira xylophone shakers drums and children's chatter and laughter strains simultaneously mix and float gloriously through the air five children are at the piano (two on the bench and three standing) two on the African drums Ms. Ethel's husband has made and one boy is playing a xylophone (alone in a corner) completely absorbed six children sit on chairs in the audience as serious as opening night at the Met after a time performers and listeners reverse roles the performance concludes chairs return to tables

green tickets flutter down to

rest on the floor



A Drum Lesson

It is now 10:42 a.m. at Alpine School and the shallow thud of short footsteps clomping up wet wooden stairs can be heard. The K-2 students have just arrived back in the building from outside play on the playground and in The Forest. They remove their snow boots, snow pants, coats, hats, and mittens, revealing scarlet ears and noses and bits of icy snow clinging resolutely to clumps of hair and shirt sleeves. Teachers do not assist the students as dress and undress for snow play—it is expected that they can both put on and remove their own snow clothing. Several children sit on the 8-ft. by 10-ft. burgundy and cream rug in the foyer area and pull on their “inside shoes”: slipper-like with a brightly-colored felt upper and a hard cork bottom or rubber sole.

Although the outside temperature measures a crisp 34 degrees, Ms. Ethel walks over to the outside classroom door and props it open with a large grey rock. Despite my wool sweater, I feel an immediate change in temperature from the surge of chilled air, however, the students and the other teachers do not seem to be bothered in the slightest. Overhead, I hear loud scraping from the school’s metal roof and then a gentle *poof!*—as a sheet of snow warmed by the sun loosens, slides off, and lands in two feet of freshly fallen snow. This has happened four times within the last five minutes as one section falls and invariably others are loosened, slide, and fall within quick succession.

When Ms. Ethel announces blithely “it’s time for music,” sixteen students *thump-thump-thump-thump-thump* down the wooden staircase, leaving the foyer bursting with an explosion of unmatched mittens, snow pants, coats, hats, boots, lunch boxes, backpacks, and wet paper. The music room is a large open room patterned with guitars on the wall and several

hanging ferns. Tall metal shelves hold drums and xylophones while little wooden boxes of ukuleles await small hands.

Mr. Maxwell, a musician from the local community, greets the children warmly from behind a gleaming gold and white TKO drum kit set up in the far corner of the room (Plate 12). He is in his early 60s, with ruddy-gray hair, and wears a basil green button-down. Mr. Maxwell's wife along with the repetitive click-click-click of her knitting needles accompany him on today's visit. Students sit on the floor in front of Mr. Maxwell's drum kit on a large rectangular olive-green rug with a gold leaf pattern. Several different types of hand drums are also set out on the rug for the children, and most are accompanied by an adjacent pair of sticks (Plate 11, 14). The excitement for what is to come is palpable; children bounce and squirm, instinctively anticipating and manifesting the rhythms of this morning's lesson through their bodies.

Okay, begins Mr. Maxwell. *Before we can learn to play on the drum set, we have to learn how to play rudiments. Rudiments are like scales—do any of you play the piano?*

Several hands shoot into the air followed quickly by shouts of:

I do! I do!

I used to!

My sister goes to piano!

First, Mr. Maxwell demonstrates a single-stroke roll for the children, each hand alternating rhythmically with the stick—

1-2-3-4, right-left-right-left.

The children attempt to imitate Mr. Maxwell with great concentration on their own drum in front of them; their sticks move with a purposeful beat. Some use a flat frame drum

while others have a bongo-type drum. One boy uses a metal snare, another beats a goblet-shaped drum with his hands. One child's ochre drum is over three feet tall, requiring her to kneel as she plays.

1-2-3-4, right-left-right-left.

1-2-3-4, right-left-right-left.

The children repeat this pattern several times. Both the alternating of the hands as well as remembering to begin the rudiment with the right hand prove unexpectedly challenging. Next, Mr. Maxwell demonstrates a double-stroke roll on the snare (Plate 10), this time with two strokes per hand—

1-2-3-4, right-right-left-left, right-right-left-left.

This particular rudiment seems easier for the children; however, some still struggle with keeping a steady beat:

1-2—3-4, right-right—left-left.

1-2—3-4, right-right—left-left.

Soren decides to improvise his own rudiment—

Hey guys, listen to this! he shouts, squeezing his eyes shut and drumming as hard and as fast as he can with both arms. Several other students promptly follow suit, improvising their own patterns and tempi.

Next, Mr. Maxwell points out the snare drum on his kit and demonstrates with one stick how it keeps a main beat. He shows the students the difference in sound when the snare is on and off. He also points out several distinctive sounds that are created depending on the type of stick or brush as well as the musical style.

In Jazz, one brush keeps the beat.

He taps the brush gently on the snare, creating a softer sound. The children listen attentively.

It sounds like a band marching! exclaims Amir.

Mr. Maxwell continues rhythmically on the rest of the drums, pointing out the tom toms, bass drum or kick drum, kick pedal, and cymbals.

Two cymbals are called a hi-hat, explains Mr. Maxwell. *It's on a pedal.*

He plays the hi-hat with his foot pedal for several beats and the two cymbals snap crisply together.

snap! snap! snap! snap! snap! snap!

Mr. Maxwell then plays the kick drum for several beats which makes a steady rhythm like a heartbeat.

Punch. Punch. Punch. Punch. Punch. Punch.

And then, increasing the tempo—

punch-punch-punch-punch-punch-punch.

You can be a drummer with just your feet! he exclaims, raising his grey eyebrows high and cocking his head to one side. The children pause in dubious reflection, contemplating the veracity of this statement.

Can I really be a drummer with just my feet? Thinking...thinking.

Next, he demonstrates the sound of the splash (Plate 13):

It's a high-pitch cymbal, it spreads, says Mr. Maxwell as he hits the golden Zildjian orb.

At the end of a roll, you can finish with a crash. And in Jazz, you keep time on the ride. I'm going to play 4/4 time: one on kick, one on snare, and two on the hi-hat.

Thump. Pop. Followed by a crisp *snap! snap!*

Can you hit the big one really loud? exclaims Asher, smiling and hugging his knees to his chest. Mr. Maxwell smiles widely and obliges their request, playing the kick drum for several penetrating beats with a warm, smooth tone.

Punch! Punch! Punch! Punch!

Listening intently, the children smile and laugh with shouts of *Whoa-a-a!*

Next, Mr. Maxwell slides off the throne and stands to the side, inviting each child to come up one at a time to try “the big set.” After much wavering back and forth and encouraging words from the other children and her teachers, Maddie, an unsure student, hesitantly decides to give it a go. Clearly, trying a novel percussion instrument (and a large one at that!) in front of her peers and the other adults in the room engenders a sense of risk. Finally seated at the drum set, Maddie focuses, mouth scrunched up in determination and green eyes narrowed. She presses the kick pedal, smiles at the warm, full-throated sound, and then, emboldened, hits the crash hard, jerking backward with surprise.

Hudson is eager to go next and plays very deliberately. First, the tom toms—

Dubmmm, dubmmm, dubmmm

Next, the ever-popular kick drum—

Punch, punch, punch

Then, he plays the snare—

Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop! Pop!

and finishes by hitting all three cymbals with an excited flourish, a broad smile of delight pinching his round cheeks—

CRASH! CRASH! SPLASH!

The next child to take a turn is petite Stella. Positively enveloped by the drum kit, she smiles shyly as her small cinnamon eyes dart quickly from one drum to the next to the next to the next. The sticks she squeezes tightly within her fists are nearly the length of one half of her body. Holding her tongue still at the corner of her mouth, Stella pauses for a brief moment and then hits the snare, tom toms, snare, bass drum, snare, hi-hat, all in rapid succession as quickly as she can—

popdubmmthumpsnapthumpPOPsnapthumpSNAP!

Other Rhythms and Rituals: Oleanna and The Bell

Ms. Ethel orchestrates other pedagogical rhythms and rituals for her students throughout the school day and I characterize these intentions as having *more utilitarian* and *more embodied* functions. By more utilitarian, I mean using music as an aid for memory or for learning. By more embodied, I refer to Bresler's (2008) appreciation of music's unique function as a place for knowledge and expression through the body: "embodiment is at the core of music...sound penetrates us, engaging us on a bodily level in ways fundamentally different than the visual" (p. 231). Ms. Ethel finds clear value in the function of each of these two kinds of aesthetic rituals for her students' learning:

I feel like rhythm is a great thing to have in your body. And I feel like for the movement, it's awesome to be able to do patterns in math with just you know, clapping or with shaking. The 4/4 beat which is, you know, how I do the 1-2-3-4 in the different languages. I think it's just nice to be able to have some rhythm. It's something I never had until I was, you know, in my later years of life.

Ethel enacts more utilitarian aesthetic rituals using the song Oleanna and the nursery rhyme Itsy Bitsy Spider and the alphabet song. This practice functions as both a memory aid and also as a way for students to gain practice with rhythm, repetition, time signatures, and memory. Oleanna draws its inspiration from the chorus of a Norwegian folk song popularized by Pete Seeger:

Ole Ole anna! Ole Ole anna!

Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Oleanna!

The students begin by standing in a circle at the map rug and singing the chorus slowly in 4/4 time with Ms. Ethel, clapping and stomping their feet to the beat.

Ole Ole anna! Ole Ole anna!

Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Oleanna!

Next, Ms. Ethel adds a common nursery rhyme, The Itsy-Bitsy Spider, which requires to children to switch from the 4/4 time of the Oleanna chorus to 3/4 time. Their voices and movements slow and their hands switch from clapping to touching fingertips:

Ethel: How about we do....hmmm....

Students (shouting): Itsy Bitsy Spider!

Ethel: Okay, so we're gonna sing—everyone sing—Oleanna again and then we're gonna do Itsy Bitsy Spider and right after we're done with Itsy Bitsy Spider, we're going to go back into Oleanna okay? Okay, we're ready!

Students and Ethel (singing): Ole Ole anna! Ole Ole anna! Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Oleanna!

The itsy-bitsy spider went up the waterspout, down came the rain and washed the spider out. Out came the sun and dried up all the rain and the itsy-bitsy spider went up the spout again.

Ole Ole anna! Ole Ole anna! Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Ole, Oleanna!

Students are eager to keep singing and Ms. Ethel overlays other nursery rhymes at their request, including Hickory Dickory Dock and Jack and Jill.

With the bell aesthetic ritual, Ms. Ethel's intentions are more embodied. That is, she aims to create space for her students to be still and attuned to their breathing with the overall goal of coming to a "coming to a calming place":

When I ring the bell and we just all are listening to the bell, we're focused on the bell. And that's what it is really—it's really us just breathing. Because if you think about it, some kids—probably their whole day—there's not one time where they just stopped and are still, you know? It's to help them realize that they can find that space and then hopefully in the future, they'll use it to help them come to a calming place when they need to.

The bell ritual commences when Ms. Ethel announces, "we're waking up our owls."

Students stop their conversations and move toward where she is kneeling on the blue map rug. *Raise your hand when you don't hear the bell*, says Ms. Ethel softly. She clasps the bell in front of her and, with one exaggerated stroke, strikes the 6-inch single silver bell with a xylophone stick (Plate 4). She brings the stick slowly to her chest in an image of prayer, head bowed, eyes closed. Most children do the same although some sit on their heels or lay on the rug. The strike note rings clear through the air. Children squeeze their eyes tightly, chins resting on top of fists, while others fold their arms or sit or lay on the ground and stare at the ceiling. After the tone is no longer audible, a few students begin to raise their hands. Some stand and begin walking slowly toward the math shelves. *I see we have some owls who are ready*, Ethel whispers.

This aesthetic ritual in particular holds specific meaning for Maddie, which I described in my field notes (January 16):

Today during journaling Maddie (6 years old) asked Ms. Tia to help her spell *This is when Ethel rings the bell*. This piqued my interest immediately as I am curious to know that the children think of the bell. I walked over to the table where Maddie was writing in her journal and sat down next to her on the wooden bench.

Jodie: Tell me about your picture.

Maddie: This is what I see when Ms. Ethel rings the bell.

She slides her notebook closer to me and I observe that she has drawn a picture on the left side of her journal with colored pencils. It is of a completely opaque sky-blue background punctuated by many seemingly random Pollock-esque bursts of color: yellows, reds, and oranges. The background gives the color bursts depth—they seem to hover in mid-air and vibrate in the foreground. Maddie's composition not only expresses sound through color choice and placement, but it also suggests repetition. Even though Ms. Ethel's ritual is to strike the bell a single time, if you listen carefully, the soundwaves repeat as they vibrate and float across the room, sometimes dispersing in completely new and different ways depending on the time of day and where Ms. Ethel is standing in the classroom when she strikes the bell.

Jodie: What happens when Ms. Ethel rings the bell?

Maddie: I close my eyes and see lots of colors.

Jodie (pointing to her picture): Are these the colors that you see?

Maddie nods.

Jodie: And what do you feel?

Maddie: I feel happy.

Although it may be difficult to ascertain the exact significance of this specific aural ritual to Maddie, her personal journal entry combined with our brief conversation clearly illuminates four things. First, Maddie finds the bell both personally and socially meaningful. On this day during journal writing, specific prompts were unprescribed and Maddie chose of her own accord to reflect on and *communicate* an expression of an aesthetic classroom ritual that she clearly valued. According to Herbert Read (1974), the drive to communicate constitutes the very purpose of expression in the art of children:

All types of children, even prodigies of skill in naturalistic representation, use their drawings, not as the expression of their perceptual images, nor of their pent-up feelings, but rather as a ‘feeler’, a spontaneous reaching out to the external world, at first tentative, but capable of becoming the main factor in the adjustment of the individual to society. (p. 167)

Second, Maddie derived a sense of aesthetic enjoyment from the bell, as evidenced from both her drawing and her unhesitating declaration that it made her feel “happy.” Third, Maddie understands what is experienced inwardly can also be expressed outwardly and that genres of cognition can and often do transpose during that interaction. She represented visually what she came to know auditorily— “I close my eyes and see lots of colors.” As Maddie received the sound, she associated it with an image of color bursts and expressed her mind’s image through drawing, writing, and speaking. Fourth, Ms. Ethel facilitated Maddie’s aural perceptivity through deepened sensory experience. Thus, through Maddie’s expressions, we see that Ethel’s repeated aesthetic ritual of the bell afforded her the opportunity to perceive the nuances of sound, construct and communicate meaning, offer

enjoyment, and develop her aural perceptivity. For all students, such aesthetic rituals encourage students to perceive and experience their body as a source of personal expression.

Reimer's Features of Musical Experience

What was the import generally for the students of this inquiry regarding their musical experiences, what philosopher Alfred Schütz (1951) characterized as “a web of social relationships” (p. 85)? And what conditions for specific meanings were present? Bennett Reimer (Reimer & Wright, 1992) presented fourteen features of musical experience that I draw upon here to organize and appraise the meanings and significance of musical experience for students. One suggestion is to employ the features holistically, viewing them as integrated, rather than separate qualities of experience. A second way is to choose two or three features to focus on to create deepened meaning and engagement for students. I employ the former strategy to interpret and appraise a range of integrated qualities of musical expression for the students who participated in this inquiry:

1. *Intrinsicality*. Music can assist us in understanding our inner, subjective worlds. By instituting a musical ritual in her curriculum centered around singing with the mbira, Ms. Ethel provided students the opportunity to apprehend the commencement of the school day through a personally felt form. During the interlude and the bell ritual, students experienced music's intrinsic nature through aesthetic enjoyment and embodiment.
2. *Affect*. Dewey (1934) noted that sound, more than any other sense, has “the power of direct emotional expression” (p. 238). Langer compelled Dewey's sentiment further, declaring music to be “a tonal analogue of emotive life” (1953, p. 27). Congruous with intrinsicality, musical affect as experienced by

the students presented as an engaging force that that fostered sensorial connections to self, others, living things of The Forest (plants and animals), and the local community. Conditions for personal cultural connections were also present via Ms. Ethel's intentional incorporation of seven different languages into the daily ritual of the Good Morning Song, including English, French, Mandarin, Shona, Japanese (Ms. Ethel's culture), Spanish (students Ella and Casey's culture), and Korean (Ms. Tia's culture).

3. *Expectation.* According to Reimer, "music sets up tendencies we can recognize when we are familiar with the stylistic context in which particular tendencies exist. We can then anticipate, expect, contemplate, or speculate on how the music might then unfold" (1992, p. 206). Both the Good Morning Song and the drum lesson assisted students in listening for and anticipating pattern (vocal, beat, and time), linguistic structure (tone, pitch, call and response), and differentiation (using a brush instead of a stick in Jazz, for example) of diverse genres of music. Pragmatically, the aesthetic ritual of the Good Morning Song also provided a pattern of recognition and expectation for the commencement and subsequent unfolding of the school day.
4. *Meaning.* Music expresses meaning, what Langer refers to as "vital import," through its ability to underscore the human experience. The daily ritual of singing with the mbira fostered opportunities for students to make meaning through the aesthetic themes of personal and social connections, sensory experience, and active engagement, solidifying the classroom as a place of community. During the drum lesson and interlude, students actively

participated in leading improvisations that spoke to larger democratic and participatory meanings.

5. *Intelligence*. Reimer contends that enhancing musical intelligence, or the capacity to generate and share musical meaning, requires sensory intelligence through repeated, ritualistic exposure to an auditory form. Mr. Maxwell enhanced students' musical intelligence by encouraging them to recreate particular types of rudiments on the drums. Students also practiced discriminating between various types of sounds and linguistically representing the qualities of such variances—"it's a high-pitch cymbal, it spreads."
6. *Listening*. By explicitly directing students' attention to specific components of the drum kit (snare, kick drum, and splash) along with their corresponding sounds, Mr. Maxwell fostered their abilities to perceive aural relationships. Learning to listen for repeated patterns, both in the dynamic structure of the mbira and in the vocal patterns of the Good Morning Song (4/4-time, call and response), encouraged students' abilities to attend to the structure of a composition through anticipation.
7. *Sensuousity*. According to Reimer, sensuousity refers to the embodied immediacy of sound. The mbira has a particular sensuousity about it that is expressed in the soothing, melodic tones of its timbre. The drum set invited an invigorating, exuberant quality reflected in its warm rhythms and crisp swishes. Thus, the energy of students' embodied experience was affected by the specific qualities of a particular instrument. Students swayed, rocked back and forth, tapped their feet, and clapped their hands.

8. *Time*. When students learn time, they learn that music can be structured through beats and organized into phrases. They also learn to discern the length of time *between* sounds. During Ms. Ethel's mbira playing as well as Mr. Maxwell's drum lesson, 4/4 signature time was emphasized. During interlude, some students played a consistent 4/4 rhythm while others spontaneously experimented with a variety of time signatures. For the Oleanna song, Ms. Ethel developed students' capacities for recognition of and switching between various time signatures and rests.
9. *Reference*. Langer (1942) emphasized that music has a symbolic point of reference and Reimer similarly noted that music is uniquely capable of pointing to things, emotions, and experiences beyond itself. As one contemporary example of reference, listening to Wynton Marsalis's *The Democracy! Suite* (2021) allows us to consider the qualities, forms, and meanings of our democracy, engaging in the significance of freedom, presence, beauty, revolution, and imagining things "deeper than dreams" through the gift of Jazz. For Maddie, the bell ritual functioned as a reference for things beyond itself, allowing her to envision and express not only a beautiful picture punctuated by colorful bursts—similar to fireworks against a bright blue sky—but also to feel happiness.
10. *Inspiration and creativity*. Mr. Maxwell patiently provided time for each student who wanted a turn at "the big set." This intentional decision afforded students adequate cognitive and affective space to be guided by their imagination and exercise inspiration through a creative and participatory

decision-making process. Most children did not simply sit down and bang away randomly on the drums when it was their turn. As children imagined and then created their improvised soundscapes, there existed an element of thoughtful judgement at play, a decision-making process guided by a sense of intentionality. I could literally *feel* the children thinking. Additionally, a playful freedom characterized students' expressions of improvisation engendered by Mr. Maxwell's musical connoisseurship and care. As Ms. Ethel noted: "I think that if you give them that freedom, they take it and they want to play with it."

11. *Greatness*. Children's interactions with music have the potential to incite transcendent or "wow" experiences. When Mr. Maxwell afforded every child a turn on "the big set," as well as when children practiced with their own small drums and sticks, he engaged their individual capacities not only as listeners but as composers and performers. Conditions for these types of enlivened and elevated experiences are of course present in all three modes, however, students may not have adequate opportunity to gain experience as composers and performers in a school setting that typically favors listening. The findings from this inquiry suggest that when we attend to the variety of ways in which children come to know and experience music (through performance and especially through composition), we expand opportunities for students to have wow experiences and feel music's power for greatness for themselves.

12. *Universals*. Are there certain ubiquitous features of music that allow people to appreciate a variety of musical genres? The findings from this inquiry indicate in the affirmative. Ms. Ethel enhanced students' appreciation of music from another culture through the mbira, making it, with its own unique melodies, structure, and style, more accessible for their listening in the future. Improvisation, as students experienced in interlude and the drum lesson with Mr. Maxwell, is a feature of music that transcends multiple genres.
13. *Functionality*. Reimer noted that musical experience often extends from serving individual concerns to the social and cultural needs of a group: "The social interaction of creating and sharing music both reflects and strengthens bonds of common feeling...musical experience is an instrument for social communion" (p. 268). The social connectivity of musical experience was most apparent in the Good Morning Song. Ms. Ethel understood and valued her students' emotional needs and structural needs to coalesce as a group and gave special attention to how they encountered the commencement of the school day.
14. *Musicality widespread*. Reimer suggested that everyone has some innate capacity for music, and that that potential can be developed: "the art of music is an essential mode through which human experience acquires meaning. The function of music education is to develop every human's capacity to share such meaning through musical experience" (p. 272). This last feature is particularly germane for students who may not have adequate exposure to meaningful musical experiences either at home or at school. By providing a

wide array of musical experiences for her students, along with opportunities to act as listener, composer, and performer, Ms. Ethel is encouraging her students' development of their musical identities.

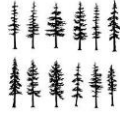
The Meaning of Musical Experience for Students

The Good Morning Song, Interlude, the Drum Lesson, and the other rhythms and rituals described above collectively gesture toward possibilities for the development of a unique kind of affective vitality and engagement developed through musical learning experiences. Regarding this singularly compelling form, an enduring landscape of feeling, Langer (1942) wrote:

The real power of music lies in the fact that it can be “true” to the life of feeling in a way that language cannot; for its significant forms have that ambivalence of content which words cannot have...music is revealing where words are obscuring. (1942, p. 243)

For the students of this inquiry, music revealed specific possibilities for meaning through personal and social connections and embodied experiences. Patricia Campbell (1998) noted that for children, musical meaning is deeply related to function—that is, the range of forms that students use to purposefully engage in musical experience. For Maddie, music functioned as a symbolic form (Langer, 1953) for enabling personal emotional expression as well as for risk-taking in front of her teachers and peer group. For Melony and Asher, music afforded opportunities for performance and freedom of physical response. And for Hudson and Stella, a turn at the drum kit served as an improvised expression of interactive imagination. For all the K-2 students, singing and moving to the Good Morning Song functioned as a socially integrative rhythm of their school day, a coalescing force to enhance connection with self and unity with others.

II. Connected Geographies



The Forest

One afternoon in the forest she said
Come, Miss Jodie. I'll show you
we follow an embankment down down
enveloped by softness I kneel

It's a different area than the playground

exalted pines guarding paper thin flakes
veiling space, collecting enchanted games
among piles of mottled wood.

And there's these pink—I don't know how they got here
you're gonna feel wood
you're not in boundaries
there's a distance you can go

they're free and they just let it go.
Sometimes we imagine we're dragons attacking each other
translucent pink crystals covered and unearthed
I don't know how they got there
building forts and selling things for crystals

forts weigh memories and silence.

There was this one girl, she's at Stanford now
she just became that horse you know
You're out there in mud

and it's kind of fun to get dirty

you can play in the bushes and hide.

Pinecones and pine needles, playing capture the flag
All the man-made stuff is like plastic and metal
Arctic Foxes disappear and reappear in tunnels of snow

burrowing, digging
scampering up gauzy drifts
as if they still remember.
It was a big deal when we were in Kindergarten
I turn to look at them

you're not near here

lying still on their backs, tongues
stretched to the sun,
stretching squinting stretching
licking paper thin flakes.

The fort is built, the tunnels carved
time flickers, I hesitate in the void—
savoring the taste of radiance

mirages suspended in a fragile snow globe.

The Significance of Aesthetic Experience of Forests

In a remarkably lucid essay on the aesthetic experience of forests, Holmes Rolston III (2004) surmised that “a forest cannot be understood simply by looking long and hard at it...forests must be encountered” (p. 188). According to Rolston, the criteria for aesthetic experience with forests is entirely distinct from the criteria for aesthetic experience with human-created art forms like painting or dance or music primarily because of aesthetic intent. Whereas the energy of a musical performance is intended toward the experience, a mutual give-and-take between performer and listener mediated by the instrument, forests are constituted by objective qualities engendered by nature that exist without human engagement. The sweet scent of the bark of the Ponderosa Pine or the delicate blue-green needles of the Sub-Alpine Fir knows nothing of the aesthetic until human interaction organizes time and space and elevates it to a meaningful form, what Dewey (1934) termed the rhythm of consummatory experience. “Aesthetic appreciation of nature, at the level of forests and landscapes, requires embodied participation, immersion, and struggle,” Rolston continued. “We initially may think of forests as scenery to be looked upon. That is a mistake. A forest is entered, not viewed” (p. 189). Thus, the place of the forest is made and not given. In addition to immersive experience, the perennial vitality of forests exists in its direct presentation to our senses. Rolston went on to emphasize:

The forest attacks all our senses—sight, hearing, smell, feeling, and even taste. Visual experience is critical. But no forest is adequately experienced without the odor of the pines or of the wild roses; and one catches how much animal senses of smell can exceed our own. The elk I heard, but did not see; they caught my scent. The wind is against me. What is a forest without the wind heard and felt, against which one draw his jacket tighter? Wait, wasn't that a kinglet that called—the first I have heard this season. Art is seldom so multisensory. (p. 189)

In addition to requiring our immersive participation and provoking our senses, forests embody a certain affective quality in that they can be experienced as both space and place, with the former denoting a sense of unrestricted freedom and the latter designating security and meaning. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) explored the spatial significance of forests by considering how a forest dense with trees can nevertheless retain a sense of spaciousness:

The forest, no less than the bare plain, is a trackless region of possibility. Trees that clutter up space from one viewpoint are, from another, the means by which a special awareness of space is created, for the trees stand behind the other as far as the eyes can see, and they encourage the mind to extrapolate to infinity...The forest, although it may be small, appears boundless to one lost in its midst. (p. 56)

Students' Aesthetic Engagement and Expressions Within The Forest

I present the preceding conceptions of the aesthetic experience of forests to assist in centering a significant place for student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences to unfold. Due to Alpine's geographical location—literally in the middle of a national forest encompassing millions of acres—it is not difficult for even a casual visitor to consider the school as part of The Forest and The Forest part of the school. I felt the unique contextual paradox of space described by Tuan almost immediately upon arrival at the school and this impression was confirmed after only a few days of observation and talking with the students. In the sections below, I consider The Forest (Plates 23, 24, 25, 28, 29) as an enmeshment of both space and place, or, as an “ordered world of meaning” (Tuan, 1977, p. 56) by considering the implications of specific features of The Forest and its significance to student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. Unlike other focal points of this inquiry, the student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences narrated here are unique in both

conditions, initiations, and use. For example, in the preceding focal point of Rhythm and Ritual, I illustrated how the teachers' incorporation of musical instruments (the mbira, the drum set, the bell, etc.) and their specific qualities influenced students' expressions and meanings of their musical experiences. Looking forward to the next focal point, Imbricated Forming, I will narrate findings that explore the significance of Ms. Ethel's intentions to structure aesthetic learning experiences for her students using explicitly tactile forms that developed students' capacities for perceptivity. The current focal point, however, is distinctive in that the findings aim to surface possibilities for student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences that push beyond the place of the classroom to encounter the aesthetic dimensions of Alpine's natural environment. In the following section, I narrate four specific features of the natural environment that created conditions for students' aesthetic engagement. I then explore the possible meanings and significance of The Forest for students within three areas: aesthetic enjoyment, social connections and imaginative response, and freedom.

Trees. Trees such as the Ponderosa Pine and Sub-Alpine Fir were a manifest feature of The Forest that represented for students both "a trackless region of possibility" and a distinct, bounded area for collecting and organizing space. Despite their immense number, certain trees (some I could not distinguish between initially) held more visual affinity for students and those were defined by perimeter and play. *See that tree over there?* said Maddie. *We can't go past that.* Specific trees and groupings of trees also functioned as a perimeter imposed by the students, as in the boundaries for their preferred games of capture the flag, king of the fort, and "warriors."

Forts. The rural context of Alpine afforded an abundance of space and natural materials like thick sturdy logs, soft and hard branches, rocks of varying sizes, and ample pinecones and needles. Students engaged in two kinds of fort-building: snow forts (Plate 19) and forts constructed from fallen tree branches and gathered logs (Plate 27). Forts were unique in that they functioned as important child-created places for climbing, hiding, possession, privacy, and social activities like role-play. The inside of these forts seemed quite spare due to the heavy snow, yet remnants of collected pinecones, woven branches, and other groupings of found and treasured objects could be seen. Students were quite proud of their forts and eager to show them to me. When I asked the students what they liked to do in there, Casey replied, *I like to sit in here and hide from the others.* Students' need for privacy, to be and feel separate and apart, echoes Sobel's (2002) research on children's special places:

I suspect that it is the sense of self, the ego about to be born, that is sheltered in these private places. The onset of puberty in adolescence initiates an often painful focus on "Who am I?" The construction of private places is one of the ways that children physically and symbolically prepare themselves, in middle childhood, for this significant transition. (p. 48)

Crystals. Small, translucent pink crystals (Plate 26) were mentioned in every interview and conversation I had with students at Alpine School and were also referred to by teachers and staff as an important part of children's interactions in The Forest. Part of the mystique attached to the crystals was that no one knew quite where they came from or exactly how long they had been there. Some of the younger students said they were found by the creek and then transported to The Forest while the middle school students insisted the crystals originated from a larger pile of rocks near a house up the hill that was being remodeled. Whatever the case, the pink crystals were cherished by the students because of their appearance, their scarcity, and their function as currency for buying and selling. Students

described to me in detail their adventurous treasure hunts to collect items of interest in The Forest to then “sell” for crystals. Since the crystals were submerged by several feet of snow during my fieldwork in January, I was never able to actually see or touch them. However, intrigued by the students’ deep attachment, I returned to Alpine the following summer and was quite delighted, after some amount of digging, to finally discover the crystals for myself and hold them in my hands (see also Chapter Three).

Natural vs. Man-made. Students certainly recognized and articulated the difference between natural and man-made. Man-made features within Alpine’s outdoor environment included a basketball hoop, metal bars for swinging, an old wooden play structure, and a newer, more traditional playground. This playground, with its bright colors and hard plastic slide, seemed crudely out of place and it appeared that students also perceived this sense of dissociation: the playground was rarely used. Children quite clearly preferred The Forest with its open-ended and multisensory opportunities for imaginative and sociodramatic play. As Elliot said: *You’re gonna feel wood. It’s just like you’re out in the wild.*

The Meanings and Significance of The Forest for Students

For the students of this inquiry, The Forest kindled unique conditions for aesthetic learning experiences and students expressed the meanings and significance of these experiences across the following four areas:

Aesthetic enjoyment. In an educational climate where “biodiversity surveys” have replaced nature walks in the elementary school curriculum, it is important to recognize the pleasure that students can derive from their experiences in nature and that student satisfaction is a central aspect of aesthetic learning experiences. Particularly consequential

were students' expressions of joyful engagement within The Forest: they played imaginative games; smiled and squealed in delight as they darted in and through the trees; worked diligently with others to construct study forts, proud to have physically transformed their surroundings; sang as they walked side-by-side with friends; lied prostrate on top of snow forts, looking up at the sky; and laughed as snowflakes melted on their tongues.

Social connection and imaginative response. The aesthetic dimensions of the natural environment created an ordered world of meaning by providing an organic backdrop for students to develop social connections through imaginative play. David Harvey (2009) noted that “the sense of belonging and not belonging (and hence of identity and otherness) is closely intertwined with ideas about place” (p. 170). Students' expressions of imagination within The Forest included collective and interactive participations within their own constructed world—collecting crystals in order to buy and sell pinecones and other objects of value, interpreting adult roles through sociodramatic play, challenging fears and other tensions through fantasy play, and responding to their shared culture. It is also important to note that the world of imagination and adventure engendered by The Forest was not tied to sentimentality of nature but rather directed toward the purposeful and pragmatic function of imagination, calling to mind Tuan's (1977) point that “the child's imagination is of a special kind. It is tied to activity” (p. 33). Furthermore, in her seminal essay *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*, Edith Cobb (1959) argued that the purpose of imagination in childhood is not to discover the self in order to discover the world, but to “make a world in which to find a place to discover a self” (p. 540). The aesthetic dimensions of The Forest provided one such place.

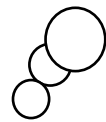
Freedom. Students' active engagement with The Forest was an expression of the desire for freedom: *they're free; they just let it go; you're not in boundaries.* This release was not only physical energy (*you can let out your energy better*, as Elliot said), but also psychic energy bound up with continual negotiation between two cultures: the adult world and the child world (Corsaro, 2018). In contrast to the other focal points narrated in this educational criticism (with the exception of the brief Interlude in Rhythm and Ritual), students' expressions were derived from experiences that were *initiated by them* rather than adults (see Chapter Five for more discussion on the relationship between power structures and student expressions).

“Ecstatic” Childhood Places

Broadening student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences to include places and spaces beyond the classroom invites deeper meaning to educational experience. For the student participants of this inquiry, their embodied connections to the natural aesthetic features of place—snow, crystals, trees, logs, pinecones—as well as the intangible features—imagination, play, unrestricted space—conferred not only meaning but also affinity. The importance of aesthetic learning experiences within place for the students of this inquiry calls to mind Louise Chawla's (1990) study of memories of “ecstatic” childhood places, those intensely felt childhood places where “we stand outside ourselves, we stand in the place that surrounds us” (p. 18). According to Chawla, ecstatic memories are inevitably bound with landscape qualities, particularly those of natural spaces, where “they are like radioactive jewels buried within us, emitting energy across the years of our life” (p. 18). In Chawla's study, ecstatic childhood memories were characterized by conditions for space, physical freedom for multisensory exploration and discovery, and psychological freedom. Specifically,

this meant that children (1) freedom to encounter the space spontaneously, 2) sense of appropriation—the place belongs to the child and the child belongs to the place, and 3) basic emotional security of love (p. 21). Although students’ experiences in The Forest seemed to satisfy each of Chawla’s conditions for ecstatic memories of place, whether these memories will one day rise to this level remains unknown. Nevertheless, what remains significant here is the *potential* engendered by the natural landscape and its influence on students’ expressions of aesthetic learning experiences.

III. Imbricated Forming



I am following Ms. Ethel outside along a short path that connects the old building to the new. White-grey stone sculptures of animals and a slender metal totem peek from sloping snow drifts in front of the entrance. Constructed as an addition to the original school nearly fifteen years ago, the new building includes Alpine School’s main office, the art room, a small kitchen, and a large cafeteria that hosts multiple community gatherings after school and on the weekends. The grades 3-5 and 6-8 classrooms, along with several smaller rooms used primarily for storage, are located downstairs. Upon entering the new building, I am greeted by a large rectangular bulletin board adorned with red paper cut-outs of apples welcoming visitors and proclaiming the school’s mission: *to teach a growth mindset in a flexible, unique, and nurturing environment that empowers our learning community to explore significant ideas and exceed state standards.*

Alpine School is not an arts-centered school nor does it entertain any kind of explicit aim toward promoting the arts. Nevertheless, this school entertains a dominant implicit curriculum (Eisner, 1985b, 2002) that reveals specific and ingrained values. Colorful displays of student art saturate every cream wall, every wooden shelf and table, and every windowsill (Plate 36). Students' detailed drawings of native animals—owl, elk, and fox—are displayed the length of a long rectangular wall and contrast with an opposite wall featuring mixed-media cutouts of Middle Eastern hamzas. The geometric quality of three-dimensional space is also carefully attended to, resulting in a pleasing visual balance of low, medium, and high focal points for the eye. Circular paintings are suspended from barely distinguishable thread attached to the ceiling and hover above, frozen in weightlessness (Plate 35). A stairwell demands the visual attention of the passerby with students' optical art pieces, influenced by Soto and Calder, that jut from the wall. These are intentionally displayed following the diagonal line of the stairs so that those ascending see one image while those going down are treated to an entirely different one (Plates 33, 34).

In the cafeteria, the distinct aroma of white bean chili layered with baking bread envelops the main floor with a sense of comfort. At Alpine School, students and staff alike eat from breakable stoneware bowls and plates and converse quietly amidst a background of student-painted murals depicting mountain scenes, native animals, Dolomite Creek, and Blackfoot River. Fields of mountain wildflowers, lavenders, blues, creams, and golds spread generously across the bottom third of the cafeteria walls (Plate 38). The upper third of this expansive room is lined with 11-in. x 14-in. student self-portraits, nearly forty faces created using oil pastels. Student-created posters outline the rules of the lunchroom and persuade themes of healthy eating: *Don't Eat Like This!* cautions one poster with drawings of candy

and soda on one side and *Do Eat Like This!* with brightly colored vegetables and fruits on the other. After students finish eating, they return their dishes to the kitchen and head outside while the older students take turns cleaning up. Today it is Gavin's turn. The sixth-grader grabs a bar towel from the kitchen and quickly begins wiping down tables, finishing by sweeping a grey industrial broom back and forth across the cafeteria floor before he too dashes outside to join his friends.

The Art Room

The art room represents a significant place within the new building. This 20-ft. by 30-ft. room features three large windows along its east wall that provide an expansive view of the forest and playground. Three windowsills opposite the art room frame seven student-created wire armatures of youthful figures in motion: running, leaping, and dancing (Plate 37). Today, the scent of a cave suffuses the air—sweet and earthy and coppery. Just under the windows sits Ms. Anne's desk, the art teacher. Since teachers at this school fulfill multiple roles out of necessity, Ms. Anne also happens to be the school bus driver, rising at four a.m. each morning to drive the precarious wintertime route, slowly winding through towering slabs of quartzite on ice-slicked roads to pick up waiting students from neighboring communities. Since Alpine is the only school within an hour's driving distance, she often drives forty miles roundtrip twice each school day—once in the morning and again in the afternoon. Anne gave birth to a baby boy just a few months earlier and a car seat and walker with attached baby toys sit adjacent to her desk. To the left of her desk is a row of tall shelving packed with various bottles of paint, newspapers, recyclables, brushes, clay, felt, and a general mishmash of odds and ends. Several long wooden tables occupy the center of the

art room and ground the space with a sense of functional permanence: *this is a place where good things are made.*

Making Clay Vessels

Today, one object in the art room stands above the rest, commanding a considerable presence: a large blue clay slab roller machine, four feet tall by four feet wide, with admiral blue legs streaked with slip (Plate 39). Ten older students in grades 6-8 encircle Ms. Ethel who stands at the helm of the enormous blue wheel like a capable ship captain. The students listen with reverence as she charts the course for the afternoon, which is simply to construct a clay vessel. The origin of the slab roller is revealed when one eighth-grade boy, Gavin, reminds the others that this is his mother's machine. Speaking with the kind of caution that can only come from personal experience, Gavin explains that the heavy metal handle attached to the wheel must be turned *very* slowly or will risk detaching and landing on the user's foot. *You have to be really careful, guys*, Gavin warns, making his eyes wide. The other students solemnly nod.

Although Ms. Ethel takes great care to explain the steps and materials used in rolling out the clay, her intended outcomes for the afternoon are neither rigidly preconceived nor overly complex:

(Excerpted from field observation notes, January 14 & 15, 2020)

The students each pick a square piece of grey stoneware clay cut that has been precut from a larger block. The task is to make a vessel. First, they flatten it, making chopping motions with the sides of their hands. They pound and pound until the clay piece is about two inches thick. Working in pairs, they

place two flattened blocks about 8 inches apart on a large rectangular piece of canvas cloth, overlapping the two ends to form an envelope. Casey stands at the wheel and turns it slowly while Gia carefully feeds the cloth envelope with the clay inside through the roller.

The roller flattens the clay to about ¼-inch thick. Casey opens the cloth envelope and removes the two pieces. Each pair of students takes a turn at the slab roller, positioning, folding, and flattening their clay. Next, students place the clay on a square modeling board which the students take back to the table. Students begin forming their vessels. Some students retrieve glass drinking cups from a white dish drying rack next to the sink. At one end of their dark grey slab, they turn the glass upside down and push it into their clay, creating a circle for the base of the vessel.

They trim the sides of their slab with a metal butter knife. Some students use tools specific to clay-making, such as a metal dowel with a wooden handle.

One student starts singing and the others join in. Students are actively engaged in making their vessels with an intense kind of aesthetic focus. They wrap their rectangles carefully around the edge of the circle. Some pieces fit around the entire diameter of the circle while some do not. Ali has cut her piece too short and the other students at her table offer suggestions. After thinking carefully for a few minutes and manipulating her shapes, she decides to cut the rectangle

in half lengthwise with a knife to make two longer pieces she can then join together with slip. *It won't be as tall*, she says with disappointment in her voice.

The students use a plastic tub of grey water on the table filled with small bits of clay to create slip. They score the edges in a crisscross pattern on each side XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX and join the edges together, overlapping slightly, pressing with their fingers, which are now coated with a grey film. Some students add a handle to their vessel. Nina holds her vessel to her lips, testing the design. *This could be a teacup or maybe a vase*, she says. Students work in a rhythm: press clay with fingers, add some slip, and smooth. Smooth, smooth. Overlap, press, and smooth, smooth. The students will continue working on their vessels tomorrow.

The grade 3-5 students are in the lunchroom finishing their vessels from the day before. They are sitting on tables with their vessels in front of them.

Clay is now caked in fingernails and cuticles, and more than a few students have grey smudges on their forearms and cheeks. Students sit side by side and talk, laugh, and sing together. They show each other their vessels and pretend what it could be. One boy holds it up to his eye and imagines it's a telescope. Another student presses the rim of the vessel to her lips as if taking a drink. Some have plastic stencils and press them carefully into their vessels, while other students use a thin wooden dowel with a pointed end to carve a design in the clay.

Back at the art room, the grade 6-8 students (10 of them) shape vessels of varying heights, some tall, some small. A few have handles attached to the side. Students are carving designs on the outside of their vessel while others are carving their initials on the bottom. Casey is using a thin wooden dowel to carve his face onto a small circle about one and a half inches in diameter. *Look!* he says smiling. *I made a Casey coin!*

The carvings students make on the clay express both aesthetic and functional purposes: one student has carved delicate lines sweeping upward, another has an indented pattern on the rim that repeats a pattern of squares, like a Medieval castle. Another depicts a mountain range, and another has a full mountain scene, complete with trees and the moon. Mac has made a candle holder with a perforated lid: *for the light*, he says, grinning and gesturing upwards to the sky. Ethel draws their attention to the specific texture of the clay. She picks up her own vessel from yesterday and feels the texture, comparing it with a vessel started today. *Feel that*, she says to the students. *It's like leather*, she concludes. *Still workable.*

On the Production of Form: Materiality of Imagination and Aesthetic Agency

More than other experience observed for this inquiry, creating clay vessels was an aesthetic learning experience directed toward developing student skill in the management of a specific material. Eisner (1972) offered a framework consisting of four factors for

understanding the qualities, complexities, and implications of producing visual aesthetic forms:

1. *Skill in the management of material.*
2. *Skill in perceiving the qualitative relationships among those forms produced in the work itself, among forms seen in the environment, and among forms seen as mental images.*
3. *Skill in inventing forms that satisfy [the student] within the limits of the material with which [she] is working.*
4. *Skill in creating spatial order, aesthetic order, and expressive power.* (p. 79)

I employ Eisner's framework here to assist in understanding the meanings of the sculpting experience for the participants of this inquiry. First, students gained technical experience with the medium clay, which due to the qualities of its composition, engenders unique possibilities—what Rudolf Arnheim (1992) once characterized as “timeless immobility” (p. 83). Students learned that stoneware clay has a certain density and weight that requires substantial physical manipulation with the slab roller, their hands, and the use of specific tools for cutting and scoring (Plate 40). Second, students actively engaged in deepening their spatial perceptivity as they considered the relationship between the parts of the clay vessel. For example, when Ali cut her piece too short to cover the vessel's base and had to try again, she gained experience in what Eisner (2002) referred to as visual differentiation. Third, my observations of students' active engagement, participation in peer dialogue, and creation of form elicited evidence of student satisfaction with their vessels. Casey was clearly proud of his idea to imprint his personal signature on his “Casey coin,” as was Mac who understood that holes can refract light (Plate 44). His purpose toward creating a vessel that could display light from a candle in a unique way was clearly a personally meaningful one as evidenced by the great care and thoughtful attention to detail he applied to his work. Later, he told me that his vessel was a gift for his grandmother. Finally, the students employed their senses to explore balance, beauty, and evocation through the production of a form. Some vessels

expressed aesthetic order through pattern or through embellishments that depicted students' affinity to their geographical context (Plate 42). Other forms expressed by the students evoked beauty through a combination of several functional qualities that informed the aesthetic whole: the sheer smoothness of the clay, the balance of the vessel within space, the proportion of concavity to convexity, the suppleness of a rim for lips or of a handle for fingers (Plates 43, 45, 46).

What are the implications for the students of this inquiry regarding the production of form? The first is that students' interaction with the form of clay induced an expression that emerged from the use of interactive imagination. McConnell, Conrad, and Uhrmacher (2020) describe the aesthetic theme of interactive imagination as the "manipulation of ideas and qualities" in which a student "works with materials in a back-and-forth style to yield a product" (p. 54). Ms. Ethel structured the clay vessel experience in an open-ended and enlivening way so that her students could combine their technical skills, ideas, and the qualities of the clay to interactively imagine possibilities for what might be take shape between their hands.

In addition to interactive imagination, students' expression of form was intimately tied to students' *aesthetic agency*—which I conceive of as freedom *to* and freedom *from* in the constructive act of an aesthetic learning experience. Students were given the freedom to create and imagine through temporal, spatial, and material affordances that fostered their expressions. The act of sculpting required time, physical and psychic space (as in a caring relationship), as well as appropriate materials specific to the medium. Ms. Ethel provided each of things during this particular aesthetic learning experience. However, aesthetic agency also requires absence, and for students, this meant freedom from excessive emphasis on

conforming to rules that predetermined a specific end product or form, as well as freedom from “process policing” by either the teacher or peers. The aesthetic agency afforded to students during the experience of sculpting directly fostered their ability to express both skill in the management of a material and in conveying meaning through imagination, what Dewey (1934) considered to be the fundamental quality of all conscious experience. The *intangible*, then, functioned as an enabling force for the expression of the *tangible*.

Learning the Continents Through Map-Making

It is afternoon, and Ms. Ethel is standing in the very center of her classroom holding up a piece of paper. The sheet of ordinary-looking white paper she pinches between her thumb and index finger is approximately \$1 per sheet. While it may not seem totally cost-prohibitive for use in a typical early childhood classroom, consider that an entire ream of standard white printer paper currently sells for approximately \$6. However, Ms. Ethel is unconcerned with the material value of this particular paper.

More trees were used to make this kind of paper than regular paper, she says earnestly.

You should only use one piece.

This kind of paper is a professional grade paper—140 lb. weight, acid-free, cold-pressed to enhance its texture or “tooth”—that, in addition to watercolor, is well-suited to other mediums like paint, charcoal, and oil pastels. In addition to paper’s ecological value, which Ms. Ethel finds quite significant, she also values the relationship between the type of paper employed and the specific aims of the experience. For this afternoon’s map-making project, she has intentionally chosen a specific kind of classroom material in order to create conditions for a specific type of experience to unfold—one that is characterized by time.

Among the eleven first- and second-grade students actively engaged in the continents map-making project is Quinn, one of the oldest and tallest students in the K-2 classroom. Today, her multicolored wool tunic hangs from her lanky frame and hugs the knees of her green leggings. A rather serious second-grade student, Quinn prefers to watch from the periphery of activity, occasionally interjecting an astute comment from behind a tangled mass of long black hair. She is steady and soft-spoken, remaining remarkably even-tempered with her younger, more mercurial Kindergarten peers who buzz and flit around the classroom with buoyant exuberance.

After listening carefully to the directions, Quinn ambles over to a 24-in. by 18-in. wooden puzzle set of the seven continents that Ms. Ethel has placed on the floor (Plate 47). This map is a Montessori three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle where each individual continent can be removed to touch and manipulate. A small white button on each piece aids students in holding the continent firm to the paper while tracing. An exact replica of the map in two-dimensional form, similar to a Mercator projection, is also placed by the wooden puzzle for students to reference. In contrast to the flurry of indecision from her younger classmates, Quinn immediately extends her long arm and selects the green Africa piece. She then retrieves a 12-in. by 12-in. tile of thin corkboard from a stack, a purple plastic pushpin, a piece of *this* kind of paper, and sits on a chair at the circle table with the aloe plant, crossing one leg under the other.

Recalling Ms. Ethel's directions, Quinn carefully traces the puzzle piece of Africa on the watercolor paper with a pencil (Plate 48). *I'm finished – do you want to borrow mine?* she asks Antonio, who sits next to her and has been patiently waiting for a piece of the puzzle. Next, she attaches her traced outline to the corkboard with the purple pushpin. After searching for

and then retrieving a second pushpin that has made its way off the table and rolled onto the wooden floor, Quinn hunches her shoulders over the corkboard and begins pinpricking tiny holes, very close together, along the outline she has carefully traced in pencil. Push-push-push, she works, beginning at the southern end of Africa, squeezing the pushpin between her index finger and thumb, lips pursed into a thick line of concentration. Push-push-push. She works her way north up the continent, overlapping the tiny holes with great care, creating a perforated outline (Plates 48, 49).

Normally quite reserved, Quinn verbalizes several connections with her peers over the course of thirty minutes of sustained work:

I remember when I saw the lights on Earth from space.

So I think I saw that in National Geographic.

My hand is so tired.

I want to go to Africa one day.

Push-push-push. When she finally reaches the point where she started, Quinn gently pulls the shape of Africa from the paper, which now detaches freely and reveals slightly textured, fluffed up edges that she runs back and forth over her fingertips. Over the course of the next two weeks, she repeats this overtly tactile process with the rest of the continents. Once all seven continents are punched out using the pushpin, Quinn carefully watercolor paints each continent a different color. The color naturally absorbs with greater density along the perforated edges, creating a darker outline. These continent pieces in turn will be glued to another piece of *this* paper, this time a painted background of myriad blue greens for the oceans.

On the Aesthetics of Form: “Making a Good Thing”

Gaining familiarity with the number and shape of Earth’s continents is a common objective of the early childhood curriculum. Often, this takes the form of a worksheet where students either color and label the various continents or cut out the shapes of continents with scissors and glue them to a corresponding figure of the Earth. What is less common, however, is the way in which Ms. Ethel chooses to structure this experience for her students using an overtly sensory form that does not encourage—but demands—time. She explains her intentions this way:

I feel like when you put more time into something and you're more focused on it, then it becomes more ingrained. One thing that I really believe in is that we don't have a lot of time in our lives anymore where we just sit. I don't want to say meditate, but just sit. And so, with cutting, you'll be done in less than a minute. With this [punching outlines], they're sitting there, and I noticed the calmness with the class and they're all just punching through. I know some of them definitely lose focus after a while and you know, it'll take probably a couple more weeks before we're finished, but I think that taking that time is really important.

However, giving time is not without its own pedagogical tension for Ms. Ethel despite her unregimented approach. She continues:

And the projects—sometimes it's hard because they take a long time, but I feel like that's a really important part of it. Just letting them be with it for weeks, and keep going with it, and know that that's part of making a good thing—it takes time.

Ms. Ethel’s intention for her students to gain immersive and sustained experience through “making a good thing” calls to mind Eisner’s belief that the way in which something is formed matters: “To form is to engage in an activity occurring over time, guided by

attention to changing qualities whose end is to produce a structure, either temporal or spatial, that gives rise to feeling” (Eisner, 1985a, p. 27). As Eisner makes clear, forming influences and shapes experience. This conclusion bears considerable consequence in the classroom because the way in which learning is formed profoundly affects not only a student’s experience “in-the-moment” but also subsequent experiences. For example, the experience of a second-grade student who colors, cuts, and glues the continents onto a worksheet all in the space of about thirty minutes differs greatly from the experience of a second grader who, over the course of two weeks, patiently pinpricks tiny holes along the outline of each continent, feeling the rough edges with her finger, making personal and social connections, and painting each continent with watercolor.

A second related point of significance concerns the way in which Ms. Ethel explicitly connects the amount of time a learning activity takes—weeks even—with the aesthetic theme of perceptivity, or deepened sensory experience (Uhrmacher, 2009). The ability to perceive stands apart from the ability to recognize, and Dewey (1934) argued that the chasm between the two constructs is in fact quite wide:

Recognition is perception arrested before it has a chance to develop freely. In recognition there is a beginning of an act of perception. But this beginning is not allowed to serve the development of a full perception of the thing recognized. It is arrested at the point where it will serve some other purpose... (p. 52)

Similar to Dewey’s view, Eisner (2008) noted that the virtue of perception constitutes something qualitatively different than recognition:

...a savoring, a qualitative exploration of a variety of qualities, qualities that constitute the qualitative wholeness of the object or event being perceived... learning how to slow down perception is one of the primary ways in which one can enrich one's experience (p. 3).

Ms. Ethel provided pedagogical conditions that invited her students to perceive rather than recognize. By taking the time to persist toward the goal of “making a good thing,” students were encouraged to develop their sensory ability to notice subtle qualities—in this case, the form of a particular continent. The achievement of perceptivity required both time and patience—for the students and for Ms. Ethel—and ultimately influenced students’ expressions of this particular aesthetic learning experience. I certainly do not wish to intimate that students demonstrated sustained focus in all of my observations of the continents map-making project. In fact, the rhythm of student interest ebbed and flowed throughout multiple observations. Some days students were able to focus on the activity, and at other times, students seemed more distracted. Like Quinn, a few children complained that their hands were tired. However, students were not required to engage beyond what was developmentally appropriate, in this case for approximately 30-45 minutes each day. The point here is that through the experience of forming things well or “making a good thing”, students were given the opportunity to push beyond recognition and develop perceptivity.

“Thinking Within the Constraints and Affordances of a Material”

By carefully selecting the materials that her students engage with during aesthetic learning experiences, including their quality and specific features, Ms. Ethel directly influenced not only what her students understand, but the *way* in which they come to understand it—what Eisner called “think[ing] within the constraints and affordances of a material” (Eisner, 2002, p. 236). Such an ability requires not only familiarity with a form and its specific properties and functions, but also a deep knowledge of student development and learning preferences. Ms. Ethel’s deliberate selection of specific materials for the map-

making project to elicit a specific type of expression—the wooden puzzle, the watercolor paper, the use of Farb-Reisen rather than Crayola watercolors—calls to mind the process used by abstract expressionist Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011) who employed a distinctive method to create her paintings. She used specific products like turpentine to thin paint and then, working from a sitting position on the floor, created enormous, overlapping veils of color sometimes using mops and squeegees. Her technique created landscapes of color where the viewer could not tell which was foreground or background, engendering an aesthetic of lucid impermanence to her compositions.

Quinn quite clearly expressed her own understanding of the unique features of form and the constraints and affordances of working with a specific material during a conversation we had at the round table. I asked her if there were any times that she felt like she was being particularly creative in her classroom. With a spark in her eye and a sly half-smile, Quinn quickly replied:

When I watercolor paint. I get really angry with watercolor paint! Oils and acrylics are a lot easier for me because they stick on, so when I do watercolor, I have to put some on and then if it bleeds, I have to be okay with it and turn it into something else. So I really feel like I'm being creative when I do that.

As a second-grader, Quinn is not only acutely aware of the difference between oils or acrylic paints and watercolor—they “stick on” better (*utility affordance*)—she is also able to verbalize her frustration with the viscosity of watercolor paint (*affective constraint*). Her response “If it bleeds, I have to be okay with it” signifies her ability to notice and evaluate her own particular affective threshold for a specific type of paint. Quinn understands *flexible purposing* (Dewey, 1938; Eisner, 2002) that is, beginning with one goal in mind yet remaining

open to “turning it into something else” when a new direction arises. She connects the idea of flexible purposing as an expression of her creativity—having to alter her original idea to explore and accept something unexpected and new. When students are afforded opportunities to work within the affordances and constraints of a material, they learn, like Quinn, that forms have a range of qualities, that purposes can change and should be held flexibly, that innovation is often necessary, and that knowledge gleaned vis-à-vis an aesthetic mode (Eisner, 1985a) is indeed viable.

Critical Moments: Complexities, Alternatives, and Aporias

One complexity that arose during this inquiry concerned my participant-observer stance. This was often in tension with my intended deontological and relational ethical frameworks of reciprocity and care. Initially I tried to remain on the periphery of activity, however I quickly learned this was not an effective approach when conducting an inquiry within a rural context. Teachers and students seemed to know or at least recognize every person who happened to visit or work at the school; unfamiliar “outside” visitors were rare. Teachers and other adults remained polite but seemed rather uncomfortable being watched and in turn watched me with a level of guarded wariness (what Rancière called *le regard*, or ‘the look’). Children, too, were quite astute in their own observations of me—Ava captured this point clearly in our interview:

And you want to know what I enjoy? That like, you know, that you were looking at on the first day, that big picture up by the cubbies? I enjoy that.

A sense of distance persisted throughout my fieldwork despite living in the community during my research and spending many hours in the classroom with the students and Ms.

Ethel. This likely could have been ameliorated, in part, by remaining committed to a full participant stance at the outset of fieldwork. As a result of this perceptual shift, and in light of what I have learned thus far in conducting research with rural students and communities, I would plan to engage in fieldwork for a much longer period of time (a few months at the very least) to build more capacity for relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) and reciprocity, to de-center my tourist gaze (Lippard, 1997) and to allow a full participant stance to evolve more naturally and completely. The times that I did instinctively slip from a participant-observer stance to one of full participant were the times my research felt most authentic and joyful: being outside with the children, painting my hand, sliding down the slide, playing tag, crouching under a low ceiling of logs, laying on top of snowbanks, singing, listening to shells, skiing, sculpting clay, and digging snow tunnels. In addition to my own personal satisfaction, the interpretations emerging from my data would have conveyed more meaning and depth.

Another critical moment concerns the “prudence and importance of considering alternative appraisals” (Eisner, 2017, p. 111). Because the strength of the educational connoisseurship and criticism method is directly allied with its subjectivity, it is necessary to consider and present alternative possibilities for discussion to aid in structural corroboration. The first aspect concerns the pedagogical dimension—to what degree can student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences be attributed to the high quality of instruction and organization of pedagogical experiences by Ms. Ethel? My focus on student experience has perhaps neglected the intersection with teacher quality and skill which figures prominently in any learning context. A second aspect concerns the degree of influence of the informal organizational structure of Alpine School and its community ethos which may have

been more conducive to aesthetic learning experiences than I have considered in representing this inquiry's findings. A third point concerns the influence of students' identities, cultures, and prior experiences, which certainly contributed to their expressions of aesthetic learning experiences but which I did not probe in an in-depth manner. Along a similar vein, I did not explore expressions of aesthetic learning for specific sub-groups of students which may have been useful for comparative purposes. A fourth point concerns my emphasis on the finding of place in appraising student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences at the expense of more fully attending to the significance of *relationships*.

Finally, silencing history was an ethical aporia I found difficult to reconcile. The significant historical nature of Alpine School and its surrounding geography necessitated that I omit a large portion of data to preserve confidentiality. Including these data would have meant certain identification of the school and town but may also have elicited an additional layer of meaning and credibility. Other moments of personal disquiet included a paper sign taped prominently to the front doors of the school decrying sexual abuse specifically ("*We live in an off-limits community!*") as well as an anonymous email I received from a parent detailing her unhappiness with the school and a warning that things may not be as they seem. These tensions are present and accepted yet unresolved.

Plates for Rhythm and Ritual



Figure 4
Interior View of Ms. Ethel's Mbira



Figure 5
Exterior View of Ms. Ethel's Mbira



Figure 6
Side View of Ms. Ethel's Mbira



Figure 7
The Bell



Figure 8
Three African Drums and Two Sticks Made by Ms. Ethel's Husband



Figure 9
Red Xylophone



Figure 10
Kalimba with Carved Lizards



Figure 11
Classroom Piano with Various Instruments



Figure 12
Various Instruments



Figure 13
Snare Drum and Sticks



Figure 14
Various Percussion Instruments



Figure 15
Mr. Maxwell's Drum Set



Figure 16
Cymbal



Figure 17
Various Percussion Instruments

Plates for Connected Geographies



Figure 18
Dolomite Creek at Dawn

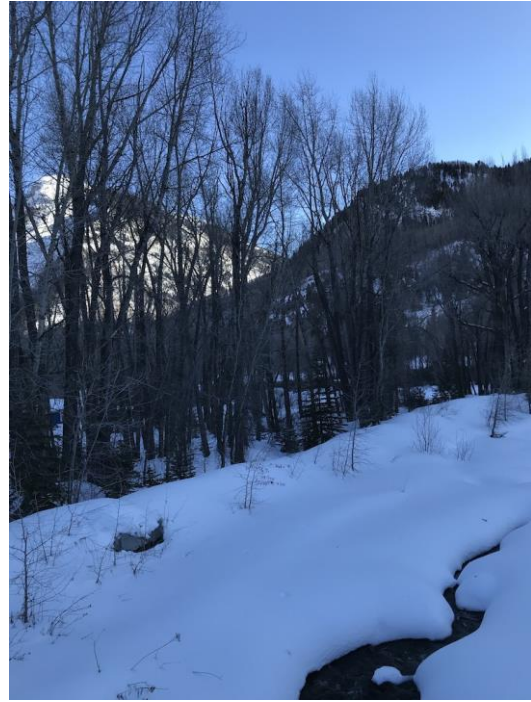


Figure 19
Sunrise Over the Mountain



Figure 20
Snow-packed Bridge



Figure 21
Century-old School Bell



Figure 22
Snow Drift Used by Children as a Fort



Figure 23
Students' Skis in Front of a Painted Mural



Figure 24
Older students' skis

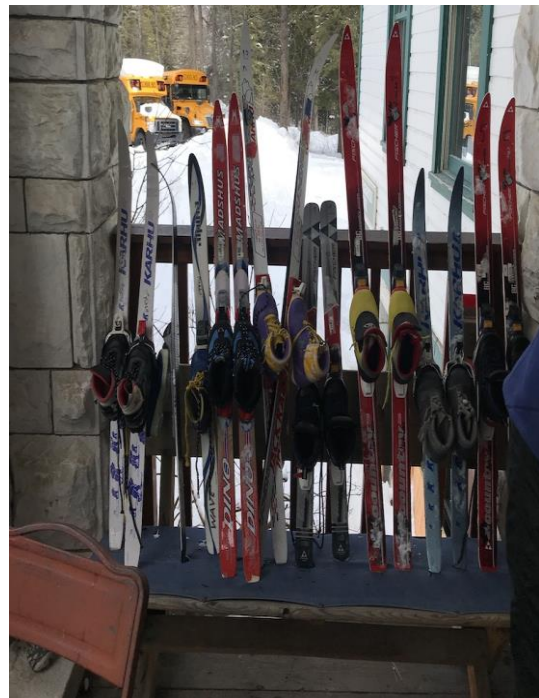


Figure 25
Younger Students' Skis Drying After P.E.



Figure 26
The Forest in January; View from Ms. Ethel's Classroom



Figure 27
Student's View of The Forest



Figure 28
The Forest in January



Figure 29
Pink Crystals Unearthed



Figure 30
The Students' Fort in July



Figure 31
The Forest in July



Figure 32
Student Play Area Within The Forest

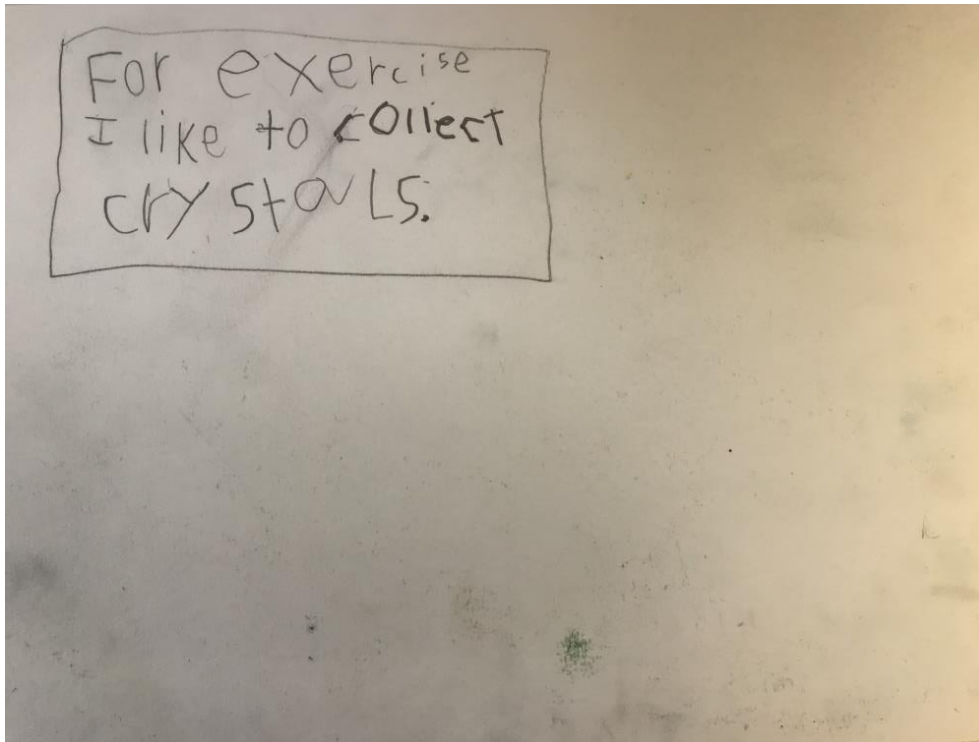


Figure 33
"For Exercise I Like to Collect Crystals" Student Age 6
193



For exercise I
like to go in the
woods.

Figure 34
"For Exercise I Like to Go in the Woods" Student Age 8
194



For exercise I like to
Ski. ~~For exercise I like to~~
~~Ski. For exercise I like to~~
~~Ski. For exercise I like to~~

Figure 35
'For Exercise I Like to Ski' Student Age 6

Plates for Imbricated Forming



Figure 36
Kinetic Art, Student Age 15



Figure 37
Kinetic Art, Student Age 13



Figure 38
Student Art, Hanging Mobiles



Figure 39
Student Art, Kandinsky's Circles



Figure 40
Wire Armatures of Youthful Figures in Motion



Figure 41
Student-painted Mural in Cafeteria of Mountain Wildflowers



Figure 42
Slab Roller



Figure 43
Bucket of Slip and Clay Modeling Tools



Figure 44
Tall Vase for Flowers



Figure 45
Clay Vessel with Mountain Scene



Figure 46
Pair of Clay Vessels on Modeling Board



Figure 47
*Candle Holder with Perforations
‘For the Light’*



Figure 48
Short Smooth Vessel



Figure 49
Variety of Student Vessels Drying in Preparation to be Glazed and Fired



Figure 50
Three-dimensional Wooden Puzzle of the Earth

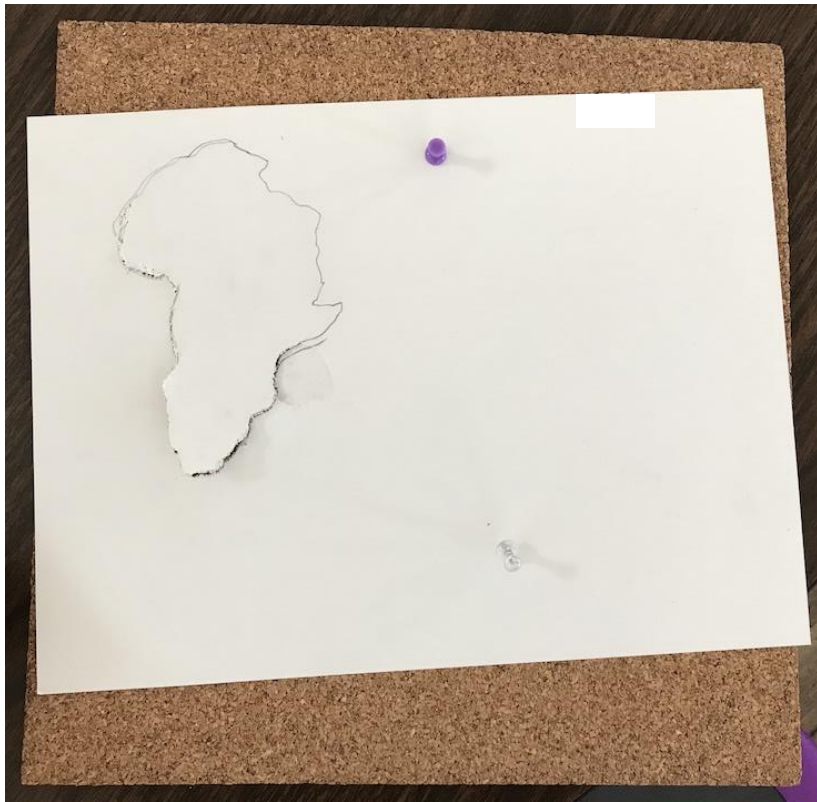


Figure 51
Pin-punch Outline of Africa, Student Age 8



Figure 52
Pencil Tracing of Three Continents, Student Age 7

CHAPTER FIVE: ANTICIPATORY FRAMEWORKS, IMPLICATIONS,
AND CLOSING REMARKS

“A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.”

~Elliot W. Eisner

For this inquiry, I was primarily interested in exploring student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences, including what students say, do, and create. I also considered the ways in which Ms. Ethel’s intentions for her students’ learning affected the instructional arc (Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017) of her classroom with a specific focus on the received curriculum. In the educational criticism presented in Chapter Four, I first identified and described three focal points of student expression of learning experiences —music, place, and composition—and analyzed how specific aesthetic qualities, structures, and forms within each created conditions for aesthetic knowing and meaning-making (Eisner, 1985a) for the student participants. When I referred to these findings as focal points, I intended to evoke what Deleuze called *qualitative multiplicity* rather than a clearly delineated category (Lundy, 2018; Tampio, 2010). In other words, I wished to preserve the fluidity, nuance, and subjectivity of multiple overlays of the classroom experience. Two focal points, music and composition, were focused on exploring and illuminating student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences within the school and classroom. The third focal point, place,

considered not only the *what* of student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences, but the *where*, a concept that was sublimated in my original research question but which the findings from this inquiry has consequently brought to the light. The meanings and value of aesthetic learning experiences outside of the classroom, specifically within children's outdoor spaces and places within the immediate location of the school and surrounding rural community, affected conditions for students to have these types of experiences. Taken together, these three aspects of experience served as focal points for specific exploration, elaboration, and evaluation rather than capacious generalizations of student life. Indeed, as Eisner reminds us in the above quote, what we don't see is equally as important as what we do see. I drew on six aesthetic themes of education (Uhrmacher, 2009), Eisner's *Dimensions of Schooling* (1988), and the ideas of Dewey (1934) to guide and frame my interpretations. Where possible, I looked to the work of artists themselves to provide theoretical framing for the processes of teaching and learning, and a similar agenda is continued in Chapter Five.

Whereas Chapter Four illuminated experiences, meanings, and implications for the participants involved with a particular focus on what students say, do, and create when involved in aesthetic learning experiences, Chapter Five is devoted to other visions for education. I build on the work of this inquiry's findings to imagine how the specific possibilities offered by the current research potentially extend to other versions of educational landscapes, what Eisner (2017) referred to as *thematics*. Here, I wish to remain modest, and in doing so, leave space for multiple possibilities for further exploration. Indeed, I wish to homage Eisner's idea that exists not multiple roads to a singular Rome but rather "multiple roads to many Romes" (Eisner, 2005). These possibilities include: 1) savoring inefficiency in the curriculum; 2) constructing ordinary imaginaries; 3) sense-making

and space-making in the curriculum; and 4) becoming in place with others. These visions serve as anticipatory frameworks, or patterns for “deepened seeing and elaboration” (Uhrmacher, et al., 2018, p. 56) of a particular context that may be subsequently adapted and reimagined across a variety of education settings for the purpose of improvement.

Savoring Inefficiency in the Curriculum

“The arts are about savoring.”

~*Elliot W. Eisner, The Arts and the Creation of Mind*

Inefficiency conjures a peculiar combination of faulty leisureliness and waste and thus incurs a particularly specious connotation in education (Clark, Nguyen, & Sweller; 2011; Betts & Loveless, 2005). One question that arises from the findings of this inquiry concerns the adequacy of the continued manifestation of efficiency-based thinking and practices toward effectuating enlivened and engaged learning experiences. Along with its neoliberal corollaries of standardization, commodification, accountability, and measurement, efficiency in education is allied with the control of production and outputs through the perpetuation of conformity: curriculum is reduced to predetermined outcomes that are measured on a test, students become test scores assessed by rubrics, and educators become “practitioners” of the technical assessed by standardized protocols and performance-based criteria. Efficiency discourse has taken a particularly pejorative turn by co-opting larger concepts of “best practices” and even the rather holy notion of “equity,” tidily subsuming sameness with effectiveness. Industrial education practice, a by-product of the abhorrence of inefficiency, has had a significant and deleterious impact on curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment within

schools (Giroux, 2001). Emphasizing the attainment of predetermined, standardized outcomes and specifying the most efficient means of achieving them has in effect reduced education to a superficial race for adequacy rather than a meaningful “celebration of thinking” (Eisner, 1994, 1998). Thus, what is inefficient has become synonymous with what is ineffective and inequitable.

The findings from this research, however, propose a counter to this theme—that what would otherwise be deemed inefficient is actually something linger over and perhaps even cherish. Slowing the efficient and savoring the inefficient perpetuates coagulation and it is this gathering of time and space that allowed particular aesthetic themes to flourish. For example, taking time to experience the daily musical ritual of singing with the mbira each morning was inefficient but fostered students’ engagement through the senses and connections to place, culture, and peers—what McConnell et al. (2020) referred to as sensorial, personal, and social connections (p. 52). Allowing each individual student a turn on the drum set was inefficient but animated the release of two forms of imagination in particular, the interactive and the mimetic (McConnell et al.), through students’ expressions of improvisation and rhythm. Making clay vessels over the course of two days was inefficient but elicited students’ development of perceptivity and supported their skill in the management and expression of form. Pin-pricking tiny holes along the outlines of continents over the course of two weeks was inefficient but allowed students the opportunity to “make a good thing” and enlarge perceptivity of the larger world.

Relishing inefficiency through aesthetic learning experiences can recenter focus on the quality of educational experience, revealing deeper meanings for students and leaving space for more enduring and capacious outcomes such as critical thinking, the development

of imagination, and increased student satisfaction. It is what Eisner (2002) referred to as the *virtue* of “slowing down perception”:

If there is any lesson that the arts teach, it is the importance of paying close attention to what is at hand, of slowing down perception so that efficiency is put on a back burner and the quest for experience is made dominant. There is so much in life that pushes us toward the short term, toward the cursory, toward what is efficient and what can be handled in the briefest amount of time. The arts are about savoring. (p. 207)

The virtue of prolonged perception in educational settings has been explored by others, notably Harvard’s Shari Tishman. In her book *Slow Looking: The Art and Practice of Observation* (2018), she argued that slow looking “foregrounds the capacity to observe details, to defer interpretation, to make careful discernments, to shift between different perspectives, to be aware of subjectivity, and to purposefully use a variety of observation strategies in order to move past first impressions” (p. 6).

In Chapter Four, I acknowledged that savoring inefficiency by slowing down perception was not without its own pedagogical tension for Ms. Ethel, who, despite her overall unregimented approach and school structure, struggled with the amount of time required by some of the learning activities. Some educators, depending on the demands of their responsibilities and contexts, may feel this concern more acutely than others—cherishing time and attending to the quality of educational experience may at times seem like a luxury just beyond grasp. While it is true that aesthetic learning experiences necessitate sufficient time due to the focus on prolonged and perceptive engagement through the senses, this tension need not be overwhelming. One appropriate place to begin is within the dimensions of curriculum and pedagogy. As critical mediators of curriculum, educators can focus on the quality of student experience rather than the destination by beginning incrementally with just one or two aesthetic themes—sensory experience and connections,

for example—and carefully considering how including opportunities to elevate the senses slows perception and creates more meaningful learning experiences for students.

Another finding from this inquiry alludes to the possibility of inefficient educational practices to counter disengagement and elevate themes of democracy. Siegesmund (2010) argued that aesthetics directly relates to public education by “preparing individuals for responsible participatory citizenship...with the goal of creating socially responsible public places” (p. 88). Ayers et al. (2016) concluded that “art inoculates against what threatens to ruin and deaden education” (p. 43), refuting institutional practices like homogeny and detachment. For the students of this inquiry, savoring the inefficient shaped expressions of active engagement, imagination, and perceptivity, and it also facilitated a practical pathway for full and meaningful participation in a learning experience that considered every voice. This process of developing capacity for active citizenship, where educators “help young people to seek out a range of ideas and to voice their own” (Apple, 1995, p. 13), was fostered primarily through the following: 1) Ms. Ethel’s decision to sublimate the pressures of standardization and external accountability structures and elevate themes of quality, community, and social connection; and 2) her fidelity to her complementary curriculum of ecological care, which facilitated her orchestration of a vibrant pedagogy attuned to the specific needs of her students and to the context of the rural community.

Constructing Ordinary Imaginaries

“The ordinary is a thing that has to be imagined and inhabited.”

~*Kathleen Stewart, Ordinary Affects*

“Let us not ignore the fact that much art is made without waiting for any occasion;
that sometimes sheer imagination goes to work.”

~*Susanne Langer, Problems of Art*

A second possibility that arises from this inquiry resides in reawakening perceptions of aesthetic learning experiences within the ordinary spaces and places of everyday schooling. By ordinary spaces and places, I am referring to engagements with the daily qualities and realities of life in schools. Constructing ordinary imaginaries involves “learning to see what we have learned not to notice” (Eisner, 2017, p. 77), to consciously peer through the “cotton wool” (Greene, 1995, p. 23) of our everyday realities and actively persist toward a greater awareness of possibility. Countering the notion of defamiliarizing the familiar, which she views as ultimately a paradox that privileges western ontologies, Saito (2017) argued for appreciating the *ordinary as ordinary* and cautioned that important limitations persist when attempting to elevate the ordinary. “Are the ordinary and the everyday *as ordinary and everyday* always incompatible with the aesthetic?” Saito asked. “Do they always have to be put “out of gear” or “distanced” from the normal flow of experience in order for its aesthetic potential to be actualized?” (p. 22). Based on the emergent findings from this inquiry in Chapter Four, I argue that the ordinary is not extraordinary because it “stands apart” from experience, but because of the connective possibilities it engenders *within* and *through* experience. Stewart (2007) captured this point well when she envisaged the

significance of the ordinary in assisting in the perception and apprehension of “what thoughts and feelings might be possible... where they might go and what potential modes of knowing, relating, and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance” (p. 3). Thus, in constructing ordinary imaginaries, it is important to seek possibility *within* context rather than apart from it, that is, educators should not strive toward crafting “special status” learning experiences, but rather should depend on the aesthetic possibilities engendered within and through the learning experience itself.

In addition to the above conceptions, the work of artists can assist in reorienting our perceptions of the ordinary. One well-known example came from Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) who famously posited the ordinary as art in his collection of “readymades.” Duchamp entered an ordinary urinal, signed *R. Mutt, 1917*, into an unjuried art competition organized by the American Society of Independent Artists (of which Duchamp was also a member of the Board) in New York City. *Fountain* was ultimately rejected, and Duchamp protested, igniting a controversy regarding what could and could not be considered art (Camfield, 1989; Sullivan, 2002). Duchamp reoriented our aesthetic perception of everyday objects—a urinal, a shovel, a broom, a window—and in doing so, provoked potential in the ordinary to occupy an elevated space. A second artist, less well-known than Duchamp but equally impactful, I believe, in terms of elevating the notion of an everyday aesthetic, is the work of sculptor Ruth Asawa (1926-2013). Asawa is best-known for her wire crocheted sculptures made from continuous loops of a single spool of ordinary wire. To Asawa, art and the everyday intertwined in co-existence, impossible to separate (Chase, 2020). In addition to her wire sculptures for which she is most well-known, Asawa also sketched everyday figures and forms, often on ordinary paper bags or towels. Her sculptures currently grace several spaces

in San Francisco, where she lived, worked, and taught. Finally, performance artist Senga Nengudi (1943-) uses ordinary materials such as masking tape, rubber, sand, seed pods, used pantyhose, and other found objects to reorient perceptions of the body, Black identity and experience, womanhood, space, and time in unexpected ways. At one of her performance art compositions in Los Angeles in the late 1970s, Nengudi covered her body in bits of tape and through contemporary dance, enlarged the spirituality of a common object: “I like to use material that people normally use in very specific ways, like masking tape. I find that there are other uses that people don’t think about...that a commonplace material, just like the average person, has a higher self” (Hart, 2021, p. 6).

The findings from this inquiry suggest that seemingly ordinary moments in the school day—whether due to ubiquity, mundanity, or both—are actually opportune occasions ripe for elevating what is already present and imagining it elevated with aesthetic themes that may make experience more meaningful—perhaps even transformative—for students. Maxine Greene (1995) had much to say about the relation between imagination and transformation; she consistently spoke of imagination in terms of an active, rather than passive, process of construction. Greene’s view of imagination is one of an alternative vision, of “looking at things as if they could be otherwise” (p. 124), abandoning helplessness and indifference, firmly rooted in resistance to what she termed a “desperate stasis” (p. 132). She saw active engagement with the arts and in aesthetic experience as fundamental to “releasing” a pedagogy of imaginative resistance. Dewey (1934) described imaginative experience as “what happens when varied materials of sense quality, emotion, and meaning come together in a union that marks a new birth in the world” (p. 267).

One way to mark this new birth is to closely examine the curriculum for the familiar. Such attentiveness to the ordinary might yield an awareness of spaces where the prosaic persists, where experiences could be reimagined for students with enlarged vitality through the aesthetic themes. It is precisely at this juncture, “when old and familiar things are made new in experience” (Dewey, 1934, p. 267) that imagination materializes. Ms. Ethel took a rather common early childhood activity—constructing a map of the continents—and enriched the experience for her students by imbuing it with overtly tactile and visual qualities. Similarly, her students encountered an ordinary moment of the school day—the daily morning routine of arriving in the classroom—made enlarged by connections to non-visual modes of expression created through music. It is important to note here that constructing ordinary imaginaries need not be ensconced with an aura of profundity; students do not require grand or dramatic aesthetic learning experiences to expand their awareness or to find learning meaningful. Transformation and consciousness are planted seed by seed within the ordinary and elevated experiences that comprise possibilities for both personal and shared learning.

Sense-making and Space-making in the Curriculum

“The senses, under the aegis and direction of the mind, give us a world.”

~*Yi-Fu Tuan, Passing Strange and Wonderful*

“Space is fundamental in any form of communal life;

space is fundamental in any exercise of power.”

~*Michel Foucault, The Foucault Reader*

A third possibility that arises from the findings of this inquiry suggests the potential for aesthetic learning experiences to influence students' capabilities to make sense of their world through the specific educational spaces they inhabit. Space has been theorized as a site of knowledge by many authors (Bachelard, 1964; Massey; 2005; Soja, 1996, 2010) and for the scope of the current inquiry a few ideas are key: space can fuel empowerment, space is inclusive of reality rather than set apart from it, and space is a mechanism for production and reproduction. Greene (1988) considered the cultivation of imaginative space as central to the production of freedom in education, an "opening of spaces as well as perspectives" (p. 5) where students are empowered to "create spaces of dialogue in their classrooms, spaces where they can take initiatives and uncover humanizing possibilities" (p. 13). Oliver (1989) offered a process view of space, one in which space functions not as a misguided fragmentation of place (e.g., children go *to* school to learn) but rather an "intrinsic part of the happening itself... all being is thus alive, not in space or environment but including space and environment" (p. 187). According to Oliver, a life-affirming view of space necessitates an emergent focus on an expansive and complex participation within space, not segregated from it. One of the more widely influential theories is Lefebvre's (1991) argument which took up the idea that every society produces and replicates its own unique and active space (cultural space) predicated on the active interrelationships of its social structures. Lefebvre suggested that the production and reproduction of space is enacted within social structures via three modes: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space (p. 33). That is, space can be perceived, conceived, and lived. It is within this last mode, representational space, which is especially germane to the present inquiry, because it is here, as Lefebvre noted, that space can be affective, imaginational, and relational.

First, student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences reproduced an expanded view of cognition (Eisner, 1994) in which affective sense-making was cherished. With regard to sense-making, I am referring to the central importance of sensory experience in contributing to the achievement of nondiscursive modes of knowing, an idea that has been undervalued in both educational research and practice (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1994; Tuan, 1993). Considering the preeminence of the senses in concept formation, Eisner (1994) noted that “all concept formation is biologically rooted in the sensory systems that humans possess” (p. 35). The concept of Jazz music is thus a composite of not only what is heard but also what is seen and felt. During the drum lesson, for example, students learned that the world can be known and felt non-visually.

Second, the findings from this inquiry allude to the significance of spaces that fight against the reproduction of the “desperate stasis” of standardization by engendering imaginative possibilities. Whether improvising a composition at the drum set, engaging in an impromptu musical performance (see Interlude), or experiencing felt freedom through expressions of imaginative play in *The Forest*, the spaces produced by aesthetic learning experiences led students to wonder, to question, and to creatively diverge. This function is similar to what Ellsworth (2005) described as transitional spaces that “allow us to use the environment to get lost in oneself, to make a spontaneous gesture, to get interested in something new, to surprise oneself, to organize bits of experience” (p. 61). Emphasizing a full range of sensory experience can develop what Dewey (1934) perceived as the construction of “deepened intelligibility” (p. 288) or the ability to attend to qualities and their relationships within experience. The value of this type of sense-making in educational

experience cannot be overstated. As Eisner (1972) emphasized in his discussion of the virtues of qualitative intelligence:

When intelligence is considered this way it becomes not simply a capacity given at birth and once and for all programmed into the genes; it becomes a mode of human action that can grow *through* experience. Intelligence in this sense is capable of expansion and through such expansion our consciousness of the world and the meanings that world can provide us also expand. (p. 115)

In the rhythm and ritual focal point described in Chapter Four, music was a form of representation (see Chapter Three, p. 48) that opened spaces for student expressions of dialogue, social and personal connections, and mimetic and interactive imagination. Yet, this form also enlarged embodied ways of knowing (Barbour, 2011; Merleau-Ponty & Landes, 2012) within space that are less emphasized and valued in educational contexts. Musical experience engaged multiple senses and developed children's affective capabilities through somatic awareness of their bodily movements inscribed within space: the weight and smoothness of the drumsticks through the air, the repetitive vibrations through the hand when striking the drum, the texture of clay rolled and pushed through the fingers, the intrinsic pleasure derived from moving and swaying to the melodious sounds of the mbria.

Finally, relational space was reproduced vis-à-vis Ms. Ethel's complementary ecological care that placed a high degree of value on caring for self, other, and the larger world. Her intentions toward developing a love of learning within her students allowed aesthetic learning experiences to unfold spontaneously and encouraged immersive participation. The significance of relationality within place is examined more in-depth in the following section.

Becoming in Place With Others

“The school can be an aesthetic community.

The school can nurture the child's feelings as well as [her] thoughts.”

~*Elliot W. Eisner, The School as an Aesthetic Community*

Congruent with Lippard’s (1997) view that “space defines landscapes, where space combined with memory defines place,” (p. 9), this inquiry prioritizes the lived experiences of students *becoming in place with others*. Ascribing to a discourse of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) rather than being prioritizes lived experience and attempts to intervene in the reproduction of western ontologies that privilege being over becoming (Saito, 2007). It is ironic (and frankly disconcerting) to think that just six weeks after I left the field, students, teachers, and families at Alpine School were forced to completely reorient their conceptualizations of place. In fact, place-based education (Gruenewald, 2003; Smith, 2002) has necessitated new meanings in the realities of a pandemic world as millions of students and their families have been forced to *dislocate* from the school as a significant place of learning and inhabit other places including the home and the virtual.

As noted in Chapter Four, one tension of this study questions the assumption of my research question, *What* are student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences? and proposes a subsequent revision to include *Where* are student expression of aesthetic learning experiences? Therefore, I argue that a fourth possibility advanced by this inquiry points to a reconceptualization of where aesthetic learning experiences occur and the subsequent meanings for students. The findings of this inquiry provide new insights of students’ aesthetic engagement with places beyond the classroom and how these places can function

as what Eisner called an aesthetic community. While certain places of this research held manifest potential, such as the classroom, the art room, and the music room, other places such as natural environment surrounding the school, were less obvious. The Forest in particular was a significant place of learning that held affinity for the student participants across three areas: aesthetic enjoyment, social connection and imaginative response, and freedom. Place functioned as a connective force that encouraged students' full participation through immersive engagement, fostered a sense of belonging with others, and facilitated the release of imagination.

The findings of this inquiry endeavor to elevate local places as sites of aesthetic knowledge (Casey, 1996; Demarest, 2015; Lippard, 1997; Theobald, 1997). When place, and particularly place with others, is perceived as a site of aesthetic knowledge, possibilities for deepened engagement and meaning are revealed. Demarest (2015) wrote of the importance of considering place as “text,” or as a valued form of knowledge:

When teachers take a critical stance toward learning in the community, there are no limits to what can serve as sources of knowledge. The teacher arranges—and makes space for the student to arrange—connections with other people, places, and forms of knowledge... It is a new kind of learning and because it is often a puzzle, it can engage the learner in ways that the printed page cannot. (p. 107)

The students of this inquiry experienced aesthetic engagement with place not only in the form of physical relation to the aesthetic qualities of place itself, but also in relation to others. Several authors support the idea of aesthetic engagement existing within a decidedly social sphere. Haraway (2016), for example, noted that children are always engaged in a social, dialogic, and relational process of becoming with others. Bourriaud (2002) advanced a theory of relational aesthetics that included interrelated social practices based on “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of

human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space” (p. 113). Glissant (1997) conceptualized relation as a “poetics” that “does not think of land as a territory from which to project to other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps” through shared knowledge (p. 144). Blair (2014) affirmed that “one of the advantages of an aesthetic engagement with place is the capacity to create a relationship that has personal meaning, draws the individual in and engages” (p. 1). The findings of this inquiry suggest that *relationality*, or the process of students *becoming with others*, was fundamental in influencing student expressions of aesthetic engagement with place. Ms. Ethel’s deeply held belief toward care for self, others, and the natural world imbued her pedagogy with a high level of intimacy vis-à-vis her knowledge of her students, their families, and the community, and in this way, care functioned as a projective spark for the genesis of aesthetic learning experiences within place. The Forest was a place that sustained generative and meaningful conditions for students’ joyful, sensorial, and purposive engagement with others. The deep intersubjectivity between students, self, and place fostered immediate opportunities for children to construct local knowledge through their senses and to discover their place *within* the world rather than detached from it.

The four preceding anticipatory frameworks generated from the findings of this inquiry collectively gesture toward both manifest and less obvious possibilities for imagining aesthetic learning experiences and the consequences for students and teachers working in diverse contexts. In the next section, I propose the inquiry’s significance by exploring implications for educators and researchers and conclude with brief closing remarks.

Significance and Implications for Educators and Researchers

In Chapter One, I noted how critical it was that the findings presented in this educational criticism make a contribution—however small—toward the improvement of the educational enterprise. Indeed, Eisner’s admonition that all educational research should ultimately lead to its improvement (2017, p. 214) permeated my thinking at nearly every twist and turn of this research journey. It is my hope that this inquiry provokes future dialogues of the numerous possibilities engendered by aesthetic learning experiences, and that such inquiries open even more doors that generatively contradict and complicate our understandings of student experience. With this in mind, I propose that the scholarly significance of the present inquiry manifests within following five pathways:

1. Explore possibilities for transformative educational practices by widening approaches to teaching and learning to include aesthetic perspectives;
2. Enrich understandings of how K-8 students experience and value aesthetic learning experiences;
3. Remediate a deficiency in the literature by amplifying the diverse perspectives and experiences of rural school students and their communities;
4. Serve as a useful catalyst for educators and others committed to agitating the practice of efficiency in curriculum and pedagogical practices;
5. Theorize and enact place as a site of aesthetic learning experience within educational contexts.

What insights does this study offer to educators, the primary audience for this inquiry, who seek to create engaging and meaningful experiences for their students via aesthetic learning? And what might this research offer to those who seek to uncover the

potential of aesthetic learning experiences in classrooms and schools? Guided by the acknowledgement that effective and equitable pedagogy is deeply contextual and highly relevant to the needs of individual students, I offer the following key implications for the work of educators. First, this study reinforces the vital and venerable role that educators are privileged to have, and will continue to retain, with respect to the conditions for learning experienced by their students. Ms. Ethel, the primary teacher participant of this inquiry, structured aesthetic learning experiences through her complementary curriculum of ecological care and intentionally fostered opportunities focusing on students' connections to self, others, and to the larger community and natural world. Attending to the way in which aesthetic learning experiences materialize as a "curriculum of care" (Siegesmund, 2010) could provide educators with new insights into how a relational aesthetic curriculum unfolds in the classroom and its subsequent meanings for teachers and students. Second, this study illuminated possibilities toward savoring the inefficient and outlined advantages of such an approach for students. Amidst the heavy responsibilities carried by educators in the current climate, is there a place in the curriculum for slowing down perception? I argue in this inquiry that there is. As noted earlier in Chapter Five, educators can attend to the quality of student experience in the present moment rather than some future destination by intentionally considering how implementing aesthetic themes can slow perception, elevate the senses, and create more meaningful learning experiences for students. Third, this inquiry suggests that aesthetic learning experiences have the potential to elevate what is already present, making the ordinary extraordinary. Acknowledging and imagining possibilities for aesthetic learning experiences within the everyday spaces and places of learning can assist students in cultivating and refining imagination. Fourth, educators should consider

embracing place, specifically the features and phenomena of natural environments and the wisdom gleaned from local contexts, in orchestrating engaged and enlivened learning experiences for their students. Educators who teach in contexts that preclude ready access to natural environments can join with others and even their students to envision and create a natural space at their school that engages the senses and supports immersive experiences with nature and others. One possibility is to create a Sensory Garden with native plants and a simple water feature to engage the eyes, ears, and hands. Considering how students create connections with each other and with nature through multisensory experiences is a pathway worthy of pursuit.

Concerning implications for researchers, this work foregrounds new inquiries into aesthetic learning experiences in several ways. First, this study alludes to the significance of attending to more political aspects of classrooms and schools that explore the function and implications of power in aesthetic learning experiences. For the students of this inquiry, expressions of aesthetic learning experiences were primarily influenced by structures imposed by adults with a couple notable exceptions. For example, the Good Morning Song and the drum lesson were both initiated by adults, whereas the impromptu musical performance described in *Interlude* and the imaginative play in *The Forest* functioned as unrestrained compositions organized and initiated by the students. The relation between who controls the power in initiating aesthetic learning experiences directly influenced students' expressions of them. Future research should attend to the ways in which student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences agitate power structures with the learning environment. Who initiates aesthetic learning experiences and for what purpose? What were the affordances and constraints determined by who or what held power to shape the

experience? Other questions my findings point to for further research concern the construct of *aesthetic agency* presented in Chapter Four. For the students of this inquiry, aesthetic agency was fostered through two areas: freedom to and freedom from. Future research might challenge and refine this conception by positioning specific dimensions of schooling—evaluation in particular—in tandem with aesthetic agency. Finally, this inquiry provides support for equity-centered research seeking to elevate the significance of local schools and contexts. Eisner (1994) noted that “educational equity is not likely without a range of opportunities for conception and representation” (p. 89) and the findings from this inquiry provide an example of one such representation focused on rural students’ expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. In their recent review of sixty empirical studies, Butler and Sinclair (2020) found that place inquiry and spatial methods used in education research, especially when paired with critical theoretical frameworks, hold potential not only for the identification of inequities but also for advancing issues of equity and social justice within localized contexts: “By collecting data about places and listening to the people who occupy those places, education researchers can produce scholarship that moves us toward greater equity and justice in schools and communities” (p. 84). Although this inquiry sought to elevate the wisdom and experiences of voices often rendered invisible—rural school students and teachers—a major limitation nevertheless concerns the fact that this research did not explicitly employ critical, justice, or equity-centered methodologies. Marginalized and underserved educational communities would benefit from future studies that explicitly conjoin aesthetic approaches to teaching and learning with these types of frameworks. Finally, future inquiries should explore student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences for diverse subgroups of students and teachers within a variety of contexts.

Closing Remarks

As we approach the sunset of 2020, its horizon will be remembered not only for the COVID-19 pandemic but also the deep ferocity of racial, social, and environmental injustices. Amidst the continued uncertainties and challenges of this formidable twilight, I can think of no more appropriate and needed path to incite hope and optimism for our collective future than by centering the educational experiences of the next and youngest generation. Students returning to in-person classroom instruction after many months of forced absence will certainly face formidable challenges—social, emotional, and mental health challenges, concerns for physical safety, and learning loss. However, in our determination to “get students caught back up,” let us not forget to embark with sensitivity and realize that students are complex beings whose dimensionality encircles many facets of identity and experience. Now is the time to take significant steps toward serving students and their communities in our teaching and research. It is time to invest in an educational system, rife with inequities as it may be, that prioritizes students’ affective lives in addition their intellectual lives, to attend to their feelings as well as their thoughts. We must commit to educational research that centers the critical work of educators in designing learning experiences that allow students to flourish and that aims to elevate the function of education in a democracy so that all may thrive. Uncontested policies and practices that continue to reward a narrow conception of knowledge (Eisner, 1988), foster student disengagement through homogenizing and exclusionary practices, and promote industrialization of pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment, perpetuate a disservice to our students and teachers. For those committed to transformative possibilities within education, attending to the

qualities and forms of students' experiences within the realities of daily life in schools should be the first and highest priority.

*“Finally, the arts are about joy.
They are about the experience of being moved,
of having one’s life enriched,
of discovering our capacity to feel.
If that was all they did,
they would warrant a generous place at our table.”*

~Elliot W. Eisner

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APPENDIX A

Glossary

Aesthetic: derived from the Greek meaning ‘capable of sensory perception.’ Attributed in the modern era to Alexander Baumgarten (*Aesthetica*, 1758). See also the writings of David Hume, Georg Hegel, Immanuel Kant, and John Dewey.

Aesthetic learning experiences: experiences grounded in qualities influenced by the arts: perceptive, sensorial, imaginative, and creative. Dewey (1934) distinguishes between ‘ordinary’ experience and ‘an’ experience, noting that the latter, aesthetic experience, is satisfying, unified, immediately felt, and moves toward fulfillment (pgs. 38-39).

Annotated: analogous to coding in qualitative research (Uhrmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017, p. 57).

Credibility: analogous to validity in qualitative research; in educational criticism and connoisseurship, it is comprised of three aspects: structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy (Eisner, 2017, p. 110).

Data generation: analogous to data collection in qualitative research; presumes data are not found and ‘collected,’ but actively generated (Leavy, 2015, p. 294).

Data appraisal: analogous to data analysis in qualitative research.

Educational critic: the researcher; self as instrument.

Educational criticism and connoisseurship: an empirical method of qualitative inquiry influenced by the arts and conceived of by Elliot Eisner. Connoisseurship is the largely individual act of the appreciation of qualities. Criticism “provides connoisseurship with a public face” (Eisner, 2017, p. 85) by disclosing qualities of contexts, educational or otherwise. Eisner notes that one can be a connoisseur without being a critic, but one cannot be a critic without first being a connoisseur.

Empirical: derived from experience.

Experience: Dewey (1938) asserts that an experience is a transaction between an individual and her environment. An experience is *educative* if it has continuity and conduces toward growth; it is *miseducative* if it stagnates casually in the present and stunts future possibilities.

Expression: a symbolic form consisting broadly of any “perceptible or imaginative whole that exhibits relations of parts....so that it may be taken to represent some other whole whose elements have analogous relations” (Langer, 1957, p. 20). Eisner notes that expression is also a form of “qualitative intelligence” (2002, p. 232). Dewey reminds us that expression is not one-sided: it is not simply a *result* only (such as a sculpture or a

poem), but a result that is inextricably bound to *personal action* with the environment that is carried forward with emotion (1934, p. 82). Similarly, Read notes that expression is in itself a desire to communicate, to provoke a response in others: “a spontaneous reaching-out to the external world” (1974, p. 167).

Qualities: aspects of the world we perceive through our senses; candidates for experience and epistemic seeing (Eisner, 2017, p. 21).

Received or Experienced Curriculum: how students perceive and respond to their educational events, i.e., what students make of their experiences (Uhrmacher et al., p. 25; Barone 2002, p. 20).

Representing: analogous to the act of perceiving, interpreting, and rendering data through words or visual media in qualitative research (Leavy, p. 294).

Seeing-about: analogous to the etic perspective in qualitative research (Uhrmacher, et al., p. 38). One function of the educational critic is to apply her connoisseurship in order to provide an “outsider’s account” that extrapolates to include multiple theories accounting for what has been observed, for example.

Seeing-with: analogous to the emic perspective in qualitative research (Uhrmacher et al., p. 38). A second function of the educational critic’s role is to provide a vivid “insider’s account” description of the educational context from the perspectives of those involved.

APPENDIX B

University of Denver IRB Approval Letter



DATE: September 23, 2019

TO: Jodie Wilson
FROM: University of Denver (DU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1464547-1] Student Expressions of Aesthetic Learning Experiences
SUBMISSION TYPE: **EXPEDITED NEW PROJECT**

APPROVAL DATE: September 23, 2019
NEXT REPORT DATE: September 23, 2020
RISK LEVEL: Minimal Risk
CHILD RISK ASSESSMENT: 45 CFR 46.404

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

ACTION: **APPROVED**

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited Category # 6 & 7
Category 6: *Collection of a data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.*
Category 7: *Research on group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Thank you for your submission of the **New Project** materials for this project. The University of Denver Institutional Review Board (IRB) has granted Full Approval for your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. The IRB determined that the criteria for IRB approval of research, per 45 CFR 46.111, has been met.

This submission has received an Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations. This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Please note that the following documents were included in the review and approval of this study:

- Application Form - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Part I Human Research Application.docx (UPDATED: 08/23/2019)
- Application Form - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Appendix M.docx (UPDATED: 08/23/2019)
- Application Form - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Appendix F.docx (UPDATED: 08/23/2019)
- Application Form - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Appendix B.docx (UPDATED: 09/16/2019)
- Child Assent - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Assent Form Minors Over 13.docx (UPDATED: 08/23/2019)
- Child Assent - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie assent_form_minors_7 to 13.docx (UPDATED: 07/18/2019)

- Child Assent - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie verbal_assent_script_minors 5 to 12.docx (UPDATED: 08/23/2019)
- Consent Form - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Assent Form Adult Students.docx (UPDATED: 07/19/2019)
- Consent Form - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Teacher Consent Form.docx (UPDATED: 07/19/2019)
- DU - IRB Application Form - DU - IRB Application Form (UPDATED: 07/19/2019)
- Letter - Jodie Wilson ICT letter.pdf (UPDATED: 08/23/2019)
- Letter - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Teacher Recruitment Letter.docx (UPDATED: 08/23/2019)
- Parental Permission Form - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Parent Permission Form.docx (UPDATED: 08/23/2019)
- Protocol - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Observation Protocol.docx (UPDATED: 07/18/2019)
- Protocol - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Student Focus Group Interview Protocol.docx (UPDATED: 08/23/2019)
- Protocol - 1464547-1 Wilson, Jodie Teacher Interview Protocol.docx (UPDATED: 07/18/2019)
- Training/Certification - Jodie Wilson CITI Completion Report 6.22.23.pdf (UPDATED: 07/2/2019)

Informed Consent Process

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and assurance of participants understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Implementation of Changes to Previously Approved Research

Prior to the implementation of any changes in the approved research, the investigator must submit any modifications to the IRB through completing an amendment form and await approval before implementing the changes, unless the change is being made to ensure the safety and welfare of the subjects enrolled in the research. If such occurs, a Reportable New Information (RNI) Form should be submitted, via the IRBNet system, within five days of the occurrence indicating what safety measures were taken and provide an updated protocol and/or consent, if applicable.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others (UPIRTSOs)

Any incident, experience or outcome which has been associated with an unexpected event(s), related or possibly related to participation in the research, and suggests that the research places subjects or others at a greater risk of harm than was previously known or suspected must be reported to the IRB. UPIRTSOs may or may not require suspension of the research. Each incident is evaluated on a case by case basis to make this determination. The IRB may require remedial action or education as deemed necessary for the investigator or any other key personnel. The investigator is responsible for reporting UPIRTSOs to the IRB within 5 working days after becoming aware of the unexpected event. Use the Reportable New Information (RNI) form within the IRBNet system to report any UPIRTSOs. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported.

Continuation Review Requirements

Based on the current regulatory requirements, this expedited project does **not** require continuing review. However, this project has been assigned a **one-year review period** requiring communication to the IRB at the end of this review period to either close the study or request an extension for another year. The one-year review period will be posted in the Next Report Due section on the Submission Details page in IRBNet. During this one-year period, a staff member from the Office of Research Integrity and Education (ORIE) may also conduct a Post Approval Monitoring visit to evaluate the progress of this research project.

PLEASE NOTE: This project will be administratively closed at the end of a one-year period unless a request is received from the Principal Investigator to extend the project. Please contact the DU HRPP/IRB if the study is completed before the one-year time period or if you are no longer affiliated with the University of Denver through submitting a Final Report to the DU IRB via the IRBNet system. If you are no longer affiliated with DU and wish to transfer your project to another institution please contact the DU IRB for assistance.

Inclusion of Children

In Colorado, the "age of majority" for participating in research is 18 years. This study involves the inclusion of children under the age of 18. The IRB determined that the child risk assessment for this project was established as 45 CFR 46.404 "Research involving no greater than minimal risk" and does not require any additional safeguards for minor subjects.

Study Completion and Final Report

A Final Report must be submitted to the IRB, via the IRBNet system, when this study has been completed or if you are no longer affiliated with the University of Denver. The DU HRPP/IRB will retain a copy of the project document within our records for three years after the closure of the study. The Principal Investigator is also responsible for retaining all study documents associated with this study for at least three years after the project is completed.

If you have any questions, please contact the Institutional Review Board at (303) 871-2121 or through IRBAdmin@du.edu. Please include your project title and IRBNet number in all correspondence with the IRB.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Denver (DU) IRB's records.

APPENDIX C

Teacher Recruitment Email

Dear [Teacher Name],

I hope this email finds you well! I'm a doctoral student in Curriculum & Instruction at the University of Denver and am writing to you today regarding your possible use of [CRISPA](#) (connections, risk-taking, imagination, sensory experience, perceptivity, active engagement) and/or aesthetic teaching methods in your classroom. I am reaching out to past participants of the [Institute for Creative Teaching](#), a weeklong workshop that you attended in the summer of [year of attendance].

As part of my dissertation, I'm researching classrooms that use aesthetic teaching and learning. Aesthetic learning experiences are those that are influenced by the arts: perceptive, sensorial, imaginative, and creative. Specifically, my research aims to understand student perceptions of these types of learning experiences. If you integrate the CRISPA teaching method and/or use aesthetic teaching methods regularly in your classroom, please see the attached information letter and email or call me by October 15th.

I hope to connect with you soon. Thanks so much for your consideration!

Best regards,

Jodie

Jodie Wilson
Ph.D. Candidate
Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver
1999 E. Evans Avenue
Denver, CO 80208

APPENDIX D

Teacher Recruitment Letter

September 30, 2019

Dear [Teacher Name]:

My name is Jodie Wilson, and I am a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Denver in Colorado. I am writing to you today regarding your use of CRISPA and/or aesthetic teaching methods in your classroom.

As part of my dissertation, I am researching student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences under the direction of my Advisor, Dr. Bruce Uhrmacher. I am interested to know what your students do, create, and say when engaged in aesthetic learning experiences. I am also interested in discussing your own perceptions of aesthetically-oriented curriculum and teaching, including your intentions and goals for your students' learning.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about student expressions of aesthetic learning experiences. You are eligible to participate in this study because you attended the Institute for Creative Teaching in [year of attendance] provided by Think360 Arts. I obtained your contact information the Education Director of Think360 Arts. For the purposes of my research, I would like to observe your classroom every day for approximately 2 weeks. During this time, I will invite you to participate in three 20-minute interviews at a time convenient for you. I will also explain the purpose of my research study to your students and invite some of your students to participate in one small-group interview outside of normal instructional time. I would like to audio-record your interviews with me, as well as the small group interview with your students. I would also like to photograph your classroom and student work during the two-week observation window. I will not be doing any videorecording of any kind during the study, and your name and identifying information as well as your students' name and identifying information will be kept completely private. I'll use the information I learn in your classroom to complete my dissertation. I may also share and publish what I've learned with the broader educational research community in the form of journal articles or books.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. **Please email or call me by October 15, 2019** if you are interested in participating in this research study. I welcome your questions and you can reach me by email at Jodie.Wilson@du.edu or by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Thank you very much for your consideration, and I look forward to speaking with you soon!

With Kind Regards,

Jodie Wilson
Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver
1999 E. Evans Avenue
Denver, CO 80208

APPENDIX E

Teacher Interview Protocol

Prior to the interview:

- Build rapport (active listening, show empathy, self-disclose if appropriate).
- Review informed consent procedures and negotiate informed consent.
- Restate the purpose of the research and how data will be generated, appraised, and re(presented).
- Review the purpose and structure of the interview, including the use of an audio-recorder and iPhone for taking pictures of artifacts.
- Provide time for the teacher-participant to ask questions about the interview and/or study.
- Leave space for participant stories that may be tangential to the research aims.

Teacher-Participant Interview Questions

Interview One: Background and Intentions

1. Please tell me about your experience with aesthetic education.
2. Do you incorporate aesthetics/the aesthetic themes into your teaching and/or curriculum? Can you tell me more about that?
3. Please tell me about your perceptions of aesthetic learning experiences/CRISPA. Do you find it to be meaningful? If yes, probe: Tell me more about that.
4. Can you tell me more about your lesson planning process?
5. What are your goals for your lesson planning?
6. What do you intend for your students to learn? Why?

Interview Two: Teacher Perceptions of Student Experiences

7. How do you know if students are engaged in having aesthetic learning experiences?

8. Please describe how your students respond during CRISPA-/aesthetically oriented lessons.
9. Can you give some specific examples of what your students say, do, and create?
10. Please discuss some specific ways that CRISPA/aesthetic teaching has supported your students' learning.

Interview Three: Elaboration on Teacher Experience

11. Is there anything about aesthetically oriented teaching that surprises you?
Disappoints you? If yes, probe: Tell me more about that.
12. What features of your curriculum stand out to you?
13. What features of your teaching stand out to you?
14. What features of your classroom environment stand out to you?
15. What about your teaching is unique to you?
16. Can you think of a metaphor that captures what your teaching is like? Please describe.
17. Based on your experiences, what would you tell other teachers about implementing CRISPA/aesthetic learning experiences in their own classrooms?
18. Is there anything I didn't ask you about that you would like to share with me?

After the interviews:

- Thank the teacher for his/her time and confirm the next interview.
- Record interview impressions in my research journal.
- Review and transcribe interview notes, interview, and prepare follow-up questions if needed.

APPENDIX F

Student Focus Group Interview Protocol

Prior to the interview:

- Affirm the competence of the student.
- Inquire about and respect cultural norms of the student.
- Build rapport, begin interview with informal conversation.
- Actively take steps to mitigate power imbalance to the extent possible (e.g., unstructured group interviews, allow students to initiate questions and activities, encourage peer-to-peer discourse, provide items to hold and play with for younger children).
- Negotiate informed consent using age-appropriate language.
- Provide younger students the opportunity to hear themselves on the voice recorder.
- Leave space for students' stories that may be tangential to the research aims.
- Student work may be used as prompt for discussion.

Focus group interview questions for students in grades K-2:

1. Tell me about your classroom. What is your favorite part of your classroom? Why is it your favorite?
2. What do you like to do in here? (prompt: play, draw, listen, talk, move, etc.) Why do you like to _____?
3. How do you feel about being in this class? Why?
4. What do you think is beautiful in your classroom? Why?
5. Can you tell me about how _____ teaches?
6. Do you use your five senses when you learn? If yes, probe: Do you remember when you learned about _____? What did you see? Smell? Hear? Touch? Taste?
7. Do you use your imagination in _____'s class? If yes, probe: Tell me about a time when you used your imagination.

8. Were there any times that you felt like you were being creative? If yes, probe: Tell me more about that.
9. Is there anything else you want to tell me?

Focus group interview questions for students in grades 3-5:

1. Tell me about your classroom. What do you like about it?
2. How do you feel about being in this class?
3. What ways do you feel like you learn the best? OR How do you like to learn about new things?
4. Can you tell me about how _____ teaches?
5. Do you use your five senses when you learn? If yes, probe: Tell me about a time when you used your senses in _____'s class.
6. Do you use your imagination in _____'s class? If yes, probe: Tell me about a time when you used your imagination.
7. Do you feel like you are actively engaged in learning in _____'s class? If yes, probe: Can you tell me more about that?
8. Were there any times that you felt like you were being creative? If yes, probe: Tell me more about that.
9. Were there any activities or parts of a lesson that you really enjoyed? If yes, probe: Why did you enjoy it?
10. How do you feel about CRISPA (if explicitly named in the classroom)? Tell me more about why you feel that way.
11. Is there anything I didn't ask you about that you want to tell me?

Focus group interview questions for students in grades 6-8:

1. I would like to know more about your learning experiences in _____'s class. Can you tell me about that?
2. What parts of _____'s teaching stand out to you?
3. Were there any learning experiences or activities that really stood out to you during the past two weeks? If yes, probe: Tell me why this experience stood out to you.
4. Were there any activities or parts of the lesson that you found meaningful? If yes, probe: Why was it meaningful to you?
5. Were there any experiences or activities that were related to your own life? If yes, probe: Tell me more about that.
6. Did you make any connections as a result of your learning experiences? If yes, probe: Please describe them and tell me what you thought about them.
7. Did you take any risks with regard to your learning during the past two weeks? If yes, probe: Tell me more about your experience.
8. Did you use your imagination during the past two weeks? If yes, probe: Can you describe how you used your imagination?
9. Did you use your senses in your learning during the past two weeks? If yes, probe: Tell me more about that.
10. Do you feel like you were actively engaged in learning during the past two weeks? If yes, probe: Tell me more about that.
11. Were there any times that you felt like you were being creative? If yes, probe: Tell me more about that.
12. What do you think about CRISPA/aesthetic learning experiences?

13. Were there any specific elements of CRISPA that you noticed during the last two weeks (if the teacher names CRISPA)? If yes, probe: Tell me more about that.

14. Is there anything I didn't ask you about that you would like to share with me?

After the interview:

- Thank the students for their time.
- Record interview impressions in my research journal.
- Review and transcribe interview notes; transcribe interview and prepare follow-up questions if needed.
- Re(present) students in their terms using their own language (center students' voices through multiple direct quotations).
- Provide opportunities for student reflection; conduct narrator checks to the extent possible.

APPENDIX G

Observation Lens

Date:
School Site:

Classroom:
Duration:

<p style="text-align: center;">Dimensions of Schooling</p> <p>Pedagogy</p> <p>Evaluation</p> <p>Structure</p> <p>Curriculum</p> <p>Intentions</p> <p>Aesthetic</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Open Observation Foci (e.g., wide-angle, multi-sensory, single-sensory, episodic, lens-specific, visual⁵)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Instructional Arc</p> <p>Intended</p> <p>Operational</p> <p>Received</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">CRISPA- Aesthetic Themes</p> <p>Connections</p> <p>Risk-taking</p> <p>Imagination</p> <p>Sensory Experience</p> <p>Perceptivity</p> <p>Active Engagement</p>	

⁵ This observation lens was adapted from Uhrmacher, P. B., Moroye, C. M., & Flinders, D. J. (2017).

APPENDIX H

Teacher Consent Form

University of Denver
Teacher Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: Student Expressions of Aesthetic Learning Experiences
Researcher: Jodie L. Wilson, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Denver
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. P. Bruce Uhrmacher, University of Denver
Study Site: Alpine School

Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to learn more about what your students do, create, and say when engaged in aesthetic learning experiences. The researcher is interested in your own perceptions of aesthetically oriented curriculum and teaching and/or use of CRISPA in your teaching, including your intentions for your students' learning. CRISPA is an acronym that stands for connections, risk-taking, imagination, sensory experience, perceptivity, and active engagement. The researcher would also like to learn more about your students' perceptions of your teaching, including what they learned and found meaningful and why.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be invited to provide information about your intentions as you plan and teach your unit using CRISPA or other aesthetically oriented methods. The researcher will conduct observations of your classroom and students over the course of approximately two weeks. You will also be invited to participate in three 20 to 30-minute audio-recorded interviews to be conducted outside of normal class instructional time at a time convenient for you. During the interviews, you will be asked to share your thoughts and intentions about CRISPA/aesthetic teaching methods, including what you find meaningful and why. Your students' work will also be examined and photographed; however, **your students will not be photographed in any form**. The researcher will also invite your students to participate in small group interviews that will be audio-recorded.

Voluntary Participation

******Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and withdraw your participation at any point. Also, you may choose not to answer any question, or discontinue any interview for any reason without penalty.***

Risks or Discomforts

There are minimal potential risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. The researcher will attempt to mitigate the possibility of unforeseeable risks or discomforts. **Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with**

you will remain confidential. In addition, your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may decide to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

Benefits

Possible benefits of participation include being able to reflect and share your thoughts and intentions as you plan and teach using CRISPA/aesthetic methods. Research conducted through this project will also add to the body of knowledge concerning aesthetic methods of teaching. By participating in this research study, you may learn more about yourself professionally, as well as learn more about your students' responses to your teaching and curriculum.

Incentives to Participate

You will receive no compensation, reimbursement, or incentives for participating in this research project.

Study Costs

You will not be expected to pay any costs related to this study.

Confidentiality

In order to keep your individual identity safe and confidential, the researcher will ensure that your name will not be attached to any data collected (e.g., work samples, scores, interview) without your explicit written consent. Rather than identifying data with your name, a pseudonym will be used instead. Only the researcher will have access to the data collected, and this data will be stored on a password-protected computer. All interview recordings will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed, and no identifying information will be included in the transcription. The results from this study may be published. However, your individual identity will be kept completely confidential (a pseudonym will be used) and your school will be appropriately masked when information related to this study is shared and/or published.

Questions

If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please ask questions now or contact Jodie Wilson Jodie.Wilson@du.edu at any time. The Faculty Sponsor overseeing this project is Professor Bruce Uhrmacher and he may be reached via email at Bruce.Uhrmacher@du.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researcher.

Options for Participation

Please initial your choice for the options below:

_____The researcher may audio record me during this study.

_____The researcher may NOT audio record me during this study.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

APPENDIX I

Parent Consent Form

University of Denver
Parent or Guardian Permission Form
for Child's Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: Student Expressions of Aesthetic Learning Experiences

Researcher: Jodie Wilson, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Denver

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. P. Bruce Uhrmacher, University of Denver

Study Site: Alpine School

Purpose

You are being asked to give consent for your child to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to learn more about how ___(Teacher's Name)___ uses CRISPA/aesthetic methods of teaching. CRISPA is an acronym that stands for connections, risk-taking, imagination, sensory experience, perceptivity, and active engagement. The researcher would also like to learn more about your child's perception of ___(Teacher's Name)___ teaching and instructional activities including what they found meaningful and why.

What your child will do in the study

If you agree to let your child participate in this research study, your child will be invited to share their perceptions of ___(Teacher's Name)___ teaching and classroom activities with the researcher by responding to interview questions in a small group. **At no point whatsoever will your child ever be alone with the researcher during the interview.**

This small group interview will last no more than 30 minutes and will be audio-recorded for the purposes of transcription only. During the interview, your child will be asked to share their thoughts about ___(Teacher's Name)___ teaching, including what he/she learned and did or did not find meaningful and why. All interviews will be conducted at school and will not occur during instructional time. Your child's classroom work may be examined and photographed. **Your child will not be photographed in any form.**

Time Required

I will be observing in your child's classroom for approximately two weeks. The time required for your student's participation in this study will be approximately 30 minutes for one group interview. Research will be conducted at ___(School Name)___ between ___ (Study dates)___ . This study will not interfere with your child's normal instruction and activities at school.

Voluntary Participation

*****Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary.** You have the right to withdraw your child from the study at any time without penalty. Your child's grades/scores will not be affected by this study in any way. Your child may withdraw

from the study at any point without penalty by telling the researcher. Your child may choose to withhold any work that either you or they do not wish to be considered for observation without penalty.

Risks or Discomforts

There are minimal potential risks or discomforts to your child associated with participating in this study. The researcher will attempt to mitigate the possibility of unforeseeable risks or discomforts for your child.

Any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your child will remain confidential. In addition, your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary and your child can decide to withdraw his/her participation at any time without penalty.

Benefits

Possible benefits of participation to your child include being able to share his/her thoughts regarding ___(Teacher's Name)___ teaching , instructional activities, and assessments. Your Research conducted through this project will also add to the body of knowledge concerning aesthetically oriented teaching and learning methods.

Incentives to Participate

You and/or your child will receive no compensation, reimbursement, or incentives for participating in this research project.

Study Costs

There is no cost for you or your child to participate in this study.

Confidentiality

In order to keep your child's information safe and confidential, the researcher will ensure that your child's name will not be attached to any data collected (e.g., work samples, interview). Rather than identifying data with your child's name, a pseudonym will be used instead. Only the researcher will have access to the data collected, and this data will be stored on a password-protected computer. All interview recordings will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed, and no identifying information will be included in the transcription.

Your child will not be photographed in any form. If photographs are taken of your child's work, a pseudonym will be used. The results from this study may be published. Your child's teacher, school, and individual identity will be kept completely confidential when information is shared and/or published.

Questions and Contact Information

If you or your child have any questions about participating in this research study, please contact the researcher, Jodie Wilson, at Jodie.Wilson@du.edu. The faculty sponsor overseeing this project is Dr. P. Bruce Uhrmacher, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver. He may be reached via email at Bruce.Uhrmacher@du.edu.

If you or your child have any questions or concerns about your research participation or your research participant rights, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections

Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researcher.

Options for Participation

Please initial your choice for the options below:

_____ The researcher MAY audio record my child during this study.

_____ The researcher MAY NOT audio record my child during this study.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like your child to participate in this research study.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Parent/Guardian/LAR Signature

Date

Full name of child allowed to participate in the study

APPENDIX J

Student Verbal Assent Form for Elementary Students

University of Denver

Student Verbal Assent Form for Participation in Research-Elementary Students

Title of Research Study: Student Expressions of Aesthetic Learning Experiences

Researcher: Jodie Wilson, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Denver

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. P. Bruce Uhrmacher, University of Denver

Study Site: Alpine School

Hi! My name is Jodie Wilson. I'm a student at college. Right now, I'm trying to learn about what students think of aesthetic learning experiences, which means how you use your senses when you learn. I would like to ask you to help me by being in a research study. A research study is a way to learn more about something. You are being asked to join the study because your teacher uses aesthetic learning experiences and I really want to know what you think about them!

You do not have to be in this study. It is your choice and is totally up to you. You can say okay now to be in the study and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me when you want to stop. No one will be upset or angry if you don't want to be in the study or if you change your mind later.

I will ask you some questions about your learning for about twenty or thirty minutes along with some of your classmates here at school. There are no right or wrong answers. I will never ask you questions alone; you will always be with your other classmates in a small group when I ask questions.

I will want to record what you say with this voice recorder [show voice recorder and answer any questions about it] during the study as you and your classmates answer my questions. If you do not want to be recorded, that is okay too. Just tell me if it makes you uncomfortable and I will turn it off.

If any question I ask you makes you feel uncomfortable or you do not want to answer it, please let me know. You do not have to answer my questions, it is up to you. By being in the study, you will help me understand more about what students like yourself think about aesthetic learning experiences or learning with your senses. You might also enjoy talking to me about your learning and experiences in this classroom.

Your teacher and parents will not know what you have said in our group interview. When I tell other people about my study, I will never use your real name, and no one will be able to tell who I'm talking about.

Your mom/dad/guardian says it's okay for you to be in my study. But if you don't want to be in the study, you don't have to be. What you decide won't make any difference with your grades in this class or what your parents, teacher, or I think of you. No one will be upset with you at all.

You can always ask me any questions about the study any time you want to. If you have a question later that you don't think of now, you can call me or ask your parents or teacher to call me or send me an email.

Do you have any questions for me now about my study?

Would you like to be in my study and answer some questions?

Name of Child: _____ Parental Permission on File: Yes No
(If "No", do not proceed with assent or research procedures.)

Child's Voluntary Response to Participation: Yes No

Signature of Researcher/Date:

Signature of Child/Date:

APPENDIX K

Student Assent Form for Middle School Students

University of Denver
Student Assent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: Student Expressions of Aesthetic Learning Experiences

Researcher: Jodie Wilson, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Denver

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. P. Bruce Uhrmacher, University of Denver

Study Site: Alpine School

Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to learn more about how (Teacher's Name) uses CRISPA/aesthetic methods of teaching. CRISPA is an acronym that stands for connections, risk-taking, imagination, sensory experience, perceptivity, and active engagement. I would also like to learn more about your learning experiences in (Teacher's Name) classroom, including what you find meaningful and why.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be invited to tell me about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to (Teacher's Name) 's teaching. You may also be invited to participate in one small group interview lasting no more than 30 minutes that will be audio-recorded. During the interview, you will be asked to share your thoughts about (Teacher's Name) teaching, as well as your own learning experiences in (Teacher's Name) classroom. This interview will be conducted outside of class instructional time at your school. Your classroom work may be examined and photographed; however, **you will not be photographed in any form.**

Time Required

I will be observing in your classroom for approximately two weeks. The time required for your participation in this study will be approximately 30 minutes for one group interview. Research will be conducted at (School Name) between (observation dates) . This study will not interfere in any way with your normal instruction and activities at school.

Voluntary Participation

******Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You have the right to stop participating at any time without penalty, even if you have already agreed to participate in the study. Your scores and/or grades in class will not be affected by this study in any way. Your classroom activities, assignments and tests will also not be affected by this study in any way. You may choose to stop participating in the research study at any point by telling me. I will not observe or photograph any completed work that you do not want me to, and you will not be penalized for this choice.***

Risks or Discomforts

There are minimal potential risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. I will actively attempt to minimize the possibility of unforeseeable risks or discomforts you may experience. I do not want you to feel uncomfortable at any point during this study.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential. In addition, your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can decide to stop participating at any time without penalty.

Benefits

Possible benefits of participating in this project include being able to share your thoughts regarding _____(Teacher's Name)_____'s teaching, instructional activities, and tests. You may also enjoy talking about your classroom experiences. Research conducted through this project will also add to knowledge concerning CRISPA/aesthetic methods of teaching and learning.

Incentives to Participate

You will receive no money, reimbursement, or incentives for participating in this research project.

Study Costs

You will not pay anything related to this study.

Confidentiality

In order to keep your information safe and confidential, I will make sure that your name will not be attached to any information I collect (e.g. work samples, interviews). Rather than identifying information with your name, a pseudonym, or fake name, will be used instead. Only I will have access to the information collected, and this information will be stored on a password-protected computer. All interview recordings will be destroyed as soon as they are transcribed, or typed up, and no identifying information will be included in the transcription. The results from this study may be published. Your individual identity and real name will be kept completely confidential when information is shared or published.

Questions and Contact Information

If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact the researcher, Jodie Wilson, at Jodie.Wilson@du.edu. The Faculty Sponsor overseeing this project is Dr. Bruce Uhrmacher and he may be reached at Bruce.Uhrmacher@du.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the DU Human Research Protections Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researcher.

Options for Participation

Please initial next to your choice below:

_____ The researcher MAY audio record me during this study.

_____The researcher MAY NOT audio record me during this study.

Please take all the time you need to read through this permission form and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for you to keep.

Participant Signature

Date