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Toward Meaningful Education: Investigating Artful Behavior as a Human Proclivity in the Classroom

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Abstract

Because students spontaneously exhibit aesthetic and rhythmic acts in the classroom and human beings across the world have engaged in the arts for thousands of years, this study argues that artful behavior represents an inherent and significant human proclivity. Exploring the tension between the human predisposition and the physical and mental limitations of traditional formal education, this cross-disciplinary study seeks to understand how artful behaviors might represent an intrinsic part of human nature and how such proclivities might inform educational policy and practice. Based on an ethological understanding of art (that is, as a behavior rather than an object), this research employs an interpretivist lens and phenomenological design. Data collection methods include observation, participant observation, and teacher interviews in a pre-kindergarten and third grade classroom of an urban public school system. Ultimately, this study aims to understand artful behaviors as they are embedded in educational contexts with the intent of bridging the gap

between our natural inclinations for learning and the methods utilized in mainstream education.

Introduction

This paper identifies as one of the potential causes of the current educational unease a striking discrepancy between inherent human proclivities, what Dewey (1938) called the "natural endowments" of children, and the physical and mental restrictions of traditional formal education. Specifically, I will argue that the methods and curricula commonly employed in conventional schools today often fail to consider the likelihood that students are predisposed to learn through methods and under circumstances more similar to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle than the typical modern-day school. These natural proclivities we inherit, the results of hundreds of thousands of years of human evolution, appear quite at odds with educational models that expect children to sit quietly for hours in neatly aligned rows of desks (Dissanayake, 2007). In fact, scholarship noting that our bodies—brains included—have changed little since they evolved during the prehistoric era suggests that contemporary learning is still very much dependent on our hunting-and-gathering past (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Mithen, 1996; Ramachandran, 2000). Notably, for the bulk of this development education was largely comprised of hands-on, contextualized, collaborative learning (Dissanayake, 2007; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Given that the brain adapted to prosper in such conditions and the minimal changes in our physiologies since that time, we might expect continued success learning in these ways.

Art has also been very much a part of this history and development. Not only art educators, but also cognitive psychologists, neuroscientists, and evolutionary-minded scholars are increasingly suggesting that the arts are invaluable to humans and their cognitive, social and emotional wellbeing. Existing theories that posit the arts as implicitly cognitive (Dewey, 1934; Efland, 2002; Eisner, 1994; 2002) have found fortification in research originating in psychology and neuroscience and concluding that the arts contribute significantly to the development of cognition (Arnheim, 1969; Donald, 2006; Zeki, 1999a, 1999b). Additionally, the social and emotional needs that the arts often fulfill are becoming more and more evident as meaningful components of cognition with adaptive value (Dunbar, 2003; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Storbeck & Clore, 2007). From this perspective, meaningful engagement in the arts may facilitate the application and contextualization of otherwise insignificant knowledge. Other scholars explain that the arts provided vital means toward ensuring our survival as a species (Dutton, 2009; Wilson, J. 1998; Zaidel, 2005) due to their communicative capacity as well as the prerequisite discerning eye and problem-solving mind that artists so often command (Solso, 2003). Perhaps most persuasive for this discussion is the possibility that the arts satisfy inherent psychobiological needs that often go unmet in today's schools and (when unmet) can be a potential source of profound dissatisfaction for children

and adults alike (Dissanayake, 2000, 2007a).[1] Taken as a whole, these arguments infer that the arts are indispensable to both our species and, by extension, our children, and we allow our schools to ignore these issues at the peril of their students.

Bolstering such theories is the everyday behavior of children. Among other artistically-oriented activities, children draw, sing, paint, dance, drum, dramatize and decorate their faces and bodies with little to no encouragement from adults. Common not just to our offspring but also to our species, these artistic behaviors appear to differ little from those of our prehistoric ancestors who engaged in such artful acts even as—or perhaps because—they struggled to survive the harsh conditions of the prehistoric world (Dissanayake 1988, 1995, 2000, 2007a, 2007b, 2008). That human beings have been artfully elaborating their bodies, belongings and surroundings for at least 30,000 years and that all known human cultures engage in some form of the arts (Aiken, 1998; Dutton, 2009; Mithen, 1996, 2006; Sarason, 1990; Solso, 2003) largely contradicts contemporary claims that the arts are frivolous and unnecessary. As Suzanne Langer (1966) wrote, "the ancient ubiquitous character of art contrasts sharply with the prevalent idea that art is a luxury product of civilization, a cultural frill, a piece of social veneer" (p. 5). Instead, this widespread and long-term engagement in the arts suggests that art making is potentially an important and innate human proclivity (Alland, 1977, 1989; Carroll, 2004; Dissanayake, 2007a, 2008; Wilson, J., 1998). Simply put, the arts have been and continue to be useful and meaningful parts of human experience.

Couched in our understanding of the cognitive benefits of art making, children's eager engagement in artful behaviors suggests that the arts are worth considering as valuable and viable components of education. Yet, our educational systems generally treat the arts as non-essential leisure subjects (Eisner, 1997, 2002; Koroscik, 1997), minimizing and eliminating the very activities that we as a species have been doing the longest. As Eisner (1994) asks, "What kinds of stimuli do we fail to provide in schools, and what abilities do we, therefore, neglect developing? What are the long range consequences of such neglect?" (p. 26). In light of these concerns, it seems essential to understand why nearly all children make art and, conversely, when and why we stop taking the arts seriously.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how artful behavior might be an inherent human proclivity, using an interpretivist lens and a phenomenological design to examine the art

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[1] "Psychobiological needs" can be understood as psychological needs that are biologically embedded by our evolutionary history.

experiences of pre-school and elementary students. Hence, my research aims to address the following question: How might artful behavior be an innate human proclivity? More specifically, how, if at all, do artistic proclivities manifest themselves in children's behavior? How do children of pre-school and elementary school age experience and perceive art? How do the perceptions and experiences of art differ between pre-kindergarten and third grade?

Although many have made claims that art making, specifically drawing, is a natural human behavior, especially for children (see Dewey, 1902/1991; Froebel, 1826; Kellogg, 1955, 1969; Lowenfeld, 1952, 1987; Mumford, 1926; Schaefer-Simmern, 1950; Sully, 1896; Tomlinson, 1934), to my knowledge few educators have explored the possibility that drawing is symptomatic of a more general inherent artfulness and even fewer have sought to fully understand the pedagogical implications of such a possibility (Sarason, 1990). In addition to making educational connections to art, we must also consider the likelihood that artistic proclivities manifest themselves in a much wider variety of modes. As drawing is only one of a myriad of forms that an inherent artfulness can take, this study takes a broader lens to its understanding of the arts as part of natural human behavior. Rather than limiting this investigation to drawing or even to various modes of art making, this investigation will also explore spontaneous and more modest artful behaviors that may be suggestive of artful proclivities. [2]

The findings of this study are presented thematically with an examination of the possible implications for educational policy and practice. Ultimately, this study aims to aid us in understanding how we might be innately artful beings and help to bridge the gap between

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[2] This study is based on an understanding of art as a phenomenon, and as a result, evades the clear cut boundaries that can be established by a singular definition. Within this exploration of the phenomenon, readers will find numerous terms that refer to the various parts and nuances of art. This study is specifically interested in the possible artistic proclivities of children, that is the broad inherent predisposition to engage in artful behavior. Those artistic proclivities give way to artistic impulses which can be defined as the specific motivation to act artfully. This motivation can lead to artful behaviors, which can emerge in a variety of forms that might loosely fit somewhere between two extremes. On one end of the continuum, artful behaviors can be spontaneous or modest without the intent to create a finished product, performance or work. For instance, impromptu acts such as a child dancing across the room or drumming rhythmically with a pencil are examples of impulsive and humble artful behaviors that lack a finished product or performance (see Flannery, 1977). On the other hand, artful behaviors can also lead to the production of art products as in artification, the act of aesthetically elaborating objects, places and persons (Dissanayake, 2007a), or art making, the process of generating works of art in various media. This second type of artful behaviors features the intention to create a finished product or performance and more closely aligns with more formal concepts of art as in the creation of a painting, sculpture, performed dance or song. Simply put, artful proclivities are the roots of artful impulses which can result in artful behaviors. Artistic behaviors will be the umbrella term used throughout this paper to refer to the entire scope of observable forms described above.

what we understand about human nature and what and how we are teaching in our schools. At the very least, this study may broaden our understanding of students' educational needs and "natural endowments" (Dewey, 1938) by considering not just where we are today, but where we have come from. Such a perspective might inform administrators and educators who seek to make formal education a more satisfying experience for students.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this proposed study is largely dependent on the work of Ellen Dissanayake (1988, 1992, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2008), an independent scholar with an ethological interest in the arts. There are three aspects of Dissanayake's theory that are relevant to this study. First is Dissanayake's ethological notion that art is a behavior rather than a product and that it is artification, the *act* of art making, that is important for our psychobiological wellbeing. Second is Dissanayake's evolutionary assertion that art is an innate human propensity, something that humans will normally learn to do given suitable conditions and materials. Dissanayake (2003) supports this claim with five observations: 1) Artification is found in all known societies and cultures regardless of their economic or technological development, hence we can consider artification universal. 2) Societies, especially pre-industrialized societies, devote great amounts of personal and material resources to artification. 3) Premodern societies artify largely in ritual ceremonies that deal with issues of biological importance such as safety, health, social harmony, birth, death and other vital issues. 4) Like many other life essentials such as food, sex, and sleeping, the arts are a common source of pleasure. 5) Children engage in unprompted artification.

The third significant facet—that rhythmic or aesthetic interactions form the basis for building relationships with others—appears shortly after birth when babies begin to bond with parents by responding positively to proto-aesthetic behaviors, such as exaggerated facial expressions, vocalizations and movements (Dissanayake, 2000, 2007a). Because this bond is an essential adaptation that ensures a caretaker for the nearly helpless human infant, Dissanayake claims that we are inherently aesthetic beings who will continue to seek out similarly rhythmic interactions in adulthood as a means of forming emotional connections with others. In prehistoric times, these rhythmic interactions were most commonly exercised in ceremonies, which were primarily combinations of "song, dance, performance and visual spectacle" (Dissanayake, 2003, p. 245). In such contexts, the arts are used to demonstrate what is meaningful to certain cultures or individuals, thereby satisfying a fundamental psychobiological need of our species to generate emotional attachments and "make ordinary things special or *extra*ordinary" (Dissanayake, 2007a, p. 792).

While Dissanayake's theory is invaluable to understanding how artful behavior might be an innate human proclivity, she grazes the surface of the full educational repercussions of her theory. Dissanayake (2007), states:

> Educators and others readers are invited to think of adolescent boys they know, for example, who seem more suited to hunting wooly mammoths or building a long house with their buddies than to learn algebra. Moreover, it is helpful to realize that for at least a quarter-of-a-million years people much like ourselves led fully human lives without reading, writing or arithmetic. It is not 'natural' to sit in school 6 to 8 hours a day. (p. 994)

In fact, none that I know of have carefully applied the evolutionary perspective of learning in general and artful behavior in particular to educational settings. This study aims to partially fill that void by examining through qualitative research the earliest artful behaviors of children within the context of education.

Methodology

Informed by Husserl's (1931/1976) notion of intentionality, Heidegger 's (1927/1962) interest in the nature of being and Merleau-Ponty's (1961/1964, 1948/1968, 1962/1981) existentialism, this study is situated within the theoretical perspective of phenomenology, which aims to understand the experience of the participant as it might reveal the essence of a specified phenomenon, in this case artful behaviors. According to Streb (1984), "a way to avoid the mistake of reducing art to fact is to consider art phenomenologically" (p. 159). Because artful behaviors include an array of complex and diverse manifestations, phenomenological methods can offer valuable insight beyond the scope of objectivist thinking. This study draws particularly from two hermeneutic phenomenological perspectives, largely adapting the reflective lifeworld research of Dahlberg, Drew and Nyström (2001) with support from Van Manen's (1990) human sciences research agenda which is also geared toward understanding lived experience and conducive to the examination of artful behavior and experience rather than the product of art making.

Data Sources

Dahlberg, Drew and Nyström (2001) advocate for a combination of fieldwork, interviews, observations, drawings and narratives as methods for collecting meaningful data. This study employs observation of the students during regularly scheduled activities, interviews with the teachers, and informal interviews with the students while they are interacting with art materials introduced by the researcher.

This study includes data from a pilot study, conducted in spring 2009 and core data collection, which took place in fall 2009. The pilot study included two hours of observation up to twice per week from both an observation booth and inside the classroom between January and April. Art materials were introduced to a smaller group of children (8) who took part in the after-school program and this interaction included informal student interviews. Interviews with teachers (3) were conducted outside of the classroom at the teachers' convenience. Adapting the same methods, the core study included one pre-kindergarten (20 students, 2 teachers) and one third grade classroom (17 students, 3 teachers) in an urban public school system.[3] Observations took place during various parts of the school day, and included observations of as many different subjects and activities as my schedule would allow. Observations in each classroom occurred up to twice per week for up to three hours each between September and February. In a form of participant observation, informal student interviews also took place during a semi-structured art activity conducted by the researcher. I introduced clay to the pre-kindergarteners once in December during work centers time. Centers time also offered ample opportunity to work and play with the children in art-related dialogues. In the third grade, instructional time was carefully guarded, and I was only permitted to introduce materials without instruction during the after-school program. Of the participating third grade students, only three attended the after-school program, and I introduced the voluntary work with clay to them in January. This after-school interaction with studio materials served to supplement the observations and conversations that occurred during art class, when I often observed and interacted with the students as they worked with studio materials. In both instances of working with studio materials, the interaction was voluntary and students were told that they could participate in the other activities available at the time. In addition, they were invited to interact with the clay as they saw fit. How the students responded to this opportunity was a telling indicator of how children felt about engaging in the arts and what role it played in their lives.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of whole-parts-whole hermeneutic phenomenological thematic analysis, which resulted in the identification of emergent themes, namely the prevalence of aesthetic and rhythmic behaviors and the building and maintaining of social relationships through artful behaviors. Because such behaviors occurred within a greater context, certain

[3] This study was approved both by the Institutional Review Board of the Human Subjects Office at the University of Georgia and the participating child development lab (pilot study) and school district (core data collection). In addition, it was approved by the Parks & Recreation department of the participating city that operates the after-school program for third graders.

themes also emerged from the curriculum and the classrooms, such as the shift from an affective approach to arts integration to a subservient one (Bresler, 1995).

Findings

Aesthetic and Rhythmic Behaviors

Because elementary and particularly early learning classrooms are often filled with music, movement and art projects that are embedded in the curriculum, it may come as no surprise that artful behaviors were observed in profusion during these times. Clearly, when given the opportunity to draw, play an instrument, sing, dramatize or dance, students will do so. What may be more surprising is the overabundance of art-related behaviors that occurred outside of overtly art-related activities in the participating classrooms. Often, children initiated these artful behaviors spontaneously and independently or in spite of structured classroom activities. Lunch time, snack, breaks, clean up, transitional times and traveling in the hall were all filled with the rhythmic and aesthetic movements and sounds that could be considered artful behaviors.[4] These consistent, pervasive behaviors ranged from extravagant to subtle and were observed in nearly all the children who participated in the study. One pre-kindergarten student in the pilot study, for instance, spontaneously danced her way across the room when called to the circle. Another student created a make-shift drum by pulling his shirt over his chair during lunch time. Yet another, while picking up blocks, delighted in shaking the containing bin to create a rhythmic sound. During core data collection, one pre-kindergarten student sang spontaneously and perpetually. One of her classmates was known for drumming his way through the school day and rocking rhythmically during lessons. More modest spontaneous rhythmic acts were not uncommon as the children walked down the hall or ate lunch.

Third grade students exhibited similar tendencies, as one student, who appeared nearly immune to gravity, danced at every opportunity. Another third grader posed theatrically or dramatically tumbled to the ground on a regular basis. Students were frequently observed drumming and often adapted classroom materials to become musical instruments. Pencils, for example, were commonly utilized as drum sticks. On one occasion, a third grader blew up a plastic bag and used it as a drum to pound out a rhythm. Observations revealed that these modest and spontaneous displays of artful behavior were a frequent, but often unnoticed, part

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[4] Similar to the actions described by Flannery (1977), the artful behaviors that are of interest to this investigation differ from ordinary physical restlessness in that they are characterized by rhythmic and aesthetic qualities. This study is primarily concerned with movements, sounds and images marked by repetition, pattern and artistry that differentiated themselves from non-artful activities.

of the pre-kindergarten and third grade classrooms. Evidence that children will behave artfully even without an overt art-making opportunity offers a telling indication of the potential existence of artful proclivities. As Dissanayake (2007) wrote:

> The artful predispositions of toddlers and young children are evident in their untaught readiness to sing and dance, to play with words, to make believe, to decorate their bodies and possessions, and to enjoy stories and dramatic presentations by themselves or others. (p. 793)

Notably, these behaviors occurred in addition to, outside of, and often in spite of, structured class activities, suggesting that it was the child's own artistic impulses rather than the structure of the curriculum or instruction of the teacher that prompted such behaviors. The prevalence of artful behaviors emphasizes the possibility that children are often at ease expressing themselves in a variety of rhythmic and aesthetic ways.[5] Many of the children in the study clearly exhibited dispositions for communicating and expressing themselves in particular media other than words or numbers. According to Dissanayake (2000), "children, premodern and prehistoric people, and the rest of us commonly use ancestral abilities that are visio-spatial, mechanical, musical, oral-verbal, social, and bodily (or kinesthetic)—that is, *non*literate" (p. 119). In fact, for many of these students life *without* artful behaviors is abnormal. As a result, artful behaviors may be considered valuable means of communication for students. Eisner (2002) reminds us of the value of embracing various forms of representation:

> The selection of a form of representation is a choice having profound consequences for our mental life, because choices about which forms of representation will be used are also choices about which aspects of the world will be experienced. Why? Because people tend to seek what they are able to represent. (2002, p. 8)

Further, students' predilection for spontaneous artful behaviors allude to the possibility that they are likely interested in the act of art as much as they are interested in its products.

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[5] Similar observations have been made by Howard Gardner (1993) and in the Reggio Emilia approach to education, which acknowledges the hundred languages that children use to express themselves (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998).

Artful Behavior as a Means toward Social Ends

Within the classrooms that participated, artful behaviors frequently seemed to facilitate and sustain social relationships. Lev Vygotsky (1971) described art as "the social within us" (p. 249) despite any individualized forms it might take. In the participating classrooms, social links were evident in the fact that students often moved and vocalized in synchronization or created similar objects within the same space. Philosopher Noel Carroll (2004) suggests that coordinated movements function as "social cement" by creating harmonized cognitive and emotive states. As a result, "artworks have the capacity—at a fairly elemental level—to promote cohesion among groups" (p. 100). Like Carroll (2004), Dewey (1934) and Dissanayake (2003) contend that artful behavior is a form of social bonding in which we can not only know more about another individual, but also come together as a social group. Historian William McNeill (1995) calls this "muscular bonding" (p. 2). He describes the pleasant effects of coordinated group movement and the potential for it to become an end in itself. He describes this "visceral" bonding as something "far older than language and critically important in human history, because the emotion it arouses constitutes an indefinitely expansible basis for social cohesion among any and every group that keeps together in time" (p. 2).

In addition, these interactions often generated conversations between students. The art materials I introduced to the students revealed both their delight in the process and the social components of art making. In the pre-kindergarten pilot study, much studio time was dedicated to the distribution and sharing of materials. Even though we generally worked at one table, the constant dialogue and the exchange of supplies and art products required much social navigation. Likewise, the teachers also noted the social qualities they observed during art activities. Similar to Vygotsky's (1978) claims, students in each classroom further exhibited an eagerness to learn from one another as well as from adults in the classroom. In all classrooms, when given the opportunity, students were likely to use art materials to interact with one another. Although these social interactions took a variety of forms, they were consistently part of the free-choice learning time that students were permitted. Therefore, we might consider, as the data suggest, that the benefits of socially-situated learning might include not just the knowledge, but the social relationships that emerge from such joint ventures.

In addition, it appears that these students embraced art as both a process and a product and utilized both aspects to form and further social bonds. The product of art making itself was often utilized as a gift to a friend, teacher or family member. Examples include the gifting of purses, valentines and drawings as well as the making of art for friends and family members. The pre-kindergarten teacher in core data collection said of her students' tendency toward gift-giving "the art my children do is so important to them that they want to share it with

others. At this age, this is something they work so diligently on and I feel that they want others to see their hard work." This notion was reinforced, and possibly introduced, by the classroom culture where students were often asked to make projects as gifts for family members. Children's gifting of art work bares resemblance to Dissanayake's (2000) claim that artification can generate a sense of mutual intimacy and "make special" the objects, places and people the artist finds important.

The Classroom as a Society of Intimates

If we ask, how do students of elementary and pre-school age experience and perceive art making? The answer, it appears, is often socially (see also Cocking & Copple, 1979; Frisch, 2006; Gebo, 2008; Paley, 1999; Tarr, 1995; Thompson, 1995, 2002; Thompson & Bales, 1991; Vygotsky, 1971). Like our history as makers of art, our social roots run deep. Revisiting the notion that our brains have changed very little in the past several thousand years, anthropological and neuroscientific research suggests that we evolved to survive and flourish in social settings. For 99% of human existence, the social needs of our species were met through what linguist T. Givón and anthropologist Phil Young (2002) call "societies of intimates," (p.23).[6] According to Givón and Young (2002), societies of intimates were characterized by patterns of trust and cooperation, and a balance of self-serving and group-serving motives developed because the survival of the group and the survival of the individual were intimately linked. Because our brains evolved to prosper under these collaborative conditions, they are likely to continue to flourish in such contexts. According to Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007), the realization that our evolutionary past still influences our present conditions,

> underscores our fundamentally social nature, making clear that the very neurobiological systems that support our social interactions and relationships are recruited for the often covert and private decision making that underlies much of our thought. In brief, learning in the complex sense in which it happens in schools or the real world, is not a rational or disembodied process; neither is it a lonely one. (p. 4)

This insight that our brains evolved to endure and prosper in collaborative group contexts has significance for cognition and, by extension, education, which might benefit from increased social components. Notably, Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) conclude that social and

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[6] 'Societies of intimates" contrast with the "society of strangers" (Givón and Young, 2002, p. 47) that began to develop upon the domestication of plant and animal life and the division of labor some ten to eight thousand years ago and continue today in industrialized civilizations.

emotional relevance support cognition by contextualizing otherwise disembodied information. Extending this argument to art, the artful behaviors that children so often spontaneously exhibit might play a considerable role in synchronizing emotions, creating social bonds and sustaining the collaborative context that our brains are likely to favor. As a result, formal education may have much to gain from children's natural predilection to participate in artful behaviors and the arts' inherent capacity to support cognition and make learning meaningful.

Contexts and Concepts of Art

It is worth noting that the observed artful behaviors took place in part because they were permitted in the classroom. Students' perceptions and experience of the arts were influenced by two components of education: first, the amount and type of arts instruction afforded within the explicit curriculum, and second, the informal opportunities that permitted the students to behave artfully and experiment with artistic materials in the implicit curriculum. Within each core data collection school, however, teachers seemed to vary in their understanding of the role of the arts and their value within the curriculum. The general consensus from lead teachers in core data collection was that the arts were appreciated and supported in the school. On the other hand, the art specialist, music specialist, and the pre-kindergarten paraprofessional, who had a background in the arts, were of the mind that the schools' rhetoric about valuing the arts was not actualized through the schools' decisions. The pre-kindergarten paraprofessional said, "I don't think it's discouraged, but I don't think it's truly encouraged. It's not important to the system." The absence of an art and music room in the elementary school would support this claim, as would the integrated curriculum which was planned by the grade level teachers with the expectation that the art and music teacher would adapt their lessons to each grade's theme.

The actions of both the school system and individual teachers serve as exemplars for the students that fill their classrooms. Modeling art making within the classroom, the third grade teacher occasionally drew illustrations of certain concepts on the dry-erase board, but her efforts were often accompanied by a self-deprecating joke about her inability to draw.[7] According to Sarason (1990), the emphasis on realism is one of the predominant factors in cultivating the notion that the arts are the domain of a talented few rather than an inherent proclivity of the entire population.

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[7] It is possible that my presence in the classroom made the teacher unusually self-conscious about her drawing abilities.

Dissanayake (2007) explains the significance of the context in which artful behaviors develop. She wrote, "if surrounded by adults who also readily and unselfconsciously engage in these arts, …children develop their latent aesthetic tendencies easily by imitation and practice as they also learn to speak and perform other required cultural behaviors" (p. 793). The reverse is also true. It is unlikely that students would demonstrate artful behaviors with much frequency under the tutelage of a teacher with expectations for a still, quiet class or within a context that completely devalues the arts. Fortunately for the participating students, their teachers were relatively permissive and allowed a certain degree of spontaneous artful behaviors during instructional and transitional times. These forms of visual, bodily and vocal expression, while permitted during the elementary years may be less tolerated as these students progress through school.[8] One has difficulty imagining a high school classroom, for example, where a student is permitted to dance to the pencil sharpener and back during instructional time or afforded the opportunity to build a drum or spontaneously dance the Macarena with his or her classmates as the students participating in this study did.

The classroom set up further affected the students' capacity for movement. That all three classrooms did not have rows of desks, but instead a more organic classroom layout that included a variety of different areas with open, carpeted floor space likely played a significant role is the manifestation of artful behaviors. Open space invites large-scale physical movement in ways that classrooms cluttered with desks do not. Falk and Dierking (2000) confirm that it is not only the personal and sociocultural contexts, but the physical context that comprise the key factors that influence learning.

How do the perceptions and experiences of art differ between pre-kindergarten and third grade? Couching students' perceptions and experiences of the arts, there were a number of evident contextual changes between the pre-kindergarten and the third grade of core data collection. Primarily, the role of arts integration seemed to shift from an affective model, in which the arts were used to shape the mood of the classroom and as outlets for creative expression, to a subservient one, in which the arts were used primarily to support learning in other subjects (Bresler, 1995). In turn, this change likely influenced students' perceptions and experiences of the arts. One day at lunch with the third graders, for instance, I asked the students about their favorite parts of school, which immediately became a conversation about their favorite subjects. In response to my inquiry, the students offered academic subjects such as math and reading. "What about music and art and PE?" I asked. One boy informed me,

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[8] Even the idea that they must be tolerated rather than embraced indicates a certain disparaging context for artful behaviors.

"Those aren't subjects. Subjects are like math, reading, social studies…" "What are they then?" I replied. "They are… special.…They are specials!" he proclaimed. A moment later he pointed to the circular impression on his lunch tray that earlier contained his salad. "Look," he said with a giant grin on his face. "I made the British flag," showing me the Union Jack he had traced with a finger into the remnants of his salad dressing. This example embodies the contradictory messages that students receive about the arts and their role in formal education.

The shift from the affective to the subservient role of arts integration (Bresler, 1995) was noticeable in the amount of time children were permitted to experiment with art materials and express their ideas through artistic media. In both pre-kindergartens, a large amount of class time was dedicated to personal expression. At least an hour of each day consisted of centers time or free-choice learning, where students could experiment with paint, build with blocks or pretend to be dinosaurs. In the third grade, on the other hand, students rarely got to choose their method of expression during instructional time and purposeful artistic expression was largely confined to their daily snack time (about 10-15 minutes) and recess, which they had three times per week. The choices students made during these times were characteristically artful—singing, dancing, drawing, building and writing imaginatively. Limitations on available materials also curtailed experimentation in these times of free-choice learning. Compared to the pre-kindergarten classrooms that had paints, play dough, blocks, colored masking tape, puppets, dress-up items, markers, crayons, recycled materials, and collage materials readily available to the students every day, the third grade's caddy of colored pencils, handful of Legos and stash of collage materials under the sink seemed sparse. Students, however, were able to surreptitiously adapt other classroom materials, such as the pencils, plastic bags and salad dressing described above, toward artful purposes.

Significance and Discussion

As Csikszentmihalyi (1990) wrote, "we keep looking for the solution to our educational problems under the bright light of reason, even though the evidence suggests that that's not where the answer lies" (p. 119). Likewise, this paper suggests that the keys to meaningful education lie elsewhere, perhaps in uncovering and attending to the inherent proclivities that children so easily employ in educational settings. In examining the educational implications of these findings, we might find considerable value in re-conceptualizing the role of the arts in education as we look to the future.

What significance do the above observations have for this study? If we summarize the main points of this study, they include the following findings as derived from the data:

- Students frequently display and may prefer communicating and expressing themselves via artful behaviors;

- Children often experience joint art making and coordinated artful behaviors as a means for inducing and maintaining social bonds;
- Students' experiences and perceptions of the arts are influenced by the context in which they occur and thrive in educational environments where individual and group movement is permitted and the arts are encouraged within the curriculum and/or community;
- The role of the arts in the core data collection school system appeared to shift from an affective mode to a subservient mode (Bresler, 1995) between pre-kindergarten and third grade and we may expect students' experiences and perceptions of art to be influenced as a result;
- Third grade students were allowed access to fewer art materials and less time to experiment with expressive art forms than pre-kindergarten students, a likely indicator that the arts are being increasingly minimized as children progress through school.

Taken as a whole, these conclusions paint a portrait of education that has the potential to embrace human nature or to contradict it—specifically by ignoring, thwarting or minimizing the artistic means through which children often communicate. That children at the pre-school and third grade level appeared to use the arts as primary means of communication and even preferred art-related activities during times of free-choice learning evinced students' needs to convey information, emotions and ideas in a variety of ways, particularly artful ones. For many of these children, artful activity was a virtually unwavering state of being and artful behaviors were the norm rather than the anomaly. Because this tendency was evident at both grade levels and many adults seem to exhibit similar modest but spontaneous aesthetic and rhythmic tendencies (Dewey, 1934; Dissanayake, 2000; Sarason, 1990) the possibility exists that this is more than a passing developmental phase. In fact, it seems plausible to claim that artistic behavior is fundamental to human nature and as a result, has enormous educational value.

Undoubtedly, children's artful behaviors result from a complex network of factors, many of which are contextual. These artful behaviors did not occur in isolation, and the effects of the educational context on the likelihood that children will feel free to exhibit artful behaviors should be taken into consideration. In these settings, the students were permitted the freedom to behave artfully in both subtle and overt ways, however artful opportunities within instructional time were noticeably more ample in pre-kindergarten than in third grade. Although the core data collection pre-kindergarten students did not have an art specialist to offer quality arts instruction, they did have a paraprofessional with a background in the arts to supplement creative development standards that mandate the inclusion of the arts in the general classroom. Pre-kindergarteners in both the pilot study and core data collection also

had a significant amount of time to experiment with art materials and behave artfully. Further, the shift from an affective model of arts integration to a subservient one (Bresler, 1995) observed in the core data collection schools is significant, as is the related reduction of available art materials and time for artistic experimentation between pre-kindergarten and third grade. Without an art room, third grade students never had the opportunity to sample materials and media other than those found within the classroom or on the art teacher's cart. It is worth noting Eisner's (1997) statement that a major impediment for art education is "the lack of space and materials" (p. 61) and all the limitations that lack implies. Although on a daily basis music seemed more readily available than the visual arts to the third grade students during the school day (for example during snack time and morning greeting), there seems to be little possibility that daily music and movement opportunities will persist during the school day through many middle and high schools. Of the arts within formal elementary education, dance and theatre education are even less readily available to students than instruction in the visual arts and music. While movement was included in the elementary music teacher's already congested curriculum, dance and theatre education in elementary schools is virtually non-existent (Center on Educational Policy, 2007; Eisner 1997). Third grade students seemed to compensate for these curricular restraints by squeezing music, art, dance and theatrics into every moment of opportunity including transitions, recess, snack and even instructional time in non-art subjects.

These changes suggest that even in a school system that prides itself on arts integration, opportunities to engage in the arts as educational opportunities may be slowly slipping away from children as they progress through their formal education. Even though the lead teachers and administrators in core data collection claimed that the arts were essential to their curriculum, by elementary school the actualization of arts integration aligned mainly with Bresler's (1995) subservient model, the most common in her findings. In addition to sacrificing authentic learning in the arts in order to illustrate or augment other subjects, the subservient model for arts integration sends the implied message that the arts are non-essential to education and not to be taken seriously as academic pursuits (Eisner, 1997; Koroscik, 1997). On the other hand, within the classroom, the participating students were permitted the freedom to exhibit the spontaneous artful behaviors that seemed to occur so naturally among children, and they lived in a community that values the arts with many artful opportunities to potentially compensate for any minimization of arts instruction within the school day.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration all of these factors, it appears that students are on the receiving end of a mixed message about the arts in education, especially if the observed trend of reducing time for arts instruction and artistic exploration continues. While students' behaviors suggest that their bodies are predisposed toward artful activities (and hence, artful learning), the

educational system appears to be minimizing artful opportunities during instructional time that would develop such proclivities into highly meaningful, expressive and articulate forms of representation (Eisner 1994). Likewise, we should consider the possibility that pedagogical approaches that ignore these tendencies create *unnecessary* educational obstacles by insisting that children adapt to verbal and mathematical forms of communication. In schools where free-choice learning, recess and arts education have been removed from the school day, the expectation for silence replaces sound, and rows of desks replace open classroom spaces, opportunities to be artful are likely minimal. As a result, students may struggle to keep their natural proclivities in check during the school day, which one could argue, is a counterproductive starting point for meaningful education.

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