Aesthetics in the classroom for social justice: how do the theories of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Jane Piirto inform us?

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AESTHETICS IN THE CLASSROOM FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE:
HOW DO THE THEORIES OF JOHN DEWEY, MAXINE GREENE, AND
JANE PIIRTO INFORM US?

A Dissertation

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in

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by
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To Chase and Shelby,

I started this for me but finished it for you.
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I was beginning to believe that this section would never be written. The first pages of this dissertation were started years ago, but in truth, the ideas presented here are something I have been exploring since grade school. To all those who have played a part in this endeavor, thank you.

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ABSTRACT

This study asks 1) What is the relationship between art, creativity, and social justice? 2) How do the theories of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Jane Piirto inform our understanding of this relationship? 3) What is the role of the arts in contemporary curriculum? To answer these questions, the study chronicled the various roles of art in Western society, from Classical Greece through the present day, before exploring the aesthetic theories of Dewey, Greene, and Piirto. The findings suggest that the absence of an arts-integrated curriculum in most American public schools does not imply the absence of art programs in society. To the contrary, communities provide numerous opportunities for citizens to participate in the making of art. The existence and number of these non-school experiences demonstrate that the community does place importance on the arts—a direct contrast from the dominant philosophies of aesthetics and education. These communal acts of making art—acts of making democracy, at times—are frequently self-generating. That is, no formal sanctioning of art by the school as an institution is necessary for democratic acts of art to occur. While the philosophies of Dewey and Greene require one to possess conscious intent and engage in reflection to make meaningful, socially just art, these findings imply that art may also be enacted bodily, without the presence of mental reasoning. The author offers the term “intuitive presence” to describe this participation in community for the purpose of artistic creation and human understanding, to complement Greene’s theory of “wide-awakeness.” The study compels researchers to revisit our current interpretation of an aesthetic experience, to assess what art should be included in curriculum, and to broaden our explanation of how art for social justice is created.
CHAPTER 1: ART

“The condition of the city necessarily depends on how the young are educated.”
~Isocrates~

Recollections of Art and Learning

The memories of school days come to me in bursts of sudden clarity. Just as suddenly, they fade into a fuzzy, old picture. I can still see the colored pictures of the alphabet lining the wall high above our seats, the fish swimming in a small tank, unaware of our tiny bodies moving about, and the homework assignments spelled out in chalk at the front of the room. Those early days were always my favorite kind of days. They were the last days of Play-Doh people, construction paper flags, and magazine collages. I can still hear the rustling of the papers at the table, the clapping of the hands in unison, my friend’s young voice, cheerily, excitedly talking (although I can no longer hear the words), and the creaking of the old doors that lead us into the giant school. I can still feel the way I fit perfectly on my carpet square, the cheap, not-quite-cotton uniform against my skin, and the gobs of sugary treats passing over my tongue after a job well done. It must be the first grade because I can clearly smell the glue holding the art projects together. It is the sweetest and sourest smell that I know. It is everything good about those early days; it is safe, familiar, calming, devouring. It is also fleeting, gone too soon, vanished until I happen upon it as a visitor in such a room. It is the smell of my youth. Yes, it was as it should be.

It was those early days that first brought me to love school. I loved the adventure that my teachers allowed. It was exploring art, music, and literature. It was hearing my teacher read aloud from chapter books using a different, convincing voice for each character. When I lay my head on my desk for this reading time, I could close my eyes and see in my mind a whole fantastic world playing out scene by scene. It was the freedom to explore my world and see it for
the first time as if it were really my own. It was the freedom to create and imagine the world, as I wanted, that excited me about returning every day to school.

The act of creating, whether through drama, dance, or literature was at the core of my educational experience. Consequently, my interest has been in exploring the relationships among art and creativity in the classroom and developing a deeper understanding of aesthetics, creativity, and the quest for social justice. As a teacher, I wanted to recreate the types of experiences I had as a student when engaging with art objects and the artistic process. I was consumed with the idea that participation in the arts was good for everyone; I just felt it. English art critic Clive Bell (1913) writes that art has the potential to “leaven” society and to “perhaps even redeem it: for society needs redemption” (p. 98). Even though Bell’s work has been largely criticized (McLaughlin, 1977), the idea of art affecting society became the center of my research. How could art affect social change, social justice?

Maxine Greene (1998) stresses, “teaching for social justice, we must remember, is teaching what we believe out to be” (p. xxix). “Social Justice” is not a noun, but a verb. It is a constant choosing to act for the betterment of all members of society. Political activist and educational theorist William Ayers (1998) defines social justice as engaging people “in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity, to their freedom, and then to drive, to move against those obstacles” (p. xvii). To persist in the crusade for social justice, new and creative ideas must be generated and tested.

Creativity, to strip the term down to its popular meaning, simply refers to generating something new. And it feels quite natural to think of art and creativity as inseparable. After all, don’t we always speak of those engaged in the production of art as “creative”?
Art and Creativity

Creativity, the generation of something new, seems inherently bound to the artistic process associated with the arts. A review of research on creativity over specific historical time periods reveals that most research revolves around five specific questions: What is creativity? Who has creativity? What are the characteristics of creative people? Who should benefit from creativity? Can creativity be increased through conscious effort (Becker, 1995)?

Researchers define creativity as an idea that is intentional (Dennett, 1996; Lumsden, 1989) as well as original and appropriate for the situation in which it occurs (Alfert, 1986; Martindale, 2005; Poincare, 1913), and results in newness (Ciardi, 1956; Hausman, 1975; Marshall, 2005; Morgan, 1923; Newell & Shaw, 1972) that is valued (Craft, 2003; Hausman, 1979; Jackson & Messick, 1973; Maddi, 1975). What counts as creative is profoundly dependent on the age in which we live: what is valued at one place in time will necessarily be different than in another place or time (Craft, 2003). If it is not relevant, it is not creative.

Based on the definition of creativity as breaking from convention in a new way that society values, recent research shows that anyone can be creative (Bushnell & Stone, 2013; Piirto, 2007; Rothenberg, 1990) despite the common assumption that the term creative is reserved for only those possessing the highest level of genius (Broudy, 1991). Generally, creative people share a number of specific and identifiable characteristics such as intelligence, flexibility, independence, and energy (Barron, 1968; Gardner, 1994; Hennessey, 1989; Howe, 1992; MacKinnon, 1962; Schaffner, 1994; Stohs, 1992; Weisberg & Alba, 1981). However, clinical professor of psychiatry Albert Rothenberg (1990) stresses that the only characteristic that is always present in any domain is motivation. Individuals possessing these traits are crucial for society’s advancement. Nolan Bushnell, a business mogul who launched Apple founder Steve
Jobs’ career, insists creativity is not a luxury or an “extra” that teachers can teach in the classroom if they have “free time.” Bushnell and Stone (2013) boldly assert “the key to survival in this new world is creativity” (p. xxii). Not only do new ideas keep industry inventive and competitive, they can provide solutions to some of society’s worst ills. “Without that first charge of creativity, nothing else can take place” (Bushnell & Stone, 2013, p. xv).

When considering how to teach one to be creative, engagements with the arts offer a sensible path. All of what art lends to a person or society—the changes in thought, the understanding of intricate ideas, the expression of the human condition—is vital to the pursuit of creative endeavors. According to psychologist Gregory Feist (2005), those who participate with the arts by specifically creating them are “more open to experience, fantasy, and imagination” (p. 275) because they have been oriented towards play by nature of art itself. For instance, artists (actors, painters, writers, dancers, etc.) are more aesthetically oriented and intuitive than non-artists chiefly because they are in an environment that demands freedom to imagine and requires them to, quite literally, think and behave as another would (Piirto, 2004). It is this sense of freedom to imagine and play that inspires risk-taking and the breaking of convention.

Engagements with the arts also assist an individual with paying attention to intuition. Mark Runco and Shawn Sakamoto (2005) note that many eminent creators have described having a hunch before engaging in their master works. This hunch is intuition, just one characteristic of many appearing in creative people. Intuition guides the inquiry process during the very early stages—the unconscious stages—of the creative process. Raymond Nickerson (2005), an experimental psychologist, notes “creative work typically involves a period of ‘incubation’ during which one does not consciously think about the task, but the mind continues to work on it below the level of consciousness” (p. 418). Engagement with the arts offers an
introspective journey that can lead to the intuitive state of creativity (Feist, 2005). Art provides one with the opportunity to feel and intuit knowledge since words can never convey the same meaning intended by the artwork (Greene, 1981). Art fills the space between meaning and knowing that cannot be accomplished with words. Participation with the arts allows for the incubation stage to present itself in the creative process.

Imagination, a critical aspect of creativity (Feist, 2005), is the ability to see possibilities, to see what is not yet there. Emma Policastro and Howard Gardner (2005) define imagination as a “form of playful analogical thinking that draws upon previous experiences, but combines them in unusual ways, generating new patterns of meaning” (p. 217). Art allows students to use imagination to reevaluate ideas. Educational theorist Maxine Greene tells us art allows one the chance to see what “habit and convention have suppressed” (1995, p. 123). Greene is a strong supporter of the arts for the purpose of developing the imagination. “There is no question but that informed engagement with the several arts enables persons to explore experiential possibilities they never imagined before” (1995, p. 158). Imagination is a key ingredient in creativity. The unrealized vision is what eventually becomes the next novel idea or invention; it becomes the creative expression. According to American philosopher and author Mortimer J. Adler’s (1952) assessment of imagination, the object imagined need not be perceived by the senses as a memory is. Just as a memory is a rendering that is no longer available, so is the imagination a possibility that is not yet reality. Society, particularly its educational institutions, has the moral and ethical obligation to then promote the use of imagination to foster human happiness and social justice (Adler, 1952; Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999).
Art and Social Justice

For social justice to begin to be realized, for the necessary conversations to be initiated, communication must be clear. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2004) suggest that, “art objects make accessible realities inexpressible through other orders of representation” (p. 570). These “realities” include multiple perspectives saturated with the range of human emotion, depicting a fluid sum of our community.

For pragmatist John Dewey, art is implicit in every experience; it is the human condition. It is an emotional utterance like a sigh or a scream that must be released. “The office of art in the individual person, [is] to compose differences, to do away with isolations and conflicts among the elements of our being” (Dewey, 1934, p. 258). Art is able to do this because, even if the artist did not intend to communicate with his or her art, communication is always a consequence of the art object. Dewey also considered art and the aesthetic experience to be the freest, most universal form of communication. “In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience” (p. 109).

There is an understanding that art offers a person knowledge that cannot be expressed through math, science, or sometimes even through words. Nicholas Paley (1995) highlights acclaimed documentary photographer Jim Hubbard’s “Shooting Back” project where homeless children of Washington D.C. photographically documented their lives on the streets and in shelters. Shooting Back positioned “young people in critically active situations, positive roles, where they’re learning ways to independently target, question, and reshape what they encounter on a daily basis” (Paley, 1995, p. 177). Hubbard was moved to create this program after the Reagan administration (which he photographed often) repeatedly denied the widespread
existence of homelessness and poverty. Through this artistic medium, Hubbard gave the mute a voice. Hubbard became connected to the homeless children of Washington D.C., and through the mobile exhibit and publication of a photo-illustrated book, thousands of others also became linked.

This sense of social-connection is both desirable as well as essential. Society is in desperate need of people who feel a communion to others: environmentalists would argue that the spreading of global warming is dependent upon socially responsible people becoming aware of the situation to stop it; moralists would argue that the crime rate depends on the development of social responsibility to understand each other and show respect for human life. Pinar et al. (2004) explains, “students need to learn to decode issues of race, class, and gender embedded in particular art objects; they need to learn to express more ethical visions of these matters via aesthetic production” (p. 580). For social change to occur or for human happiness to increase, individuals must feel connected to society. This connection allows for a sense of responsibility, which leads to the hope of happiness and contentment.

Pinar et al. (2004) warns that “abstracting aesthetic experience from personal, social, and political events with which it might be associated, impoverishes aesthetic experience” (p. 579). Art is not “art for art’s sake.” Instead it reveals what it means to be human at a particular time and place. It is in this space that humans need to have relationships with the “Other.” Self-identity is dependent on our reflection in others, and the artistic process necessitates self and social-reflection. Art is a way of connecting individuals to each other and to connect society to relevant, if sometimes forgotten, aspects of life.

Art is indeed an interactive process (and I intentionally use the term process). Art invites the participant to feel, to question, to reevaluate. It must be absorbed for any real meaning to be
made. One needs to seek within to make connections with knowledge and to forge a personal sense of learning.

Sometimes this sense making is creating something to deal with pain. In *Alterity Politics* (1998), Jeffrey Nealon remarks how Van Gogh’s *Shoes* speaks to its audience. There is a loneliness and a sadness that is understood. The struggles of a person are perceived despite the absence of the physical person. Greene describes how Picasso’s *Weeping Woman* is a symbol of our time, replacing men on horses in battle. The Woman represents what Greene calls a “tragic deficiency in the fabric of life” (1995, p. 122). It is through interactions with such works that prompt our youth to ask, “How might this be different?” She also notes that watching Martha Graham’s *Lamentation* invites the participant to read more into the movement on the stage. One must see the lines in the fabric, the mourning in the bodies; it is after seeing the pain that one can dream of new beginnings.

As a teenager in the 1990s, like millions of others, I enjoyed the rhythmic beats and the intense lyrics of 2Pac. Nearly twenty years later, I still feel 2Pac’s raw vulnerability in songs like “Dear Mama,” his painfully beautiful tribute to his flawed and fractured mother. “And even as a crack fiend, Mama/You always was a Black queen, Mama” (Shakur, Sample, Pizzaro, 1995). Through his words, I begin to see, as many young adults do, that our heroes are not infallible. 2Pac’s most shockingly honest lyrics in the song demonstrate the contradictions that we often find in life as we age.

2Pac’s source of pain is not limited to personal suffering. In fact, 2Pac sees himself as someone to bring social issues to national attention through his music when others cannot have their voices heard (Steinberg, 1999). He sings of the violence, the poverty, and the power of drugs that permeated his world. At the time his socially conscious albums were released, many
critics (including then Vice President, Dan Quayle) claimed that 2Pac unnecessarily uses profanity and violence, thereby glorifying it (Giovanni, 1999). Critics claim such depictions of life are unneeded, but 2Pac is just showing the nation what they did not want to see. With the 2009 launch of the Vatican’s MySpace social networking account, however, 2Pac’s message gained a surprising supporter. The Vatican released 2Pac’s song “Changes” as part of their official playlist. In response to the inclusion of a controversial artist in a playlist that includes Mozart, CNN quotes the Vatican in a written statement that reads: “The genres are very different from each other, but all these artists share the aim to reach the heart of good minded people” (Piazza, 2009, para. 4).

At other times, art is a cry of celebration. When much of the United States consisted of Protestant colonies with oppressive regulations, Congo Square in New Orleans remained an attraction to display the joy and pride of Black dance and music (Morgan, 2000). Even in this area that was designated for slaves, celebration reigned supreme on magical New Orleans’ Sundays. Celebratory art honors the spirit and tradition of people. Art is the corridor through which the spirit travels. It is the only path through which others can experience the truths of a people.

Louisiana painter Terrance Osborne portrays his native land with the use of vivid color even in situations where the media has portrayed Louisiana as somehow deficient or lacking. It would be hard to believe that anyone in the civilized world is unaware of the monster storm that struck New Orleans in 2005, Hurricane Katrina. While the stories and images of her destruction in the Big Easy played out in front of millions on TV, revealing the immediate devastation of the city and her inhabitants, there was never a time when the resilient spirit of the people was widely portrayed. How could New Orleans communicate an inner knowledge that life goes on,
communities rebuild and that even in death, there is rebirth? Terrance Osborne, a highly successful painter from New Orleans, chooses to combine the reality of shotgun houses flooded to the roof with the startling use of bright colors to create something truly unique in his whimsical *Hurricane Solution* series (“Terrance Osborne Art,” 2009). The people of New Orleans are depicted as doing what they do best: facing adversity head on, uniting as a community, creating solutions and moving on. Osborne’s work uses his medium to celebrate the resiliency of his native city.

Lafourche Parish native and former engineer Hank Holland uses color in a similar fashion as Osborne, but the Louisiana that Holland depicts is distinctly his own. Bringing with him the difficulties of being seen as “Other” due to cerebral palsy, Holland incorporates the safe haven of his youth—a tree house—into most of his brightly-hued paintings showing life along the bayou (Burst, 2011). The folk artist’s paintings are homage to the beauty of the marshes and the spirit of its people. In his paintings, local residents are often shown playing brass instruments in a joyous procession. In *Skully’s Juke Joint*, Holland’s absurd skeletons smile as they *second line* outside of the graveyard and into the local watering hole; not even death can snuff out of the spirit of the community. Holland himself embodies that same resilient energy depicted in his 8,000 paintings. After all of the personal pain that he endured, he chooses to use his art to celebrate Louisiana’s eternal spirit.

Still at other times, art’s purpose is not to create something new, but to give people a common reference point of understanding. American philosopher Allan Bloom (1988) suggests that art, specifically literature, provides people with a way to convey complex ideas in few words. The illustrative example Bloom provides is that of the Dickens’ character, Scrooge. When one hears the allusion, there is a common understanding of the complexities and nuances
behind the name. The same can be said of our routine allusions to mythology such as with Cupid, to the Bible with David and Goliath, and to relatively recent literature such as using the term “catch-22” to signify a no-win situation. Literature and art provide us with a succinct way to explain an intricate idea. Literature communicates the complexity of the human condition through analogies and metaphors understood only because of the existence and sharing of such art.

While it is clear that communion with the arts can lead to innovation and understanding, according to curriculum theorist Landon Beyer (1985), intentional, thoughtful engagements with the arts can even lead to a social revolution. “It is in seeing the ability of aesthetic experience to transform lived experience, the given of social interaction and meaning, and the facts of political consciousness that a revolutionized educational and social life may become possible” (1985, p. 397). With a new perspective of art as revolutionary and its suggestions for performing social justice, educators may be more willing to integrate art into their curriculum.

Displaying multiple perspectives, the quality of art that I am most concerned with here, provides us with the opportunity to explore the varied landscapes of those around us. Involving ourselves with this consequence of art is a beginning to social justice. Writing on art and social responsibility, Donald Blumenfeld-Jones (2012) points out that in order to be responsible and act for the good of the public, we must adjust our own behaviors according to others’ actions. Doing so will expand our possibilities for achieving social justice and freedom through the exposure and acquisition of new resources. Through the exploration of these new possibilities, freedom may be found. “Liberation is connected with recognizing our connection to diverse others. Liberation of self and society is the point of democracy” (p. 105).
Statement of the Problem

There is a generally accepted notion that education has three aims: the personal, the civic, and the economic (Adler, 1952). What is currently observed in public schools is the economic aim of education is our nation’s sole concern. Mandate after mandate stresses the importance of technology and math almost to the utter exclusion of disciplines once deemed important like history, music, and literature. Since the civic and personal aims of education harvest no attention, a holistic curriculum is irrelevant. Only those academic courses that fit the current American political agenda survive. In 1934, Dewey referred to the causes of discipline divisions as “forces” (p. 5). Among these forces lies political legislation. After the No Child Left Behind Act was signed by President Bush in 2001, educational priorities were mandated as science, technology, and reading comprehension. While these disciplines are necessary to function in today’s high-tech world, science, technology, and reading comprehension do not represent a complete curriculum.

The notion of art education in schools today consists of little more than elective art class in high schools or a middle school marching band. Now, even these minimal programs are being slashed, as budget cuts to schools become the norm. Current classes in schools have been separated into disciplines, and classes seen as having little scholarly value are first to be cut (Harris, 1966). British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1967) cites this division of information as "specialization of knowledge" beginning in the twentieth century. This specialization and segregation of the curriculum is cultivating a certain skill set (math and science) while neglecting others (music, rhetoric, art).

But art, far from being isolated from the human condition, cannot be separated from any curriculum. Dewey (1934) notes that “art is a mode of prediction not found in charts and
statistics, and it insinuates possibilities of human relations not to be found in rule and precept, admonition and administration” (p. 363). Art is not a story told through a newscast or a textbook. It is the actual lived experience of the creator that offers a viewpoint on social issues generally not seen within a classroom. Art education is suffering, in part, because it is viewed by the general population as the domain of the talented and diligent instead of as a gesture of expression (Broudy, 1991) or as cognitively challenging as any other discipline (Greene, 1995).

For MIT alumnus and artificial intelligence expert David Perkins (1994), art assists in prompting various modes of thinking in obvious, natural ways. Art in particular and thinking in general require the same dispositions, and art naturally lends itself to the other. For both art and general thinking, one must give looking and comprehension time—make it adventurous and broad, make it clear and deep, and make it organized. The same goals that No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top aim to achieve (i.e., problem solving skills, an understanding of the global community) can be acquired through intentional engagements with art. Art provokes, questions, insults, offends, begs, invites, and explores. Art screams to us to look at it broadly, deeply, and to interact with it. “If most disciplines dig moats, art builds bridges” (Perkins, 2004, p. 90).

When one does not think deeply and broadly about the work of art as suggested by Perkins, then all one receives is knowledge of a particular object as if it exists in isolation, free from context and meaning. However, when depth, breadth, and time are given to examining works of art, the emotions and human understanding become incredibly foundational.

Without an arts curriculum, we may very well be removing the only way our students have of realizing their creative potential. Creativity lends to us an amazing array of characteristics that not only lead to personal fulfillment, but also to positive social contributions. Art allows students to perceive objects and their contexts in such a way that allow an increased
awareness of social responsibility and freedom of expression. By marrying responsibility to freedom, students have the opportunity to develop the creativity that the future of the world requires.

I am convinced that through reflective and impassioned teaching we can do far more to excite and stimulate many sorts of young persons to reach beyond themselves, to create meanings, to look through wider and more informed perspectives at the actualities of their lived lives. (Greene, 1995, p. 172)

Art and aesthetics are championed by educational theorists (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1995; Jensen, 2001; Piirto, 2007) as vital to not only knowledge but to life itself. The arts have served different functions in schools and society through the eras, but current curriculum does not allow for engagements with either the arts or the creative thinking with which it naturally complements.

The three philosophies—of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Jane Piirto—are presented in this dissertation by the dates of their major publications in the field of aesthetic theory. These three theorists were chosen, however, for much more personal reasons. Dewey’s vision of education for democracy and art as a way to achieve democracy—as shown to me by my chair and mentor, Petra Munro Hendry—appeals to me as a public school teacher and a lover of the arts. Art as a truth, and democracy as a way of life, have remained my highest interests throughout my undergraduate and graduate years. The amount of respect paid to Dewey over the years as a brilliant philosophical mind also gives credibility to my undertaking an exploration of the relationships between art, creativity, and social justice. I was first introduced to Maxine Greene by the delightfully unconventional professor, William E. Doll. Greene’s text for Doll’s class, Releasing the Imagination, gave me hope that others saw the possibilities of what art could do for education; I was not alone and wanted to fight the good fight. Finally, committee member Rita Culross presented Jane Piirto’s work to me as a contemporary guru on all things related to
ingenuity and talent development during a course on creativity. Piirto’s theories on art and creativity easily incorporate the theories of Dewey and Greene as she offers suggestions on how to use those theories to foster creativity in the contemporary classroom. The aesthetic theories of Dewey, Greene, and Piirto pose interesting propositions on how art and the creativity involved with producing art has the potential to affect social change.

**Research Questions**

Throughout history, the arts have played an important part in the education of mankind. It has been used to train the body, build the character, and cultivate the mind (Adler, 1952). According to Jane Piirto (2004), creativity and imagination are necessarily a part of any artistic endeavor. For Maxine Greene (1998) and John Dewey (1938), the principle of social justice is not only what guides American life but governs it. Reflecting on these ideas, my dissertation aims to explore the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between art, creativity, and social justice?
- How do the theories of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Jane Piirto inform our understanding of this relationship?
- What is the role of the arts in contemporary curriculum?

**Potential Contribution**

This study is important because it makes contributions to several areas. Educational theorists will find this study relevant because it looks at creativity in the classroom from a unique perspective. Most studies conducted on creativity use biological, historiometric, or psychometric approaches to quantify creativity (Plucker and Renzulli, 2005; Simonton, 2005). This study instead delves into the aesthetic theories of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Jane Piirto to

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create an illustration of how art can contribute to an increase of creativity in the classroom and the implications for achieving social justice.

Practicing educators will find this study important because it offers sound theory about the importance of including art and creative thinking into the classroom. According to cognitive development expert D.H. Feldman (2005), “it is taken for granted that teachers, mentors, schools, and other sources of preparation for later creative work are critical to success” (p. 175). In fact, it is through mentorship and guidance that one decides to pursue the artistic endeavor or abandon it. Even in 360 B.C., Plato wrote in his last collection of dialogues before his death that the purpose of education is to produce good men for human happiness and the welfare of society.

Isocrates maintains that the disciplines of the soul (mind) and body are complementary and fused together, each enabling the other to grow richer. Every memory is unique to the carrier and represents a plural truth. Therefore, whether one chooses to rely on written text or memory, it will not be an absolute truth, but a rendering of how things might have been. Disciplines involved in critical and analytical problem solving are taking precedent over creative thinking, but “creativity is a special form of problem-solving” (Nickerson, 2005, p. 394). In fact, Nickerson (2005) asserts that creative problem-solving, or divergent thinking, must be taught alongside the popular convergent thinking in order to produce students who are great thinkers and problem-solvers.

Educational theorists and philosophers agree that one of the great things art can offer us is the ability to view an object or situation from multiple perspectives. It is the ability to see things from multiple perspectives, and then to change one’s own perspective, that has been pinpointed as crucial to creative thinking (Nickerson, 2005). Art, whether it is seen as dance, drama, athletic movement, or a visual object, is an expression of freedom. It is freedom of
thought, feeling, and ideas; it is not bound by the reasonable or the logical. Creativity necessarily requires freedom. This freedom cannot be given in science or math through proofs or deductive reasoning for “control and creativity are dialectical opposites” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 604). Educators must create the environment for freedom – give the student a structured space to play – but then allow the student to express without interference.

Curriculum makers will likewise find this study useful in developing a more complete, more comprehensive curriculum. By focusing on a narrow aspect of being, current curriculum neglects all of the parts of the student that may lead to future understanding of our world, each other, and our roles and commitment to each. Science certainly has a place in society and in our understanding of the world. However, we cannot allow science to become the only lens through which we view life. French philosopher Michel Serres (1991) warns that “knowledge is certainly excellent, but in the same way cold is: when it is cool. Science, assuredly is just as useful, but the way heat is if it remains mild” (p. 122). By focusing on a narrow aspect of knowledge, future understandings of the world, others, and our commitments to each will be lost. Petra Munro Hendry (2010) argues that viewing science as the only valid way of knowing, is a “threat to democracy” (p. 73). As Greene observes (1995), only those in “white coats” are seen as having knowledge of value. Although science serves useful purposes for providing meaning in specific instances, “it is incapable of capturing the complexity of the whole human experience” (Hendry, 2010, p. 74).

Through the exploration of the aesthetic theories of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Jane Piirto, I hope to provide ideas and, perhaps, justification, for consciously incorporating art and creativity into the classroom in the pursuit of realizing social justice.
Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to this theoretical study.

In chapter two, I briefly discuss the role that art has played throughout history from the Hellenistic times to present day and will conclude with a review of the relevant literature on creativity and art in the classroom.

Chapter three explores John Dewey’s theory of aesthetic experience. Dewey believes that achieving an aesthetic experience is the highest form of living, and this type of experience is what each individual should strive for. Using art promotes the development of aesthetic experiences because individuals must engage in the transactional communication of time, space, and context, to develop understanding of the self and other.

Chapter four traverses Maxine Greene’s belief that art can be a powerful vehicle for social change. For Greene (2001), art has nothing to do with schooling, but with the exploring of possibilities. Social control is not advocated but a sensitivity and reflectiveness among society’s members. Students need to “understand their own lives in relation to all that surrounds” (Greene, 2001, p. 7). When students have accomplished this through art and aesthetics, social understanding occurs. Once social understanding is achieved, mindful social change can begin. Possibilities not yet imagined will begin to emerge; a new creation will take form.

Chapter five examines Jane Piirto’s understanding of the various artistic domains and how what we know about each of them can inform how we develop talent in the school. This chapter analyzes Piirto’s Pyramid of Talent Development from the genetic foundation to the aspects of the environment needed to realize one’s artistic talent and creativity. Using Piirto’s Pyramid, I present brief biographies of publicly valued artists (and personal favorites) that
represent the various domains. Looking at characteristics of highly creative people, I speculate why painter Pablo Picasso, writer Edgar Allan Poe, musician Kurt Cobain, and dancer Martha Graham developed into highly valued artists. This chapter also asserts that the creativity valued in the presented biographies can and should be nurtured in the public schools.

Chapter six synthesizes the information from the aesthetic perspectives of Dewey, Greene, and Piirto and discusses implications for the diminishing role of the arts in schools as well as suggestions for further research.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Aesthetic:** the philosophical study of that which is beautiful (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1984; Miller, 2001) and is connected with art and society (Adorno, 1970/1988).

**Art:** any process or product that expresses feeling, emotions, ideas, or interpretations (Adams, 2002; Adler, 1952; Aristotle; Dewey, 1934; Jeffers, 2002; Kant, 1781/2008; Sullivan, 2002). It includes, but is not limited to, the work and processes accredited to actors, writers, dancers, sculptors, painters, decorators, and poets.

**Creativity:** an idea that is intentional (Dennett, 1996; Lumsden, 1989) as well as original and appropriate for the situation in which it occurs (Alfert, 1986; Martindale, 2005; Poincare, 1913) and results in newness (Ciardi, 1956; Hausman 1975; Marshall, 2005; Morgan, 1923; Newell & Shaw, 1972) that is valued (Hausman, 1975; Jackson & Messick, 1973; Maddi, 1975; Craft, 2003) through the processes of manipulation and recombination (Adams, 1974).

**Imagination:** The ability to break away from convention (Greene, 1995) in order to rearrange the old and the strange to form something new (Dewey, 1934), to see what is “not yet” (Greene, 1998).
Social Justice: the inclusion of all individuals to fully participate in social, economic, and cultural life for the betterment of all humankind (Greene, 1998; Jamar & Lateef, 2010); the freedom of participation in the making of a democratic society (Dewey, 1927).
Chapter 2: A Literature Review of Art’s Past and Present

“If there were only one truth, you couldn't paint a hundred canvases on the same theme.”
~Pablo Picasso~

Mandated contemporary curriculum has neglected to include the arts. Educational historian Arthur Efland (1990) muses that this is because artistic endeavors are viewed as the domain of the elite and privileged. How did the idea of creative expression as privileged develop? Access to art and aesthetics has been controlled throughout history in every society through censorship, education, and patronage (Kavolis, 1974). These three avenues have been, and are currently, controlled through the socially powerful who decide in what capacity art is useful. As Efland notes, art has always served or responded to religion and politics.

The following historical review of art education highlights those periods of achievement (or stagnation) as typically noted in Western Civilization. The focus of this brief review remains on the West, as the traditions and attitudes that began in the West eventually morphed into American’s current attitudes of art and education. The roles of the arts, artists, and art’s relationship to social justice will be examined in light of the cultural atmosphere of the time.

The Classical Era

This historical review on the roles of art and its relationship to social justice begins in Ancient Greece, as this is where the Western art tradition was born (Soltes, 2007; Tanner, 2006). It is in Classical Greece that “naturalism” began to dominate in all mediums of artistic expression, breaking free from Oriental artistic traditions of stone sculptures, rigidly posed in a frontal stance (Soltes, 2007). In contrast to the unyielding and disconnected sculptures that typified archaic Greek art, the emergence of naturalism signified an acknowledgement of the spectator, by displaying more inviting and relaxed postures of subjects (Tanner, 2001). This
emancipation from archaic Greek art, this invitation to engage with an art object, is the beginning of Western art history.

The art of Classical Greece was created for preserving the social culture (Castle, 1961; Efland 1990; Tanner, 2001). Songs, sculptures, and poems were created to honor the shared religious and civic values of the citizens. Their sculptures of deities paid homage to the beings that governed human life. Architectural feats, such as the Parthenon, served to honor the gods and goddesses as well as to provide a place for civic discourse and commerce. Archaeologist Jeremy Tanner (2001) notes that the art of Classical Greece organized citizens’ affect, “thereby motivating commitment to certain social roles or systems of cultural representation” (p. 260). With the presence of art like the Parthenon, Athenians were declaring their commitment to democracy. Engagements with the arts consequently promoted the ideal of social justice.

Art at this time functioned as a tool to maintain culture although not all modes of art were considered equal in prestige. While there is a considerable lack of information on the actual instructional methods for teaching the arts in Ancient Greece, the value of each artistic domain is distinct (Efland, 1990). Music was considered by Athenians to be necessary to the formation of the soul (Efland, 1990). Music was an integral part of education, and individuals were expected to engage in music to solidify his or her connection to Athenian culture. As such, music was considered central to the moral and social development of every citizen. In stark contrast to the necessity of music in education, painting, and sculpture were seen as inferior forms of artistic expression (Efland, 1990). This view was, in part, due to the fact that “slaves, artisans, or workers” carried out the tasks associated with these endeavors (Gortais, 2003, p. 1241). The craftsmen—potters, weavers, carvers—who comprised much of Greece’s citizenry, learned skills from their fathers, although an occasional “outsider” was taken in to learn the artistry
These skills were valued more than sculpture since the objects produced were beneficial to the stability of Greek life. In the 4th century B.C., drawing classes were taken as extra courses to the standard curriculum. One hundred years later, drawing was integrated into regular classroom instruction, and during the second century B.C., drawing was among the disciplines tested on school examinations along with literature, gymnastics, and music (Marrou, 1956).

The separation of art from the usefulness of everyday life began during the Hellenistic period, and in turn, the cultural function of art began to shift. Collecting pieces of art became a symbol of refinement and prestige (Taylor, 1948) instead of a way to reinforce commitment to a shared culture. The possession of art was used to distinguish between the commoner and the elite. While the objects of art became privileged, the fashioners of these collectibles remained at the station of “artisan” and enjoyed no perks allowed to the powerful. Thus, the production of the arts, including music, became “professionalized,” and art lost its relevance in curriculum (Efland, 1990).

The Middle Ages

After the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D., all learning, including aesthetic education, came to a virtual standstill (Efland, 1990). Archaeologist Edward James (2009) describes the Early Middle Ages as marked by decreased population, decreased urbanization, and increased violence. With the spread of Christianity throughout Western Europe (and the subsequent exclusion of all secular art and writing), the Middle Ages saw the development of monasteries. These institutions, which educated both monks and the sons of nobles, were the only schools to operate at this time (Efland, 1990).
The monastic institutions of the Middle Ages produced skilled artisans due to Benedictine Rule, which dictated that seven hours of each day were to be devoted to labor. According to Efland (1990), the artisans were engaged in scribing, painting, bookbinding, painting, and sculpting to adhere to Benedictine Rule, as well as to spread faith despite a lack of public literacy. However, these crafts were created with skill and precision in mind, not originality. Artistic activities “were consecrated to the greater glory of God, not practiced as a form of individual expression or for personal gain” (Efland, 1990, p. 21). Art was in no way seen as an avenue for social justice. To the contrary, the production of art and the process of creating it were used for social and religious conformity.

Efland notes that “the key to the understanding of medieval society is land” (1990, p. 19). The belief was that land had been given to man so that he might labor, and it was man’s obligation to defend that land. At the time of these feudal societies, the “value of money was ill-defined” notes archaeologist Alfred Kieser (1989, p. 545). With the economy in chaos and an intense sense of responsibility to land, agriculture became the focus of civilization. The changes brought about a new hierarchal organizational system in medieval society that gave birth to guilds.

The craft guilds, organizations for people working in the same trade, constituted the majority of education (Efland, 1990). The guilds established rights and standards among artisans, but they also functioned to control the labor supply by limiting the number of apprentices. The guilds functioned with a definite hierarchy: masters directed assistants and assistants directed apprentices. Efland points out that the apprentices, who were almost always the sons of masters, had to follow strict rules and were not encouraged to show any artistic originality. Art instruction was administered either orally or through the strict copying of an
object deemed as an exemplar. Kieser notes that while changing the practices or goals in a guild was “extremely difficult,” there was no other option as there was no sort of private sphere beyond the guild (1989, p. 547). Art education was reserved for the sons of craft masters, which required five to six years of training, and the completion of a final exam, which most would not successfully finish (Efland, 1990). Thus, art provided no means for social justice. Art was a way to privilege some citizens and to reproduce one image, over and over again, without original deviation.

The Renaissance

The Renaissance, notably the Italian Renaissance, forever changed the way art was viewed by Western society, “for it laid the groundwork for modern conception of the arts” (Efland, 1990, p. 26). The Renaissance was marked by European nations thriving from social, intellectual, and religious transformations (Stokstad, 2002). This prosperity also produced a growing middle class that was in a position to support research, literature, and the arts—something that was historically reserved for the wealthiest members of society.

The period of “rebirth” flourished under the premise that contemporaries could learn from Classical cultures and was termed humanism. Humanism in Western Europe denoted the idea that much intellectual knowledge was to be gained through the study of Classical Greek and Latin culture, and emphasis was placed on the individual and the rational. Theologian and art historian Ori Soltes (2007) notes that those who identified with this movement were most interested in answering the question “how should I be in the world?” (p. 77). Marilyn Stokstad (2002), an American art historian, suggests that by answering the question of “how to be,” citizens would “achieve personal freedom” (p. 619). Humanist philosophers of the Renaissance believed that general education was to the benefit of everyone and placed great importance on
history and literature because “the humanities contain all the broad truths of human experience” (Efland, 1990, p. 27).

While the subject of art remained vastly Christian, the depictions of Christ and the Virgin Mary transformed from ethereal renderings to flesh-and-blood portrayals (Soltes, 2007). This “lifelike” image carried over into portraiture, which were perhaps the most significant development of the Renaissance (Loh, 2009). With the “desire for accurate depiction came a new interest in individual personalities” (Stokstad, 2002, p. 617). Portraits were painted with great attention to realistic detail, even if the resulting image was unflattering.

In order to remain as natural and realistic as possible, “the humanists’ scientific study of the natural world . . . led to the invention of a mathematical system enabling artists to represent the visible world in a convincingly illusionistic way” (Stokstad, 2002, p. 621). Italian architect Leon Battista Alberti is credited with codifying mathematical perspective, thereby making art a standardized and simplified method. Alberti also declared that artists must be educated, intelligent, and possess a high moral character (Stokstad, 2002).

Complementing the prevailing attention to the individual, works of art were seen as individual acts of inspired creation, and artists participated in “godlike creative endeavors” (Efland, 1990, p. 27). For the first time, and in direct contrast to the medieval idea of the artist as craftsman, the artist was viewed as a member of the cultural elite and thus valued among society. Many artists began to financially profit from what Stokstad terms “the myth of the divinely inspired creative genius” (2002, p. 687).

An aesthetic education, which was completely absent during the Middle Ages, was stressed for the first time (Wilds & Lottich, 1962). The restricted guilds of the Middle Ages, however, were seen as insufficient for nurturing the artistic genius (Efland, 1990). Since guilds
could do nothing more than pass along skills, academies of art became necessary. These academies held no formal curriculum and hired no teachers. Efland (1990) describes the academies of the time as consisting of members of varied ages and skill level. They congregated to watch each other paint, to demonstrate techniques to others, and to discuss the theories of art. If anything could be called a “curriculum,” it was the developing theories presented by the member artists.

Art was not connected to social justice during this time because, just as in the Middle Ages, women were denied full engagement in social and political life. Only men were considered “geniuses,” so women were never afforded the opportunity to fully participate in the artistic renewal of the Renaissance (Stokstad, 2002). Except for a short list of incredibly wealthy women connected to powerful men (Catherine de Medici, Isabella d’Este), the life of a female was marked by subjugation: first, to her father, and later, to her husband.

**France and the Decorative Arts**

As the realistic artwork of the Italian Renaissance shifted to the rich colors and dramatic contrast of Baroque art, France found itself celebrating dominance among European nations. During the reign of French monarchs, including King Louis XIV, a mix of artistic styles contributed to the decorative arts that defined the period from the end of the 17th century through the end of the 19th century. The shunning of Italian artistic techniques in favor of the ornamental and erotic Rococo work created by Parisians demonstrated the political and artistic independence of France (Soltes, 2007). The monarch was intent on proving that France was a leader not only in the arts, but also in commerce and on the battlefield (Efland, 1990).

The primary role of the arts was to “assert the power and prestige of the state” (Efland, 1990, p. 34). While the decorative arts dominated this time period, art was not used to indulge
Louis XIV’s fancy, but rather to “systematically build an image of glory and grandeur” for France’s monarchy and to declare “the divine right of kings” (p. 35). To help him accomplish his mission, the Sun King assembled 250 French, Italian, Flemish, and Dutch artists whose sole purpose was to create lavish decorations (Raggio, 2009). This group of artists encompassed painters, tapestry weavers, sculptors, cabinetmakers, silversmiths, mosaicists, and embroiderers, and unlike in previous eras, artists enjoyed a distinguished ranking among society.

Under King Louis XIII rule, French guilds forbade any imported art as a measure to keep Italian art and artists out of Paris (Efland, 1990). However, the existence of these guilds clearly obstructed the establishment of new industries for a nation intent on expanding its economy. The Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture opened in 1648 in rebellion of guild restrictions by French artists. In this government-sponsored academy, King Louis XIV controlled patronage, censorship, and instruction of the arts. By 1663, all court painters had to join the Royal Academy, but since membership guaranteed financial success, participation was seen as a privilege instead of an obligation (Efland, 1990).

The members of the Academy created a set of written rules to guide beginners in artistic methods. Instruction within the Academy was divided into two levels of artistic skill: lower and higher. The lower level classes consisted of students copying drawings while the higher level classes drew from live models, which was considered to be the most skilled form of drawing (Efland, 1990). Since drawing from live models was prohibited outside of the Academy, the Crown maintained a complete monopoly on art education.

At this time, art was being used not for social justice, but to ensure that those in power remained in power. Admittance to the Royal Academy was reserved for men, leaving a lack of opportunity for women to showcase their artistic talents. The Crown also ensured that no
outsider had access to advanced drawing techniques by forbidding the use of live models outside of the two daily hours of drawing inside of the Academy. Every piece of art was expressly created to promote the opulence of the French monarchy, and only men were worthy of that important task.

The Enlightenment

The 18th century marks a great divide in Western history. Prior to this time, society was working with aristocracy in a semi-feudal system, but with the rise of industry, the widespread emergence of democracy and republics signaled the modern era. The new economic policies, namely laissez-faire economics, allowed for expanded trade and the collection of private wealth (Efland, 1990). Philosophers such as Locke, Jefferson, and Franklin subscribed to the belief that the individual was possessed with the ability to serve himself instead of God, that he had the ability to attain his own happiness. As neuropsychologist Daniel Robinson (2004) describes the time, “the authority of science was widely accepted, and when dilemmas of social organizations, morals, health, commerce, or industry arose, scientists would be called on to resolve them” (p. 132).

With the rise of industry and a free-market mentality, art came to be seen as a commodity to be bought and sold (Efland, 1990). The nations of Europe discovered a need for drawing and design skills to be successful in new manufacturing ventures. Art began to become the business of the growing middle class instead of the traditional aristocracy. In colonial America, the Puritans, Calvinists, and Quakers did not approve of “artistic embellishment in places of worship,” and these New World establishments lagged greatly behind the European artistic movements of Neoclassic, Rococo, and Romantic works (Efland, 1990, p. 44). However, by the
middle of the 18th century, wealthy Americans demanded imported art from their European colonizers: Britain, Spain, and France (Stokstad, 2002).

Art was considered by the majority to be a luxury of leisure and not useful in any practical sense (Efland, 1990). However, there was at least one prominent person advocating for the importance of arts at this time. Benjamin Franklin called to have all students educated in the principles of drawing and perspective as an avenue for meaningful communication. “Drawing is a kind of universal language, understood by all nations. A man may often express his ideas, even to his own countrymen, more clearly with a lead pencil, or bit of chalk, than with his tongue” (Franklin, 1749/1931, p. 158). Despite Franklin’s appeal, American art academies functioned in a rote and rigid fashion. Pennsylvania’s Academia of Fine Arts, like most Western art institutions, was modeled after France’s Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. However, in the century following the opening of the French Academy, art institutes were founded for economic reasons instead of political ones. Formalized art instruction was deemed necessary “in order to make factories flourish and increase the prosperity of the citizens” (Efland, 1990, p. 45).

Art academies were “the chief obstacle to change and independent thinking of the sort promoted by the Enlightenment” (Stokstad, 2002, p. 944). The first obstacle included strict rules and standards as artists were forced to follow academy guidelines and could not work from their own standards of beauty and inspiration. The second obstacle came in the form of injustice against women. Louis XIV proclaimed that the Royal Academy would be open to both sexes without discrimination, but in practice, only seven women were admitted between 1648 and 1706. No women were admitted between 1706 and 1770 since the Academy prohibited the enrollment of women due to the fear that the female population would become too numerous (Stokstad, 2002). When the presence of women was renewed, a limit of four women at any one
time was imposed. While women were technically allowed into the academy, young women were not allowed to enroll and were not allowed to compete for any sort of prizes (Stokstad, 2002). In addition, women were not allowed to draw from nude models under the principle of propriety, thus absolutely excluding them from the form of art most revered.

**The Industrial Revolution**

The onset of new technologies, scientific discoveries, political revolutions, and the “belief in progress” that encapsulated the Industrial Revolution led to contradictory views of the artist. At once, the artist and his work were viewed as possessing “spiritual insight necessary for the welfare of society,” while a separate faction of artists, the craftsmen, were relegated to the role of mechanized manufacturing (Efland, 1990, p. 51). During this time, the ability of a society to treasure the artistic element in both the fine arts and the crafts would lead France in becoming the cultural guide for the Western world (Stokstad, 2002).

The decisive divide between artists and artisans in America led to the belief that art was of little use to industry, and art’s role in society underwent rapid changes. Factories replaced craft workshops. Skilled artisans were replaced by machines, which were operated by unskilled workers. The growing middle class, the mass-market economy, and the increasing number of private art collectors effectively ended any type of “official” patronage, as fine art became a commodity.

France and the rest of the West adjusted to the split between the fine arts and craft arts in different ways. All agreed that a new type of art education was necessary for the artisans because the academies were not viewed as suitable preparation for industry (Efland, 1990). While the art academies established under aristocracy continued to provide instruction in the fine arts, trade institutes opened to train artisans.
The curriculum of the trade schools of nations like Britain and Germany deviated greatly from Europe’s established art academies. The schools did offer drawing classes, but the techniques used were not the same as those used in the academies, and there was no live figure drawing. These schools also commanded a strong technical focus with mandatory classes in math, physics, and drawing from copies. These trade schools proved to be economic failures. Efland (1990) uses the case of Britain to illustrate the schools’ deficiencies. Even though the start of the Industrial Revolution can be traced to Britain with the invention of the steam engine, Britain’s products were artistically inferior to France’s goods. At stake for Britain (and for all industrialized nations) was the ability to compete in an international market.

By contrast, France’s education of artisans proved to be wildly successful, as “the undisputed capital of the nineteenth century Western art was Paris” (Stokstad, 2002, p. 982). France’s answer to industry’s need was to open schools for the decorative arts. These schools differed greatly from the trade schools of other nations because the emphasis on techniques established in the Royal Academies, including live figure drawing, remained. The famed school in Lyon, the Academie des Beaux Arts, was one such institution. Even though the school’s explicit purpose was to improve the manufacturing of silk, students took classes in painting, architecture, ornament, botanicals, sculpture, and engraving. France’s ability to effectively combine art and industry resulted in goods considered superior in the international market (Efland, 1990).

According to veteran art director of thirty years for Houston’s Museum of Fine Arts, Peter Marzio, (1976), a group of art teachers in the United States banded together as “art crusaders” between 1820 and 1860. These crusaders were intent on bringing a democratic form of art to a democratic society. These crusaders, consisting of art instructors, believed that art had
a place in developing social justice. However, the idea of art as social justice was limited to industry. The crusaders believed that anyone could learn to draw provided that they devoted enough time to practicing the art. A systemized study of drawing would allow all people to enter into and be successful in manufacturing. While the role of art was very limited with this notion, it disputed the idea of artist as genius.

Post-Civil War

After the Civil War, the United States as well as Europe, realized that success in industry required reading, writing, and the ability to interpret and create designs (Efland 1990). New England industries were in competition with the Midwest as well as the international textile market, and this was one competition that New England was losing. In the quest for economic prosperity, New England set out to increase the diversity of their industries and to develop instruction that would meet their specialized needs.

The idea of art being taught in public schools was re-examined as a possible solution to this economic woe. In 1870, Massachusetts developed the Drawing Act. A petition was delivered to legislators asking that free drawing instruction be offered to both the young and the old, both men and women, in any community whose population exceeded 5,000. According to Efland, the petitioners had a stake in the textile industry and necessarily wanted to protect the American industry. Massachusetts responded to the petition by mandating drawing classes relative to industry be taught in elementary schools and offering evening classes in communities with a population of at least 10,000.

Ultimately, drawing in schools again suffered in 1873 when the United States experienced a depression. Attempts were made to eliminate “frivolous” programs supported by public funds; drawing classes fell into this category. Public support for the program was
wavering. “One group objected to the program because they felt the schools should not deal with fine art; another objected to the high cost of the program; the third objected to the mechanical, inartistic quality of the program” (Efland, 1990, p. 110). Drawing, once it could be linked to commerce, became a justifiable expense in the years following the Civil War, but when Americans suffered economic loss, even industry-driven art was seen as “extra” and irrelevant to the human experience.

While women were more able to secure a job in industry after the Civil War, the education of whether or not women should be educated remained. Those who were educated were exposed to the various domains of art at this time, which was quite different than previously experienced. They were only engaged in the endeavor, however, in an effort by parents to make their daughters enjoyable company for men and thus quip them for marriage (Efland, 1990).

The Turn of the 20th Century

At the turn of the century, prominent thinkers began placing art education last on the list of essential knowledge. Scientific rationalism, propagated by Darwin and continued by others, such as Herbert Spencer and G. Stanley Hall, attempted to explain all knowledge through scientific law (Cremin, 1964). Spencer once posed the question, “what knowledge is of most worth?” (quoted in Efland, 1990, p. 157). He argued that the degree to which a subject potentially contributes to the survival of the individual should determine its place in education. Since the aim of education is preparation for life, one begins by teaching students those activities ministering directly to self-preservation (Efland, 1990). In Spencer’s mind, artistic pursuit was of the least consequential knowledge a student should learn.
Sociologist David Snedden (1917) agreed that art had very little to offer an individual in terms of survival. Snedden’s stance was that music and the visual arts may have at one point guided primal cultures to evolve, but that the arts could no longer move a society in the same way.

Perhaps the functions of art in ministering to the primal needs of society are not what they once were, and so, as a consequence, while society may still be willing to spend of its energies and resources freely on art, it now refuses to take art seriously because it cannot make of it a means toward realizing the more serious and worthy things in life. (Snedden, 1917, p. 805)

Social Darwinism pushed art outside the realm of acceptable knowledge. Science and the natural world order became the lens through which all other information was understood as educational psychologists like Snedden considered adult job-task analysis as the basis for curriculum development (Pinar et al., 2004).

The art produced in the United States at this time, which was very different from the new forms arising from modernism in Europe, was focused on realism (Stokstad, 2002). Realism in the art world sprung from the overarching cultural faith in science as the holder of truth. Soltes (2007) describes the mission of the realist artist as “the pursuit of truth; the revelation of that truth will help eliminate social inequalities” (p. 159). Paintings were crafted to show lifelike details and flaws. Photography became more frequently used in an attempt to show what was “true,” for photographs were considered free from artist and spectator interpretation (Stokstad, 2002). The artist and his work were expected to uphold the belief in science’s impartial authority.

The status of art in schools was allotted to electives, taking a seat behind classes promoting scientific rationalism. The purpose of the electives was to develop student appreciation for the arts and to cultivate “good taste” (Efland, 1990). In order to accomplish this
task, specialists were hired; it was no longer believed that traditional classroom teachers could adequately teach students about “good art.”

Despite the belief that Realism was impartial, art’s aim was for the first time linked to social justice. The works created were politically and socially conscious, depicting the gritty streets of urban life or the loneliness of personal solitude; they showed life “as it is” (Efland, 1990). Because art objects were no longer decorated in pursuit of political propaganda as seen in France, or focused on depicting Romantic literary themes, they were seen as egalitarian. This outlook was in line with American ideals as “unadorned realism was the more appropriate style for democratic values” (Stokstad, 2002, p. 1047).

**Interwar**

The years between World War I and World War II were filled with both triumphs and devastations. While it cannot be said that justice for all citizens was achieved in the United States after the winning of World War I, the democratic ideal showed evidence of spreading with the eruption of the Harlem Renaissance and the granting of women’s suffrage. Private industry boomed following World War I creating a sense of national prosperity until the Great Depression thrust the country into economic turmoil and unease. With the movement of the country, so went the changes to art education that followed the scientific movement, the expressive stream, and the Reconstructionist stream (Efland, 1990).

Despite harsh economic struggles, the production and viewing of art flourished. Within a month of the Wall Street crash, The Museum of Modern Art opened in New York and featured works by Cezanne, Seurat, and Van Gogh. In the first decade of the museum’s opening, one million people had toured the temporary exhibitions. Other museums featuring modern art began to open in major cities such as Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, and Philadelphia.
At the time of the scientific movement, Americans sought to quantify all data including human intelligence. Early intelligence tests measured verbal and mathematical reasoning, and excluded artistic skills as a measure of general intelligence (Efland, 1990). E. Zimmerman (1985) observes that a number of studies at the time attempted to prove that artistic ability was a result of innate talent instead of intelligence. However, in Zimmerman’s review of a study conducted by Charles Tiebout and Norman Meier, successful artists were found to have an above average IQ. Tiebout and Meier (1936) concluded that artistic ability must be intertwined with general intelligence. However, educational psychologists and curriculum planners disregarded the bond between art and intelligence that Tiebout and Meier noted.

The attempt to measure and predict student performance on the basis of tests tended to weaken the position of the arts in education, since art abilities did not appear to correlate with general intelligence . . . as long as it was seen as special, its place in general education would be vulnerable. (Efland, 1990, p. 191)

Arts played a part in the quest for social justice in two central ways in the years between World Wars: the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and the Federal Art Project during the Great Depression. Prior to the economic shock of the Depression, hundreds of thousands of Black Americans migrated to the North in search of increased social and economic opportunities that the boom of industry offered. What emerged came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. Blacks encouraged each other to participate in American democracy through the patronage of other Blacks; it was a scenario that could have never happened prior to World War I (Stokstad, 2002). Sprung forth from the Harlem Renaissance came music, literature, and visual art depicting a “New Negro Movement.”

From 1935-1943, the Works Progress Administration of the New Deal ensured nonacademic artists received commissions for government buildings and professional artists were sent to “culturally underdeveloped” areas through the Loan Artists Program (O’Connor,
1972). Under the program, a Federal Theatre Project, Federal Writer Project, and Federal Art Project were all created. The Federal Art Project employed ten thousand previously unemployed artists. Together, those artists created 108,000 paintings, 18,000 sculptures, 2,500 murals, and thousands of photographs, posters, and prints. As these workers were paid generously to create fulltime, they came to be seen as professionals (Stokstad, 2002). These artists flocked to New York City, which soon overthrew Paris as the “art capital of the world” (Stokstad, 2002, p. 1109).

World War II to Present

While the American economy prospered after World War II, idealistic hopes of evolving civilization to a higher level of humanity were lost. For many Americans this marked “the age of anxiety” (Rosenberg, 1973). However, the United States became a global Super Power, and New York soon became the bustling center of the art world.

More and more Americans were continuing in higher education which in turn led to more exposure of the arts during their course of study. Despite the availability of art instruction, old ideals of integrating the arts through all disciplines were dashed due to the more commonplace practice of departmentalizing subjects (Efland, 1990). Departmentalization occurred after political liberals and conservatives alike began to attack Progressive ideas: The Right began to associate the Progressive Movement with communist ideals and the Left criticized the intellectual value of pragmatist views.

According to historian Arthur Bestor (1953), progressive educators all but corroded the quality of American curriculum and education. He believed that education’s goal was to strengthen the intellect and any efforts to deal with emotional or social issues were misaligned with that goal. Bestor was just one of many from the intellectual community who believed that
the aim of school was to provide intellectual training through systematic methods (Kainz and Riley, 1949). This presented another shift in the American notion of what constitutes education and its purpose. Consequently, in post-World War II America, art education did not fit into school curriculum because it was not considered a body of knowledge, but rather a developmental activity (National Arts Education Association, 1949).

In 1949, the Tyler Rationale had become a blueprint for American education. Tyler makes his position known early on about his educational beliefs. Tyler writes that “no single source of information is adequate to provide a basis for a wise and comprehensive decision about the objectives of the school” (p. 5). This is indeed a fantastic notion – that schools have the ability to decide what their students need. Instead of using this idea, we now see the national political force mandating a curriculum they deem best for the future of America. That future is not one of emotional, expressive, freethinking beings; it is a future of orderly, logistical followers. It is not aesthetic; it is scientific.

Tyler asserts that, “one of the functions of education is to broaden and deepen the student’s interests so that he will continue his education long after he has ended his formal school training” (p. 11). If Tyler’s Rationale is the foundation of our current curriculum, why is it that our students’ education does nothing to broaden interests? Math, science, and technology are pushed as the only interests while they represent only a portion of a holistic curriculum. In an effort to give students the most time possible in the sciences disciplines like history, sociology, drama, athletics, music, and visual art are being removed from a “core curriculum.” What will happen to these millions of students who graduate from American schools who have neither the interest nor the aptitude for the orderly?
The 1957 Soviet launch of Sputnik sealed the fate of art education for the next 50 years. The United States found itself in an international race of intellect in math, science, and technology. The economic aspect of education was valued far above personal and civic aims as science became the model for all education (Efland, 1990). Despite the Science Advisory Committee’s concern over the amount of federal funding to science education in relation to arts education (Murphy & Jones, 1978), the focus on systematic methods of teaching math and science persisted.

The focal shift towards evaluation led to devastating changes in education. According to Efland (1990), accountability became the new buzzword of the 1970s. Educational costs continued to rise as school scores declined from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. Instead of a focus on content seen in the 1940s and 1950s, methods of evaluation and measurement were spotlighted (Davis, 1969). Behavioral learning objectives became mandated across states, and art teachers struggled to present evidence that their curriculum led to student behavior changes. This assumption that educational problems could be solved with value-free technology was more of a means to control both teacher and student than it was a means to provide efficiency to instruction (Duchastel & Merrill, 1973), and art classes remained secondary electives (Stokstad, 2002).

In the 1960s and 1970s, art as social justice emerged in the form of feminist art. Female artists began banding together to create “women’s cooperative galleries” (Stokstad, 2002, p. 1162). Females formed these galleries in response to the overt exclusion of their artwork. In a survey conducted in 1970, females comprised half of all U.S. artists, but only 18% of commercial galleries carried work by women (Stokstad, 2002). The galleries served as a
network among women where curators, novelists, and critics all worked together to promote feminist art.

**National Mandates**

This aggregate approach to curriculum and education was dealt a blow with the release of the 1983 national education report, *A Nation at Risk*. While our nation has historically recognized the three purposes of schooling as personal, economic, and civic (Ferrero, 2011), *A Nation at Risk* eliminates the need for personal fulfillment in education and only casually mentions its civic component. The only “risk” that the report frets over is the loss of America’s superior economic edge in a global market. The report cites a “desperate need for increased support for the teaching of mathematics and science” (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983). The reason for this is outlined as an increase in technology in jobs in health care, energy production, science, education, and military. According to Pinar et al. (2004), educational funding was still driven by the desire to produce “economically useful citizens,” which began with the social efficiency movement at the start of the 20th century. But where do philosophy, history, and art fit into teaching future workers in these fields the ethical and humane responsibilities that necessarily accompany the technological aspects?

The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) federal mandate of 2001 (and precursor to 2009’s *Race to the Top*) only served to further push science and mathematics as the most important disciplines in school. Not only is there a focus on mathematics and science as disciplines to be taught in the schools, but only scientifically proven instructional methods are deemed appropriate (*No Child Left Behind*, 2007). What, then, of educating the whole child as proposed by Dewey? What of the reconceptualist vision of Maxine Greene to use qualitative research as meaningful data? What of developing creativity as suggested by Piirto?
As with *A Nation at Risk*, NCLB ignores the personal and civic aims of education and solely focuses on national economic gains. The Department of Education boasts that through NCLB, they are “helping states and schools align educational goals with workforce needs” (“No Child Left Behind,” 2007, p. 1). This statement is a clear beacon that personal and democratic needs have not just been laid aside, but *buried*, in favor of a wealthy nation. As D. Ferrero (2011) points out, the relevancy of teaching the humanities including art, “rests on a broader understanding of humanism, an orientation toward teaching and learning that goes beyond workforce competency and credentialing to encompass personal and civic dimensions of life” (p. 25).

Further driving home the point that personal fulfillment is no longer a purpose of schooling, the Common Core State Standards have been released and adopted by nearly every state. According to the Common Core State Standards website, the standards are “research and evidence based [and] aligned with college and work expectations” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). The purpose of American public education has now been reduced to economic as evidenced by the national educational goals. What happens, then, to our sense of democracy, citizenship, and responsibility for seeking social justice?

Since these national reports and mandates have forcefully affected state education, numerous scholarly articles have been written on the nature of art and creativity and the need to keep both in the curriculum for all students. Outlining the functions of art in the West during historical eras grounds my understanding of contemporary academic research on art and creativity. Current research highlights art’s role in social justice due in large part to its expressive, communicative quality.
Art and Social Justice

Art's function is to probe a reality that has not yet appeared (Miller, 1995). Many times this yet-to-be-realized reality begins with a social movement in search of social justice. Charles Harper and Kevin Leicht (2007) define a social movement as “collective action to produce or prevent change that is outside the established institutional framework of society” (p. 156). Adams (2002) argues that the role of art has not been fully examined in this vein. "Social movement analysts should examine art not only because it is pervasive in many movements, but also because it is instrumental in the achievement of a movement's objective" (Adams, 2002).

Adams (2002) suggests that art is used in communication, mobilizing resources, providing frameworks, and as a symbol for social movements. If we look to the 1960s and the Counterculture Movement, we can see what Adams means. While the Civil Rights Movement and the struggles of Third World nations contributed to this youth-driven movement, “the issue that drew masses of students into the movement was America’s increasing involvement in the Vietnam War” (Harper & Leicht, 2007, p. 172). The folk music of the time, like Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind,” worked to spread the anti-war message through concerts and radio. The fashion of the era, which included bell-bottom pants, long hair, floral prints, and love beads, served as an outward display of membership to the Counterculture Movement while the peace sign symbol stood as the framework for the ideology of the movement.

Art, as demonstrated by its use in the Counterculture Movement, can serve to reinforce the status quo, or it can serve as both an emancipatory process and product by breaking complicit silence (Chaffe, 1993; Pratt, 1992). Art can even go so far as to shape our political behavior and ideas (Alpers, 1983; Bonnell, 1997; Chaffe, 1993; Edelman 1995; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998;
Jasper, 1997; Pratt, 1992). Art signals to others that there is a forum for dissent (Adams, 2002), that there is a different way to live.

Social movements use art as a means to communicate with the larger society as well as internally within the movement group (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Kaplan, 1992; Neustandter, 1992). Whether it is with a painting, song, or a dramatic performance, the transmission of ideas and values is taking place. For example, the songs sung during the Civil Rights Movement were used to communicate between students, the less educated, and outsiders (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998). Songs like Nina Simone’s “Mississippi Goddamn” illustrates the frustration of Blacks during the tense and violent times with lines like “I don't belong here/ I don't belong there/ I've even stopped believing in prayer” (1964). But still, Simone urges those listening to “just try to do your very best/stand up be counted with all the rest.”

Adams (2002) specifically points to music as having a great impact on social movements and social justice. Music, she notes, provides needed emotional reassurance and the reminder that social change is possible. It allows people to express themselves and can remove feelings of despair, which is not helpful in a movement's progress (Denisoff, 1983; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Morris 1984; Qualter, 1963; Sanger 1997). Music offers courage, strength, and hope for a brighter future. It also has the ability to reach infinite numbers of people, unlike visual art, which will always be finite (Adams, 2002).

Art can help to mobilize the movement or protest as well (Chaffe, 1993; Denisoff, 1983; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Pratt, 1992; Qualter 1963; Sanger, 1997) through its public visibility. It carries the potential to prompt debates and recruit others for the movement (Chaffe, 1993; Denisoff, 1983; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Garafolo, 1992; Neustandter, 1992). Through the transmission of the song or the display of a poster, art gives the movement a vehicle to travel.
Perhaps as important as any other function, art serves to keep those involved in a movement working together. Participating in creating art produces a feeling of "insiderness" among movement members (Adams, 2002; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Firth & Street, 1992; Jasper, 1997; Vila, 1992). The act of shared creating creates a bond not easily severed. Collaborative art making also allows for the relative anonymity of its participants, removing fear of repercussions when protesting a controversial subject.

Finally, art serves as a symbol of a movement (Adams, 2002). "Art can contribute to the success or the failure of a movement" (p. 45). How rapidly and widely a message is spread is pivotal to a movement's success. "Artwork can inform about the ethos of a movement" (p. 49). That peace sign stamped around the country on vans, posters, and the sides of buildings in the 1960s succinctly communicated the philosophy of the entire Counterculture Movement: peace.

Art provides the freedom to communicate in a way not readily available by any other means. It also provides the opportunity to learn by making new connections with existing knowledge. Julia Marshall (2005) explains that "art-making promotes imaginative play with concepts and whimsical projections of abstractions onto new contexts" (p. 233). Thus, engagements with the arts involve creative thinking that can lead to benefits for the individual and society.

**Benefits of Creativity**

Creativity is putting new ideas together to achieve a valued goal (Seltzer & Bentley, 1999). Most researchers see creativity as widespread and often shown in everyday innovations (Goleman, 1992; Maslow, 1970; Seltzer & Bentley, 1999; Weisberg, 1993). Anna Craft (2003) calls this everyday creativity "lifewide" while Britain's National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCE) coined the term "democratic creativity" (1999).
The NACCCE believes all pupils can be creative. They also believe that creative thinking means utilizing the imagination to produce innovative and alternative solutions to problems (1999).

Others see creativity as a continuum (Worth, 2001). R. K. Elliot’s (1971) early views stated that creativity is part of the artist but is essentially lacking in the scientist. He later revised his ideas to incorporate the notion that creativity has occurred when something novel has been produced (Elliot, 1971). L. Meyer (1974) points out that artists create while scientists discover, but others argue that the processes of each are the same and that they are creative. American scholar Paul C. L. Tang (1984) feels we "often underestimate science as an expression of human creativity and human values" (p. 261). Tang further connects scientific discovery and the composition of music, noting that imagination is not the final product but merely the first step in discovery. Igor Stravinsky (1980) suggests that creativity and imagination are always coupled by observation. For physicist Arthur I. Miller (1995), the question for scientists and artists is the same: "How can new knowledge be created from already existing knowledge?" (p. 189).

Current forays into research on creativity do not focus on measurement as it did in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s (Craft, 2003). Present research is trending towards qualitative data collected by experts and peers in a given domain. British theorist Howard Gibson (2005) found that there are two themes in current creativity discourse. The first theme views creativity as a means of economic prosperity for a nation. If the United States can learn to nurture (or even teach) creativity, then the nation’s economy will undoubtedly benefit from new ideas with a high-market value. The second theme views creativity as necessary to the aesthetic development and personal fulfillment of the individual. This view holds that when one invests time in creative pursuits, the quality of life is exponentially higher than if creative endeavors had not been sought.
"While users often combine more than one meaning, nowhere do we find a negative view of creativity" (Gibson, 2005, p. 151). Craft (2003) agrees that it is hard to imagine an instance where creativity is a bad thing. Furthermore, in a country driven by its high economic hopes, it should be noted by the government and the public that "creativity is good for the economy and therefore for society" (Craft, 2003). The development of creativity is necessary to a society that wishes to make economic gains by introducing new, marketable products and ideas to mass consumers (Couger, et al, 1993; Craft, 2002; Smith, 2003; Miliband, 2003).

Corinne Roling (2004) laments, “the message that the government is sending is that creativity and imagination are not important” as presidency after presidency these attributes are shoved aside in favor of efforts dubbed to be strictly intellectual. The economy requires creativity, as does the individual (Craft, 2003). England’s Prime Minister from 1997 until 2007, Tony Blair, insists that "culture and creativity matter. They matter because they can enrich all our lives...they also matter because creative talent will be crucial to our individual and national economic success in the economy of the future" (2001, p. 3).

England's government now specifically names creativity in its curriculum and supports other initiatives to bring together art, science, and technology (Craft, 2003). However, a tighter control on curriculum and pedagogy provides a stark contrast to the emphasis of creative learning spouted by England's government (Craft, 1999, 2000, 2002). This alone is not enough to endure the development of creativity in the classroom. "Creativity is inevitably the business of the education system, not only the economy" (Craft, 2003).

**The Conditions of Creativity**

According to Amabile (1983), there are three conditions necessary to produce creative works: knowledge of the domain, creativity-relevant skills, and intrinsic motivation. One must
first possess sufficient knowledge of the discipline before incorporating creativity-relevant skills such as flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity (Feist, 2005). Finally, it is rare that an external reward will produce creative work. Instead, the individual or team must have the desire to be creative for its own sake (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005).

The use of the term team becomes necessary because as we move through the 21st century, the isolation of creative genius is nearly non-existent as individuals must work together at corporations or in research labs (Culross, 2004). Discoveries no longer belong to the inventor but often times to a company due to a contract. Shouldn't we then teach creativity for both the individual and the group?

Creativity is disappearing from both learning and teaching (Hargreaves, 2004). Creativity can be developed across and through the curriculum although the way it manifests is distinct in each domain (Craft, 2003). To establish a school climate conducive to fostering creativity, new ideas from students and teachers must be met with encouragement and support. They must also feel the ability to take initiative, to take risks, and to interact with others (Craft, 2003; Amabile 1988; Ekvall, 1991, 1996; Isaksen, 1995). A fixed, compulsory curriculum is antithetical to the promotion of creativity (Craft, 2003). "How does a teacher balance professional creativity and judgment against the requirements to teach in certain ways?" (Craft, 2003).

Seltzer & Bentley (1999) point out that companies are successful when every aspect of the environment provides for creative learning. To aid in developing this environment, creativity techniques are to be used during all phases of a task, not just the beginning (Couger, et al, 1993). The same techniques of teaching creativity in a group setting can be applied to the schools.

Art and creativity possess qualities that the individual, the economy, and society can benefit from. Why, then, haven’t our schools been taking advantage of all that art and creativity
can offer our students? A thorough probing of Dewey’s, Greene’s, and Piirto’s ideas about aesthetic experiences as a springboard for democracy show that the themes discussed in their philosophies offer insight on the relationship of aesthetics and social justice, which the current scholarly research lacks.
CHAPTER 3: JOHN DEWEY

“The first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art.”
~John Dewey~

The Father of Progressive Education

Baptized as the “Father of Progressive Education,” John Dewey is associated with twentieth-century pragmatism and the movement to equate learning, not as preparation for a future life, but for life itself (Zilversmit, 2005). Influenced by the philosophies of David Hume (1751), Georg Hegel (1807), and William James (1907), Dewey conducted research in multiple areas of philosophy during the course of his prolific career, including nature, psychology, democracy, and ethics. Throughout his writings on education, two recursive themes are present: 1) education is necessary for the democratic realization of a society and 2) schools can and should be a site for social reform. Schools, as an integral part of the larger social situation, have an obligation to assist in the realization and the guardianship of America’s democracy. As one of the United States’ founding principles, democracy was not only the business of schools, but all members of society. “The idea and the ideal [of democracy] involve at least the necessity of personal and voluntary participation in reaching decisions and executing them—in so far it is the contrary of the idea of indoctrination” (Dewey, 1937, p. 237). Dewey defined democracy as the willing action of all members of society to reach decisions and carry out communal decisions.

True to his pragmatist ideology, Noortje Marres (2007) writes that Dewey advocated for a “spirit of experimentalism” in all pursuits (p. 765). Even though all pragmatists do not agree on all aspects of empiricism, they do adhere to the unifying belief that experience is the conclusive test of knowledge, that experience is what must be interpreted for insight (Hookway, 2010). Meaning cannot be made through reasoning alone, and it does not exist outside the
context of human experience. Pragmatists also dismiss the idea that practice and theory belong to different realms. Instead, as Steven Fesmire (2003) notes, all inquiry is seen as practical because pragmatism “situates reason within the broad context of the whole person in action” (p. 28). Along with Dewey, the other main figures of pragmatism include William James, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Sanders Pierce (Robinson, 2004; Holloway, 2010). Petra Munro (1999) expands the list of key figures in pragmatism to include Jane Addams, Ida B. Wells, and Ella Flagg Young because “these women extended progressive thought to include issues of gender, race, and ethnicity in ways that dominant progressive ideologies did not” (p. 43).

While Dewey’s general philosophy centered on the idea of experience as knowledge, his specific interests grew out of his surrounding circumstances. Dewey’s interests in education and the pursuit of social justice through aesthetic experience and democracy are well understood when considered alongside the social milieu during the 92 years of his life. Dewey had a front-row seat to the opportunities created with rapid industry expansion, as well as the horrors of inequity it created. He witnessed the ideological quest for democratic reform throughout the world after World War I, and according to Charles Howlett (2008), his interest in education for social justice was “inspired, in part, by the stinging condemnation he received for supporting President Woodrow Wilson’s war aims in 1917” (p. 4). Dewey’s enthusiasm for education for democracy continued as the nation passed through other defining moments in history such as World War II, which he considered to be a threat to democratic institutions (Dewey, 1939/1989).

John Dewey is perhaps best known for integrating the pragmatic ideas of experience as knowledge in developing his discourse on education. Michael Roth (2012) of The New York Times calls John Dewey “America’s most influential thinker on education,” greatly influencing America’s notion of public school (p. A27). Dewey’s vision of school reform has lasted nearly
one hundred years, and it is his position that aesthetics are central to any meaningful experience.

In an aesthetic experience, an equilibrium—a harmony—is achieved, even though it is momentary. Within these aesthetic, meaningful experiences, the possibility of achieving a full democracy and social justice—an American quest in action for the first half of the twentieth century—is understood. This chapter will examine definitions of key concepts in Dewey’s theories on experience and social justice, as well as how his notion of an aesthetic experience is fundamental to achieving social justice.

**Experience**

Experience, for pragmatists, constitutes the only world worth investigating. As philosopher S.E. Frost, Jr. (1962) writes, “man’s experience is the measure of the universe, the only possible measure which we can have, for no man can get outside of his experience” (p. 78).

The importance of experience to life is woven throughout Dewey’s work, whether his writings are on democracy, education, or aesthetics. His philosophy, which he called “naturalistic empiricism,” drew from other empiricists such as David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill (Robinson, 2004). However, Dewey’s conception of experience and knowledge is marked by important breaks from his influential predecessors.

David Hume, a key figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, related the universe to man’s existence. According to neuropsychologist and philosopher Daniel Robinson, for Hume, “the mind is formed out of sensory experience, that this is where everything begins” (Robinson, 2004, p. 146). In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748/2004), Hume describes how the external world forces itself onto the senses, how the mental organization of information is merely replicating what is occurring on the sensory level.

It seems a proposition, which will not admit of much dispute, that all our ideas are nothing but copies of our impressions, or, in other words, that it is impossible for us to
think of any thing, which we have not antecedently felt, either by external or internal senses. (Hume, 1748, p. 45)

For Hume, anything that is known about the world is known through experience.

In the midst of the Enlightenment—the Age of Reason—Immanuel Kant (1781) sought to find a sort of middle ground between empiricism and rationalism. Kant asserted that the representation of an object allows its existence. This perception “introduced the human mind as an active originator of experience rather than a passive recipient of perception” (Robinson, 2004, p. 310). For Kant, the mind was the space where meaning of experience was made. Unlike Hume’s position, sensory experiences do not provide meaning on their own.

In A System of Logic (1843/1900), John Stuart Mill returns to Hume’s philosophy of experience as sensory. Considered a “radical empiricist,” Mill believed that experience was the sole form of knowledge. He rejected the notion affiliated with rationalism that there was any knowledge that existed outside, or before, experience. We might assume that a rapid inference is a priori knowledge, but it is just an inference—an inference that “we make with more and more correctness as our experience increases” (p. 4).

Dewey’s position on experience is that it cannot be understood as something only occurring within an individual. Experience is not private in the sense that it belongs and remains within the confines of an individual. Variables such as environment, time, and personal history mean that experience is transactional; that is, experience includes not only the individual and the natural world, but also the sum of the objects that he or she encounters, and the infinite interactions among them. It is within these interactions where experience (knowledge) and meaning are made. In Dewey’s own words, experience is defined by “the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives” (1934, p. 45).
Dewey’s rendering of experience as interactive and transactional builds upon the previous views of experience in Western philosophy. In *The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy* (1917), Dewey discusses his addition to the pragmatist view of experience: he insists that experience and knowledge are not one-way episodes that occur within the individual, whether it is within the mind or the senses. “The very point of experience, so to say, is that it doesn’t occur in a vacuum; it is agent-patient instead of being insulated and disconnected is bound up with the movement of things by most intimate and pervasive bonds” (p. 14-15). Experience is orchestrated with a push and pull, give and take, strain and slack, involving an infinite number of factors, including the individual, the environment, and the people with whom a society is shared.

Using the idea of transaction as the keystone to interpreting experience, Dewey rejects the idea of radical empiricism that the sensory perceptions of a situation are sufficient for meaning making (Hookway, 2010). Experience, far from being a solitary undertaking, “is primarily a process of undergoing” (Dewey, 1917, p. 10). To “undergo,” according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2013), means “to submit to: endure.” To *endure* suggests that one must withstand difficulties with patience, to last until the end. Dewey comments that “to endure” an experience is also to be aware of its quality of being boundless. “The undefined pervasive quality of an experience is that which binds together all the defined elements, the objects of which we are focally aware, making them whole” (1934, p. 202). These connotative meanings of “undergo” indicate a crucial requirement for one to understand Dewey’s concept of experience and how it differs from “*an experience*”

The necessity of distinguishing between experience as singular and fleeting, and *an* aesthetic experience as life fully-realized, is the root of Dewey’s theory on the importance of aesthetics in education. The development of the connection of experience and a full life and that
led to the idea of an aesthetic experience, can be traced in his writings published prior to his 1934 treatise on aesthetic experience, *Art as Experience*. An overview of the treatment of these themes in selected works can appropriately illustrate this evolution.

First published in 1900, *The School and Society* explains the philosophy behind the design and curriculum of the lab school that Dewey and his wife had opened in Chicago. Displeased with systematic and mechanized methods of instruction in schools at the time, Dewey advocates for classroom instruction to be rooted with communal life. He asserts that “the school itself shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons” (1900/1990, p. 14). This fundamental belief of Dewey’s assumes that an individual’s everyday, ordinary life is worthy of being called “knowledge.”

As a pragmatist, Dewey believes that experience holds valuable knowledge for each person in terms of making sense of the world. In *The School and Society*, Dewey begins to distinguish mere action or perception as experience from an experience in which social, historical, and environmental factors influence the knowledge gleaned. Dewey uses the presence of light to illustrate the influence of psychology on the field of elementary education. Here, Dewey discusses psychology’s contemporary view of the mind as social, but he is also laying the foundation for making the claim that for experiential knowledge to occur, multiple factors of influence must be considered.

The bare physical stimulus of light is not the entire reality; the interpretation given to it through social activities and thinking confers upon it its wealth of meaning. It is through imitation, suggestion, direct instruction, and even more indirect unconscious tuition that the child learns to estimate and treat the bare physical stimuli. It is through the social agencies that he recapitulates in a few short years the progress, which it has taken the race slow centuries to work out. (1902, p. 99-100)
Although relatively brief, *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902/1990) provides several seedlings to Dewey’s blossoming concept of an aesthetic experience. While presenting the two prevailing arguments over school curriculum—child-centered versus subject matter-centered—he remarks “learning is active. It involves reaching out of mind” (p. 187). This fleeting assertion demonstrates Dewey’s understanding that experience does not occur within the confines of an individual’s mind.

Just a few paragraphs further, Dewey makes the claim made in *The School and Society* (1900): The subject matter taught in schools should be related to the child’s ordinary experiences. Returning to the claim with a fresh eye on his words, interwoven with the argument over content in the curriculum, Dewey is identifying the conditions of a meaningful experience.

Abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience; cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. (1902, p. 189)

Experience cannot be compartmentalized as an item that is begun and then cut off. This assertion occurs again as Dewey considers the meaning of interpretation and guidance. “The child’s present experience is in no way self explanatory. It is not final, but transactional” (p. 191). By describing experience as transactional, specifically a child’s experience in regards to learning, Dewey acknowledges that for meaning to be made, the child must not only receive information, but also bring forth something to achieve understanding.

Although he does not mention art, when returning to the debate between a child-centered curriculum versus a subject matter-centered curriculum, Dewey recognizes that certain stimuli can be chosen to evoke specific experiences. “The problem of direction is thus the problem of selecting appropriate stimuli for instincts and impulses which it is desired to employ in the
gaining of new experience” (1900, p. 196). He then asks teachers to consider “what new
experiences are desirable, and thus what stimuli are needed” (p. 197).

Another stone is laid in the development of Dewey’s theory of aesthetics as he, again,
discusses the opposing views on school curriculum and their implications on the proper
development of the child. The child’s experience of learning “gives past experience in that net
form which renders it most available and most significant, most fecund for future experience.
The abstractions, generalizations, and classifications which it introduces all have prospective
meaning” (p. 199-200). That is to say, an experience that occurs when knowledge has been
gained also necessitates that the information extracted be of use for future encounters.

In Democracy and Education (1916), Dewey explicitly describes the nature of a
transactional experience and the benefit of having endured it.

The nature of experience can be understood only by noting that it includes an active and a
passive element peculiarly combined. On the active hand, experience is trying -- a
meaning which is made explicit in the connected term experiment. On the passive, it is
undergoing. When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it;
then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it
does something to us in return: such is the peculiar combination. The connection of these
two phases of experience measures the fruitfulness or value of the experience. (p. 96)

Dewey explains that a transactional experience is fluid—the past merges with the present in
anticipation of the future. “To 'learn from experience’ is to make a backward and forward
connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in
consequence” (p. 96). The recursive quality of a transactional experience signifies reflection,
(re)evaluation, and anticipation. Dewey would later call this quality conservation while
elucidating on the meaningful life experience he christens as an experience.

An experience signifies an aesthetic experience. The term “aesthetic” commonly pertains
to the perception of beauty, but conveys so much more when considering experience. “The word
‘aesthetic’ refers, as we have already noted, to experience as appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying. It denotes the consumer’s rather than the producer’s standpoint. It is gusto, taste” (Dewey, 1934, p. 49). But an *aesthetic* experience is one that—through interaction—results in momentary equilibrium, harmony, and order.

In this interaction, human energy gathers, is released, dammed up, frustrated, and victorious. There are rhythmic beats of want and fulfillment, pulses of doing and being withheld from doing. All interactions that effect stability and order in the whirling flux of change are rhythms. There is ebb and flow, systole and diastole: ordered change. (Dewey, 1934, p. 15)

As Dewey notes, achieving equilibrium through an aesthetic experience is necessarily a dynamic state. If one is in a perpetual state of harmony, there can be no change or growth. “Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives” (Dewey, 1934, p. 13). Growth is vital to the concept of aesthetic experience. It implies that circumstances will be altered after undergoing an experience. We can never be compelled to experience life differently if there appears no reason to do so.

In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey identifies five components necessary in determining those familiar objects and events that qualify as “aesthetic”: continuity, cumulation, conservation, tension, and anticipation. These are the characteristics the “formal conditions of aesthetic form” (p. 143).

*Continuity* comes from the physical and intellectual form that the individual chooses to use. Dewey explains “there are general conditions involved in the orderly development of any subject matter to its completion, since only when these conditions are met does a unified perception take place” (1934, p. 143). That is, if writing a poem, word choice and meter are used to create the work while a painter would not choose to employ meter or rhyme.
Dewey's second component of aesthetic form is *cumulation*. Cumulation is the progressive buildup of value while creating. Value refers to paint for the painter, paper for the writer or understanding for the scholar. Cumulation “must be such as to create suspense and anticipation of resolution” (p. 143). Expounding on this idea, Phillip Jackson adds that “without a buildup of some kind, there can be no fulfillment. And without fulfillment there can be no aesthetic experience” (1998, p. 48).

The third aspect of an aesthetic form is *conservation*. Conservation is the careful attention “of the import of what has gone before” (Dewey, 1934, p. 143). Conservation attends to the events and meanings that happened before the immediate moment. Jackson (1998) clarifies that this act of conservation as proposed by Dewey generally happens without conscious thought. “When reading a book or watching a play we normally do not have to stop and think about what happened in the last act or the last chapter. We remember enough of it to allow us to proceed” (p. 49). When we enter into a circumstance, we do not enter alone. We bring with us the intellectual, emotional, and sensory knowledge of all other circumstances thus far. “In life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges” (Dewey, 1934, p. 17).

The fourth component of an aesthetic form is *tension*. Reaching an equilibrium, succeeding in finding stability—these require a person to first be discomposed, unstable. For it is *because of* the tension that we seek to act in achieving balance. “Through the phases of perturbation and conflict, there abides the deep-seated memory of an underlying harmony, the sense of which haunts life like the sense of being founded on a rock” (Dewey, 1934, p. 16). Tension, although discomforting, is necessary in an individual’s quest of living life fully through an aesthetic experience.
The fifth component of an aesthetic experience is *anticipation.* Dewey describes this enthusiasm for equilibrium “anticipation of resolution” (1934, p. 143). Once a buildup of value (cumulation) and resistance (tension) occurs, anticipation naturally follows. Anticipation guides the individual from the distress of tension to the satisfaction of harmony. Anticipation urges us to move past the tension, to see the light at the end of the tunnel instead of merely ignoring or succumbing to the circumstance. Anticipation of resolution acts as a powerful motivator because “the moment of passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intensest life” (Dewey, 1934, p. 16).

Apart from the five formal aspects of aesthetic form, Dewey names another necessity of an experience: resolution. When having an experience, one is not satisfied merely because the event has ended but because the tension—the intense, stifled anticipation, anxiety, or excitement—of the situation has come to a successful closing. The term “resolution” does not, however, suggest that the situation has reached finality in the sense that all knowledge, emotions, and sensory experience have been locked away. Instead, resolution signifies that a balance has been momentarily acquired. Since *conservation* is an essential part of an aesthetic experience, the knowledge gained will alter the person’s thoughts or behaviors in future situations.

Resolution of an aesthetic experience, then, does not mean “the end,” but the acquisition of new insights for future use.

In sharp contrast to an aesthetic experience, experience that requires only “doing” or “reacting” does not allow for the same enjoyment of a purposed life. Dewey (1934) calls this type of experience a “general experience.” The idea of general experience is an occurrence that is not educative. A non-educative – or even a miseducative – experience is characterized by passivity; the individual is not fully engaged in the present moment or in the task at hand. The
non-educative experience is one in which the resulting knowledge, emotions, or routines of the occurrence prevent a person from developing new insights for the future. These types of (non)experiences are typified by a lack of both sensory involvement and interest. There is no awareness of the present, no integration of the past with a consciousness of the now. Instead, people often find themselves reminiscing about the past, or worrying about the future, leaving themselves unavailable to extract a meaningful lesson from their environment.

Any experience is miseducative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experience in the future are restricted. (Dewey, 1938/1991, p. 25)

Through the aesthetic experience, meaning, knowledge, and insight, are formed. True to the pragmatic stand that theory is only as practical as the consequences that result, an experience is only meaningful when the knowledge gained of the universe is used to inform future attitudes or behavior. “Experiencing, like breathing, is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings” (Dewey, 1934, p. 58). This transformative property of an aesthetic experience is the essential difference between the unfulfilling general experience and an experience.

**Art and the Aesthetic Experience**

Dewey argues that the meaning of “aesthetic” should be widened to include an intense appreciation for those things in our everyday lives that might, at first glance, not be considered as having an aesthetic in the sense of it being beautiful or pleasing to the senses.

In order to understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd — the fire-engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth; the human-fly climbing the steeple-side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts. (Dewey, 1934, p. 3)
Recalling Dewey’s position that “aesthetic” (as applied to experience) signifies an occurrence that ultimately brings about balance and order for an individual (albeit impermanent), then it is quite obvious that aesthetic experiences can be found just about anywhere if we are conscious of the present.

So why use works of art to invoke an aesthetic experience if the aesthetic can be found within our daily lives? Dewey explains that we only become conscious of experience when imagination transforms a situation into something new; we only take notice when tipped from our routine, our equilibrium. “The theory that art is a form of make-believe suggests itself as the natural one with which to begin” (1934, p. 287). The imaginative property of art, the ability to see beyond what is, allows what we know to metamorphose into something new. Using art appears well suited to creating imbalance since “aesthetic experience is imaginative” (1934, p. 283).

However, merely exposing students to techniques or works does nothing to promote an experience. An aesthetic experience requires an “extended and self-sufficient experience” (Jackson, 1998, p. 33). The appearance of the common school, greatly influenced by the new demands that came with industrialization, taught art consisting of a mechanized system of combining straight and curved lines to copy realistic representations. The focus of art was not on communication, imagination, or originality because art in the common school was merely used as a method of strengthening the faculty of perception to produce skilled workers. Engagements with arts in this manner could never lead to aesthetic experiences, for “the engagement of the imagination is the only thing that makes any activity more than mechanical” (Dewey, 1916, p. 276).
More than being “make believe,” art complements the aesthetic in the forming of an experience, for “the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience” (1934, p. 1). In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey describes three functions that art serves. The first function of art is to provide a deeply satisfying sense of completion. The “completion” in this sense is akin to the balance, harmony, and order that characterizes the resolution of an aesthetic experience.

A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive whole, which is the universe in which we live. This fact, I think, is the explanation of that feeling of exquisite intelligibility and clarity we have in the presence of an object that is experienced with aesthetic intensity. (Dewey, 1934, p. 202)

The second function of art is to change, in some way, a person's habits or perceptions of life and the world. Art, when fully attended, can provide new information, insights, or revelations for its audience. Clear reflection of the intellectual, emotional, sensory, and cultural knowledge used in an art object’s creation will begin to reveal fresh connections and insights for the participant. Dewey suggests that this reflection of an experience predicates knowledge gained from it. “Reflection is turning a topic over in various aspects and in various lights so that nothing significant about it shall be overlooked—almost as one might turn a stone over to see what its hidden side is like or what is covered by it” (Dewey, 1910, p. 11).

Clarifying Dewey’s description of a successful reflection, postmodernist and Dewey-enthusiast William E. Doll (1993) notes that reflection on the experience is most important when trying to derive meaning. “Reflection is looking at it critically, variously, publicly: that is, connecting our experiences with others’ experiences, building a network of experiences wherein past, present, and future are interrelated” (p. 141). Through intelligent reflection and evaluation of experience, human growth and learning happen; transformation only occurs if reflection
occurs. “To ‘learn from experience’ is to make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence” (Dewey, 1916, p. 139).

Art’s third function is to allow the audience to act as a philosopher, looking at life from an aerial view. When engaging with a work of art, when we reflect on it, we are called to look beyond the confines of our own thoughts, our own perceptions. We are being called to consider the experiences of another.

We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world, which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves. I can see no psychological ground for such properties of an experience save that, somehow, the work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience. (Dewey, 1934, p. 202-203)

Art, with its imaginative properties and its call to us to reflect upon its meaning (regardless of whether that meaning was intended by the artist), inevitably leads us to question the rigidity of the world as we perceive from an angle of one; art is transformative. This ability to transpose and translate indicates its ability to communicate in a way that transcends the written word. Because of this unifying quality, Dewey declares art the “most universal form of language” and “the freest form of communication” (1934, p. 282). Art possesses the potential to stimulate transformative experiences. The process undergone during an aesthetic experience requires a contemplation and reflection of self, others, and the larger world. When one has endured such an experience, has seen it through to enjoy the resolution, new and significant insights are poured into the fluid movement of personal growth. In this reflection and growth, common understandings and shared experiences emerge, prompting us to communicate with one another in an effort to reform the ills of society.
The Good Life: Aesthetics, Democracy, Freedom, and Social Change

While Dewey continuously makes the case for art as means of achieving an aesthetic experience, and in turn, achieving balance, he stresses that an aesthetic experience is only possible because of the people who create a society.

The material of aesthetic experience in being human—human in connection with the nature of which it is a part—is social. Aesthetic experience is a manifestation, a record and celebration of the life of a civilization, a means of promoting its development, and is also the ultimate judgment upon the quality of a civilization. For while it is produced and is enjoyed by individuals, those individuals are what they are in the content of their experience because of the cultures in which they participate. (Dewey, 1934, p. 339)

If aesthetic experience is a demonstration of our interactions with those around us, it also demonstrates those inequities that are realities for many. Dewey declares that “art breaks through barriers that divide human beings, which are impermeable in ordinary association” (1934, p. 254). When the barriers to understanding the fellow members of society are penetrated, the process of achieving democracy for social justice can begin.

Dewey is widely regarded for his role in the development of theories on democracy (Rogers, 2009). In *The Public and Its Problems* (1927/2012), he sets forth the idea of the Great Community, which requires “the sense of free and full inter-communication” among citizens (p. 146). Democracy in the Great Community is a way of life that must be enacted with the assistance of all participating members of society. Democracy, as Dewey explains it, “is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (1916, p. 97). To have a “communicated experience,” an equitable exchange between all members of society is required; there must be compromising and understanding of shared experiences. “Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves” (1916, p. 98).
But democracy is not a state that is simply given to citizens. It must be “enacted anew in every generation” to ensure the participation, voluntary choosing, and cooperation in decision-making that is relevant for society (Dewey, 1916, p. 238). Dewey notes that many Americans assume freedom and participation in a democracy is inherited, a birthright. However, we experience democracy in a constant state of achievement, without ever attaining an end, an ideal. “Democracy as a form of life cannot stand still” (Dewey, 1916, p. 182). Just as the mind is a verb, so is the idea of democracy.

In Freedom and Culture (1939/1989), Dewey posed the question “what is freedom and why is it prized?” (p. 11). He defines freedom as “cooperative and a cooperation which is voluntary” (p. 15). Freedom in this sense is not concerned with the individual’s autonomy to be free from the other. Dewey very deliberately chooses to define “freedom” as voluntary cooperation, which necessitates there being an “other” for freedom to be realized. “Cooperation—called fraternity in the classic French formula—is as much a part of the democratic ideal as is personal initiative” (Dewey, 1939/1989, p. 24).

For Dewey, freedom, and its characteristic cooperation, is a state of mind, a “mental power capable of independent exercise” (1910, p. 13); it is a prerequisite for democracy as Dewey envisioned. David Carr (2006) also asks us to “assume the mind is a collaborative, improvisational entity, remaking itself as needed using all available materials at hand” (p. 14). The mind is always in motion. When we think of the mind in this way, the mind naturally wants to commune with other minds. When freedom is enacted, an individual chooses to think in cooperation with others, and does so willingly.

Dewey asks two questions when determining the viability of a so-called democratic community: “How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? How
full and free is the interplay with other forms of association?” (Dewey, 1916, p. 89) As noted, a sharing of interests must occur in a democracy. Without it, society begins to separate into the “superior” and the “inferior,” where some hold power and resources that the rest do not. Adding to the concern of the disappearance of the public good, Joseph Grange notes that “the public good is the consequence of citizens participating in a community” (1996, p. 356). Each person choosing to act, and choosing to allow others to act, is the only course to seeking freedom and democracy.

Although Dewey earned a spot as a prominent philosopher on social reform, Simich and Tillman (1978) note that there was plenty of opposition to Dewey’s solution of reform and considered his idea of the Great Community little more than wishful thinking. Marxists believed that the type of instrumentalism that Dewey propagated was far too ideological and did not consider larger issues within society.

They contend that Dewey had an inadequate conception of class structure, little appreciation of the role of the working class, an unviable commitment to incremental rather than radical change and an unwillingness to confront squarely the problem of corporate power in capitalist societies. (Simich & Tillman, 1978, p. 413)

The Marxists were not alone in their critique of Dewey. Reinhold Niebuhr, social critic and Protestant theologian, accuses Dewey of ignoring the pervasive narcissism of American society (Simich & Tillman, 1978; Westbrook, 1991). For Niebuhr (1944), "man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.” The solution to correcting social inequities remained in the willingness of each member in a society to commit oneself to religion in hopes of superseding the prevailing conceit of our nature.

When Dewey warns that “to cultivate unhindered, unreflective external activity is to foster enslavement, for it leaves the person at the mercy of appetite, sense, and circumstance”
(1910, p. 14), it is accurate to assume that a lack of freedom for some necessarily translates into inequity for all. Without consciously cultivating reflexive thought and behavior among all members of a community, then there is no choice but to allow unchecked and unreflective behavior to occur. In this scenario, while some will possess more resources, and, perhaps, more power, no one will be free; the failure to choose ourselves and each other guarantees captivity.

When we find the members of society un-free, what is the remedy? “The cure for the ailments of democracy is more democracy” (Dewey, 1927, p. 146). When Dewey calls for “more democracy,” however, Judith Green reasons he does not mean more votes, “but rather democratic communicative actions” (2008, p. 46). Art’s unique communicative property, as well as its propensity for inspiring aesthetic experiences, makes it a desirable choice for seeking out “more democracy.” However, doing so requires a break from cultural traditions.

Dewey points out that a large problem with using art for “more democracy” is one rooted in our historical marginalization of the potential art possesses. “It has not been customary to include the arts, the fine arts as an important part of the social conditions that bear upon democratic institutions and personal freedom” (1939/1989, p. 15). As industry rose, as outlined in chapter two of this dissertation, the view of art held by society continued to be that art was only as useful in the ways it could aid in boosting the bankroll of corporations.

Since schools act as a microcosm of society and reflect the greater social order, social change can occur here. Dewey believes that “education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform” (1897, p. 80). However, since schools follow society and not the other way around, it is improbable that intentional change initiated on the school level would carry over into the larger community.
Alfonso Damico (1978) clarifies a point of contention among some of Dewey’s critics: The idea of The Good Life is opposed to individuality and authority. Damico is correct in suggesting that Dewey is adamantly opposed to such separation. While Dewey wrote extensively about the Great Community and the quest for freedom, his work clearly advocates for the complete integration of all of our roles in order to create an identity.

While agreeing on that point, however, Simich and Tillman (1978) point out that Damico argues that “Dewey avoids serious reflection about values, especially political values, because, by focusing on the issue of the place of standards in choosing, he becomes preoccupied with the process of choice at the expense of criteria of choice” (p. 14). While Dewey expounds the benefits of choosing freedom, no real progress can ever be made towards that end since all choices are treated equally. Surely not all of our choices, even when made as collective, can result in social justice for all citizens.

At a John Dewey Society meeting in New Orleans, Dewey opines that “society is in a process of change” but “schools tend to lag behind” (1937, p. 234). Dewey adds “it is unrealistic, in my opinion, to suppose that schools can be a main agency in producing the intellectual and moral changes, the changes in attitudes and disposition of thought and purpose, which are necessary for the creation of a new social order” (1937, p. 235). Since “no single measure of social change can itself accomplish what is enthusiastic devotees expect from it” (Dewey, 1940, p. 235)—some demanding students performing mathematics at a genius level, others expecting teachers to teach students obedience, and still others who anticipate the ease with which educators will impart absolute knowledge of right and wrong—the school, as an institution, is not sufficient for change, albeit necessary.
And yet, education is still the key to social justice. Luckily, life provides infinite opportunities for education. “School’s education is but one educational agency out of many and at the best is in some respects a minor educational force” (Dewey, 1937, p. 235). Education happens within families, in churches, in nature. Perhaps the most important content schools can teach is not actually content at all, but a process. If schools can teach students to consciously and fully attend to the interactions between self, Other, and environment, they can begin to appreciate aesthetic experiences and their capacity for inciting the reflective change necessary for social justice.

Dewey’s philosophies on aesthetics in education for social justice extended beyond words on a page; he enacted agency to affect change and bring about what he believed ought to be. As a founding member of the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, he chose to fully participate in bringing democracy to all. But it is Dewey’s work at and Jane Addams’ Hull House and the Chicago Laboratory School that is widely known.

Dewey’s ideas on curriculum being connected to life, which would serve as the guiding force at his Laboratory School, were formed at Hull House (Eisele, 1975; Westbrook, 1991). Before accepting his position at the University of Chicago, Dewey spent several years lecturing at the settlement house where a diverse group of immigrants resided. Opened by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, the residents of Hull House participated in organized debates, completed chores, and learned English. The efforts of Addams and the Hull House residents led to the opening of Chicago's first public gallery and its first public playground. These reformers also “helped pass critical legislation and influenced public policy on public health and education, free speech, fair labor practices, immigrants’ rights, recreation and public space, arts, and
philanthropy” (“Jane Addams Hull House Museum,” 2009, para. 4). It was these activities geared toward assisting immigrants in navigating their lives in the United States that drew Dewey to form a close relationship with Addams and Hull House (Eisele, 1975).

As the 20th century approached, a new wave of immigrants (mainly hailing from Eastern and Southern Europe and South America) came to call the United States their home. Many Americans came to view the country’s newfound diversity as a threat to the nation’s identity (Eisele, 1975). That fearful view is exemplified in the writings and speeches of Theodore Roosevelt. He advocated for the total assimilation of immigrants, a view he held before he inherited the U. S. presidency in 1901 and maintained until his death in 1919. In a letter written shortly before he died, the sum of Roosevelt’s view on immigration (and that of many Americans) can be seen.

In the first place we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the man’s becoming in very fact an American, and nothing but an American. If he tries to keep segregated with men of his own origin and separated from the rest of America, then he isn’t doing his part as an American. There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn’t an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag, and this excludes the red flag, which symbolizes all wars against liberty and civilization, just as much as it excludes any foreign flag of a nation to which we are hostile. We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, and American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house; and we have room for but one soul [sic] loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people. (1919)

Dewey disagreed with Roosevelt that a total denouncement of one’s entire cultural identity was in the best interest of democracy. According to Eisele (1975)

Dewey recognized the assimilative function of the public schools, which they had been successfully performing, to him, through the transmission of knowledge and information.
However, he felt that the new circumstances, causing drastic changes in society, required more of the schools. (p. 69)

Dewey felt that the United States should be viewed as a collage or mosaic instead of as a melting pot. As such, schools are required to ensure that everyone can bring their own ideas and beliefs to making of a democratic community. To conform to a single language, to cut ties with one’s past, is an exercise in oppression and the antithesis to everything Dewey believed the schools should be. So, along with Jane Addams, the residents of Hull House, and the other lecturers, Dewey worked to implement education of community health and social issues including immigration reform geared towards democracy (Eisele, 1975).

When Dewey first suggested the idea of a laboratory school where education was related to life, he suggested the Hull House as a model institution (Westbrook, 1991). Deeply steeped in the philosophies and activities of the settlement house, Dewey operated the school with belief that students learn best while engaged in their own experiences and their responsibilities to fellow students (Harms & DePencier, 1996). With fifteen students and a small house on 57th street, Dewey sought to test his hypotheses of education through this experimental school.

Lessons at the school were very similar to life in the larger community as each student had a role and responsibility to the Other in learning and that the curriculum was rooted in the child’s own experiences and interests. The youngest students would spend three years observing their world, something Dewey calls “the most central thing” (1902, p. 173). While Dewey praises the potential of art to facilitate aesthetic experiences (which are central to learning and growth), three years into the operation of his experimental school he writes:

If I do not spend a large amount of time in speaking of the music and art work, it is not because they are not considered valuable and important—certainly as much so as any other work done in the school, not only in the development of the child's moral and aesthetic nature, but also from a strictly intellectual point of view. I know of no work in
the school that better develops the power of attention, the habit of observation and of consecutiveness, of seeing parts in relation to a whole. (1902, p. 174)

Despite discounting art and aesthetics as essential to learning and experience at the time, Dewey’s school allowed him to experiment with his philosophies about democracy and curriculum. Dewey left the school and Chicago after his wife’s dismissal from the university. However, the reputation of the school for being cutting edge and its mission to unite the theory of learning with the practice of teaching ultimately influenced other American universities to adopt a policy of uniting educational research and practice.

When considering the quest for social justice in a democratic community, Dewey reminds us, “the course of human history is a record of changes in human habit” (1940, p. 234). Schools, through their inherent role of educating the young, assume the responsibility of showing students how to attend to the full experiences of others as well as their own experiences. There will always be people among us, “those opposed to projects for social change [who] think it will fail, so it shouldn’t be tried” (1940, p. 234). But we must remember that aesthetic experience, democracy, education, freedom—life—requires continuous action, continuous growth. To do nothing because of the fear of failure only guarantees that social justice will never be realized.
A Lifetime of Pursuit

Maxine Greene’s belief in the valuable role of aesthetics in education for social justice has been at the root of her research, her lectures, and what she describes as “a lifetime’s preoccupation with quest” for more than sixty years (Greene, 1988, p. xi). Her dominant concerns of social imagination and change in education stem in no small part from her nearly four decades of serving as Philosopher-in-Residence for the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education, an establishment whose primary mission is to “advocate for the centrality of imagination and the arts in American education” (“About LCI,” 2011).

Greene’s aesthetic philosophy (developed heavily from John Dewey’s ideas about an experience and from the philosophies of existentialism, critical theory, and postmodernism) centers around the idea that engaging in an artistic-aesthetic experience is ideal for providing opportunities for all people to engage in a public dialogue, thus allowing them spaces to imagine change, envision a type of freedom separate from an illusive meritocracy, and begin to identify the “self” with the “other.” Through her theories of education and aesthetics, Maxine Greene offers detailed visions of how art and aesthetics are related, the role of using art in “releasing the imagination” (1995), the connection between art and the quest for freedom, and finally, the role of the artistic-aesthetic in initiating social change.

The Artistic-Aesthetic Domain

Greene (2001) often jointly discusses the topics of artists, artwork, participatory engagements with the arts, and aesthetics. She readily acknowledges that aesthetics and the arts are tightly enmeshed with one another, yet there still remains a distinction between the terms. For
Greene (2009), “art” refers to the object or product created through the use of various mediums such as a theatrical production, a painting, or an opera. While works of art offer enjoyment, pleasure, life, hope, and “the prospect of discovery” through revealing that which is possible, art does not automatically create a transformative aesthetic experience simply by being (Greene, 1995, p. 133). Objects of art merely provide the materials for the necessary instruction on how one may engage and respond; works of art must be “achieved” (Greene, 1996/2001). Participation—action—with art is required beyond simply perceiving it, for perceiving is only the beginning of understanding. Art must be followed through to the end as it can lead to the “startling defamiliarization of the ordinary” (Greene, 1995, p. 4).

While Dewey (1934) calls for art to be “de-privileged,” to be viewed as relevant to the familiar daily life experience, Greene argues that art is indeed privileged because it is “deliberately created to evoke the [aesthetic] experience, to make possible the pleasure discovered in the moment of awareness in the natural world” (1987/2001, p. 72). The privileged nature of art objects has the ability to not only link us with others throughout time and space, but also to provide links within our own existence (Greene, 1995). Art bridges the various ways we enact our existence—the roles we assume as determinate, a given—to what our existence could declare (if we choose it to be so). The distinction Greene highlights is that while art itself is indeed privileged, special, it is not relegated to members in elite society.

“Aesthetics,” a specific realm of philosophy, pertains to “perception, sensation, and how they relate to knowing, understanding, and feeling about the world” (Greene, 2001, p. 5). When the modifying term “aesthetic” is used, it is to describe a “mode of experience brought into being by encounters with works of art” (Greene, 2001, p. 5). Greene extends the description of aesthetics to illustrate that it “involves inquiry into or clarification of critical talk and writing as it involves
reflection upon personal experiences with the several arts” (1980/2001, p.25). Action is required (inquiring, clarifying, reflecting) to understand that which is aesthetic.

Like her influential predecessor Dewey, Greene considers artwork to be the most promising opportunity available for one to engage in an aesthetic experience. Engagements with the arts “enable us to feel more, to sense more, to be more consciously in the world” (Greene, 1980/2001, p. 10). Artistic-aesthetic encounters are “bound to disturb, if they do not simply confuse” (Greene, 1988, p. 39). The arts are connected to discovering differences and to the making of community. It is only through disturbing the mundane, the “taken-for-granted,” that alternative possibilities become visible.

While Greene and Dewey both acknowledge the importance of relationships, tensions, and the weight of the past as central to an experience, it is Greene’s insistence on the importance of consciousness in our everyday life—something social scientist Alfred Schutz (1967) calls “wide-awakeness”—that best reveals the pragmatic influences on her theories on education, justice, imagination, and social change (Greene, 1988; 1995). As aesthetic encounters require wide-awakeness on the part of the individual, “anaesthetic” experiences are characterized by “numbness” and “an emotional incapacity” to display empathy (Greene, 2001, p. x). This “anaesthesia” is likely to prevent the critical and creative questioning of circumstances in students. If there is no sensitivity to the environment or one’s place in the world, there can be no aesthetic experience, and there can be no transformation.

Greene argues passionately to fuel the imagination, to encourage freedom, among students who will inherit the world in all its splendors and tragedies. For educators to speak of an “aesthetic education” is to discuss “an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural participatory engagements with the arts” (Greene, 1980, p. 6).
Aesthetic education is meant to develop a “more active sensibility and awareness in our students” (Greene, 1980, p. 8). Whereas the aim of “art education” implies a focus on exploring various artistic media, aesthetic education allows people to understand their own lives in relation to others and the environment (1980). “What we try to do through aesthetic education is to move persons to their own creativity by means of active and participant encounters with works of art” (Greene, 1995/2001, p. 96). Students are asked to reject the presumption that all knowledge must be scientific and to reject the notion that an individual is only “enlightened” when they “act in accord with technically correct strategies” (Greene, 1978, p. 26). To this end, the aim of aesthetic education is not in delivering predetermined knowledge but rather inviting students to explore their own creativity, ideas, and possibilities. “The obligation of the aesthetic educator is to make clear what it means to enter a created world” (Greene, 2009, p. 2).

Releasing the Imagination

Just what does Greene mean when she calls on educators to ready students for entering into a socially and culturally created world? “Young people will require a great range of habits of mind and a great number of complex skills” (1995, p. 13). In addition to preparing for occupations which do not yet exist in the fields of technology and science, students will be asked to accomplish what no other generation has been able to do: They will be asked to make our world better by eliminating human suffering. Students must be equipped with tools for an art (wide-awareness) that they have mastered in order to successfully navigate this dynamic environment. While Greene acknowledges that certain foundational skills acquired through disciplines like mathematics and science are necessary, the most important aptitude students need is the ability to “release their imagination.”

Greene has defined imagination in slightly different ways over the years, but discovering the
possible is always at the heart of the term. In her book *Releasing the Imagination* (1995), she writes

To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or “common-sensible” and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with that presumably is. (p. 19)

At a conference for pediatricians, she says “imagination, as most of you know, is the capacity to break with the ordinary, the given, the taken-for-granted and open doors to possibility. One way of describing it is as a ‘passion for possibility’” (Greene, 2007, p. 1). One exercises imagination through the conscious reformation of both the old and the new, and it always “deals in unpredictabilities” (p. 124). To release the imagination is to command the “power to form mental images and to mold experiences into something new” (1980, p. 30). Imagination is creation, knowledge, and understanding through means other than perception. “Imagination breathes life into experience” (1995, p. 22).

Always remaining the same, however, is that imagination is “at the heart of aesthetic experience” (1982/2001, p. 65). For one to engage in a truly transformative experience, one that will shape future actions and perceptions, imagination is necessary. The imaginative integrating of knowledge is the sole way to form new insights fundamental to the definition of an aesthetic experience.

Just as Dewey (1934) understands it, Greene views the aesthetic experience as the key to unlocking alternative possibilities for society. Greene emphasizes the quality of imagination as paramount to achieving such an aesthetic experience. Imagination is used to “get into another’s world” (1995, p. 4). If students—and teachers—are unable to see from another’s point of view,
they likely lack the empathy needed to understand those seen as “other.” Empathy, “the capacity to see through another’s eyes, to grasp the world as it works and sounds and feels from the vantage point of another,” is necessary to view all those who are a part of the human condition (Greene, 1996, p. 102). It empowers students to know and understand enough to make sound choices through critical judgments, imaginative projections, and transformative actions (Greene, 1995). Without releasing the imagination, “our history can be frozen and our inquiries crippled” (Greene, 1982, p. 66).

Greene poses the provocative question to educators, “What kinds of intelligences are required to remedy homelessness and addiction?” (1995, p. 172). What skills will keep our students’ inquiries mobile? Indeed, it seems that since these social deficiencies still exist, it naturally follows that no skill thus far taught, mastered, and employed has been able to offer redress. Necessarily needed is something new, something inspired, and the only way to bring about the “not yet” is to actively engage with the imagination. Students and teachers alike must be invited to tango with imagination, hold it in a close embrace, take turns following and leading.

With much of Greene’s writing from the last twenty-five years paying special attention to the importance of imagination in society (1995, 2001, 2008, 2009), her words carry with them a sense of urgency. “Beginning to take for granted the existence of things—the wars, the inequities, the depth of abandoned people’s suffering—they may accept the idea of there being an objective reality impervious to subjective interpretation and to alternate possibilities” (Greene, 2008, p. 18). However, students must never be encouraged to accept the status quo, to accept their existence as unchangeable and determinate. In the song that is now a part of the Vatican’s official playlist, 2Pac laments about the hopelessness that many who are struggling feel. “I see
no changes/All I see is racist faces/Misplaced hate makes disgrace to races we under/ I wonder what it takes to make this one better place” (Shakur, Evans, & Hornsby, 1998).

But nothing is ever fixed. “The intellectual and social realm, unlike mortality, is alterable. They forget that norms and prohibitions and divides are functions of particular sets of interests at particular moments of time” (Greene, 1978, p. 25). The obstacles—the systems, policies, institutions, expectations—that prevent change, are constructs. While some obstacles may have deep roots, roots that are lodged into the very ground one walks upon, there is no tree that cannot be uprooted when the winds are strong enough. Students must regularly and intentionally be invited to think of society as it ought to be instead of how it is, to use social imagination.

Slightly different from imagination conceived of on a personal level, social imagination is “the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society” (Greene, 1995, p. 5). Social imagination is required for cognizance of shortcomings brought about from the marginalization and alienation of others. When one can see the world from another’s perspectives, to see life through foreign eyes, he or she may understand what is possible, regardless of whether or not approval, or even appreciation, of difference is achieved (1995). For society’s “web of relations” to be revealed, imagination must be used (Arendt, 1958, p. 184).

Before students can be expected to use imagination to understand the “other” and the web of relationships, they must first understand the “self.” Students have not only been conditioned to see others in a socially constructed world, but they view themselves inside of the same matrix. A young person is likely to have been convinced that he or she is either belonging to a superior cultural group or to one that lies on the fringe.
How can social imagination even begin to occur if an individual is convinced in his or her own inability to be something other than what they have been told? “Imagination may be a new way of decentering ourselves” (Greene, 1995, p. 31). By decentering the self, a student shifts from her or his dictated identity. Suddenly, leaning off of their “center,” they are gifted with new perspectives. Rarely are “young people looked upon as beings capable of imagining, choosing and of acting from their own vantage points on perceived possibility” (Greene, 1995, p. 41). The practice of viewing students as “beings who are to be shaped for uses others will define” is generally insidious and never questioned (p. 32). Further, much of what we see in schools is an “education in forgetfulness” (p. 74). Teachers and administrators, politicians and school boards, distract students from their own vantage points, their own perspectives, and inculcate them into predetermined modes of operation. Seldom is the opportunity offered for students to engage in imagined scenarios. Seldom are students invited to see themselves as a being connected to, and perceived by, “others.” Greene reminds educators to “remain cognizant of alternative possibilities” (1978, p. 89), for students “have something to say about the way things might be if they were otherwise” (1995, p. 34).

Greene repeatedly argues that engagements with the arts provide the most likely way to release the imagination and perceive alternatives. Imagination allows an individual to “realize that there is always more in experience than we can predict” (1995, p. 14), and that “the arts in particular can bring to curriculum inquiry visions of perspectives and untapped possibilities” (p. 90). Art provides one with connective threads to help a person “overcome obstruction” that has all too often been accepted as a given (p. 95).

Visionaries are always products of their times, and looking at literature can provide us with the most imaginative insights. In Louisa May Alcott’s novel, *Little Women*, the protagonist
uses her imagination to negotiate her role in a male-driven society. In *Releasing the Imagination* (1995), Greene offers Jo March as an example of how literature uses the imagination to explore alternate ways of being. Living in Victorian tradition, Jo “invented open spaces for herself” (p. 91). When her father was away at war and there was not enough money to sustain the family, Jo carved a spot for herself in the world through her own writing. “She chose herself to be reader and writer, to be someone who demanded to be free” (1995, p. 91). She used imagination to resist against the social inertia of her time to find her own way to be.

**The Problem with Freedom**

Breaking through the mundane by releasing the imagination denotes empowerment of students; it is an expression of achieved freedom. Greene’s concern about the realization of freedom is present in her earliest works and continues to receive heavy attention in her most recent musings. While her focus on freedom throughout the decades is constant, the philosopher who is “not yet” shows a distinct shift in how she defines freedom and for what purposes freedom should be achieved. In her essays from the 1960s, Greene clearly acknowledges that she views the issue of freedom from an existentialist framework (1967). But her work from the following decade shows a gradual shifting away from her spotlight focus on the individual’s importance as she begins to relate what the “one” contributes to society (1978). The subordination of the individual’s identity to dehumanizing social institutions and policies represents the existential basis for Greene’s lifelong pursuit for a view of education that, ultimately, envisions freedom that also accounts for political and social realities (1988).

Even when she labeled herself as being aligned with existential phenomenology, Greene knew that “existential encounters cannot satisfy this need” to provide people “moving experiences” or the “courage to be” so that they might be aroused to search for freedom (Greene,
1967, p. 166). Finally, in the 1990s, Greene publicly declared that in contemporary discussions on freedom, “the very metaphor of uncovering no longer serves, nor does the idea of a preexistent vision” (1995, p. 113). Greene’s understanding of freedom has evolved to incorporate the inescapable bond of individual freedom and the freedom or oppression of others.

“What does it mean to be a citizen of the free world?” (Greene, 1988, p. 3) If Greene had asked herself this question a decade earlier, her response would have been “the opportunity to think for oneself, to make one’s own sense of the world” (1978, p. 7). She was at great unease that American society during the 1970s placed emphasis on “what was useful for social stability and progress rather than on what might promote individual happiness” (1978, p. 25). The plight of the individual, the “vantage point of one,” was Greene’s focal concern (1967, p. 156). “His” happiness and “his own need to choose” values, morals, and ethics was paramount to achieving freedom (1967, p. 8).

Greene’s contemporary concept of freedom is, in many ways, a direct critique to her earlier existential writings on the same subject. In the opening pages of The Dialectic of Freedom (1988), Greene disdainfully recounts the prevailing American attitudes regarding freedom. She notes that laissez-faire economics has come to shape (if not define) Americans’ definition of freedom to mean deregulation, noninterference, and privatization. Personal freedom as a birthright carries the connotation of “self-dependence and self-determination” instead of indicating a responsibility to a larger community (p. 1). For the United States to be the leader in the global race involving “economic competitiveness, technology, and power,” educational institutions are now “geared to training instruments for the state,” contributing to “a general withdrawal from what ought to be public concerns” such as violence, neglect, and alienation (p. 2). In the quest for the American Dream, the once highly valued principles of
democracy and liberty have been subsumed by the idea that freedom means the ability to pursue success, or to indulge one’s desires after success has been accomplished. There is a “preoccupation with having more rather than being more” (p. 7).

But all individuals are “unique persons living in a shared world” (Greene, 1980, p. 11). Any attentive understanding of freedom must take into account that a life is not lived in isolation; there is no “authentic self” for us to discover separate from the transactions between individual, the “Other,” and the environment. Freedom is “a distinctive way of orienting the self to the possible, of overcoming the determinate, of transcending or moving beyond in the full awareness that such overcoming can never be complete” (Greene, 1988, p. 5). Because the context in which we exist—enacted roles, space, time—is organically fluid, there can never be an understanding of the self that is fully understood or separate from the situated context.

Freedom requires becoming more than one was before; it is “the right to ask why” (Greene, 1995, p. 25). Freedom allows one to “transform what is inhuman, what alienates people from themselves” (p. 114). It is the ability to perceive through various vantage points to see what is possible. It is the linking of personal freedom to a social commitment. Freedom requires society to “empower students” (Greene, 1988, p. 13) to become “awakened to pursue meaning and to endow a life story with meaning” (Greene, 1995, p. 132).

While Greene does not explicitly answer the question of who or what has the ability (or the authority) to empower others to choose freedom, her narratives do name those people, structures, and taken-for-granted ideals that represent “the obstacles to being” (1967, p. 160). These obstacles to being free include the indifferent corporations amassing wealth even though the top one percent of Americans already have a net worth that is 288 times greater than the typical household (Luhby, 2012); they are the “object-ness” of women in magazines and the
manipulation of media; they are the consumer goods and depersonalized treatment of students in schools (Greene, 1988). Greene asks us to set aside, to erase, conventionality. This is not to say that anything that is considered “culture” or “tradition” should be (or could be) discarded simply because of its pervasive, ritualistic existence. Greene only asks that people question the things in society that are often acceded as fixed and unchangeable. Freedom cannot occur “when oppression or exploitation or segregation or neglect is perceived as ‘natural’ or a ‘given’” (p. 9).

As Maxine Greene understands the notion, it appears that achieving freedom in contemporary American society is the exception rather than the rule. In some way, every person is subject to the invisible constraints that have been erected in society with little or no challenge because their omnipresence resides in the subconscious as a “given.” Only those individuals who can “learn how to notice what there is to be noticed” can see what lies beyond and begin to choose to act in ways to initiate change (Greene, 1996, p. 102). Then, they may be unbound to “pursue their freedom and, perhaps, transform to some degree their lived worlds” (Greene, 1995, p. 48).

The essentiality of freedom to being cannot be overstated. To put it simply, to fully live and appreciate life, one must be attentive to the possibilities. One must behave differently in the beyond than he or she does in the now. One must choose to engage in activities that lead to change. The ability to choose is inextricably fused with freedom. As legendary writer John Steinbeck wrote in his 1952 novel East of Eden, actively searching for our freedom is a choice. “But the Hebrew word, the word timshel—‘Thou mayest’—that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man. For if ‘Thou mayest’—it is also true that ‘Thou mayest not” (p. 301-302).
Teachers must do better than reproduce the status quo within their classroom. They must serve as an agent to help empower students to choose to act. “Learning involves a futuring, a going beyond,” and as much as one can possibly empower others to go beyond, teachers must provide students with time, space, and opportunities for aesthetic encounters, for circumstances to achieve freedom (Greene, 1978, p. 39).

To begin their quest for freedom, students must learn to acknowledge the vantage points of others. Students should “come to know each other and have regard for each other as human beings in the course of their journey” (Greene, 1988, p. 30). We must question our own assumptions. The knowledge that there are infinite possibilities in this lifetime is foundational to the ability to choose freedom. It will take a shared effort to bring awareness of alternatives into being; one must recognize that the other can, and does, bring a unique history into the imagining of the future.

Greene often points out that opportunities for change and freedom are never noticed by those who have no reason to “move beyond.” “There is no consciousness of obstruction, no resentment or restraint, when a person experiences no desire to change or to question.” If there is nothing a person wishes to say, he or she “will not suffer from censorship or controls on freedom of speech” (1988, p. 11). Those who are aware of freedom have something to say but are restricted from speaking, and they feel that obstruction on a deeply personal level. Teachers are thusly charged with guiding students to hear what there is to be heard, to see what there is to be seen, to notice what there is to be noticed. Students must learn to recognize the ways in which he, she, and the other are oppressed, and this can be accomplished when students have been empowered to speak and to act in the classroom by providing opportunities for imaginative empathy. For students, there are hardly any measures employed to “seek out openings in their
lived lives, to tolerate disruptions of the taken-for-granted, to try consciously, to become
different than they are,” thus making the role of the school, and specifically, the role of the
teacher to nurture a culture where free discussions are allowed to simmer, boil, cool (Greene,
1988, p. 15). Situations must be purposefully developed in the classroom to allow “the mass of
people to act on their power to choose” (p. 18).

One can never hope to bring something into being if there is no cognizance of voids in a
situation. But what to make of the inner sense that this life might not be chosen but rather pre-
molded by something akin to malignancy? “Many are likely to share a feeling of subservience to
a system…they can scarcely name” (p. 19). People find it burdensome, and often confusing, to
“name the obstacles in their way” (p. 20). Greene repeatedly warns that young people must be
able to name—identify—obstacles to freedom in order to “move beyond the limits established by
resignation and helplessness” (p. 49). To ease the “sense of being manipulated by unknown
forces,” students must be taught to call out by name the “powerful and faceless” (Greene, 1978,
p. 22). The purpose of mastering skills and understanding academic disciplines (history, science,
art, literature, etc.), after all, is so that “they may contribute to our seeing and the naming”
(Greene, 1995, p. 25). Through engagement and participation with works of art, students
become “wide-awake to the world,” able to name and give faces to obstacles, so that they can
begin “making community” (Greene, 1995, p. 4).

Social justice advocate Herbert Kohl (2007) tells us writers are “likely to bring to the
surface values, ambiguities, and unanswered questions relevant to schools but either ignored or
unspoken by reformers preoccupied with literacy” (p. xii). Greene often looks to Ralph Ellison’s
novel, Invisible Man, as a way to decenter herself and become “wide-awake” to the voids in
society. The unnamed Black male of the story is not physically invisible, but socially invisible.
Greene, as “Other” to Ellison’s troubled protagonist, finds the conditions of the man’s state uncomfortable if not alarming. The details in the novel “offer the reader a context in which interpretations can be made and significations read as they cannot be read in contextless abstractions” (1995, p. 95). As the anonymous man, damaged by the ills of his time, attempts to maintain his individuality while upholding his responsibility to his community, the reader is also carried through the totality of the aesthetic quest; the reader has been transformed by the plight, and hopefully, becomes aware that somehow, society has not been fair—has not lived up to its responsibility—to the unnamed man.

**Social Justice**

With freedom comes the responsibility to ensure the welfare of those who are not yet free. “There is almost no serious talk of reconstituting a civic order, a community,” yet schools and their teachers are expected to fix the most tragic deficiencies in American history (Greene, 1988, p. 2). Schools are asked to perform miracles in spite of social atrocities. Some seek “technical solutions” for their “secret fears”—war, illness, poverty, and so on, but these solutions “lack a grounding in significantly shared vales and norms” (Greene, 1988, p. 2). There has been no coming together by those who feel responsible to choose to act to make things different. “Individuals working and fighting in collaboration with one another, discovering together a power to act on what they are choosing themselves to be” is critical to achieving a shared freedom (p. 12).

I still find myself reflecting on Tupac, an artist respected for his refusal to remain silent, his resistance to being submerged by the realities of others, his ability to name the obstacles. Many times I think of the message (if at times contradictory) that he gives to Black women in “Keep Ya Head Up” (Shakur, 1993), his attempt to empower others to choose. My students and
I have come to engage with Tupac’s words as thoroughly as another would study Keats or Poe. We have attended to his metaphors to create meaning, to see from another’s vantage point. However, it is during an informal interview with MTV, recorded in 1992, where I can most clearly understand his frustrated urgency—his insistence—that we see things as they could be, that we release our imaginations to envision a more just society for all.

I feel like there's too much money here. Nobody should be hitting the Lotto for $36 million when we got people starving in the streets. That is not idealistic. That's just real. That is just stupid. There is no way Michael Jackson—or whoever Jackson—should have a million thousand quadruple billion dollars and then there's people starving. There's no way. There's no way that these people should own planes and these [other] people don't have houses, apartments, shacks, drawers, pants…It just takes to be revolutionary, and it takes that to do something out of the ordinary. I think that if we just said, "OK, I got an idea. No more porno buildings — let's build houses." Or "No more polo games. Let's build houses for poor people.” OK, I know you rich. I know you got $40 billion, but can you just keep it to one house? You only need one house. And if you only got two kids, can you just keep it to two rooms? I mean, why have 52 rooms when you know there's somebody with no room? It just don't make sense to me. (Shakur, 1992/1996)

While teaching the poetry of a Black male, at no time did I pretend to my students like I could ever know life from Tupac’s eyes. And I think that's the point. Greene tells us that empathy is not being able to be in someone else's shoes, but to recognize their experience as a possibility. “The power of empathy is to become more present to those around, perhaps to care” (Greene, 2007, p. 4). The best that we can ever do is try to acknowledge the varied perspectives in this life. I think by using Tupac’s words, I am showing my students that I am trying to engage with the other—that I recognize his experiences as a truth even though I have not lived it. And even though I have never experienced his life, I recognize that he also shares in the human experience.

Despite my intentions, I have often felt unease when attempting to engage others in Tupac’s lyrics. I have questioned if I have any right as a white female to present to my students
the struggles of a young Black male and attempt to understand something I have not lived. But then I consider the alternative. Do I only teach the white perspective? Would that be only white females? Could it only be Southern white females in their late 20s from a two-parent household? What purpose would that serve? In the end, I am always reminded that “the human being must experience difficulty and unease if he is to be” (Greene, 1967, p. 32). I must ask myself to be at unease (as I should be) with the disadvantaged and disenfranchised of society.

Greene reminds us that “the support systems once desired to sustain the disadvantaged and the sick have been chipped away…to be left to one’s own devices, to rely on one’s own powers is to become stronger, more vital, more effective” (1988, p. 17). Those who “don’t got” are blamed, judged, immobilized, simply because they “don’t got” (Shakur, 1992/2006). We cannot—must not—depersonalize the sufferers; it may devalue their experience, but it does not diminish the pain. We must look to those men and women who achieved their freedom with empathy for, and solidarity with, others.

Americans are creating “a society where material needs are satisfied, but where the needs for consolidation, solidarity, love remain unmet” (Greene, 1988, p. 19). Many feel desperately apart “from a world where people coming together might bring change” (p. 25). Freedom of the self and the freedom of others can only be significantly accomplished when all come together and choose to act for a better world. “What might be, should be, is not yet” (p. 21).

Like Dewey, Greene joined her theory with practice in several educational ventures. Teaching for social justice has remained her primary concerns, and her undertakings have remained rooted in the belief in freedom, imagination, and justice. “Teaching for social justice, we must remember, is teaching what we believe ought to be” (Greene, 1998b, p. xxix).
In 2003, Greene opened the Foundation for Social Imagination, the Arts and Education. Her vision in launching the foundation is to generate inquiry, imagination, and the creation of art works by diverse people. It has to do so with a sense of the deficiencies in our world and a desire to repair, wherever possible. Justice, equality, freedom - these are as important to us as the arts, and we believe they can infuse each other, perhaps making some difference at a troubled time. ("Philosopher, Imaginer, Inquirer," 2013)

The Center “provides opportunities for dialogue, reflection and interaction in diverse communities, among participants focused on works of art as possibilities toward human growth” ("Mission Statement," 2013). It offers access to Greene’s lectures and writings and actively promotes to disseminate her work. “It seeks to form and strengthen alliances among arts organizations, schools, universities, and other cultural organizations, as well as individual educators, teaching artists and experts from other fields who are engaged in aesthetic education, inquiry, and developing social imagination.”

The Center also hosts a website where browsers are invited to participate in dialogue with other scholars and educators. A forum is available for idea exchange, as well as a calendar for those interested in upcoming workshops and conferences. Digital archives are also available, allowing instant access to many of Greene’s videos and speeches.

As Philosopher-in-Residence since 1976, Greene has been a guiding force for the mission of the Lincoln Center Institute. The Institute, which advocates for “the centrality of imagination by educating teachers” ("Lincoln Center Institute," 2011), boasts professional development for educators at the core of its practice. Professional development is offered to all teachers in K-12 schools, as well as those at institutions of higher education. These services include hosting summer workshops, partnering with area schools, and acting as consultants.
The summer workshop is the Institute’s most popular outreach program. Now connected with Common Core State Standards, the summer workshops invite guest artists to lead an international group of teachers through an “imaginative learning experience” ("Summer Workshops,” 2013).

In a message to the 2013 participants, executive director of the Lincoln Center Institute Russell Granet writes

Above all, it is my wish that you will acquire skills to help your students think like artists. Don’t you think the world would be a better place if everyone did that? Artists face difficult questions in their process all the time: questions that require vision and decisiveness. I cannot think of a better recipe for success, whether you study an artistic discipline or the sciences. ("Summer Workshops,” 2013)

The goal of the workshop, Granet declares, is to teach teachers how to teach their students to engage in the creative process through engagements with the arts in order to create a “better place.”

Educators participating in the five-day introductory summer workshop engage in “imaginative learning through the arts” ("Summer Workshops,” 2013) with the guidance of guest educators an artists. For $550, participants will spend the week at one of five host sites—New York, New York; Kalamazoo, Michigan; Mexico City, Mexico; Rockland, Maine, or West Memphis, Arkansas—attending performances and/or visiting art exhibits. Reflection on one’s experience with the artwork is a large part of the program and attendees can count on in-depth facilitated discussions with their colleagues.

Participants in the advanced session, having already been through the introductory session, will spend either two or three days attending workshops on topics such as “Aesthetic Education and the Common Core,” “Guiding the Noticing,” and “Questions at the Core: Arts Integration and Student-Centered Curricula.” The tuition and registration fees, which are $340
for a three-day workshop and $235 for two days, provides teachers with the opportunity to study special topics on art and education while also engaging in hands-on studio work with a guest artist. The culmination of both the introductory and advanced sessions result in graduate credit and aesthetic experiences with which to create imaginative lesson plans.

For pre-K-12 schools in the New York City area, the Institute offers a partnership between students and artists. Educators desiring participation for their students choose one or more works in the performing and visual arts to be studied in the classroom.

Specially-trained teaching artists work with classroom teachers to plan lessons around these works of art and across the curriculum that model imaginative learning practice. Teaching artists may visit the classroom several times during the unit, engaging students in activities such as art making, observation, reflection, and research. (“School Partnerships,” 2013)

Schools can opt for a single classroom visit or for a long-term commitment, and the costs associated are dependent on the number of students involved, the domain of art selected for study, and the number of visits the trained teaching artist visits.

For teachers and administrators who are unable to benefit from the summer workshops or a partnership with the Institute, the LCI Consultancy designs a workshop to bring to them. The LCI Consultancy boasts that their workshops offers “a philosophical foundation based on the work of John Dewey and Maxine Greene that keeps evolving to address 35 years of classroom practice” (“School Partnerships” 2013). By that claim, the LCI Consultancy means that the workshops will focus on engaging students with art in order to “release the imagination.” Teachers will learn how to facilitate students’ choice-making perceptual abilities, and collaboration skills.

In cooperation with the Lincoln Center Institute, the High School for Arts Imagination and Inquiry opened in New York City in 2005. Maxine Greene’s philosophy on inquiry, art,
imagination, and social justice formed the foundation of this school. Designed to prepare students for college, careers, and community involvement, principal Stephen Noonan says that the school works to “foster the sense of self-worth, empathy and agency necessary for students to become participatory citizens who will create a more just, humane, and vibrant world” (2013). A public school open to all of New York City’s five boroughs, a full two-thirds of enrolled students receive free or reduced lunch. White students account for one percent of enrollment, and one fifth of the student population is a part of the state’s special education program (“At a Glance,” 2012).

The school does not function as a conservatory to produce artists, despite the name. The use of the words “art,” “inquiry,” and “imagination” signify Greene’s influence about how education ought to be. True to her aesthetic philosophy, art is integrated into traditional subjects instead of taught separately. In fact, the school has no designated faculty art teacher. Students are offered opportunities to see professional plays, ballets, and art exhibits with their general education teachers—opportunities most students would not otherwise have. Listed only as “Patty” on New York’s Inside Schools website, the former student praised the experiences she had at the high school prior to her 2009 graduation.

This school has great connection with Lincoln Center and gives students an opportunity of a life time by seeing high paying performances, amazing internships, connection to the art museums and a whole lot more. Mr. Noonan has been a great principal he has done his best to make this school its best and he abides by the rules. One other thing i (sic) can say about this school is that they give students freedom of speech in making the school better for many other students in the future. now preparing you college wise well they can do a lot (sic) better but if it wasnt (sic) for me attending programs like college summit or having a teach like Ms.cross (sic) i (sic) would have never been prepared. (“Comments,” 2011)

Not all students share Patty’s experience, however. Using the screen name “Danny_and_mickey,” a senior from the class of 2011 expresses frustration that the high school
is seemingly like all others, leaving students unprepared for their futures.

I'm a student this school is a horrible school, don't send your child to this school. They will regret it big time! I am currently a senior and I hated my time here and regret that I picked this school. Scanning [through a metal detector] is like going threw (sic) airport security, the rules of the building as a whole just has dumb rules, and we don't have art in our art school. To make it worse we don't have most of these programs. When you visit they will try to make it sound great, but its (sic) not. The education is elementry (sic) school level. I only stayed to be with my friends which is my single greatest regret!!!!! If that doesn't (sic) convince you, lets (sic) just say freshmen year was just gang wars everyday, and my senior year was the worst, and if I wasn't in Harlem children zone program, I would feel totally unprepared for college! The only good thing about it is the connection with Lincoln Center, THATS IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (“Comments,” 2011)

While the commenter acknowledges that the school’s connection to the Lincoln Center is a benefit, it seems that even this school, dedicated to preparing students to create a humane and just world, cannot escape the realities of our post-9/11 and post-Columbine society. The school is also plagued by poor attendance, high suspension rates, and weak academic performance (“At a Glance,” 2012).

The idea of fully using the arts to prompt social reform is appealing, but Greene’s efforts to exert change through agency have not escaped criticism. Dancer-turned-educational theorist Donald Blumensfeld-Jones (2012), in an open response to Greene’s romantic view about art’s potential, poignantly states, “I am both sympathetic and disturbed by your ideas” (p. 112). He understands the desire to use well-known pieces of art (most of them considered masterpieces) by renowned artists as exemplars of how to uncover possibilities, which might have otherwise remained concealed. He objects to what undertakings like the summer workshops really say about the nature of the artist.

Blumensfeld-Jones (2012) points out that by using only studio artists to lead summer workshops and classroom visits with school partnerships, that art is not being utilized as if it were genuinely accessible to all. Instead of working to bring art back in line with the everyday
work of an individual as envisioned by Dewey (1934), the LCI perpetuates the categorization of art as special and separate from non-studio artists. Blumensfeld-Jones’ reaction is understandable. “I learn, in part that when I view the world with fresh eyes I am not enacting artistry, for my pleasurable experiences in such situations come only ‘by fortunate chance’ and are only a ‘release from the habitual and practical’” (2012, p. 115). It would seem that any insight garnered from an artistic-aesthetic experience is resulting from a fluke instead of intentional wide-awakeness, for only the professionally trained artist truly knows how to see the world anew.

Ultimately, for Maxine Greene, social justice is a choice. We must choose for things to be different from what they are. But alternate modes of being cannot be explored without releasing the imagination. Engagements with the arts, engagements with seeing from multiple perspectives, releases the imagination so that it might entertain ways to achieve a just society.

So long as we remember that education has to do with the young in their unpredictable becoming, so long as we can free ourselves from today’s “iron cage” of technicist manipulation and control, we may be able to illuminate the public school with a vision arising from the “community in the making” John Dewey called “democracy.” (Greene, 2007, p. xvi)
CHAPTER 5: JANE PIIRTO

“This illusion of rationality has lost sight of the central role of imagination.”
~Jane Piirto~

Rethinking the Creative Curriculum

Educational theorist, Jane Piirto, is both a researcher in the field of education as well as an award-winning novelist. She has published over 100 poems, short stories, essays, and academic articles. Her novel, The Three Week Trance Diet, won the Carpenter Press First Novel Award, and she is the recipient of Individual Artist Fellowships in both poetry and fiction from the Ohio Arts Council. Her scholarly research has focused on the nature of creativity and on teaching the gifted and talented. Driving her research interests are two questions: 1) Is everyone creative? and 2) What makes people creative thinkers? (Piirto, 2011).

As a researcher and artist, Piirto brings a unique voice to the importance of an aesthetic education, simultaneously understanding the communicative value of an aesthetic experience and the future transformative effects on an individual and society. Piirto's specific interest in fostering creativity in the classroom, from an aesthetic and academic framework, makes her theories especially relevant to this dissertation.

Can Creativity Be Identified?

“Everyone is creative. Those who are most creative have learned to be so” (Piirto, 2004). Such a bold statement will no doubt take many people in the psychological, educational, and philosophical world aback: The term “creativity” is one which has become part of popular language usage, yet there is not unanimous agreement on how one can be sure they are in the presence of creativity or not. Is creativity merely a product that society largely values as useful or beautiful? Is it the process one takes to fulfill an innate need?
There are two very different terms used in creativity discourse. The first attributes creativity to the novelty or act of creation routinely experienced on a personal level (Perkins, 1988). The second sees creativity only in products or ideas that are unique to, and accepted by, society (Mumford, Reiter-Palmon, & Redmond, 1994). Developmental molecular biologist John Medina (2011) concedes that while researchers have yet to reach a complete agreement on what constitutes creativity, researchers agree that creativity is both culturally subjective as well as dependent on individual experience.

Creativity as ability has been a major assumption in the American educational realm since the 1950s just as the notion that school and society kill childhood creativity has become accepted folklore (Piirto, 2004). While many psychologists, educational theorists, philosophers and businessmen have attempted to harness creativity for profit or humanity, there must be a consensus of what creativity is before these goals can be accomplished. Is this even feasible? Can we pin creativity down long enough to comprehend what it is without so narrowly defining it that its true essence eludes us? According to educational psychologist Jane Piirto

This interest in creativity is truly postmodern perplexity for little is tangible, all is one, one is many, everything is true, and nothing is true. The terms chaos, fracture and split fit the creativity enterprise well. . . education is an important factor in the development of creativity. (2004, p. 5)

This chapter will explore how what we know about talent development informs the talent development of young artists by using the Piirto Pyramid of Talent Development across the various artistic domains.

**Model of Talent Development**

While Piirto asserts that the most popular model of creativity is Wallas’ four-step theory developed in 1926, Piirto herself provides a more comprehensive Pyramid Model. The Piirto
Pyramid looks to genetics as the foundation for developing creative attributes. Every personality trait and predisposition is linked in some way to genetics.

On top of the genetic foundation lies the Emotional Aspect or our personality. Piirto notes that many studies in creative research have observed that highly creative people share a distinct set of qualities across domains. A brief summary of these attributes includes passion, resilience, preference for complexity, self-discipline, imagination, and openness. Perhaps the most important shared trait is the disregard for social conformity. The drive for individual success is high and artists remain incredibly self-sufficient. While these traits are predetermined by genetics to some degree, these are also attributes that can and should be taught, developed, and nurtured through the creative process.

Between the Emotional Aspect and the tip of the Pyramid rests the Cognitive Aspect. Creative people generally need to have at least a normal IQ, that is, they exhibit an IQ of about 100. Multiple studies have confirmed that as IQ increases, creativity increases until it reaches a threshold of around 120-130 (Bowers, 1969; Getzels & Jackson, 1962; Yamamoto, 1964). However, possessing favorable personality traits are more likely than IQ to determine whether a person is a successful creator.

The top layer of the Pyramid is the specific talent one possesses. While a talent is inborn, it must also be nurtured for an individual to realize potential in the domain. Thus, students who exhibit what Piirto describes as “predictive behaviors” should be provided with mentorship to move through the different levels of mastery.

While an individual theoretically consists of the genetic, emotional, cognitive, and talent layers, Piirto (2004) also insists that environment play a grand role in the development, or the lack thereof, of a talent. These are represented by Environmental Suns. Piirto’s insistence on the
Pyramid of Talent Development

1. The Genetic Aspect
   - Genes
   - Ability
     - Specific Talent
       - Competence
         - Intelligence
           - Creativity
             - Conscientiousness
               - Openness
       - Personality
         - Amatas
           - Insight
             - Persistence
               - Risk-taking
       - Attributes
         - Leopards
           - Leadership
             - Responsibility
               - Independence

2. The Emotional Aspect
   - Sensitivity
   - Emotions
     - Confidence
       - Communication
         - Collaboration
           - Collaboration
             - Collaboration
               - Collaboration

3. The Cognitive Aspect
   - Knowledge
   - Skills
     - Problem-solving
       - Mathematics
         - Creativity
           - Innovation
             - Invention
               - Invention

4. The Talent Aspect
   - Talent
     - Career
       - Music
         - Drama
           - Art
             - Literature
               - Science
                 - Technology
                   - Business
                     - Entrepreneurship

5. The Environmental Aspect
   - Environment
     - Home
       - Community
         - Culture
           - School
             - Society
               - Economy
                 - Government
                   - Religion
                     - Education
                       - Sports
                         - Media
                           - Entertainment
                             - Politics
                               - Philosophy
                                 - Religion
                                   - Science
                                     - Technology
                                       - Business
                                         - Entrepreneurship

* Talent becomes a "calling"
importance of environment is a classic case of nature vs. nurture. Without the innate predisposition to a domain, a talent will not develop; without an environment conducive to creative practices, a talent will lay dormant.

Piirto outlines five specific suns that may shine upon a talent, or fail to nourish it, because of “clouds.” The first sun is a nurturing home environment. Individuals must be raised in a home where inquiry, complexity, and ambiguity are acceptable. The second sun, community and culture, requires that the larger society value and support creative behaviors. The third sun is the school. This sun is especially important to have if the child does not have a phenomenally supportive home life. Teachers must identify giftedness and help fuel the passion for the domain.

Two lesser suns include gender and chance. Even in the 21st century, some avenues of expression may publicly befit either males or females. Historically, female writers have felt the need to assume a masculine pen name to earn public validation of their creative work. Female artist Lee Krasner was rejected after her first attempt at applying to art school. She was accepted on her second application, but was viewed by teachers as aggressive, difficult, and talentless. It took her many years and several schools to begin to have her work shown in exhibitions. Males were also found to self-promote more than female artists, which may be a factor in the difficulty encountered by Krasner in her attempts to exhibit her work (Piirto, 2004).

Like gender, chance cannot be controlled. Sometimes the development of a talent lies in the chance meeting of a mentor or expert. Opportunities may also occur by simply being in the right place at the right time. However, chance remains a minor sun since students who have been guided by an expert during the school years may seek out opportunities for success.
Finally, recognition of “the call” is necessary to become and remain engaged in creative pursuits. “The presence of talent, although absolutely necessary, is not sufficient” (Piirto, 2004, p. 144). An individual must have a passion in the soul to remain motivated to strengthen a talent.

Embedded in this Pyramid are the “Seven I’s” of the creative process: Inspiration, Imagery, Imagination, Intuition, Insight, Incubation, and Improvisation. Inspiration is the inhalation of stimulation; the mind and emotions are roused to activity. The inspiration one experiences at the beginning of a creative endeavor can come from one of six identified sources, the first being the muse. Paintings, songs, and poems have all paid homage to a visiting muse, whether it is the mysterious, smiling woman of the Mona Lisa or the motherly woman in Poe’s life that inspired To Helen-. The second source of inspiration comes from nature. Piirto notes that it is nature that causes children to become scientists, particularly biologists. One can also look to the reverence given to a bird or blooming flower in timeless haikus or the Chinese poets of the T’Ang Dynasty of the 8th century. Nature calls us to reconnect with Mother Earth, to reunite with our beginnings, our essence. Galen and Harvey developed notions of nature as art (Adler, 1952), but most theories see art as man’s contribution to nature. The third type of inspiration Piirto discusses is indeed a controversial one especially when discussing the nurturing of creativity. Inspiration though substances include the use of alcohol, drugs, and herbs. Many a renowned, genius artist like Kurt Cobain has been publicly known to produce creatively accepted works while under the influence of substances. Other times, inspiration comes from other’s creative works such as art and music. This inspiration from others is Piirto’s fourth source. The famed Greenwich Village was a haven for artists, bohemians, writers, and radicals from the 1920s to the 1950s. Community support allowed artists to mix with each other to share ideas and works. Many creative people learn to listen and trust their dreams and fantasies (or nightmares)
when it comes to their domain of giftedness. With this fifth source of inspiration, people believe that dreams can predict the future, solve problems, or explain something in a symbolic way. This subconscious stimulation provides a likely opportunity for seemingly incompatible ideas to merge and develop. The sixth inspiration Piirto discusses is novel experiences through travel. The newness of food, sights, sounds, smells and ordinary experiences are no longer ordinary. The mind, body, and soul are experiencing a “creative explosion” as new ways of sensing and intuiting are flooding the artist.

The second “I” in Piirto’s Pyramid is imagery. Imagery is often thought of as the spatial ability to visualize perceived objects vivid, but it is not confined to the visual. Figurative representations also recall sounds, smells and feelings. Artists must be able to evoke the sensation of immediate experience when it is no longer present.

Imagery is also an attribute of imagination, Piirto’s third “I,” According to Adler’s (1952) assessment of imagination, the object imagined need not be perceived by the senses as a memory is. Just as a memory is a rendering that is no longer available, so is the imagination a possibility that is not yet reality; imagination is something that is beyond us. Aristotle even felt that imagination allowed for a deeper conveyance of truth than facts (Piirto, 2004). Imagination allows for the insertion of symbolism into fact.

The fourth “I,” intuition, refers to the hunch that a creator experiences. While most people experience gut feelings about situations or events, the key to using intuition for creative purposes is to trust it. While intuition is not measurable or quantifiable, it is the preferred method of creative people for understanding the world (Piirto, 2004).

The fifth and sixth “I’s”—insight and incubation—are closely related. Insight refers to the “Eureka!” moment one has as the workings and underpinnings of a thought, idea, or feeling
are all at once revealed to the individual. After insight is gained, incubation occurs. Incubation is settling with the insight and waiting for development. Once a problem has been presented, it must have time to work itself out in the unconscious. Sometimes solutions present themselves during dreams, car rides, showering, etc.

The seventh and final “I” is improvisation, and its importance in the creative process cannot be overemphasized. Piirto notes that the stakes are higher during the impulsive formation of ideas, actions, words, or notes. The fluidity improvisation provides is key to reshaping ideas and thoughts into something novel.

**Artistic Domains**

Art is essential to binding together all of the disciplines because it naturally arises from the human experience. Art is not a subject to be taught in isolation. Instead, art should naturally grow from life experiences. It is not a waste of time when students partake in artistic endeavors. Instead, it involves all facets of our physical being and our mental awareness and interpretations of life.

Although there are enumerable artists whose biographical information supports Piirto’s analyses of highly creative people, I have chosen to present biographies of well-known artists, whom I personally interact with deeply and routinely, to best illustrate creative traits. The following biographies demonstrate how the levels of the Piirto Pyramid and the influence of Suns combine to produce creative outlets and opportunities.

**Visual Artists and Architects.** In studies of creative people, artists and architects were found to relish in the androgynous; that is they were unconcerned with which pursuits may be masculine or feminine (Barron, 1968). Barron also described how highly creative people are also more likely to remain pacifists. The connection between androgyny and pacifism is attributed to
the belief that it is still the men and not the women in society who decide whether or not to go to war.

“One of the consistent findings throughout all of the studies is that creative people in all domains prefer complexity and asymmetry in design. This came to be called tolerance for ambiguity” (Piirto, 2004, p. 151). Tolerance for ambiguity refers to the ability of an individual to simultaneously entertain multiple, complex thoughts in the mind. Rounding out the dominant personality traits found among visual artists and architects are naiveté, nonconformity, intuition, and ambition. Successful creators in this field are flexible, desire both variety and fresh perspectives, are unconcerned with social norms, and value intuition over the sensory in understanding the world (Piirto, 2004).

The cognitive level of the Pyramid for architects and visual artists involves a strong sense of spatial visualization. However, there is a gender difference in this talent (Piirto, 2006). Male artists generally outscore their female counterparts in spatial ability tests. Closely related to this perceptive ability is critical sensitivity to the arts. Piirto (2004) cites Gardner and Hurwitz’s studies that theorize perception talent is needed to be a critical reviewer of the arts, but that verbal ability is dominant. The passion for the domain requires the individual to feel a calling from the soul to engage in the vocation.

The suns for visual artists and architects seem to indicate that artistic talent runs in families. Perhaps this is due not to a genetic factor, but as the sun represents environmental influences, freedom of expression and risk taking are fostered and encouraged among artists who themselves require that freedom. As far as school and formal education in art, successful artists generally forge a specific path in middle school and high school that leads them to an art school. It is here where the surrounding communities support engagements with artists and their work.
In regards to the gender sun, Piirto found that male students were likely to be evaluated based upon the likeability of personality while women were judged on perceptual and artistic ability.

Picasso was born the son of an art teacher and received his earliest training from his father. With the support of his parents, Picasso was sent to study art at the most exclusive schools in Spain despite his reluctance to follow school formalities. Due to an atmosphere that allowed artistic freedom, Picasso was able to focus solely on his art to the detriment of his academic schooling and his personal relationships (Richardson, 1996).

Characteristic of many artists, Picasso remained a Pacifist during the Spanish Civil War, World War I, and World War II (Richardson, 2007). He chose not to take sides nor fight for a side, although his most famous work, *Guernica*, depicts the horrors and evils of war. Picasso also received necessary support from his bohemian lifestyle and colleagues including Matisse, Gris, and Braque.

The ambition and drive found in visual artists is not always a positive, personal force. Picasso’s confidants were to meet bitter fates as his drive for creative expression drove the women in his life to either insanity or suicide. “All is not rosy when considering the drive and ambition of certain well-known creators” (Piirto, 2004, p. 155). During his lifetime, Picasso maintained numerous affairs, even during his two marriages, which were always abusive. He also frequented European brothels to help fuel his narcissistic personality. One of his mistresses was so set on marrying the artistic genius, that after his death, she hung herself.

The characteristics illustrated here: genetic proclivity, the presence of a domain mentor, the ability to tolerate ambiguity, and the drive of ambition, melded together to produce creative genius. These particular traits were needed in just the right amounts to produce desired results.
Not only was Picasso painting unique works for himself, but he was painting pieces of work valued by society.

Along with Braque, Picasso is credited with the invention of a whole new form of painting: Cubism. Picasso rejected the traditional belief that art should replicate nature and instead wanted to highlight the two-dimensionality of the canvas (Rewald, 2004). An exemplary piece highlighting this geometric form is his oil-on-canvas, *Weeping Woman*. Here, we are shown an example of how closely Picasso's inner anguish was tied to his artistic and creative work. He depicts one of his mistresses in a highly stylized and exaggerated state of misery (Smith, 1994). The nostrils are opened and flared, and the brows are angled to such a degree that the bewilderment is evident on the face of the woman. She is distorted and ugly, but we know that she is in pain.

The advent of Cubism did not begin and end with paintings. Cubism extended itself into sculptures of the same time in the works of Archipenko, Duchamp-Villon, and Lipchitz. The freeing concepts of Cubism also had far-reaching influences on Dadaism, Surrealism, and Abstract artists (Rewald, 2004). Thus, Picasso's artwork provided works of value in his own time but also provided a framework for others to create future unique pieces of work.

**Creative Writers.** While a gene for faculty with words has not been identified, it does appear that writers are less likely than visual artists to be gifted in the domain if their family was also gifted in writing. When delving into the Emotional Aspect of the creative writer’s Pyramid, writers possess both envy of other writers and an ambition to outdo colleagues. Writers are also incredibly fluent in production of manuscripts, so that it is not unusual for a writer to lose count of how many pieces have been written.
While it has been earlier noted that some creators find inspiration through substances, Piirto (2004) warns of the danger of psychiatric drugs on the creative process. As writers are 35 times more susceptible to mental illness, having the creative process damaged by such medication is a very real danger (Jamison, 1995). During a study of prolific writers, Andreason (1987) noted an overwhelming abundance of writers who suffer from manic-depression. During the 15-year study, two of the thirty subjects successfully committed suicide, while many others attempted suicide or spent some time in a psychiatric institution. Rothenberg (1990) observes that many poets, if they did not commit suicide, spent a great deal of time in sanitariums, or became slaves to alcohol. Rothenberg also notes that more than half of the U.S. writers who have won the Nobel Prize for Literature also had issues with alcoholism. It is plausible that these artists used substances to aid in the creative process or to help ease the anxiety experienced while engaged in the same process. Andreason observes that these writers tended to produce significant work during breaks between manic-depressive episodes rather than during either the highs or the lows.

According to Piirto (2004), it is easy to measure intelligence of writers because their IQ can be tested using conventional tests that focus on verbal skill. In this Cognitive Aspect, writers scored higher than even the gifted population in terms of verbal intelligence. The fact that we assume we can measure verbal intelligence so readily indicates a bias our society has for certain types of creativity.

The passion for the domain, like the visual artists, rests in a pure passion to write. Writers write because there is nothing else for them to do. However, psychologists and theorists disagree on whether the passion to write stems from internal turmoil that must be worked out or from a higher calling, a happy need that must be filled (Collins, M. & Amabile, T., 2005).
The sun of home involved with creative writers is not a happy one. When educators tend to think of the ‘right home environment” when it comes to creativity, they may assume that means a supportive and loving one, much like the families of visual artists and architects. Piirto (2004) paints us a different home life for creative writers. It seems that eminent writers come from a home environment filled with turmoil, depression, substance abuse, and an absent father.

Edgar Allan Poe came from a broken home in all ways. According to Piirto’s analysis, this unhappy environment helped develop the creative genius Poe has become. Poe was born to actor parents who left him an orphan by his second birthday. Poe was split from his elder brother, Henry, and his younger sister, Rosalie, and sent to live with a businessman and his sickly wife. Poe experienced an odd relationship with his foster father as he was at times praised and lavished with money and material goods, and still at others left in great debt without means for obtaining food or shelter. Despite Poe’s attempts to reconcile with his foster father, John Allan used his last meeting with Poe to curse him instead of blessing him.

Poe was also unlucky in love. After the death of his beloved wife Virginia, who died at the same age of the same disease as his mother, Poe attempted to woo many women. His words were unreceptive to the women as his financial and personal reputations were unbefitting a suitable groom. The literary genius even attempted suicide to attract competing women’s attention and to test their devotion to him.

Piirto asserts that writers possess very high IQs, and Poe's is a fitting example. According to biographer Jeffrey Meyers (1992), Poe often felt tormented by his high intelligence and felt that no others could understand him. His consciousness of his intellectual superiority often led him to mock those in a position to help the writer, and thus he often found himself without work and mostly without money.
Poe’s substance abuse also fits the profile of creative writers. It is well documented by biographers (Meyers, 1992) that Poe was often found drunk. As one acquaintance said, Poe drank “as though there was something inside him that he had to kill” (Meyers, 1992, p. 25). He drank not for the social aspect and certainly not for the taste. He was known for drinking as much as possible in the shortest time possible just to become intoxicated. Poe’s drinking was so excessive that he fell prey to hallucinations, tremors, paranoia, and vivid nightmares. It was alcohol that led him to a death befitting a scene from one of his macabre stories: after being found drunk and semi-unconscious in a gutter, Poe was hospitalized in a cell with bars where he hallucinated until the time of his death just days later. Edgar Allan Poe died alone, poor, and tormented, at the age of 40.

Poe's life is a textbook illustration of the creative characteristics found in writers. He very much came from a broken home and lived his entire life in a state of unbalance and unease. His biographer has also documented Poe's substance abuse and possession of a very high IQ. Different from the necessary ingredients to produce creativity in the visual domain, the troubled life of a writer leads to creativity in his work.

Perhaps the most famous short story of all time, *The Tell Tale Heart*, provides us with a look inside of Poe's macabre and tortured life. In this Gothic story, an unnamed narrator admits to killing an old man, all the while trying to convince himself and others of his sanity. However, through his detailed plans and description of events, it becomes very clear to readers that the narrator is indeed insane. The narrator also fancies himself smarter than the police who have been sent to investigate a scream heard by a neighbor, and he becomes over-confident. This false intelligence and state of madness lead him to confessing the murder.
Poe's imagination and originality as well as his command of the English language have made him a household name (Edgar Allan Poe, 2011). *The Tell Tale Heart* is a how-to on writing short stories and moving the plot along, impacting writers from the mid-1800s to present day. Poe's legacy continues with the duration of his writings as well as providing the architecture for the modern short story.

**Musicians.** There is support that there is some Genetic Aspect to musical talent, as composers, musicians, and conductors tend to run in families (Piirto, 2004). Many people recognize the foundations of music. Whether it comes from spiritual hymns or a rock song about lost love, all humans recognize the emotion and rhythm of music.

The Emotional Aspect of musicians, composers, and conductors has some similarities, but each division demonstrated distinction. All appear to be sensitive, self-disciplined, introverted, and detached. However, composers tend to be more radical than musicians and conductors, as well as more aloof and intellectual. The Cognitive Aspect of the musically gifted demonstrated a slightly higher IQ than peers with the same level of education (Piirto, 2004).

Talent in this domain does appear to be a “thorn.” Piirto notes that the most original pieces of music are composed or performed during periods of tremendous personal pain. Many musicians may have chosen another professional field, but they choose music because they want to be engaged with the emotion.

Kurt Cobain rose to fame in the 1990s while fronting the alternative rock band, Nirvana. The band sold 50 million records, won Grammys, and made the top music video of the last twenty-five years while Cobain himself was named *Rolling Stone*’s “Artist of the Decade” (Burlingame, 2006). Despite the money, fame, and success, Cobain exhibited classic behaviors and thoughts of the highly musically gifted.
Like other musicians Piirto cites, Cobain was born into a family of musicians. His enjoyment and experiments with music then, were not a surprise to his parents. Cobain’s happy family life came to an end when his parents separated when he was nine years old. He then bounced from relative’s homes to friend’s couches in an attempt to find a place to belong. When he could not find a place to fit in at school, either, he dropped out. It did not take long for Cobain to begin experimenting with drugs. He made the switch from marijuana to heroin after suffering severe stomach pains and wanting to self-medicate.

During the drug use, the suicide attempts, and failed relationships, the most highly acclaimed music was written by Cobain. Many of his songs were based on his life’s torment (Burlingame, 2006). For Cobain, music truly was a “thorn” that led to his demise. At the height of Nirvana’s success, Cobain could no longer take the pressure and perceived judgment from the world; he overdosed on heroin before shooting himself in the head at the age of 27.

The characteristics that combined to produce creative genius in Kurt Cobain were genetic proclivity, introversion, sensitivity, and detachment. Biographer Burlingame (2006) noted that Cobain abused illicit substances because he “felt the drug took him out of his shell” (p. 65). In the end, the same introversion and sensitivities that produced great music were also Cobain's downfall.

Cobain penned the song Lithium, and it became one of Nirvana's many hits. The song takes on two meanings as one reads through the title and lyrics. The first interpretation is that the person in the song needs lithium to control episodes of mania. The song has the person constantly changing his mind about something: "I'm so excited/ I can't wait to meet you there/ And I don't care.” The second interpretation suggests that the person in the song is using crystal meth made from lithium batteries. Regardless of which instance Cobain was describing, he
poured his own emotional turmoil and drug addiction into the lyrics: "I'm so happy 'cause today/
I found my friends/ They're in my head/ I'm so ugly, that's okay."

Kurt Cobain and his band were important to the development and spread of grunge and alternative rock during the 1990s. Nirvana was part of a new, edgier, grittier music scene that spoke to the dirty underside of life. It was a side many were eager to latch on to, and that propelled the band's success and its front man into superstardom. By combining soft melodies and harsh lyrics, Nirvana helped create a new genre of music that came to define a decade and a generation.

**Athletes, Dancers, and Actors.** The final group of creative artists to be discussed here are physical performers. This category includes actors, dancers, and athletes. There is obviously a case of acting families as evidenced through the Coppolas, Fondas, Barrymores, and Baldwins. One can also recall the families of athletes such as the Barbers and Mannings. It stands to reason then, that there is a genetic component to physical giftedness that allows an individual a more acute understanding of his or her body than experienced by the general population.

The Emotional Aspect of physical performers resembles personality traits seen in other domains (Piirto, 2004). Different from many other domains, however, is the extraverted nature of actors. They are the most extraverted of all creative domains. They must also be incredibly observant and acutely intuitive of human nature and needs. It is only through this intricate understanding that actors are successful in their craft.

Actors, dancers, and athletes require active memory in the Cognitive Aspect (Piirto, 2004). Physical performers must also intuitively reject the Western idea of the Cartesian split; body and mind must be one. In addition to kinesthetic intelligence, creators in this domain
require inter- and intra-personal intelligence to participate as an active and helpful member of a team.

The sun of family is important in the realization of physical creativity. Creativity and freedom of expression is valued in the home. More important than the sun of family in predicting success in the domain is the sun of chance. Being at the right place at the right time is paramount to achieving success and recognition. Hopefuls must be geographically located in areas where their talent will likely be recognized. A teenage actor from rural Arkansas is less likely than one in New York City to be “discovered.” Ballerina Suzanne Farrell credits her mother with the opportunity to work with the New York City ballet when a scout advised a teenage Farrell that auditioning in NYC would be beneficial (Piirto, 2004).

Often necessary to achieve great success, world-renowned American dancer and choreographer, Martha Graham, enjoyed the support of her family in pursuing her dreams to dance, despite her parents’ initial resistance. Graham displayed nearly all of the Emotional Aspects common to creative artists including a strong need for justice and compassion. Unique to her domain, however, was her outspokenness and extraversion. Graham began her life as a bossy older sister who maintained her status as ringleader among her siblings (Freedman, 1998). In high school she became editor of her school literary magazine, played sports, acted lead roles in plays, and served as vice president of student council. This ringleader role stayed with Graham as she spent her life building up the most famous American dance company of all time, insisting on being involved in every step to ensure perfection.

Most of her works were commentaries, like her 1927, *Revolt*. This was a dance of “social protest, a stark, forceful comment on injustice and the outraged human spirit” (Freedman, 1998, p. 44). Other dances such as *Heretic* and *Immigrant: Steerage, Strike* conveyed the message of
hardship and intolerance that many Americans endured at the time. Typical of artists who use their bodies as art, Graham wanted her dances to be felt with the soul rather than understood by the mind.

Although Graham’s dances were seen as strange and disturbing as compared to the technically beautiful Russian ballets, in 1932 she became the first dancer to receive the Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1937, she was invited by Eleanor Roosevelt to be the first American dancer to perform at the White House. She was also the first American dancer to be dubbed as a cultural ambassador. As popular as Martha Graham had become throughout the world, she refused to perform at the 1936 Olympics under Nazi-Germany rule; she could not reconcile being a part of what her art so ferociously fought against (Freedman, 1998).

Despite dancing principal parts into her sixties, Graham became devastated by her aging, arthritic body. Relinquishing roles to younger dancers pained Graham to such an extent that she became a heavy drinker. After her last performance at the age of seventy-five, she sank into a deep depression, and friends feared that the combination of her mental and physical state would quickly lead to death. Fortunately, Graham found some life again after she resumed choreographing, teaching, and taking curtain calls. She continued to do so until her death at the age of 96.

Martha Graham exhibited all of the qualities of a creative genius in the physical domain as outlined by Piirto (2004). She was a natural extrovert who was supported by her family in her ambitious pursuits. She was intuitive of human emotions, and it showed in both her choreography as well as her dancing. Her sensitivity and the drive to succeed can best be illustrated by the jealous depressions she fell into as she watched her body age and younger dancers take her place.
Graham's *Lamentation* (1930/1976) is illustrative of the new dance form that Martha Graham was introducing to the world. In contrast to the graceful lines and pointed toes of traditional ballets, one sees harsh angular use of the limbs and flexing of the feet. The dancer presents her internal life struggle to the audience by stretching and wrestling with a large stretchy tube of fabric. There are pushes and pulls to represent the strife she is experiencing. Also different from other dances to date was the fact that most of the dance was performed seated. Despite this unusual position, one is still left with a deep impression of the performer's suffering. Martha Graham merged her intuition about human behavior and emotion with knowledge of the body to create something unique and of value.

With the advent of Graham's own dance company came the dawning of a new dance era. Audiences were seeing dramatic social and personal issues performed on the stage in a way never before seen (Freedman, 1998). Graham took what the world knew about dancing and merged it with the ideas of social justice and personal pain. She is still considered to be one of the greatest choreographers of all time, and her dances remain world-renowned.

**Nurturing Talent**

The classical cellist Yo-Yo Ma is a typical example of the dedication and mentoring needed to attain a certain level of expertise. Ma began playing the cello at the age of four under his father’s instruction. He later came to be a pupil of the head of Julliard and then went to Harvard to expand his horizons (*Yo-yo ma*, 2007). Without the intensive training of experts within a scholastic/academic setting, Ma would not have achieved the success that he has.

Perhaps the most important sun for the musical domain is that of the school and mentors. For a musician to be successful, it seems that one must be nurtured throughout secondary school,
a conservatory, and private teachers. It is unlikely that the exposure or training one receives during the regular course of K-12 schooling will be sufficient for a musician to blossom and grow.

Piirto draws heavily upon studies conducted by the Goertzels for support of her Pyramid. The Goertzels (1978) conducted biographical studies of 300 eminent, creative people. Included in this group were visual artists and architects. In regards to genetics and environmental factors, it appears that both are relevant in the development of talent. However, among this domain there is evidence that artistic families breed artistic children, especially sons (Piirto, 2004). But as noted earlier, notable artists take certain paths throughout middle and high school to lead them to train with experts at art schools.

New Orleans artist Bruce Brice emphasizes the importance of encouragement in the schools for artistic and creative achievement. “As a successful artist, Bruce feels that art is not effectively promoted in the Crescent City” (Bruce R. Brice: The Today Show via Jackson Square, 1974). It was only through a mentorship outside of the school system that he found his voice in painting. His paintings “tell a story,” and it is one of human spirit and merriment. Art and aesthetics should be incorporated into the public education, as the very soul of the city seems to bring Brice’s work to life. His lively vision of a jazz funeral in the Treme neighborhood evokes a sense of celebration, even in death.

We cannot assume that our students will be as lucky as Brice to find a mentor to guide them through the experiences with art. Although he was fortunate enough to find his guidance from outside the school, it is very clear that our schools must now assume the role of teaching our students to tell their own story. It is crucial for teachers to realize that they are not working with blank slates; students enter school with their own ideas and interests.
Piirto (2004) illustrates that not only has genetics and emotional aspects been laid, but the suns of the environment, home, and gender are present. It is at this juncture that talented students reach educators. Dewey writes on the nature of a child child:

He is not purely a latent being. . . . The child is already intensely active, and the question of education is the question of taking hold of his ideas, of giving them direction. Through direction, through organized use, they tend toward valuable results, instead of scattering or being left to merely impulsive expression. (1915/1990, p. 36)

These “intensely active” children must necessarily be given guidance, mentorship, and support if the entire educational institution is to shepherd creative minds to reach their fullest potential.

Using Piirto’s Pyramid Model of Talent Development we understand that creative success in a domain is dependent upon genetics, personality, and external environmental factors. While the suns of chance, luck, gender, and hope are beyond the control of educational institutions, it is the educator who is responsible for the identification of predictive creative behaviors in students. Beyond the classroom, institutions have a social and ethical obligation to provide mentorship and guidance to future creators.
CHAPTER 6: SILVER LININGS

“How to live seems much more important than why.”
~John Clellon Holmes~

Reflecting on the Beginning

Confused and saddened by the evaporation of art programs in contemporary American public schools, I began this study wanting to explore the consequences, intentional or not, of their absence. The arts remain something seen as “special” or “separate” from our ordinary lives and our goal as a nation. To be “number one”—and to stay that way—is America’s top concern. A review of the educational policies and practices in place show that most Americans believe that being “number one” means having the most wealth. Without ignoring the necessity of a healthy economy to a nation’s success, I am often wondering why commerce is our only criterion for prosperity. My work in this dissertation explored the relationship between art, creativity, and social justice; how the theories of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Jane Piirto inform our understanding of this relationship; and the role of the arts in contemporary curriculum.

Making the Familiar Strange

At the start of this theoretical exploration, I genuinely believed that I would have devised concrete steps—a “how to” if you will—of uniting these aesthetic theories with my practice in the classroom. And now I laugh. Reflecting on the time that has lapsed since the majority of the introduction was conceived, my error in judgment seems a little more forgivable. (Right?)

I initially imagined that my thorough study on the relationships between art, aesthetics, creativity, and social justice would seamlessly translate into specific steps for making my classroom into something more meaningful, more engaging, and more demanding than the classrooms of my colleagues. Version 2.0.
But it was my first year teaching. I was not yet aware of how profoundly bureaucracy, the culture of a school, and the demands of basic responsibilities would keep me and my students from achieving this grand vision of using the arts to discover each other and the world. In the back of my mind I thought, if I could just get “caught-up” with providing specific feedback on essays, sorting assessment data for intervention groups, get to that last piece of office paperwork on my desk, then I would be able to bring art into my room in a way that would change us all.

And then life really started happening. Eight years have elapsed from the time I began writing chapter one to the time that I write this final chapter, and those eight years were full of so many life-changing events and experiences.

I housed my parents, sister, and two cats in a one-bedroom apartment after Hurricane Katrina rendered my family’s home temporarily uninhabitable. I ate MREs delivered to my parents’ front porch as I took pictures of our belongings spread out onto the ground (the candy was almost always taken before they arrived).

I attended my high school reunion. I got my first and only tattoo (for now), and I saw the New Orleans Saints win the Superbowl.

I became somebody’s wife.

I became somebody’s mom.

I wallowed in guilt over giving more of myself to other people’s children instead of my own daughter. I voted for the first Black President of the United States, and I cried when 33 miners emerged from the Chilean earth. I directed a couple of community plays and auditioned for one. I heard that Chuck Norris counted to infinity. Twice.

I consider these significant experiences as I contemplate my failure to meet my initial goal with this dissertation. These events immediately came to my mind when trying to
determine how and why my initial thoughts about aesthetics and education changed so drastically. Events so...big...they surely impacted a change in my philosophy.

Right?

But I have found that it is now the subtle occurrences that enter my mind when I reflect on my current understanding of these themes and their relationship to each other. “Insignificant” would not be the correct term for these moments. No, it’s just that they so cleverly blend in with the background of the ordinary that had I not become increasingly aware of the importance of the present, I would have missed the opportunity to undergo my own transformative experience, bringing me new insights into my field of study.

These nuggets of opportunity sneak up on me in funny places, like when I’m rocking my baby girl to sleep, or rushing around in my car to drop my child off at the sitter before signing in at work. Actually, while there are lots of times the past pops into the present, it is in my car, on my way to the sitter, listening to a song that I loved in high school, where I’d like to begin this concluding chapter.

It began on a day not unlike this one. I was running behind, and it seemed that every responsibility I had was too important to come in second. The time: Early one weekday morning in the not-too-distant past. The place: My car. The song: Get it Ready, Ready. The insight...well, for that one, I’ll need to start at the beginning.

**Talk That Stuff.** Starting in the late 1980s and early 1990s in what the *New York Times’* writer Jonathan Dee calls “the cultural Galapagos that is New Orleans,” (2010, p. MM22) a new genre of music was born. *Bounce*, drawing from Southern hip hop beats and the traditions of the Mardi Gras Indians, became the lens through which I came to understand how creativity, art, and the aesthetic experience coalesced to help form the Great Community.
This party music uses *call-and-response* to establish a relationship with the audience (Dee, 2010). In the case of bounce, the MC “calls out” a phrase, often unintelligible to an outsider, and the audience responds through movement. The call-and-response quality is what allows bounce to offer dynamic interactions between self, the Other, and the environment; through these interactions, aesthetic experiences are born.

Jerome Temple, a teacher in Jefferson Parish who is better known in the Greater New Orleans area as DJ Jubilee, made himself a local legend in the late 1990s when his song “Get Ready, Ready” became a staple at every high school dance. The hit starts by calling everyone out to the dance floor: “Gettin' ready, gettin' ready, gettin' ready, ready.” The audience’s response is always to clap their way into a cluster in preparation to dance. DJ Jubilee then proceeds to shout out what David Dennis (2012) calls “seemingly meaningless phrases” to the uninitiated. To those with roots in the region, however, every nonsensical phrase is a call for the audience to dance.

Each time the song played during block parties in the 1980s and 1990s, the “calls” and their order within the song would be different; no performance was ever the same. Early versions of “Get Ready, Ready,” like most bounce songs, always demanded audience acknowledgement of their neighborhood of residence (Dee, 2010; Dennis, 2012). But while pride for neighborhoods is abundant, pride for area high schools is insane. DJ Jubilee capitalized on that pride when he recorded a version of “Get Ready, Ready” and added the line: “What’s the name of your school?” (DJ Jubilee, 1997) Dennis (2012) emphasizes that “anyone that understands New Orleans culture knows that high school pride trumps all and this aspect of the song plays directly into that.”
Returning to that hurried morning in the car, I began to reflect (seemingly by accident) on the many high school dances I attended in the 1990s. Always responding “Fontainebleau!” to Jubilee’s call, I now see how bounce music—always new, always evolving with audience participation—serves as a way to form community. In a school full of social cliques, the song that calls dancers to “walk it like a dog,” “monkey on a stick,” and “A walk it like a serve it like a bounce, it like yeah,” for 7 and a half glorious minutes, the 1600 of us moved as a single unit.

Similar to Dewey, teacher, artist, and scholar Eric Jensen (2010) values the capacity of art to bind a community through shared experiences. The arts “promote social skills that enhance awareness of others and tolerance of differences” and “serve as vehicles for cultural identity and free expression” (2010, p. 5). By participating in Fontainebleau High’s rendition of “Get It Ready, Ready,” we proclaimed the joint love of our school. The shared experience brought forth a common understanding. Participating with this artwork allowed us to identify and share our cultural identity. While this small opening may seem insignificant to some, my reflection on this particular song in my car that morning became key to not only the understanding of the aesthetic theories in this dissertation, but also of my own understanding of what I believe art can and should look like in the pursuit of social justice.

Adding to my understanding of bounce as formation of community, both David Dennis (2012) and Jonathan Dee (2010) report on the unlikely spread of this regional music to other areas of the country. I never knew, in all of my times doing the “sissy poo,” that what I heard on the radio was something only being played for New Orleans. Bounce would trickle out into far-off places as high school students began moving away for college, but a single devastating event would introduce the music to club-goers in big cities.
A wave of exposure to the genre occurred when thousands of Louisiana residents were displaced after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. As the displaced musicians tried to piece together the remnants of their lives, so went bounce music. In Dee’s 2010 interview, bounce rapper Big Freedia cites her homesickness for the Big Easy as the reason she began performing in states such as Texas, Georgia, and New York. And even though these new audiences enjoy the 808 beats of her music, their general lack of understanding her “calls” reiterates the importance of common understandings and common values in order for participants to share in an aesthetic experience. By bringing with them music that uniquely belongs to a group of people which does not include them, the opportunity to see life from another’s perspective began to emerge.

A subgenre of bounce, categorized by those outside of bounce culture as sissy bounce, illustrates how the music I grew up with can provide an opportunity for social justice, even if only for the few minutes everyone is on the dance floor. Dee (2010) asserts that while music produced and consumed by the Black population tends to be both homophobic and misogynistic, sissy bounce offers females the opportunity to restore the sexual balance. The lyrics of most bounce, including sissy bounce, are composed of explicit lyrics and sexually suggestive responses. But at shows like those put on by Big Freedia (a large male by birth but “ma’am” in the city), there is a shift in sexual power among participants. Both Dee and Big Freedia note that the women take control of the dance floor, pushing the men to the outskirts to watch. The women gyrate—twerk in bounce lingo—to seemingly offensive lyrics, but they do not perform for the men. They perform for Freedia. And if a man gets any ideas about their dancing as an invitation, Big Freedia, all 6’2” of her, puts an immediate end to it. For the moment, the women feel safe, unthreatened, empowered. “You’re the agent of all this aggressive sexuality instead of its object” (Dee, 2010). For the moment, freedom is being chosen.
Fifteen years after “Get it Ready, Ready” was recorded for radio play in Greater New Orleans, I think of that time in high school and our enjoyment of the song and I think I understand what we were doing there. But I can guarantee that fifteen years ago there was zero reflection on my part about the implications of participating with bounce. But does that matter? In Dewey’s eyes, an aesthetic experience demands reflection to synthesize the past and present to inform the future.

In speaking of reflection, we naturally use the words weigh, ponder, deliberate—terms implying a certain delicate and scrupulous balancing of things against one another. Closely related names are scrutiny, examination, consideration, inspection—terms which imply close and careful vision. (Dewey, 1910, p. 57)

Can I say that I pondered the “delicate and scrupulous balancing” of diversity and uniformity and time and space in my high school gym? I cannot.

The more I thought about the situation and how it fit into the aesthetic theories of Dewey, Greene, and Piirto, I began to question whether my high school experience even counted as an experience. Dewey repeatedly asserts that “experience in the degree in which it is experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up within one’s own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world” (1934, p. 18). Can I honestly say that while I responded to the call “do the Big Keith” that I was “active and alert” to this collaborative display of unity through participation in dance? Greene says that “we must reach out toward the object or the text or the performance through an act of consciousness that grasps that which is presented” (1996, p. 30). Was there a certain consciousness my peers and I possessed, which allowed us to grasp the opportunity to have an aesthetic experience as described by Dewey? I fully doubt it.

We were not—I was not—wide-awake to the interaction among self, the Other, and the environment during—I didn’t even know what to call it. Was dancing to “Get it Ready, Ready”
even an “engagement with the arts?” Am I being naïve in wondering if in that sweaty moment of
twerking, a group of teenagers were unknowingly using the arts as a vehicle to build community?
Or did our collective teenage obliviousness to these deeply philosophical notions about
community, consciousness, and experience cancel out any gossamer-like threads indicating the
weaving of a communal aesthetic experience?

After my first *Aha* moment in the car that morning, I was not yet ready to answer any of
these questions brewing in the background. I pushed my memory aside and turned back once
again to Dewey, Greene, and Piirto. The thoughts of how each theorist addressed the idea of an
arts-integrated curriculum in a formal school setting prompted my interest in finding out if there
were schools out there who were “doing art” better than the traditional public school. In schools
where art matters—where art is not just found at afterschool dances but is a part of the enacted
philosophy—are students more creative? More successful? (And by whose definition?) Are the
schools that consciously and consistently incorporate the arts doing *it* better than we did?

**Where Art Matters**

I became familiar with New York’s High School for Arts Imagination and Inquiry during
the scope of my research on Maxine Greene, but as more questions began to developed, I felt
that continuing to look closer to home for examples of the intersecting philosophies would aid in
my understanding. I felt that rooting my understanding of these complex relationships in my
everyday world was in the spirit of Dewey’s philosophy of school and curriculum.

I believe that the school must represent present life - life as real and vital to the child as
that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground. I
believe that education, which does not occur through forms of life, forms that are worth
living for their own sake, is always a poor substitute for the genuine reality and tends to
cramp and to deaden. (Dewey, 1897, p. 78)
Embracing this approach led me to two acclaimed schools in my area: the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and the Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts.

Founded in 1973 by artists, educators, business leaders, and community activists, the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA) opened as a pre-professional arts training center. The idea for the Center was born from the need of an institution designed to nurture young talent in artistic domains while “demanding simultaneous academic excellence” (“Overview,” 2013). In an interview with Jonah Lehrer (2012), the President and CEO of NOCCA, Kyle Wedberg remarks, “We’re a vocational school, but the vocation we care about is creativity” (p. 231).

In addition to dance, drama, music, and the visual arts, students receive instruction in media arts, filmmaking, audio production, creative writing, and culinary arts, as well as the traditional disciplines taught in schools. NOCCA’s academic curriculum is fully approved by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, and graduates earn a state high school diploma. Graduates are also eligible for the state’s Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), a scholarship program for Louisiana residents who attend a Louisiana public college, university, or trade school (“TOPS Index Page,” 2013).

A school day at NOCCA, however, proves that there are as many differences between the center and traditional schools as there are similarities. While a majority of the area’s students spend the entire day rotating academic and elective classes, the day of a NOCCA student is divided into three distinct components. For students (students choose to attend a full-day program, a half-day program, or an afterschool-only program), the morning is spent in the traditional academic classes, which is led by a team of teachers in the interest of creating an interdisciplinary approach to instruction. Three hours each afternoon are devoted to training in
the student’s single specific artistic domain where working, professional artists mentor students. As the official school day ends, many students remain on campus to continue their studies in art or one of four foreign languages (French, Spanish, Latin, and Mandarin) offered on eight different levels. The NOCCA website says that “during this time, students work with faculty, individually or on group projects in order to expand upon that which is not understood, move to the next level, or dive more deeply into subjects that interest them.”

Alumni of NOCCA, which include musicians Wynton and Bradford Marsalis, Trombone Shorty, and Harry Connick, Jr., boast an impressive record of achievement each year with 95-98% attending a college or a conservatory (“Overview,” 2013). And of those who go on to attend a post-secondary institution, 80% receive scholarships that average out to $99,000 per student. This means that while the school has an annual operating cost of $5 million, each graduating class generates $12 million in scholarships (Lehrer, 2012). The school credits the success of its graduates to “the ethic of discipline and responsibility it instills in students” (“Overview,” 2013).

Less than an hour’s drive from NOCCA, the Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts (BRCVPA) has existed in East Baton Rouge as a magnet school for 17 years. BRCVPA enrolls over 400 students in their Kindergarten through fifth grade program. Students in East Baton Rouge Parish who wish to enroll must do so through an application process. Unlike other magnet programs in the parish, prospective students do not have to meet specific academic requirements to be eligible for enrollment, only an interest and aptitude for the arts.

Voted “2012 Magnet School of Excellence” by the Magnet Schools of America, students at BRCVPA follow an academic program, and “instruction in art, dance, music, drama, [and] creative writing are taught by specialists in each of those disciplines” (“Our Program,” 2013).
The school calls their curriculum an “arts-integrated program” that is “grounded in the proven research that instruction in the arts beginning at an early age enhances brain development and produces strong academic students” (“Our Program,” 2013). Unlike NOCCA, which specifically instructs students in artistic domains to nurture recognized talent, BRCVPA uses art as a means to enhance academic performance. “The integration of the arts throughout the curriculum reinforces academic skills by making connections for students which enhance their understanding” (“Our Program,” 2013).

And it appears that the school is fulfilling that mission. Like all Louisiana public school students, students at BRCVPA (beginning in the third grade) must take the state’s annual standardized test. The Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) is a high-stakes test for students in the fourth grade, meaning that they must perform at a minimum level of proficiency to advance to the fifth grade. The released data for the 2011-2012 school year shows that the students participating in this arts-integrated curriculum are outperforming students at other schools in Baton Rouge as well as the (slightly better performing) students in the rest of the state. In the four tested areas—math, English, science, and social studies—averages for fourth graders around the state range from 68-75%. By contrast, fourth graders at BRCVPA boast averages of 92-96% in all four areas (“LEAP Results,” 2012).

Although their purposes for using art in the curriculum are different, both NOCCA and BRCVPA appear to be fulfilling their respective school’s mission on student success, and unlike private schools, any student meeting requirements can enroll. The students at either school attend tuition-free, a bonus for the economically underprivileged population that comprises much of the schools’ student body (Lehrer, 2012).
Institutions like these are not without weaknesses, however. I view NOCCA and BRCVPA as semi-democratic in their approach to education since enrollment is open to “the public” and free of charge. It is in this way that the arts can be viewed as accessible. However, as I recalled Donald Blumensfeld-Jones objections to the Lincoln Center Institute’s summer workshops, I was able to understand the deficiencies in the arts curriculum models used at NOCCA and BRCVPA.

Blumensfeld-Jones (2012) argues that institutions such as NOCCA perpetuate the belief that “doing art” is privileged. Only those students identified as possessing talent in an artistic domain, or at least the raw potential for artistic talent are awarded spots at the center, and this selection process (not “choice”) automatically excludes the rest of us from being artists. “I learn, in part that when I view the world with fresh eyes I am not enacting artistry, for my pleasurable experiences in such situations come only “by fortunate chance” and are only a release from the habitual and practical” (p. 115). By only accepting those students deemed to possess a talent, barriers are built around art objects and access to them is restricted.

Blumensfeld-Jones’ criticism reminded me of an article unrelated (or so I thought) to my dissertation. In a study involving Baton Rouge’s foreign language immersion magnet school, Beal and Hendry (2012) looked at school choice and “how increased parental engagement affects democratic education” (p. 522). The researchers largely comment on democratic education in terms of race, but their findings have implications for democratic education in regards to accessibility of an arts curriculum—especially since the site of their study is another magnet program in Baton Rouge. Beal and Hendry found that despite the school’s prescribed racial quotas, it ultimately fails to provide a fair and equal opportunity to the magnet program for those Baton Rouge residents who are most underserved.
School choice did not create new “equal opportunity” but instead privileged nonblack and middle-class parents because of unintentional gatekeeping mechanisms. While EBRP magnet schools like South Boulevard may have contributed to a vision of democratic education in terms of achieving a degree of racial integration largely absent in the district as a whole, waiting lists excluded many black and low-income families from the high-quality school of their choice. (2012, p. 542)

Choice alone is insufficient to promoting and achieving a democracy. As Greene (1988) points out, “there is the question of being able to accomplish what one chooses to do. It is not only a matter of the capacity to choose; it is a matter of the power to act to attain one’s purposes” (p. 3-4). The “choice” to attend schools like NOCCA or BRCVPA does not ultimately rest with one person, nor is there only one choice to be made. A seemingly infinite number of choices are made within transactions between people, institutions, culture, history, and nature. By limiting the access of an arts-integrated curriculum to certain students—through application and lottery—the view of art’s role in the schools remains one that is restrictive and separate—of the selected.

Silver Linings

While initially dismayed that engagements with the arts are not widely valued or accessible, I remain excited and hopeful about opportunities outside of school and in the community for students and adults to participate in art—to make meaning together. Nonprofits and afterschool programs provide such opportunities, instead of within a prescribed curriculum. Their existence signifies a remaining desire to experience art and to relate to one another on a basic level. I have in some way been a part of the following artistic-aesthetic opportunities, and have been delighted in their continued support.

Peace Be With You. In 2002, Tibetan Buddhist monks visited Florida State University to ceremoniously dismantle a sand mandala. While outsiders to this practice often view the ritual
as one of construction and then destruction, *deconstruction* appropriately describes the careful ceremony, which aids in the attainment of peace, goodwill, and inner balance (Anderson, 2002).

A sand mandala can take anywhere from days to weeks to complete (Anderson, 2002). Millions of grains of colored sand are carefully laid flat atop an outline drawn on a wooden platform. The design of mandalas is taken from geometric shapes and spiritual symbols to promote healing while the rapid deconstruction that follows the construction represents the impermanence of life. The end of the ritual is marked by the collection of the sand for the closing ceremony. Here, half of the sand is distributed to the audience and half is cast into a nearby body of moving water so that it may carry the blessings to the rest of the world.

The ceremonial aspects involved with disassembling the Tibetan mandala induces “a sort of social glue that holds people together, as processes and products that personify and cement collective values, mores, and beliefs” (Anderson, 2002, p. 34). In my new understanding of aesthetics, participating in the construction and deconstruction of the sand mandala functions in the same way that singing the Star Spangled Banner pregame in Tiger Stadium embodies American’s collective belief in the sovereignty of our country and of the bravery and sacrifice that serves as our nation’s prologue.

I originally came across Anderson’s (2002) article on his students’ experience with the mandala a few years ago, and I had at that time intended to include it with the literature review for this dissertation. As a happy accident (or divine collaboration), the Baton Rouge newspaper prominently covered a similar visit by nine Tibetan monks in late May of 2013. Nine monks, accompanying the Dalai Lama as he traveled to deliver Tulane’s commencement address (and then on to Baton Rouge to celebrate the Buddha’s birthday), took four days to construct their sand mandala. The ritual, which was open to the public, ended as the colored sand of the
deconstructed mandala was poured into the Mississippi River so that peace would be spread beyond the confines of the city (Wold, 2013).

The public turnout to observe the artful construction of the mandala was welcomed. *The Advocate* article notes that the Abbot of the local Buddhist meditation center was “happy when the monks asked to come to Baton Rouge not only because of the mandala they would create, but also to let the Baton Rouge Buddhist community learn from other outlooks” (Wold, 2013). The audience in Baton Rouge came out of their interest to see and learn of something that was outside of their experience. No one forced them to be there; no grades were attached to attendance. No, their presence, as well as the presence of the monks, tells me that contrary to Niebuhr’s (1944) harsh assessment of humanity, people are not as self-absorbed as he claimed them to be. Could it be that we have an innate desire as social creatures to learn about the experiences of others to aid in the understanding of them as well as ourselves?

**The Points Are Not the Point.** Part of the Baton Rouge Big Buddy Program, WordPlay is composed of area teens and adult mentors on a quest to write. This teen writing project hosts writing workshops and open mics, focusing on individual expression as well as community building. The mission of WordPlay, which serves about 400 area students each week, is to “create spaces where civic voices can be amplified” (2011). Each year I am an audience member at the All-City Poetry Slam, a showcase of the best in our area’s high school talent. The evening is always enjoyable, and my friends, with no ties to the local schools, come with me. But our role as an audience is not to sit and passively watch. We are encouraged, if not expected, to provide our approval of beautifully crafted metaphors or salient truths about life while the poets are on stage.
At the April 2013 All-City final event, I was able to see the experience from the perspective of an outsider as I watched the reactions of my husband to each performance. Really only coming as a favor to me, I watched as he quickly caught on that his active participation was required. When a musical line of alliteration flowed from the stage, the hum of fingers snapping urged the poet to continue. When a line stung—like a paper cut or fatal gash—the theatre resembled a Sunday sermon as affirmations—from a simple and sharp “Mm” to a more enthusiastic “Amen”—encouraged these teens to “speak their truth.” If my husband, or any of the other audience members, wanted to fully experience this artistic event, they were going to have to participate.

This particular forum, more than any other to date, forces me to confront things that I would prefer stay hidden. Like Greene’s (1995) painful reaction to Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, “it is not that I learned anything altogether new; moreover, I was made to see what I had not particularly wanted to see” (p. 98). For me, participating in the audience of the All-City Poetry Slam places me squarely in the sights of racism, parental neglect, sexism, and other social deficiencies so that I have no choice but to confront them.

I am always disturbed when I hear the poet speak their truth about an injustice, but I am unfailingly shocked and embarrassed when I am the perpetrator. Not me, personally, of course. Not to them. But to someone like them. I hear their rhythmic retellings of words said that cut them to the bone, shook their belief about who they are. And sometimes, I recognize those words. It’s not a pleasant experience then, sitting in the audience. I have been slapped into awareness about how my actions or words, benign in intent, affect others in ways unimaginined.

**Thirty Days and Nights of Literary Abandon.** National Novel Writing Month (that’s NaNoWriMo to insiders) takes place in November, but this California-based event has branched
out to encompass much more. The idea behind NaNoWriMo is simple, but insane. Participants commit to writing an entire 50,000-word novel, start to finish, in 30 days. Voluntarily.

When I first took part in this month-long hibernation into my office, I hoped that I could persuade some of my literary buddies into also accepting the challenge. Inevitably, I was met with the response: “Are you crazy? Why would you do that to yourself? On purpose?!?” It turns out that the reaction I received is standard for participants when they accidentally mention the grueling challenge.

I was afraid I would be alone in my experience. As I found out, I was. And was not. While no one I personally knew was participating, I was quickly included in a community of people who were like me, at least in the way that counted. An entire system of virtual cabins sorted participants from all over the world into writing groups. On a daily basis, I would give a 12-year-old boy in the Midwest feedback on his character’s superpowers, argue the appropriate spelling of “y’all”—I stand by “ya’ll”—and had teenage alpha readers in Australia providing me with pointers about portraying students in high school for my young adult novel.

The cabins at Camp Nano served as my editors, my cheerleaders, and my therapists. This strong sense of community is what helped turn NaNoWriMo into a 21-writer event in its first year, to over 250,000 in its 12th year in 2011 when I was a participant. Describing the rapid interest of this scary-awesome program, founder Chris Baty (2012) writes,

It was a beautiful, organic system where everyone, including complete strangers, chipped in with solutions. And better still, everyone took care of each other. This, too, would come to be one of NaNoWriMo’s greatest and most defining features. Friendly, funny writing support everywhere you turn.

**On Second Thought.** Considering these art programs—who participates, where they occur, why they occur—several contradictions emerge between their enactments and the juxtaposition of the philosophies of Dewey, Greene, and Piirto. It is through the detailed
reflection of my local art programs, the ones that bewitch and addict me, that finally bring me to consider ideas that had been ripening since the beginning of my journey to understanding. Of all the questions I had wanted to answer, one loomed the largest: Are arts in the school necessary?

**Is That Dewey Rolling Over In His Grave?**

Will students fail to learn how to be creative without arts in the curriculum? Are we really doomed to live an empty existence without conscious engagements with the arts? Should we focus on developing the artistic skills of those with talent in fear that without such nurturing, they will fail to recognize their full potential in life?

The answer to all of them is “no.”

When I began this inquiry, the thought of contradicting the aesthetic theories of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Jane Piirto was implausible. It’s not that these three aren’t geniuses in the field because clearly, they are. Without their decades and decades of scholarship, I could not have attained the understanding that I now possess of the relationship between art, creativity, and social justice. It is with great reverence for these three that I respectfully suggest that the view of this relationship held by those in the field of aesthetics and education is inadequate. Current scholars are using the principles of Dewey, Greene, and Piirto to ask how we can implement these principles in the classroom, what are the obstacles to enacting an arts-integrated curriculum, which art—fine or ordinary—should be studied. I suggest to you that they are asking the wrong questions. I am asking the one question the others have overlooked: *Should* we be implementing their principles of aesthetic education in the classroom?

**Pirouette and Pointe: They’re Not for Everyone.** I have no contention with Dewey’s and Greene’s fundamental belief that the arts are for everyone. Extensive literature clearly suggests that all people should be provided opportunities to create and participate in the various
artistic modes. But there exists a threshold where, without a talent in the domain, extensive study and performance are void of the benefits that a more general approach to the arts will bring.

Piirto has spent most of her academic career writing on the education and growth of the academically gifted and artistically talented. Her Piirto Pyramid of Talent Development is specific only to those identified as possessing talent and completely excludes those who are left. She has a point.

Creativity can be small and can happen to anyone, be taught to anyone. But the nurturing of artistic talent should be reserved for those whose work will likely win society’s approval. The two—art and creativity—are not necessarily bound to each other. With a short account of my love affair with dance, I illustrate the wisdom behind this philosophy.

I enjoy dance; I always have. As a little girl not yet in school, I begged my mother to take dance lessons. She enrolled me at a studio just blocks from our house, and I intermittently took dance classes from that point forward in just about every style known. I still take the occasional class, but I also find that same joy of dancing when I am at a nightclub or sweatin’ to the oldies. I learned how to endure, persevere, and grow. I learned to enjoy this body of mine, capable of doing so much even when it no longer fits into those skinny jeans in the back of my closet. And, truth be told, the greatest joy to date that I have experienced with my daughter is watching her dance and knowing that through her joy she will learn to endure, persevere, and grow. Sometimes, dance is absolutely all that I can think about and all I want to be doing. But I am not good. I suppose there have been worse dancers than me, but I possess none of the talent that would necessitate an intensive study of dance that someone with talent would require. Had I enrolled in a school like NOCCAA because I have this insane passion for dance, I would have
received instruction and guidance that I literally could not put to use. I have no doubt that frustration, and later apathy, towards that domain would have ensued. And then what benefits would I have received from engaging with dance?

Art, if used for the purposes of teaching creative thinking or for revealing the multiple perspectives of existence, does need to be so intensive that it constitutes more than half of a child’s time at school. At that point, it is simply called training. The desire for an aesthetic experience will likely be lost. And like athletes, only those possessing talent need dedicate so much to a specific domain. Treating everyone as if they had the passion or talent to succeed at a high level of artistic skill does not equate to social justice, but giving those highly artistic individuals the opportunity to advance does.

**Intuitive Presence.** Consciousness of the present and reflection of the past are crucial to Dewey’s understanding of an aesthetic experience. Consciousness of the present (one’s “wide-awakeness” for Greene), Dewey explains, is necessary to interpret the various and simultaneous transactions producing meaning within the experience as well as for determining one’s place within the community. Reflection of that meaning alters behavior ensuring a life more fully lived. In theory, these assumptions seem sound, but in practice, they don’t always hold up.

When I now think of twerking to DJ Jubilee at Fontainebleau High School with my classmates, I know we were creating community. There was no consciousness to display unity, to engage in an art form unique to our area code, to reaffirm our cultural identity with each replay. Save my reflection for this dissertation, I never once considered the implications and effects of bounce music. In the last 15 years, there has been no meaning I came to understand through the experience that altered future behavior. But that does not mean what we did during that dance mattered less.
When Dewey and Greene discuss consciousness, wide-awakeness, and reflection as essential to achieving an aesthetic experience, I believe they may not have seen the entire picture. By focusing only on these mental faculties, aesthetic experience becomes an intellectual endeavor. I offer here as a complement to wide-awakeness the idea of intuitive presence. Intuition by definition involves ways of knowing that are separate from mental reasoning. The creation of and participation in art—and of democracy—do not necessarily require us to use intellect when we possess an instinctive desire to understand the self and the Other. This intuitive state of being is every bit as compelling and earnest as having a conscience presence in a situation. As Blumensfeld-Jones (2012) asserts, we know from and through our bodies. In seven and half minutes, each and every reflection-free time we danced to “Get Ready, Ready” we enacted community through bodily movement. We heeded the calls and responded with our movement in a near automatic wave of action. Our engagement in the song and dance required neither a consciousness to the implications of our group dance nor a reflection of the interactions surrounding our experience. We were using music and dance as a means of creating democracy through an intuitive presence to our place in life at that one moment in time.

Considering the local art programs discussed here, I assert that art, and any meaning deriving from its creation or our spectatorship, happens within a community. While a single hand may hold the brush to a canvas, art is created within a community, not in isolation. The existence and number of these non-school experiences demonstrate that the community does place importance on the arts, quite contrary to the dominant philosophies in aesthetics and education.

Perhaps the arts are so important, and our desire to be accepted within a community so great, that we don’t need curricular mandates to ensure that we reap the benefits of engaging
with the arts. We are choosing to do this on our own. But why do we continue to choose the arts, whether through participating in religious ceremonies or toasting marshmallows with virtual cabin mates during a web-based writing retreat? Although contradictory to the scholarly literature, I say it is because we don’t need to be taught how to be human. There are aspects of a community that are self-generating, which need no explicit or formal instruction to ensure its future existence. If schools do not provide places and spaces to have meaningful engagements with the arts, we have responded by saying, “Hey, that’s OK, we’re going to do it anyway.” Understanding one another, the ability to display empathy for others in our community—these are things that we enact continuously as part of our intuitive existence in this world. The desire to belong is at the heart of relationships, and art is instrumental in developing relationships; those are what bind a community.

Art—even if created by just one individual—is meaningless unless there is community acknowledgement, response, and dialogue. To ever achieve an aesthetic experience through the arts, community must be involved. So while the absence of art in the curriculum may imply other things, it does not imply that we are losing our path to realizing the Great Community. In an effort to understand our small part in this big life, we will continue to seek out those experiences that can bring us closer to finding the answer in ways that make sense for us, not by studying masterpieces. Whenever you notice a building adorned with the tags of graffiti artists, a procession of people heading to the river led by monks, or hear the call to “Get it ready, ready,” pay attention to the moment, for you are witnessing community in the making. Or not. They’ll make it anyway.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Permission to use Piirto Pyramid of Talent Development

Dear Jane,

I am writing to request your permission to include an image of the Piirto Pyramid of Talent Development in my dissertation on art, aesthetics, and social justice titled "Aesthetics in the Classroom: How do the Theories of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Jane Piirto Inform Us?" This dissertation will be openly available online through LSU Library's Electronic Thesis and Dissertation database. Specifically, I would like to include the image of the Pyramid on your website at http://personal.ashland.edu/jpiirto/.

I would greatly appreciate your permission to reprint this work in my dissertation. I can be reached by email at valerie.comeaux@gmail.com (personal) or vcomeaux@olomschool.org (work).

Thank you,

Valerie Meiners Comeaux
Graduate Student
Curriculum and Instruction
Louisiana State University

Dear Valerie:

Yes, of course you may use the image. I'm flattered you thought of me.

--

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Valerie Meiners Comeaux is a lifelong Louisiana resident. She was born and raised in Mandeville, a northern suburb of New Orleans. Valerie attended Louisiana State University where she received a B.S. in Elementary Education, a M.Ed. in Elementary Education, a Specialist's degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on Curriculum Theory.

Valerie taught middle school English Language Arts in Ascension Parish public schools for nearly a decade. She served as sponsor for drama club and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Valerie currently works in Baton Rouge as a curriculum specialist as well as a theatre instructor. She lives with her husband and daughter in Southeastern Louisiana.