

Awakenings through Personal Encounters with Nature and Art

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the concept of awakening one's self through personal encounters with the natural world articulated by way of artistic endeavor. By following the birth of our modern sense of self from the Renaissance to the Romantic period, I argue that through the contemplation of nature in conjunction with personal artistic process, each student should be able to create a set of ideals for him or herself to live by having learned the tools to articulate what is manifested within.

Dedicated with love to:

Nana and Granddad Laydon

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Table of Contents

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedicated with love to:.....	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
Awakenings	1
Nature and Art	3
Emergence of Romantic Self	6
The Renaissance	6
The Enlightenment.....	11
The Romantic Movement.....	15
What Do I Mean By Nature?.....	27
Reuniting Our Students with Nature	37
Stimulates the Intellect.....	37
Lessons.....	42
Inspires Creativity	45
Nurtures a Sense of Connectedness	48
Concluding Thoughts on Reuniting Our Students with Nature.....	53
Importance of Artistic Education	56
Connectedness	56
Making Art.....	59
Sense of Self.....	64
Restorative Effects.....	68
Concluding Thoughts on the Importance of Art in the Classroom.....	71
A Marriage of Nature and Art.....	74
Romantic Notions of Nature and Art and the Idea of the Creative Genius	74
Our Classrooms	82
References	97

Awakenings

For the past two summers I have taught week long art camps with children aged six to ten. During this time, I made two observations that have stayed with me. The first is the patience that is necessary to produce art. The second is how still my students were when asked to go into nature and make what they saw come alive. When I teach art, despite the young age of my students, I send them back to the drawing board over and over again asking them to draw what they see. They erase and erase, paint over and paint over. I do not pretend that they enjoy this process at the time, but, I notice that once they grasp the idea and see the results of their efforts, they are proud. I also notice that they become more responsible about the environment that they are working in, cleaning it up and handling their tools with evidence of more understanding. I believe that this comes from their newly awakened perception of themselves as art makers who have earned their merit. I also notice that the next time that they approach their art making, it is with more patience from the outset.

Secondly, I witnessed a beautiful stillness in all of my students, yes even the twitchy ones, when they were asked to go outside and make what they observed come alive. In particular, I remember one little boy perched on the edge of a big boulder. He was normally a rather disruptive child, so imagine my pleasure when I saw him there, ever so still. His page became slowly filled with an intricate display of the delicate thorny stems of the wild roses he was drawing. Even more curious was the fact that he focused not on the abundant blooms of

the wild rose, but on the stalk itself. In his stillness and gentleness, it seemed that part of him was awakening. He was connecting to something that made him feel alive. And viewing his expression on the page, I was witness to his voice.

Later at play, on the big grassy field I noticed that my students were bent over, their faces almost touching the grass apparently searching the ground for something. Inquisitively, I moved towards them and began to search with them, not knowing what they were searching for. I must confess I could not see anything. No ants or worms or little spiders. Nothing but blades of grass. Confused, I asked one of the little boys what was everyone looking at. "All the colors", was his reply. "We never noticed all the colors before." My heart leapt. I cannot begin to describe how magical it is to witness such an awakening.

Nature and Art

Sam Taylor-Wood exhibited her photograph *Self-Portrait as a Tree* at the Hayward Gallery in London in 2002. The photograph is an image of a lone weathered and misshapen tree standing on the top of a hill illuminated by the last rays of the setting sun. The sky looks as though it is increasingly being covered by dark cloud. A single red poppy raises its head above the unkempt grasses in the immediate foreground of the tree. The tree, just off center in the photograph, appears to stand in the path of the fence that runs along one edge of an enclosed field. A closed gate separates the field from the photographer's stance on the overgrown mud road. Taylor-Wood comments that "when she came across the contact sheets [she] thought that single image summed up everything she was feeling" (Vaughan, Friedrich 332). Her meeting with this tree and her response to it seem reminiscent of ideas of the Romantic era because of her focus on the relationship between herself and an encounter with nature. Her encounter allows her access to her feelings. By capturing the tree in a photograph and identifying with it, she entitled the photograph *Self-Portrait as a Tree*; she is actively engaged in an articulation of her being.

Often, to experience an intimate encounter with the natural world is to be awakened. It can feel as though a dawning of understanding has surged through one's whole being. This sense of awakening, although momentarily all consuming, can also be so incredibly elusive. One wants to hold onto such a moment of awakening even if for a little longer. For to hold on, it seems, is to

know one's self. I propose that it is possible to hold onto such an awakening, perhaps even essential to do so. If one is to freely respond to the sensations that natural encounters manifest within us and artistically express what arises, then one can become more truly awakened to who one is as a human being: a unique individual. I believe that, once awakened, the individual will find it impossible to be passive in the world, but have the desire to passionately explore the possibilities the world offers.

My purpose in writing this thesis is to gain insight into what it is to be awakened as individuals. It is my intention to show that by artistically responding to encounters with the natural world, a person will develop the tools to actively articulate who they are as an individual. They will be able to express what life means for them. I begin by exploring the emergence of the idea of the self from the Renaissance to the Romantic Era. From this point, I attempt to explain what I mean by the word 'nature'. I then present the many advantages that natural encounters can bestow upon a person. This is followed by a presentation of the benefits of artistic endeavor. Finally, through a review of the Romantic notion that each individual has a personal obligation to explore his or her creative self in order to decipher how best to live his or her own life, I emphasize the importance of artistic expression of personal and intimate encounters with the natural world.

Essentially, the ongoing expression of these encounters, when performed on a daily basis, becomes an exercise in self-development and understanding. The whole experience provides an opportunity for students to engage their imagination and to be creative rather than passively accept life on terms dictated by others. The underlying purpose is to guide students toward an active

participation in the world around them. By being creative, they will learn to develop their own sense of uniqueness and develop their own ideals. They may begin to feel free to take control of their own destinies, relying upon their own interpretations and understandings derived from real life experience. Hopefully, this marriage of art and nature will enable students to develop their own ideals to live by and develop the self-confidence and comprehension that is essential for surviving in such a seemingly chaotic world.

Emergence of Romantic Self

The Renaissance

During Medieval times not much recognition was given to the concept of the individual. There was no need. God and the church had taken care of any mysteries that a person may have been confronted with. This world view had typified human existence for hundreds of years preceding. It was not until the dawning of the Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that this world view began to disintegrate. The Renaissance is seen as a time of tremendous growth and innovation in all fields of human endeavor. The Renaissance has often been cited as the birth of modern man. These developments in part were due to a renewed fascination with the Ancient Greeks and Romans who had been great admirers of human beauty, effort and organization. The Renaissance thinkers began to see and assert a new faith in human achievement. As a result, Humanism, the belief that humans were in control of their destinies, became popular. The Humanists believed more in human goals than spiritual ones and “human experience tended to become a practical measure of all things. Ideal life was no longer a monastic escape from society, but a full participation in rich and varied human relationships” (Kreis 2000). For the Humanist, it was through reason that one could find truth, not simply through the Bible. It was up to the individual “to choose and create his or her own destiny” (Cranny 222). This was a radical change and a relief from medieval times where the course of human life was dictated by an often times corrupt Catholic Church. Life was short and full of suffering.

A new focus on reason encouraged thinkers to explore the world scientifically through direct observation and experiment rather than learn about the world through the Bible or philosophers. There were two important scientific advances of the Renaissance that changed the course of history. They were Nicolas Copernicus' discovery that the earth revolves around the sun and Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. First, Copernicus' discovery, which explained celestial movements, was vital in changing the way people viewed themselves. Previously, it had been thought that humans existed at the centre of the universe, but now it could be demonstrated that this was not true. This revelation caused people to question other beliefs that they held. They began to rely less on the teachings of the Catholic Church and increasingly turned to science and reason for explanations that gave new meaning to their lives. Second, Gutenberg's printing press provided the means by which information could be spread quickly and cheaply. For the first time, more people were able to educate themselves. Reading materials and reading skills were no longer only available to the wealthy, but also to the growing middle class.

The growth of a middle class began to pave the way for life as we know it today. Previously people had lived in the shadow of isolated manors under the rule of feudal lords who provided for their meager material needs. Every aspect of their spiritual lives was accounted for by way of the Catholic Church and its teachings. During the Renaissance these lords and the Catholic Church both began to lose their power to the monarchs and the growing middle class. The middle class' wealth increased with the increase of trade, which was regulated by

the monarch. With the people increasingly looking to the king for guidance and support, not only did the feudal lords lose power, but so did the Catholic Church.

People were increasingly frustrated with the corruption of the Catholic Church. The church's corruption was very unsettling because the only access people had to God was through the church authorities. Disheartened, frightened, and confused by this and influenced by humanist ideas, a new world view began to develop. Martin Luther crystallized this new world view. He declared that the church authorities could no longer be trusted. Martin Luther encouraged people to break with the papal church. He used St. Paul's Letters to the Romans to reinforce his stance. St. Paul wrote that "if a person had faith, then that in itself was enough to be saved.' If Paul said this [Luther presumed], then people were saved by believing in God and because God was merciful, not because they obeyed priests and gave money to the pope" (Cranny 281). Therefore, Luther believed that the Bible, instead of the Catholic Church, should be a person's spiritual guide. So, the Bible, which had formerly been written in Latin, was now written in the language of the people. It became increasingly up to the individual to develop their own relationship with God. To do this, people began to recognize the need to be educated in order to be able to read the Bible themselves. As Cranny notes, "for the first time, literacy became the goal of the rich and the poor" (283). With each person becoming responsible for his or her own soul, everything changed. Individual responsibility meant that each person was important. Furthermore, without being focused on Rome for spiritual purposes, Europe began to develop stronger national identities. This newly emergent middle class were temporarily content to accept their monarch's rule.

These ideas were also reflected in Renaissance art where an emphasis on ordinary people and everyday settings began to emerge in many paintings. A good example of this is Robert Campin's *The Virgin and Child Before a Firescreen* (1500-1525). This painting presents "the Virgin Mary as a wealthy fifteenth century lady" (Dickins and Griffith 36). She is wearing jeweled clothing and has a beautiful prayer book open at her elbow. A carefully painted fire screen, an everyday object, serves as Mary's halo. Through the open window in the painting is a "scene of everyday life in the Netherlands, with riders on horseback and a man climbing a ladder" (Dickens and Gritffith 36). Because the Virgin Mary is sitting in a contemporary home surrounded by contemporary objects and overlooking a contemporary view, she would have seemed more accessible to the Renaissance viewer.

The idea of presenting the ordinary in painting also appeared in portraiture at this time. It was no longer just the monarchy that commissioned portraits, but anyone who could afford to pay such as "bankers, merchants, scholars and diplomats" (Dickins and Griffith 38). Instead of presenting the classical and idealized style of a profile, portraiture during the Renaissance began to include frontal and three-quarter views of the person sitting for the portrait. The person sitting would be painted as he or she was (although often a more flattering depiction). In addition, the portraits included more of the person's body and surroundings than previously. In this way, "the portraits also began to express the character of the person sitting for it" (Dickins and Griffith 38).

The idea of the ordinary and everyday was evident, not only in portraiture, but also in the attention to realistic natural detail. The development of oil paints

and the new interest in science influenced this. A man named Leon Battista Alberti was especially influential in this area with his book "On Painting". Alberti's book "described ways artists could make pictures more realistic by using light, color and perspective" (Dickins and Griffith 38). Artists began to use Alberti's techniques and would include careful depiction of the natural setting where the scene of their paintings was set. Giovanni Bellini in his painting *The Agony in the Garden* (circa 1465) was the first artist to place the figures in a landscape instead of "just using [the landscape] as a background" (Dickins and Griffith 50). In Bellini's painting, Jesus is kneeling and praying. We can see the soldiers who are to take him and kill him coming toward him in the distance. The landscape is barren, yet the sun is rising in the distance. So, although the scene is an austere one as Jesus awaits his death, it is also hopeful because the "rising sun...remind[s] us how, in the Bible, Jesus rises from the dead" (Dickins and Griffith 50). In this way, the landscape began to take on a significance of its own.

The Dutch artist Pieter Bruegel painted *Hunters in the Snow* in 1565. This painting depicts a winter scene. In the distance, below the snow covered mountains, people can be seen skating on a pond. In the foreground are heavily dressed hunters with their dogs and we can see people tending a fire nearby. The rooftops and tree branches are laden with snow. It appears to be an ordinary scene with ordinary people going about their daily business. There does not seem to be a religious or moral focus in the painting. This increasing focus on real people and real settings is indicative of the increased focus on the here and now. The subject matter of Renaissance paintings increasingly seems to be of an

individual style and for individual tastes. People of the Renaissance were increasingly turning to their own inner inspiration to make sense of life.

The Enlightenment

The individual gained autonomy and strength during the Enlightenment; people became far less subject to the will of others. Politically, people had formerly submitted to the demands of the monarchy and the other nobility. Spiritually people had only looked to the church. During the Enlightenment, people were drawn to the concepts revealed through scientific enquiry. They no longer thought of themselves as part of a uniform and obedient class. Philosophers of the Enlightenment suggested that, instead of accepting the dictates of authority to be truths, the individual should employ his capacity to reason in order to make decisions. Ultimately, the American and French Revolutions demonstrated that the people, using their own capacities to reason as individuals, not only deserved, but could attain political freedom from the monarchy and aristocracy. Spiritually, the concept of the individual had gained strength because people were increasingly moving toward a more personal relationship with God. Finally, the evolution of science and reason resulted in the supposition that there were no longer questions that could not be answered; ultimately all questions had an answer and somewhere there existed, or would exist, a person who could discover the answer. The world was thought to be made up of universal truths and humanity was using these truths to work toward perfection. To the Enlightenment thinker there was a closed, perfect pattern of life. It became the onus of the individual to take part in interpreting the facts of

existence and to adopt the belief that the truth of existence did indeed have a finite explanation. All of these factors led to a stronger focus on the supremacy of the individual and reinforced the individual's right to take part in and comprehend life.

John Locke's rebirth of the idea of the tabula rasa, 'blank slate', went a long way toward empowering the individual. He followed Bacon's "advocacy of a great reform of knowledge based on observation and rejecting the blind worship of authority in favor of the immediate world of sense experience" (Krauze and Spencer 42). If the individual was indeed born with a 'blank slate' and it was his life experiences and not his innate nature that dictated his life, then it was the individual, not the dictates of the church, that wrote his own story. Man could then stand unaided at the center of his own rational universe. Locke also set in motion the development of a new language for the internal state of being. He began to focus on how we form ideas. Again, this led to the empowerment of the individual. Self examination granted the individual more control over their personal actions and beliefs.

The ideas of Isaac Newton and the strong focus on scientific inquiry in general also added to individual empowerment. Newton brought about the belief that the whole universe could not only be described but that it was also self-regulating and ordered. People began to believe that science would progress toward absolute certainty. These scientific developments reduced the authority of the church and God in people's lives. In fact Buffon's scientific research into fossils suggested that the world predated the biblical teaching of creation and therefore could not be in the state in which God created it. To the enlightened

thinker, everything not founded on fact and observation should be rejected.

Therefore, even a rational belief in God could be flawed.

At the same time, conflicting religious movements that diluted the power of the Catholic clergy were occurring. People were increasingly developing a closer personal relationship with God. Since the Reformation, they no longer needed to go to church to speak with God or speak to God through an intermediary priest. Religion continued to become more personal.

The concept of a free market was another factor that empowered the individual during the Enlightenment. The free market is based on the idea that the government should not interfere with the natural dynamics of supply and demand. People became free to trade of their own accord without interference. It came to be acknowledged that it is not just the production, but also the exchange of goods, which creates wealth. Unfettered free market activity created both increased economic activity and increased employment. These factors in turn led to a more widespread accumulation of wealth that in turn broadened trade. But perhaps most importantly, free trade brought the human dependency which was characteristic of the feudal age to an end. People were now at liberty to leave their bondage and search for better opportunities. They could also enter into employment contracts of their own free will.

At the same time that all these profound changes were occurring, Diderot was writing the *Encyclopédie*, a series of volumes that, in typical Enlightenment fashion, sought to explain all that was known about the world. Diderot's intention was to make all knowledge accessible to everyone in order to educate the public. People began to have access to ideas that formerly only the privileged few

enjoyed. This not only occurred in literature but in music. Access to great music was no longer confined to the church and the royal courts, but was available in music halls. People were free to choose the books they read and the music they listened to. Fashion also began to change from year to year. Individualism was on the rise and people were beginning to express their inner selves.

The political ideals of the Enlightenment eventually fuelled the American Revolution and the French Revolution. Thinkers such as John Locke and Jacques Rousseau encouraged people to acknowledge that those in positions of authority did not have divine power and, therefore, should not be in a position to exercise control over the fate of the people. These newly empowered individuals wanted to have a political say in who their governing representatives should be and what they should be responsible for. Locke suggested that the government's authority is dependent upon the consent of the people and that government has no other duties beyond those for which they were first conferred. This perspective of government justifies rebellions that are occasionally required to keep despots in check. Rousseau's 'Social Contract' was extremely influential. According to Rousseau:

by joining together into civil society through the social contract and abandoning their claims of natural right, individuals can both preserve themselves and remain free. This is because submission to the authority of the general will of the people as a whole guarantees individuals against being subordinated to the wills of others and also ensures that they obey themselves because they are, collectively, the authors of the law.

The American and French revolutions embodied these ideas. Thus the monarchy and aristocracy began to lose their legitimacy and hold over the people. The individual could now look forward to a future of his own making.

The Romantic Movement

The Enlightenment emphasized the importance of the individual and placed the individual in a rational framework within the universe. However, some of the very concepts that materially freed the Enlightenment thinker began to stifle him spiritually. The suppression of the spirit led to the beginning of the Romantic Movement. The Romantics were “shaped by a turbulent world and a whirl of real events... [as] the French Revolution [had] announced a radical break in historical continuity” (Wolfson and Manning 7). The monarchy and the aristocratic ruling class no longer held absolute power because a new social structure based on egalitarian terms had begun to emerge. However, in spite of the new social order based upon democratic principles, a new kind of despot appeared. For example, in France, Napoleon, who had been formerly seen as a liberator, appointed himself emperor and seized absolute power. The emergence of these new despots caused a sense of confusion and disillusionment. Taken together, “[t]he act of revolution, The Terror and the militarist aftermath forced artists and philosophers to acknowledge that there are elements of the illogical, irrational, uncertain, even unknowable in our experience of the world” (Boreham and Heath 52). But this confusion brought about a new energy. It became the goal of the Romantics to build “a new world on the wreckage of the old” (Prideaux 7). Individuals realized that they could actively lay the foundation for this new

world instead of passively accepting changes imposed by others. “A Romantic...was one who had broken loose from the rigid controls of the past, and felt free to move ahead...Romanticism was an attitude of mind that was not inclined to recognize limits” (Prideaux 13). As a result, the individual’s concept of his or her position in the world underwent a momentous change. The Romantic focused on those areas of experience beyond logic and reason: the free expression of imagination. Creative action became the most important means of making sense of one’s place in the world. A true Romantic was not an over-sensitive dreamer, but a heroic figure facing head-on the painful realities of the time. “Romanticism came to stand for [the] authenticity, integrity and spontaneity” (Boreham and Heath 5) of the individual.

The Romantics thought that the Enlightenment belief that humans were finite and moving toward perfection was untrue. For the Romantic, the idea that everything could be controlled and organized along scientific principles overlooked the whole human experience. For example, if there was a specific way of existing and all humans are just scientific specimens expected to act in a predetermined role, where did emotion fit into this picture? What about the uniqueness of the individual? There began to emerge a belief that the mind “was not just a recorder or mirror, the mind was an active synthetic, dynamic, and even visionary power” (Wolfson and Manning 9). Eventually, the Romantic notion emerged that individuals are not just marching towards a finite self. Instead, the Romantics recognized the importance of individuality and urged people to express what is within by using the mind to create; to imagine one’s own reality. Isaiah Berlin in his book *The Roots of Romanticism* describes philosopher

Johann Hamann's epiphany that man did not want Voltaire's ideas of happiness, peace, and contentment; what man wanted was: "for all their faculties to play in the richest and most violent possible fashion. What man wanted was to create..." (Berlin 42). To live in a world without paying heed to the feelings evoked through our senses, without celebrating the uniqueness of the individual, and instead to live in a rational, ordered world, wasn't to live at all. If man was to achieve peace and contentment, we would have nothing to live for; there would be no struggle, no action, and no sense of moving forward. To the Romantic, to live a life without passion was to exist in a world that was a dead place. The sensory experience and the unique emotional experience of each individual simply could not be overlooked.

At the same time, a fascination with the occult was brewing beneath the surface. The oppressive Enlightenment thinking, "the rapid changes, new demands, and confusions of the age often pressed [Romantics] into imagining worlds elsewhere" (Wolfson and Manning 10). Outwardly, it was popular and necessary for people to express their adherence to reason and the rationality of the scientific age. But, inwardly, faced with this public unacceptability of acknowledging emotion and sentiment as valid characteristics of humanness, many felt stifled. As a result, some people were drawn toward fantastic ideas including inherently mysterious and supernatural subjects. The Romantic Movement was fuelled by this "inclination, toward the supernatural and the irrational" (Brion 47), which allowed imagination to move to the forefront. Instead of relating things factually, the Romantics drew on their emotional and spiritual responses to the world. Essentially they were exercising their imagination to

explore the concept of reality as it appears uniquely to the individual. Wolfson and Manning suggest that “[i]ndividual experience, simultaneously the most exotic and most common region of all, led to excavations of the depths of the single self – which is to say, the unfolding of a self conceived as having depths and mysterious recesses” (13).

In a sense, there was a move from objectivity to subjectivity. In order to ‘consult’ with one’s inner world, many Romantic artists began to draw on nature and landscape painting to explore these ideas. They returned to a direct and intense experience of nature. Carl Gustav Carus, a painter and philosopher of the time, believed that nature was intimately linked to the feelings of man. Instead of presenting the picturesque or simply describing nature, the Romantics manifested the idea that “man and nature share the same emotional world and are rooted in a single being” (Brion 109). Brion highlights this when he quotes Carus:

Man, when he contemplates the magnificent unity of a natural landscape, is made conscious of his own insignificance and, feeling that everything is a part of God, he loses himself in the Infinite and renounces his individual existence. To bury oneself thus is no loss, it is a gain; what one can ordinarily see only through the spirit almost becomes visible to the naked eye; one is convinced of the unity of the infinite universe. (109)

Through this deep exploration of nature, the division between the self and the non self became more apparent along with the concept that it is within the self

that integration of the inner self and the outer world takes place. Consequently, it was necessary to foster a communion with nature and be free to express this communion in order to understand the world around one's self and the individual's place within it. Marcel Brion describes this idea: "it is the movement of the soul towards inanimate objects and the opposite journey of those objects, which in turn are assimilated by the painter" (114). It is this exchange that allows the Romantic to explore his individual existence and feel rooted in the infinite universe. Instead of relying on divine inspiration, the individual understands his or her existence through the exploration of the self and its relation to the surrounding world. Accordingly, the interior, imaginative, world of the individual began to hold value and be the tool for understanding, or at least attempting to understand, reality. Within the Romantic artist, the imagination is called upon to present and express the enormity of these thoughts and the feelings derived from these experiences with nature. For example, "the sense of the sublime was increasingly used to bridge the gap between limited faculties of human understanding and the unimaginable infinity of the physical universe" (Boreham and Heath 19). Perhaps one of the best examples of this is Friedrich Caspar's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. This painting depicts the back of a lone gentleman perched high on a crag. He appears to be intensely contemplating the misty abyss extending below him. Scattered peaks seem to alternate between exposure and darkness as the fog rolls in. *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* demonstrates how the drive to deal with the overwhelming ideas of reality through the imagination pushed the Romantics deeper into themselves.

The sensory experience and the uniqueness of the individual became vital facets of the Romantic Movement. This resulted in a more personal awareness of one's spiritual self. In fact, "Romanticism itself sprang from essentially Protestant principles of self-determination and individual faith" (Boreham and Heath 18). Wolfson and Manning explain that "post-Enlightenment, bourgeois Protestant individualism moved beyond the rhetorical first person of eighteenth century poetry to produce the 'I' as an individual authority, for whom the mind, in all its creative powers and passionate testimony of deeply registered sensations, became a compelling focus" (14). Berlin suggests that the pietism that grew, especially in Germany, brought about a more powerful connection to the self and the inner analysis of the self. Instead of following the strict traditions of the Lutheran church, the pietists, although a branch of Lutheranism, sought a closer more personal relationship with God and, therefore, the soul. Pietism was an especially important refuge for a Germany that had become broken by France and left with many despotic rulers who presided over small areas that became poorly governed. Many of the previously educated were left with no voice and no financial security. As a result, Berlin suggests that the Germans became increasingly critical and suspicious of the intellect and more dependent on the self. One was almost compelled to create a sense of self-sufficiency both materially and spiritually with the few resources that an individual actually had. One thing that they did develop and maintain control over was their personal relationship with God which became an inner examination and expression of the self. This new introspection is evidenced by the many highly personal and emotionally stirring works of art that appeared during this period. This emergent

pietism spread beyond Germany and took hold over many people of the time, continuing to increase the importance of the individual and his relationship to the self.

An important development arising from this intense inner spiritual analysis and relationship of the self was the idea that an individual creates his or her own values. In other words, humans developed the concept that they, and they alone, had the unique ability to choose how to direct their own moral lives. Immanuel Kant, although a scientist and supporter of Enlightenment thinking, profoundly influenced the Romantic sensibility of the self. It is Kant that suggested that man is only a man because he chooses and therefore he is responsible for his own acts. He suggested that humans had always had a responsibility to generate their own moral values. He argued that these values must have been intrinsic to all individuals or else there would never have been such a thing as free choice. As a result of these revelations, the individual gained more power. The individual's importance was elevated even further beyond the authority of the church or the nobility because each individual chose which morals to live his life by. In fact, the individual was elevated even beyond nature because, being amoral, nature itself cannot develop a moral code. It became the individual's responsibility to develop his own morality and then act accordingly and live his or her life to the dictates of his own conscience.

Reflecting on Kant's ideas, Friedrich Schiller believed that to be truly free to make personal choices it is essential that we create our own ideals with which to lead our lives. He suggests that ideals are "not intuitive, scientific, discovered through sacred texts, [or] experts" (Berlin 85), they are to be invented by the

individual. Schiller believed that there was a time when passion was not divided from reason. For Schiller, the action of modern man in creating his own moral and imaginative universe is equivalent to the play of children in which 'reality', as decreed by reason and science, is suspended. He believed that "the only way to reconcile the necessities of nature which cause stress with the rigorous commandments which narrow and contract life was by placing ourselves in a position of people who freely [(unselfconsciously)] imagine and invent" (Berlin 85). Here arises the importance of the artist to the Romantic Movement.

One of the hallmarks of the Romantic Era was a movement away from a strict Enlightenment concept of what constituted art. Enlightenment art reflected the notion that nature and man move toward perfection. The paintings were idealized and formal and adhered to balance and symmetry. The Romantics found this limiting and not a true reflection of life because could "an art of such visual perfection [...] be used to express the full range of human passion and thoughts" (Vaughan, Rom. and Art 13). Ritual and form began to be pushed to the wayside and a focus on the imagination began to surface. No longer was "the value of a work of art [...] said to consist [simply] in its being what it was" (Brion 58). For the first time, a piece of art was to be considered an expression of its maker. Not only did art begin to depict the realities of the time, but the inner nature of the maker was entwined within a piece; "a work of art is the voice of one man addressing himself to another [...]. When we appreciate a work of art, we are put in some kind of contact with the man who made it, it speaks to us." (Berlin 59-60). Art became an expression of the self. It became a vital means of representing the inner choice of one's ideals and was the ultimate reflection of

what it means to be an individual in the fullest sense of the word. The artist was, of course, an individual. But most importantly, the artist was one who created his own ideal. Here we can see how Kant's idea of choice is ultimately important to the Romantic. If as an artist you create your own values, then you must create your own vision of the universe interpreted according to those personal values.

The combination of the liberation of the artist and the recognition of freedom of choice led to the idea that "a man who does not create, a man who simply accepts what life offers [...] him, is dead" (Berlin 90). Berlin suggests that the German philosopher Johann Fichte also had a profound effect on the Romantic understanding of the self and one's duty to the self. First of all, Fichte proposed that "the self was not a thing, not an object of direct perception but perhaps simply a name for the concatenation of experiences out of which human personality and human history were formed" (Berlin 94). Secondly, he believed that in order to feel the self or have a sense of self, one has to experience some kind of resistance. Without this resistance, how could a world beyond the self exist? Therefore, without the not-self, or the resistance, there would be no sense of self. In this way, only through effort and struggling against obstacles does a sense of self arise. This struggle against resistance is why we must be creative in order to feel the essence of the self. The Romantics moved toward creative action, responding to the spirit within, not assuming that there was a foretold or specific way in which to live one's life. It became the individual's responsibility to make one's life meaningful. We are not moving toward a perfect self but are constantly 'becoming' as we take action to move forward with the universe. The artist presented his own thoughts and ideas of the world and in doing so,

expressed and explored his inner self and his relationship to the world. The concept of being an artist became the symbol of how one is to go about one's life.

From this, it is clear that the Romantics did not believe that the self is simply a vessel of knowledge. They had moved beyond the Platonic ideas of divine inspiration, toward exploring and exclaiming what is within. Unlike the Enlightenment concept that there is an ultimate structure to the universe, the Romantics believed that the universe was infinite, inexhaustible and never still. If this is the case, one could choose to fear the universe, believing that it is a hostile place that humans will never be able to control, or one could love the universe believing that it is friendly. As Berlin points out:

by identifying yourself with it, by creating with it, by throwing yourself into this great process, indeed by discovering in yourself those very creative forces which you also discover outside, by identifying on the one hand spirit, on the other hand matter, by seeing the whole thing as a vast self-organizing and self creative process, you will at last be free. (Berlin 120)

The Romantic Movement was fuelled by this tension and as a result the uniqueness of each individual became not only more apparent, but more celebrated.

In today's western world many of the principles of the Enlightenment still exercise a strong influence. An individual is still responsible for his or her life story. It is up to the individual to obtain the facts, interpret them, and act upon them through their own individual faculties of reason. The individual, without the authority of church or aristocracy, chooses to live by his or her own moral code within the confines of the law as determined by a democratic government. The

belief persists that scientific research will continue to drive progress and in the process not only solve all of our problems but also define human existence. These ideas are reinforced by our school systems in which there remains a strong focus on science and math as fortifiers of our ability to reason. In fact, schools themselves, in cooperation with every level of government, go so far as to rely on statistical evidence to 'know' whether a school is successful or not. That is, students are tested to see whether they have retained the knowledge that teachers present them with. This suggests and provides the example that for all circumstances a correct answer can be found without referring to any other external source such as nature itself. But of course, within the individual's life, all questions cannot be answered. Because of this duality and conflict of fact and feeling, many people are left to feel inadequate and uncertain about how to proceed through their lives. When the accumulated scientific knowledge of both the inner and outer universes is weighed and examined, there remains a huge and, to date, indefinable and irreconcilable gap in our knowledge.

To go further, I feel that in trying to rationalize and gain a sense of control of the world as a perfectible object, some of the very useful Romantic subjective ideals are being overlooked. I think a balance needs to be struck. Science, reason and individual rights are extremely important and should continue to be encouraged. But I believe that the Romantic focus on imagination, creation, and struggle through personal encounters with nature need to be held to higher esteem. It seems that any programs that embrace these ideals such as Rudolph Steiner's 'Waldorf' schools or Kurt Hahn's 'Outward Bound' schools are considered to be alternate methods of education. Although Richard Louv

describes increased progress toward encouraging outdoor educational environments often under the label 'Leave No Child Inside', such programs need to become more available to the public and incorporated into mainstream education because of their many benefits. Instead of leaving individuals to fear the universe as an unfriendly and disconcerting place, let us provide the option to free ourselves by identifying and creating with the universe. Let our imaginations absorb through nature and interpret through art and thereby be our guides. Let a Neo-Romantic Era begin to take shape. Let us begin with our classrooms.

What Do I Mean By Nature?

In his 1849 essay *Nature* Ralph Waldo wrote that “[n]ature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf” (Emerson 10). In a similar manner Richard Louv, the author of *Last Child in the Woods*, explains that nature “[i]n its broadest sense, [...] includes the material world and all of its objects and phenomena; by this definition a machine is part of nature [...]. The other meaning is what we call ‘the outdoors’. By this connotation, a man-made thing is not part of nature” (8). Similarly, Kate Soper also describes nature as “those material structures and processes that are independent of human activity (in the sense that they are not a humanly created product), and whose forces and causal powers are the necessary condition of every human practice” (Eagleton 87). All of these descriptions of nature appear to be straightforward, yet a universal definition of nature remains elusive to us.

The above descriptions of nature leave us, as humans, somewhat separate from and outside of nature itself. The question follows: Where does that separation lie? We are similar to nature because we are organic beings and as Terry Eagleton (2000) in his book *The Idea of Culture* puts it: “we, like [nature] are to be cuffed into shape, but we differ from it in that we can do this to ourselves, thus introducing into the world a degree of self-reflexivity to which the rest of nature cannot aspire” (Eagleton 6). We are able to think abstractly and thereby alter our existence. This is an important distinction not just because it highlights our capacity as humans to manipulate both our physical and intellectual perceptions of existence, but because it also makes clear that while

human beings are able to create morals, nature remains amoral. It seems that we can choose how we exist in this world, whereas the natural world cannot.

“Everything else in nature [...] conforms to laws blindly. Only rational creatures conform to [moral] laws that they themselves formulate” (Taylor, Sources 365).

Eagleton goes further to explain that human beings are, of course, part of nature, but unlike nature we are historical animals. He explains that “history is what happens to an animal so constituted as to be able, within limits, to determine its own determinations” (Eagleton 97). Humans are historical animals because they can move beyond sensual limitations and establish symbols and language and thereby, culture.

Again this seems to set us at a distance from nature because, as beings able to rationalize beyond our sensual limitations, we are also able to contemplate nature as an object or combination of objects. We are able to consider the aesthetics of nature. Immanuel Kant brought forth the idea of the disinterested gaze, appreciating nature without the interference of one’s personal opinions, which allowed for “nature [to be] taken as an exemplary object of aesthetic experience” (Carlson 2). Edmund Burke, a Romantic thinker, wrote *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful* through which he attempted to elaborate on the different ways nature affects our emotional beings. Nature’s capacity to affect humans could be split into two categories; the sublime, which elicits feelings of awe and dread and thereby revulsion, and the beautiful, which elicits feelings of love and thereby attraction. The sublime is the aspects of nature that are terrifying to us. The overpowering nature of the sublime defies our intellectual capacity to make sense

of it. For example, standing by the edge of the sea, we are confronted by the vastness of the ocean as the horizon disappears into sky. This vision would be considered sublime because it is so intellectually daunting. On the other hand, the beautiful referred to cultivated gardens and tamed wilderness which are comparatively more comprehensible and pleasantly engaging. His ideas, however, were deemed to be too polarized mainly because it was his assumption that “the standard of both of reason and Taste [was] the same in all human creatures” (Vaughan, *Rom and Art* 36). His ideas on the sublime and the beautiful did not take into account the subjective nature of individual response. The addition of the concept of the picturesque, an aspect of nature that is worthy of a picture or appears like a picture, bridged the gap. The picturesque “seemed suitable for that pleasurable area that lay between the Beautiful and the Sublime” (Vaughan, *Rom and Art* 36). These were the “first major philosophical developments in the aesthetics of nature” (Carlson 2).

Since then, many philosophers have attempted to use the concepts of art aesthetics as a template for appreciating nature. To truly appreciate art, it has been argued, one must gain a deep knowledge of art itself by studying art history and being exposed to all types of art. In a similar manner, it has been suggested by philosophers such as Allen Carlson that the best way to aesthetically appreciate nature is through studying natural sciences and thereby creating an intimate knowledge and relationship with nature.

Other philosophers however, feel that intellectualizing the aesthetic appreciation of nature excludes simpler appreciative responses. Noel Carroll in his essay “On being moved by nature: between religion and natural history”

claims that “sometimes we can be moved by nature – *sans* guidance by scientific categories – and that such experiences have a genuine claim to be counted among the ways in which nature may be (legitimately) appreciated” (Carroll 245). That is to say, I can appreciate the little white mushrooms that seemed to materialize over night and are currently sprinkled across my lawn without knowing how they got there or to what category of mushroom they belong. I can simply marvel at their sudden appearance and their milky whiteness solely because of their existence.

Rather than only intellectualize one’s experience with nature by attempting to categorize it and learn of its ‘history’, Carroll argues that to simply be moved by nature is a valid means of appreciating nature. He further argues that to be moved by nature does in fact have cognitive elements. If one is moved by nature, then one must have a cognitive understanding of what the object that moved him or her is. And if an emotional response can be assessed, then it is “open to cognitive appraisal” (Carroll 257). Carroll suggests that we can go even further to assess “whether the appropriateness [of an emotional response to nature] ought to be shared by others” (Carroll 257). And, if it is a response that ought to be shared by others, then we can consider the state of being appropriately emotionally moved by nature an objective one.

To explain the concept of being ‘moved’ further, Carroll alludes to Jay Appleton’s essay “The Experience of Landscape”. Appleton suggests that “our responses to landscapes are connected to broad evolutionary interests” (Carroll 263). We take a survival interest in certain features of landscape. When confronted with a particular type of landscape, we may react in an emotional way

because that landscape “address[es] our deep-seated perhaps tacit, interests in the environment as a potential theatre for survival” (Carroll 264). Carroll points out that perhaps we are moved because we are part of nature.

Simply intellectualizing the aesthetic appreciation of nature or likening this appreciation to the appreciation of art can also be problematic for other reasons. Carroll recognizes that, unlike art, a natural object has no clear boundaries; it cannot be framed in the same way as a piece of artwork. A painting sets us at a distance and excludes us, “whereas in nature we are included as a self” (Carroll 248). A full appreciation of nature is not reliant solely on vision as a painting is, but is compromised of not only vision, but also of odors, textures, sounds, tastes, and temperatures. Because of this, art cannot become nature, whereas nature can become art. Art in this sense can act as a frame to isolate or capture an aspect of nature, but it cannot become nature.

Furthermore, Carroll makes another distinction between the aesthetic appreciation of art and the aesthetic appreciation of nature. His distinction is that nature, unlike art, has not been produced by a creator that can be defined succinctly. Therefore, to appreciate it, we need not wonder at the motive of a creator, for there is none that we could define. Because nature is free of such a creator, it is also free from judgment. It is indifferent to our sense of morality. Hence, it would be a folly to suggest that we can gain moral understanding from nature. Kill or be killed; hide or be eaten; strength defeats weakness; the fast devour the slow. These are not moral concepts. Conversely, the golden rule, do unto others as you would have done unto you, is not nature’s rule, but man’s.

Nature, it appears, simply is. We attribute all manner of qualities to nature, but it has no qualities other than what we give it. Emerson points out that “the power to produce [...] delight, does not reside in nature, but in man [...] Nature always wears the colors of the spirit” (Emerson 13). For example, we assume that nature is here for us. While I feel enlivened by the Chickadee chirping and flitting about in my back garden, the truth is that each chirp may be a song of desperation, a cry of alarm, or a fight for territory. I may not want to admit it, but those pretty birds I attempt to lure into my garden with bird feeders and water fountains do not arrive with my aesthetic appreciation in mind; rather they arrive with their survival in mind. It is us that impose a personality on nature and sometimes even derive a sense of morality from it. However, it is the amoral aspect of nature that makes it so possible to be ‘moved’ by it. We seem to be free from nature’s judgment, yet free to judge it. It could be argued that the neutrality of nature is what allows us to connect with our selves because when surrounded by nature we are free to be ourselves. In nature, there is no moral code that one must adhere to. One can simply abandon one’s self to nature. We can allow ourselves to be free to exist as we are, free from judgment.

Caspar Friedrich, a German artist well known for his expressive landscape painting during the Romantic Era, was perhaps the first painter to transform landscape painting from a simple backdrop for human activity into a scene where the viewer is drawn into the picture to experience the impact that nature can have on the human spirit. His paintings appear as psychological renderings of the spirit attuned to nature. It seems that he turned away from society disillusioned by its increasing materialism and sought nature as a refuge. Nature served as a refuge

for Friedrich perhaps because it could not ask anything from him and could not judge him. He was therefore free to project his own psychological interpretations into his paintings of nature.

When viewing many of Friedrich's paintings, the viewer is invited to exchange places and see the landscape through the eyes of the 'rückenfigur', a person, seen from behind, who is contemplating a view. In this manner, the viewer is invited by Friedrich to contemplate his or her own moral being when confronted by the sublime. His painting *Monk by the Sea* is a well known painting which does just this. The poet and critic Clemens Brentano "was unnerved by the picture, complaining that we are invited to enter the picture and identify with the human figure of the monk, but the flat, oppressive wall of the sky and sea throws us back on ourselves" (Boreham and Heath 2010 p .94). This painting, *Monk by the Sea*, like many of his other paintings with a rückenfigur, makes it seem that man is not naturally part of the landscape. The figure stands apart from the landscape while attempting to contemplate it. Paintings of this genre seem to illuminate the difference between man and nature. Although man is part of nature, he is not entirely subsumed by nature and therefore remains separate from it. He is able to take a step back and evaluate nature with the workings of his own mind.

Again, it seems that while we are at once part of nature, we also remain something apart. It is because of our ability to intellectualize that we are able to see ourselves reflected in nature even when we are not wholly part of it. It is through this reflection that nature can help to serve to sustain us spiritually

because it allows us to consider our personal position in the world and how we would like to play out our lives as individuals.

During the nineteenth century, a group of Romantic American intellectuals began to pay close attention to humans' relationship with nature. They came to be known as the Transcendentalists. This label is derived from Immanuel Kant's idea that the understanding of moral concepts comes to us intuitively. Unlike Enlightenment thinker John Locke's theory that everything that we understood about the world comes to us through our senses and through reason, the Transcendentalists believed that our moral responses to the world transcended sensation and reason. They felt that humans are intuitively moved by nature. Transcendentalists believed that there is an intense connection between God, man, and nature. God is the ultimate being and man, in the Transcendentalist's mind, is above nature in that nature serves us as a means to comprehend God and make sense of our existence. What the Transcendentalists experienced as a divine connection with God is perhaps akin to simply being 'moved' by nature. The Transcendentalists believed that to be 'moved' by nature allows us, for a moment, to feel deeply connected with our selves and all that exists.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, perhaps the most well known Transcendentalist thinker, believed that, although our bodies are part of nature, our souls are not. In his essay *The Over-Soul* Emerson explains that the individual can understand his place in the universe through "this deep power [...] accessible to us all [...] seer and spectacle, subject and object are one [...we can] see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are shining parts, is the soul" (Emerson 187). According to Emerson, nature is

able to guide us to understand our place in the world and this understanding is available to us anywhere and at any moment because we are so intimately connected to it. But to grasp any of this, we are not reliant on our intellects, but on our intuition.

Intuition is not something that can be easily described, yet the Transcendentalists felt that it is important for us to foster intuition in order to make sense of our existence. Intuition is difficult to cultivate and one must work to maintain an awareness of it. Intuition, according to the Transcendentalists, can best be cultivated through acknowledging and appreciating a relationship with nature. Intuition allows a man to be able to think for himself, to trust in his own ability to understand, evaluate, and act. In order to maintain and promote this autonomy, one cannot rely on another's experience with nature, but only one's personal relationship with it. The Transcendentalists came to the conclusion that a personal relationship with nature enabled humans to reach their full potential. This set the Transcendentalists apart from those who were stunted by their compliance and acceptance of the authorities of the church and of history. Nature is here to serve only as a guide to understanding our existence, it up to us to be receptive to it and make sense of it.

Henry David Thoreau, another important figure in Transcendentalism, believed so much in the divine connection between nature and man that he spent an entire year living meagerly in a rudimentary cottage surrounded by nature at Walden Pond. He wrote a memoir of his time there entitled *Walden* (1854). Throughout the memoir the natural world appears to communicate to Thoreau. It is during this time that he seems to grow and gain a strong connection with his

inner self. He strongly urges others to do the same. It is not enough to let life pass by and to repeat the conventional lives of those who have gone before us, but instead each individual should take time to be with nature and awaken one's self to one's own unique nature. For Thoreau, this means spending time on one's own and allowing nature to speak to you. Throughout the memoir he is physically and spiritually attuned to nature. Walden Pond is a place of reflection and of spiritual and physical rebirth. He finds patterns in the seasons that seem to mirror the patterns of human life. Ultimately, Thoreau seems to believe that to have a rich life, one must embark on an inward voyage. It is this voyage that will allow us to discover our unique possibilities for existence. In the conclusion of *Walden* he implores us to “[d]irect your right eye inward, and you’ll find a thousand regions of your mind yet undiscovered. Travel them, and be an expert in home-cosmography” (Thoreau 284). If one can do this, then one shall never be alone and one shall be the navigator of one's own life, no matter one's standing in society. For after all, “the setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode” (Thoreau 290).

Nature, then, can be described as all that is other from us and has not been created by us as humans. It sustains us not only physically, but also spiritually. It can be the vehicle for understanding ourselves as unique individuals and guide us to appreciate the fullness of our existence.

Reuniting Our Students with Nature

For 1.5 million years, humans have been a part of nature. Nature has been our partner in livelihood and inspiration, as well as contributing to our physical and emotional well-being. Our close affinity to nature has shaped us as humans. “It is hard-wired and deep-rooted in our genes [...]. Yet today we spend less and less time in nature, and even less time intimately involved with it” (Butler). I see this separation from the natural world reflected in many of my students and peers. It seems such an effort to get out into nature. There always seems to be a multitude of obstacles. But if asked, I am sure most of these people would acknowledge the many benefits that nature has to offer us, in fact, they may listen to such a question and think: “what a stupid question. Isn’t it obvious? Everyone knows how restorative experiences in nature can be.” Perhaps this is why we so easily let days go by without pausing in nature. Because it is too obvious. We can attend to it later. But this attitude diminishes the opportunity to experience the many benefits that nature has to offer. By routinely attending to nature we can develop our intellects, learn lessons, be creatively inspired, and nurture a sense of connectedness.

Stimulates the Intellect

Encounters with the natural world benefit our intellect. A psychological study published in 2008 by Marc Berman, John Jonides and Stephen Kaplan highlights this. These researchers gathered a group of thirty-eight students and

gave them a series of tests. The students were then randomly split into two groups. One group was sent on a 2.8 mile walk through downtown Ann Arbor, Michigan and the other group on a walk of the same distance through a nearby park. Upon returning, the students were tested again with the same tests. It was found that the ones who walked in the park performed, on average, significantly better. By contrast, the students who walked downtown, had a mixed result. Some of them performed better, some of them performed worse, but on average their performance stayed the same. Berman, Jonides and Kaplan attribute these findings to the different mental exposures the students experienced. Those students who walked in the city did not get any rest from constant stimulation while the students who walked in nature were surrounded by restful, beautiful things and remained free from harsh distractions. Their findings support Stephen Kaplan's ideas that

interacting with environments rich with inherently fascinating stimuli (e.g. sunsets) invoke involuntary attention modestly, allowing directed-attention mechanisms a chance to replenish (Kaplan, 1995). That is, the requirement for directed attention in such environments is minimized, and attention is typically captured in a bottom-up fashion by features of the environment itself. So, the logic is that, after an interaction with natural environments, one is able to perform better on tasks that depend on directed-attention abilities. Unlike natural environments, urban environments contain bottom-up stimulation (e.g. car horns) that captures attention dramatically and additionally requires directed attention to overcome that stimulation (e.g. avoiding traffic, ignoring advertising etc.),

making urban environments less restorative. (Berman, Jonides, and Kaplan 2008)

In other words, to foster a sense of peace in our students and enhance their intellectual capacities, it is important for us to encourage our students to spend time in natural environments with intricate, yet non-threatening stimuli, and allow their minds and bodies to respond to such environments in a relaxed, yet attentive manner.

Nature also provides an ideal arena for intellectual development because it is full of variation. Rachel Carson describes her personal encounters of the shore line: “The shore is an ancient world, for as long as there has been an earth and a sea there has been this place of land and water. Yet it is a world that keeps alive with the sense of continuing creation and of the relentless drive of life. Each time that I enter it, I gain some new awareness of its beauty of its deeper meanings, sensing that intricate fabric of life by which one creature is linked with another, and each with its surroundings” (Carson). Carson’s description illuminates Stephen Kellert’s explanation in his book *Building for Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection* that the natural world is an unparalleled space for the developing mind to grow. In children, the first stage of cognitive development is forming a basic understanding of facts and terms, creating rudimentary classifications, and crudely discerning causal relationships. Trees, birds, shrubs, flowers, rocks, soils, and more all have the capacity to activate all of our senses. The natural world therefore greatly aids the emerging capacities of children because it affords numerous highly stimulating and engaging opportunities to identify and order basic information and ideas. Nature

consists of a vast array of objects that provide opportunities for labeling and discerning different features and properties. Furthermore, Kellert argues, because the objects encountered are alive or closely relate to a child's world, nature offers an especially relevant and dramatic focus for developing the capacities to know, label, and classify.

Kellert explains how contact with the natural world also engenders comprehensive development. The ability to analyze, assimilate, and comprehend facts and ideas is aroused when a child is in contact with nature. Kellert provides the following example:

The North American child learns to comprehend that snow falls at certain temperatures and rain at others; that trees grow in soil and not in water or through asphalt; that ducks and geese inhabit wet rather than dry or upland places; that butterflies fly during the day and moths at night; that many, rather than one or a few trees constitute a forest; that cattle and sheep group together in herds while large predators generally stand alone and apart; that crabs and clams muck about in marshy rather than dry habitats; and more. (69)

He acknowledges that "no other aspect of a child's life offers this degree of constant but varied chances for critical thinking and problem solving." Through these encounters, "the child engages in an ongoing dynamic of intellectual development by distinguishing creatures, natural features, and environmental processes; by [...] classifying life and non-life into categories of relation and distinction; by observing and interpreting the processes of feeding, reproducing,

surviving, and dying.” They develop not only an understanding of the world around them, but an understanding of themselves and an understanding of their relationship with the natural world.

Any natural place contains infinite reserves of information, therefore, there is a potential for inexhaustible new discoveries. It is these discoveries that allow us entry into the larger world. “Nature presents [us] with something so much greater than [we] are; an environment where [we] can easily contemplate infinity and eternity...without [such] experiences we forget our place; we forget that larger fabric on which our lives depend” (Louv 97). To feel alive and comforted by the knowledge that we fit, we cannot rely on cognition alone. Wolfgang Welsch’s article “Reflecting the Pacific”, refutes the suggestion that we are connected to the world only through cognition. Through a multitude of encounters with the Pacific Ocean, he has come to the understanding that he is part of this great universe. He believes that his connection with the infiniteness and the immeasurableness of the Pacific Ocean has enabled him to grasp a concept of infinity.

Furthermore, the ocean’s greatness and indifference to us humans, Welsch contends, enables him to think beyond human limits. He also notices that during his walks along the shore of the great Pacific, he walks the boundary between the finite and the infinite. He is forced to recognize that he is part of a bigger picture. He also comments on the familiarity he begins to feel while at the edge of the world. Here he loses the sense of time and slows down, he becomes “more connected, less distinct, more symbiotic” (Welsch). The water, rocks, etc. are not distinct but part of a greater unity with each other. Finally, he suggests

that the cosmic view is better than the city view because it includes the city, while the city does not include the cosmos. The cosmic view allows for completeness. His empathy with the Pacific Ocean allows us to consider how such experiences enable us to recognize that we are deeply connected to the natural world. Welsch foresees that a cosmic view gained through experiences such as his with the Pacific Ocean, will allow us to transcend mere citizenship and instead be aligned with a world connectedness, where we will be one with all other things. Then, perhaps, we could leave the accustomed picture of the human condition (i.e. we're autonomous and opposed to the world, not connected with it) behind us. Perhaps we will recognize that we do not establish our relationship with the world. It just is. And we are part of it.

Lessons

We can derive lessons from encounters with nature. Kellert comments that “nature provides young people with diverse and challenging opportunities for affective and cognitive growth, [which] present many ways for children to cope and adapt” (74). Because changes in nature are often unpredictable and challenging, they necessitate a wide range of adaptive and problem solving skills. For example, I remember setting out to hike one of the many trails in the mountains of North Vancouver with some friends. A good way into the hike, we encountered a small river, which we needed to cross. This was accomplished relatively easily as we were able to spot an area where the water level was fairly low and the current not too strong. We continued our hike enjoying the air and the scenery. As we climbed, it began to rain hard enough that we stopped under the

trees for cover to eat our lunch hoping that the rain would pass. It did not.

Reluctantly, we left the cover of the trees and began our way down worried that it was getting late and darkness would come before we could return to the trail head where our car was parked. Again, we came to the river. It had not occurred to us that the rainfall would cause the river to rise and the current to quicken. We stood looking helplessly at the river, growing anxious at the thought of being trapped in the darkness. We began to search the banks to find an easier spot to cross, but could not find one. Eventually, one of us found a long tree branch. While two of us held the branch on one end, the most brave among us held onto the branch and began to make her way across the water. Upon reaching the other side, the next crossed until we were all over. We held each other and shook and laughed realizing we were safe. Our hike allowed us to appreciate the changing and potentially dangerous nature of the natural world. We found cover when it rained and a means to cross the river. The natural world demanded our alertness and attention, which necessitated problem solving.

Experiences in nature also help us to recognize that time is important. Time just to be alive to our senses, without over-stimulating or over-directing them. Nature helps us to relax and calm our minds. Involvement with nature allows for a sense of peace and with the sense of peace comes the ability to think clearly. This sensitivity is pivotal for an understanding of our existence. We are only on this earth, as we know it, for a moment. If a child is able to witness the fleeting life cycle of a butterfly or a petunia, he or she will witness the fragility of existence; know the transience of his or her life as natural, and perhaps, therefore, savor each day for its innate worth. They will be stilled. In the

classroom, they will be more receptive to creative endeavor for its own sake. If a child is exposed to the natural world, he or she is likely to be more aware and responsive to his or her environment and not only be more attuned to the changes, but celebrate them.

“By returning to [...] simple yet enchanted places we see [...] how the seasons move and the world turns, and how the critter kingdoms rise and fall” (Louv 171). In doing this we can not only experience our connectedness, but see the resilience of the natural world. Nature’s resilience provides us with a wonderful role model. Think of the poppies in Flanders Fields gently surfacing and bringing their bright reds to sites where horrific destruction took place. Think of fireweed named for its capacity to thrive and therefore bring color to burn sites. Think of Linda Hogan’s description of the bomb sites of Hiroshima:

Seed. There are so many beginnings. In Japan, I recall, there were wildflowers that grew in the far, cool regions of mountains. The bricks of Hiroshima, down below, were formed of clay from these mountains, and so the walls of the shops held dormant trumpet flower seeds. But after one group of humans killed another with the explosive power of life’s smallest elements split wide apart, the mountain flowers began to grow. Out of the crumbled, burned buildings they sprouted. Out of destruction and bomb heat and the falling of walls, the seeds opened and grew. What a horrible beauty, the world going on its own way, growing without us. But perhaps this, too, speaks of survival, of hope beyond our time. (Hogan 33)

Nature is resilient. And through an appreciation of this resilience, we have the opportunity to realize, not only our mistakes, but our strengths. We, too, can move forward, put the past in its proper perspective, and thereby restore the beauty of existence.

Nature also provides a comforting role model. Erin Lau points out that “[t]he quiet wisdom of nature does not try to mislead you like the landscape of a city does, with billboards and ads everywhere. It doesn’t make you feel like you have to conform to any image. It’s just there, and accepts everyone.” This brings to mind Celie’s awakening in *The Color Purple* when her “eyes opening, [she] feels like a fool. Next to any little scrub of a bush in [her] yard, [her husband’s] evil sort of shrink” (Walker 197). The toll of her husband’s brutality is lessened when she feels the restorative virtue of nature reconnecting her to the larger world, and in this she finds beauty, something worth living for. In a similar manner, Sean Covey’s *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* includes a teen anecdote that echoes Celie’s experiences with nature. The troubled teen recalls, “By going to the river, that place didn’t judge me. That place didn’t tell me what to do. It was just there. And by following its example, the peacefulness and the serenity that existed there, that’s all I needed to calm down. It made me feel like everything was going to work” (Covey 15). The restorative benefits of the natural world are available to all of us, but they cannot be taught or left to be considered abstractedly, they must be experienced at a personal level.

Inspires Creativity

Kellert and Louv both suggest that a natural landscape is more engaging for creativity than any other landscape; not only within the physical moment immersed in the natural world, but also in memory. It has been shown that parks incorporating a natural environment enhance children's creative play. Louv quotes the 1998 journal "Environment and Behavior" when he reports that in sixty-four outdoor spaces at a Chicago housing development, almost twice as many children (ages three through twelve) played in areas that had trees and grass than played in barren spaces, and their play was more creative. Nature provides a place to make one's own space and these places are also of the child's known world therefore there is more possibility for exploration, discovery, and adventure. The stimulus of nature promises that there is more to come and more to do.

Recently, I was substitute teaching at a school that had many tall Douglas Firs skirting the edges of the playground. During my recess supervision, I noticed a group of children collecting fallen debris from the previous night's windstorm. While many of the boys were racing back and forth over the grass kicking a soccer ball, these children were constructing a little fort in the corner of the school grounds from the fallen debris. Slowly and carefully they were piecing it together. I noticed that they were also helping each other out. Whether it was excitedly bringing over new branches or discussing which twigs would be best for a potential door or be most useful for a character that might live there or whatever else came to them. Their minds were active. They were playing creatively and with pride in their endeavor. I was aware, that although the boys chasing the soccer ball were learning all sorts of things and having fun, they were not as

creatively engaged as those students interacting with nature. Louv suggests that this is because the hierarchy in free play in the natural world relies on language, creativity and inventiveness, far more healthy and useful things than the narrow disciplines of soccer.

Kellert and Louv repeatedly acknowledge the fact that these experiences in nature must be natural, they must involve free play, not organized or structured play. This is an important point because the child's innate capacity for wonder and intellectual development needs to be fostered within them selves. Hillary Burdette and Robert Whitaker point out that while playing outdoors, a child is likely to encounter fewer constraints on his or her gross motor movement and less restriction on their range of visual and gross motor exploration. These factors do not proscribe or limit activity and, therefore, induce curiosity and the use of imagination. Louv quotes Sebastiano Santostefano, a psychologist:

children interpret and give meaning to a piece of landscape, and the same piece can be interpreted differently. Usually, if you [use] traditional puppets and games, there are limits. A policeman puppet is usually a policeman; a kid rarely makes it something else. But with landscape, it's much more engaging, and you're giving the child ways of expressing what's within.
(51-52)

Furthermore, because nature is governed by unyielding physical rules and there are always risks, the resultant tension informs all of our senses and builds character. Louv suggests that a limitation that is always present in sports is that kids are egged on to win, win, win, clearly dividing the players into both winners and losers. Whereas, in wilderness play, teamwork and cooperation are

important and there are no artificial limitations such as rule books. Imagination is paramount. Wilderness play does not divide children into winners and losers. In this way, the interior life of the children can develop naturally with a constant awareness of their surroundings. Just like the children playing with the fallen debris, they were able to express and discuss what each piece could mean or be used for. There were no winners and losers; everyone had an opportunity to contribute. Their creativity had few limits set upon it.

Nurtures a Sense of Connectedness

Every spring as I walk through the forest willing life back into the deciduous trees that surround me, my mind travels to little Mary and young Dickon in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

"They've run wild," he said, "but th' strongest ones has fair thrived on it.

The delicatest ones has died out, but th' others has growed an' growed, an' spread an' spread, till they's a wonder. See here!" and he pulled down a thick gray, dry-looking branch. "A body might think this was dead wood, but I don't believe it is--down to th' root. I'll cut it low down an' see."

He knelt and with his knife cut the lifeless-looking branch through, not far above the earth.

"There!" he said exultantly. "I told thee so. There's green in that wood yet. Look at it."

Mary was down on her knees before he spoke, gazing with all her might.

“When it looks a bit greenish an’ juicy like that, it’s wick,” he explained.

“When th’ inside is dry an’ breaks easy, like this here piece I’ve cut off, it’s done for. There’s a big root here as all this live wood sprung out of, an’ if th’ old wood’s cut off an’ it’s dug round, and took care of there’ll be--” he stopped and lifted his face to look up at the climbing and hanging sprays above him – “there’ll be a fountain o’ roses here this summer.” (125-126)

Dickon and Mary explore the natural world and its processes together.

Throughout the novel, Mary has many experiences like the one described above and learns to work with nature to bring life to a beautiful flourishing garden. As the garden grows, Mary grows into a healthy young girl with the understanding that there is a place for her and that she is very much part of this world. Mary, like any child, recognizes not only the ongoing processes of the world, but that these processes affect her. In other words, the child develops the understanding that they too are affected by and are part of these processes. This engagement aids a child’s progress from simple acts of identification and classification to more complex conceptualizations and predictions.

Another noteworthy aspect of Kellert’s work is his belief that nature provides opportunities, aside from human contact, for children to emotionally connect with it. These emotional connections motivate them to seek to understand further information and ideas. In fact, Mary’s first understanding of herself is her friendship with a little robin. It is through the robin’s ungrudging

affection for her that Mary first realizes that she is lonely. This little positive interaction with the natural world encourages Mary to see the beauty in her surroundings. She develops a desire to understand the natural world and seeks further information from Dickon. I believe that being emotionally invested in something, especially our connection with the natural world, is critical for the desire for life-long learning to develop. Kellert draws our attention toward Rachel Carson's observations that nature arouses our emotions of interest, joy and wonder. She notes "Once the emotions have been aroused...then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning" (Kellert 73). I do not believe that the absorption of abstracted ideas, delivered vicariously, can have as much impact on our understanding of the world as information that is pursued because we desire an intimate association with it.

The euphoria that a sunset, or a moment of profound understanding that occurs when one pauses in nature, provides us with passion, connectedness, and the desire to live fully. Alice Walker's Shug Avery in *The Color Purple* (2003) so perfectly describes:

My first step from the old white man [the "white person's version of God] was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and I run all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happen, you can't miss it. (195-196)

Peter London describes a similar experience in his book *Drawing Closer to Nature*. His awakening occurred during a walk along a beach that he frequently visits. When he began his walk “[o]n a dead-cold day in January” (13) the biting cold of the wind occupied his entire being, but as he turned to make his way back across the beach he experienced a distinct change in his response to the world around him. Instead of being only aware of the cold, his mind, body, and spirit react to the brilliance of nature’s creation. He noticed that “[w]hat [he] had taken to be Nature’s mess was only [him] looking through [his] messy lens” (London 23). On that particular day at the beach “[o]n the way out Nature was an obstacle; on the way back it was [his] teacher. On the way out [he] felt alone; on the way back [he] felt at home embedded in an infinitely extended family” (London 27). This encounter excited London and altered his world view by providing him with the courage to attempt art making in the most raw manner he could conceive, without his usual reliance on the techniques and information he had learned in art school. Instead of seeing the world through a “messy lens” cluttered by secondhand ideas, he decided to record his responses to nature with the most minimal of artistic tools. This move away from preconceived notions and techniques freed him to focus on drawing closer to nature “not so much as an outer journey to some distant exotica but a journey in the exact opposite direction, inward to an awakening of what is already contained within” (London 318).

Encounters with nature such as the ones that Walker and London describe enable us to feel fully alive and connected to the cosmos. So often this sensation drives us to communicate with others. Walls all over the world are adorned with

photographs and paintings of natural scenes. These representations mirror our attempts to capture the euphoria that nature has bestowed upon us, sometimes for only a fleeting moment. Books are full of poetry and descriptions of these moments of connectedness. Delicate, dramatic musical notes attempt to capture or reflect the euphoria specific to an experience in nature. This euphoria is virtually inescapable. Even Emily Dickinson's father, known to be "a thin, severe punctilious man...a Calvinist of the strictest persuasion...who never abated his rigor in the interests of pleasure" is said to have "rung the church bell, as if to summon people for a fire. The whole town came running, for he rang the bell excitedly. He wished to call attention to the sunset" (Brooks 415). The sunset enlivened a passion in him, a passion he became desperate to communicate despite his religious principles which in many ways proscribed earthly pleasures. Again, one of the most memorable scenes of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, a novel that has been devoured by thousands of grade eight students, is when Cherry Valance, a member of the Socs, the wealthy West Siders, and Ponyboy, a Greaser, a poor East Sider, briefly re-unite for the first time after a terrible tragedy has occurred. They find it difficult to articulate all of the things that they want to say. Finally, the only thing that can make sense for them is:

"Hey," [Ponyboy] said suddenly, "can you see the sunset real good from the West Side?"

[Cherry] blinked, startled, then smiled. "Real good."

"You can see it good from the East Side, too," [Ponyboy] said quietly.

"Thanks, Ponyboy." She smiled through her tears. "You dig okay."

(129-130)

Although they live close by, their financial status keeps them worlds apart, yet the beauty of a sunset brings them together and holds a beauty that can be felt all over. Imagine if our apathetic students were brought into contact with such possibilities of euphoria, not only would they feel alive and part of the natural world, but they would feel intimately connected to each other. No matter the culture, the age, or the gender, the natural world has the capacity to overcome all of this and bring us together acknowledging and accepting the beauty of existence.

Concluding Thoughts on Reuniting Our Students with Nature

If getting out into nature is a chore or something fraught with uncertainty, feelings of inadequacy, or getting it right, then nothing positive will be accomplished. Our students need the possibility of finding themselves on their knees in the grass exploring the color green; discovering subtleties that could never be experienced with such depth in a classroom. Students need to experience nature with their senses fully activated, surrounded by earth, air, and water. I believe it is our duty to provide students with the opportunities to explore the natural world on a regular basis. This does not mean isolated trips to the mountainside or ocean. It means on a daily basis in a local area. Children must be allowed to feel an ongoing connection with the natural world in order to be affected by it. It is clear that the natural world is irreplaceable for the development of a child. Imagine if Mary in *The Secret Garden* was not visited by the robin red-breast. Like her, we might be left feeling alone, apathetic and powerless in an over-stimulating world. Instead, through close encounters with the natural world,

awakenings are plentiful and inevitable. Our students will arrive in our classrooms alert, calm and ready to further their understanding of the world and their place in it.

Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you reckoned the earth
much?

Have you practiced so long to learn to read?

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems.

You shall possess the good of earth and sun...

there are millions of suns left,

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand...

nor look through the eyes of the dead...

nor feed on scepters in books,

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,

You shall listen to all sides and filter them for yourself.

Leaves of Grass

Walt Whitman

Importance of Artistic Education

Connectedness

Since time began, human beings have experienced an intimate and innate connection with nature. All along the way, the impulse to capture moments in nature by means of art has been part of the human experience. For this reason, the urge to create art is, and always has been, fundamental to human existence. From early times humans have painted. According to John Berger, an esteemed art critic, these paintings are “affirmations of the existent, of the physical world into which mankind has been thrown” (Berger 14). As they paint or draw their connections to the world, we, in turn, are connected to their world and therefore to those artists as fellow humans. “In art museums we come upon the visible of other periods and it offers us company. We feel less alone in face of what we ourselves see each day appearing and disappearing. So much continues to look the same: teeth, hands, the sun, women’s legs, fish... in the realm of the visible all epochs coexist and are fraternal, whether separated by centuries or millennia. And when the painted image is not a copy but the result of a dialogue, the painted thing speaks if we listen” (Berger 21).

A few summers ago, in Grenoble, I listened. I sat in La Collegiale Saint-Andre, a cathedral built in 1228. I closed my eyes and felt the coolness of the sanctuary touch me and hold me as the subtle aromas and timeless chorus of the choir held me ever more still. Art, whether created in devotion or not, reaches us through the centuries and holds us, binds us together. Art displays universal and timeless themes and, because of this, the arts connect us across time and place.

Not only does “art record human history, it incorporates our feelings, ideas, dreams, and aspirations. It chronicles and conveys a wide range of emotions, [thus] art has served as a way of understanding, making sense, and clarifying inner experiences without words” (Malchiodi 39). In this manner, as Charles Fowler, an avid promoter of arts education, points out in his book *Strong Arts, Strong Schools*, “[t]he arts may well be the most telling imprints of any civilization [because they] are living histories of eras and peoples and records and revelations of the human spirit” (60). And today, just as we have always done, we continue to paint and draw, to express, to make sense of ourselves and the world around us.

We continue to express ourselves through art because humans are intrinsically creative. Art offers us a means to express this creativity. Cathy Malchiodi, who is a licensed art therapist and clinical counselor, goes beyond psychologist Abraham Maslow’s idea that once a person’s basic needs are satisfied, they show a strong drive toward self-expression. Malchiodi points out that “even when deprived of basic necessities, some humans still strive to express themselves through the arts” (16). She uses the example of the people continuing to express themselves artistically in Sarajevo despite constant shelling and sniper fire. This, she claims, “illustrates that our drive to express ourselves through art is a powerful and compelling human need” (Malchiodi 16). The need to create art under adverse circumstances was certainly evident when I visited the Imperial War Museum in London, England.

On the top floor of the Imperial War Museum there is a gallery that exhibits artists’ experiences of World War II. These artists created their images from

direct experiences at war, or from memory, or in reflection of their experiences. In spite of exploring the entire museum to look at all the information that lay before me from photographs, to clothing, to weapons, to real stories, to reenactments and live video footage, certainly the paintings exhibited on the top floor were most informative for me. Here, unlike the rest of the museum, I felt that I was more fully encountering the impacts of war on its victims. One of the artists had sat and painted in the holocaust camps. She recorded that, as she was painting a particular scene, the woman, who was the focus of the painting, collapsed before her. Upon viewing this painting, I could sense the collapsing woman's inability to go on and feel the artist's response to her even as she continued to paint. I found it difficult to move away from the painting, from the truth. The painting was crying out to me, its viewer. Further into the gallery, another artist painted the story of his brother who had tried to escape his duties and was caught. His brother's best friend was forced to hang him, but the rope was too long and the brother lay gasping before he died. The painter (the brother) contorted the image of the crucified Jesus to convey his own agony, his brother's, the friend's and ours.

The artifacts from the war were interesting and valuable, but they could not arouse such emotion, such a feeling of presence, as the paintings did. It is the innate truth of an artistic response that reaches out to us and implores us to consider the world as seen through other's eyes. In order to truly learn, we must be emotionally engaged. When I related my ideas about the difference of emotional engagement between the paintings and the artifacts, my companion suggested that, unlike adults, a child would not be as interested or as engaged with the paintings as much as by the artifacts themselves. Why then, I asked him,

was there a sign on the door to the upstairs gallery that warned people under the age of fourteen to be cautioned about viewing the paintings as they may be disturbed, yet on the doors to other war exhibits, there were no such warnings?

The arts allow us to develop an understanding and sense of the world around us. Iris Murdoch, philosopher and essayist, suggests in her lecture “The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts” that “the enjoyment of art is the training in love of virtue” (84). Good art presents a truthful image of the human condition that “can be steadily contemplated” (84). She notes that some people need the presence of art to reach this awareness; therefore, it is essential to present good art to children because it transcends the self and the attendant limitations of personality. By being brought to objectively see the qualities and the characteristics of other people through works of art, we are expanded in both understanding and feeling. Artistic experience allows us to grow beyond our limited perspective toward a greater understanding of others and the world around us.

Making Art

Recently, I took a Fundamentals of Drawing class, which required me to bring in a number of tools (i.e. pencil, charcoal, conte, pen and ink, bamboo brush etc.). The very first thing we were asked to do was to ‘make marks’ on our page. We were not asked to ‘draw’, but to ‘make marks’; in other words, we were asked to explore our tools unhindered by preconceptions. Naturally, I began by tentatively drawing lines on my paper, but as the time began to tick away and we were not straying from this activity, my hands began to play with the tools, I

began to 'make marks' I had never considered from a pencil or a piece of charcoal. Images began to arise and my hand began to move freely and swiftly and to play, sometimes pushing hard, sometimes banging and twisting down, sometimes smearing or dragging. My mind became free from everyday constraint and this allowed my body to interpret my feelings almost independently. I felt free and completely engaged at the same time. At last the time was up, I reviewed what now lay before me on a number of pages: sprawling marks and subtle images. My body, under the influence of ideas that emerged as if by themselves from my subconscious, was allowing me to explore possibilities I had never considered before.

Everyone is capable of making art because "[t]he creation of art is not some esoteric activity of a gifted few; it is the natural way of forming meaning whenever important issues are addressed sincerely" (London 59). Art form, according to Stuart Richmond in his article "Art's Educational Value" is "the shaping of materials and ideas into coherent, meaningful pattern" (2). This is vital to our understanding of the world because it provides a means for us to fashion a sense of identity and meaning. Through art making, we are able to determine what is significant. Drawing and painting assume that the artist is carefully considering his or her world; taking an in depth look at his or her environment and then focusing the ideas into a meaningful visual concept. Taking the time to do this is crucial because the artist is forced to slow down and consider his or her relationship with the world.

Richmond also notes that "drawing develops the capacity to see and render the world through the human touch, in its detail, proportion, structure, and

qualities, to observe and consider what in this hurried life is significant, to do justice to the visual realm. And drawing calls upon a person's interests, the resources of the eye, the hand, mind, and feeling" (2). He also notes that "[t]hrough the development of perception and skill, encounters become richer, and capacities for noticing and absorbing nuances and qualities are developed" (2). A person involved in painting or drawing, especially from life, is establishing a connection with the world around him or her and, as Fowler notes, "in the process of translating their inner discernments and revelations into symbolic form, children, discover and develop their capabilities and uncover some of their human possibilities" (57). These connections are often 'new' connections which "transcend previous limitations" (Nitzberg) and therefore enable a person to think more openly and in more depth about the world around them.

Fowler notes that "[o]ne of the major requirements of education is to give children the breadth of symbolic tools they need to represent, express, and communicate every aspect of human life" (63). The learning of a technique and subsequently embarking on a project is important because "it demands enormous self-discipline and teaches students how to handle frustration and failure in pursuit of their idea" (Fowler 64). When a student is exposed to a large variety of styles and techniques for presenting an idea or feeling, the student will develop their own unique skills to participate in the real physical world. They will be better able to make decisions and develop a voice. By capturing a connection or an idea through art, a student has the opportunity to organize his or her ideas and use critical thinking and problem solving skills and; thereby, achieve greater comprehension and retention of the event, situation, or concept being

considered. During this process, it also becomes clear that problems can have more than one solution and that there are many ways to interpret the world. Once this point is realized, the opportunities to experience the world become boundless.

Hoffmann Davis enlarges on the importance of “allowing children to create something new of their own invention that was not there before it was created and [the fact that] the product can be changed or altered at a child’s discretion” (51). She notes that the tangibility of this product is extremely important, requiring both imagination and agency to bring it about. The beauty of artistic products is that there is no definitive right or wrong and, because they are tangible, the artist can reflect on them, add to them, change them, or destroy them. It also can become a vehicle for dialogue in which the artist, who has made some sense of the world and thereby revealed some inner part of his or her self, can share and compare their experiences with another individual. Furthermore, the tangibility of a piece of art allows a person to return to it and reconsider it at any time; in essence the dialogue is always open.

While taking a course on Aesthetics, I recall being asked to explore the concept of identity through an artistic medium. No further instruction was given. During this exploration, I was constantly making decisions and adjustments to my ideas and to my work. I began by brainstorming concepts of identity and sketching how I could get my concept across to a viewer and to myself. I remember beginning on a small canvas and realizing part way through that it was not big enough. Once I had a bigger canvas, I became aware that the confines of what I had sketched out were also too limited; my body and imagination began to

take over and present my concept to me. Throughout the whole process, I was constantly rethinking and re-feeling my work. By the end, I had made numerous decisions and judgments necessary to present a concept of identity. Within me, a series of ideas and understandings had developed; I became more aware of what I valued.

The personal dialogue I was engaged in during the creation of my 'Identity' painting was essentially a series of decisions. Fowler explains that because students must make decisions about how to translate an idea into art, "they learn how to exercise judgment and how to justify their decisions" (65). He explains further that "in the process of making such judgments, a person's value system is developed [...because a] student learns to appraise, that is, to judge the worth of operating one way or another" (Fowler 65). Through decision making in the artistic process, students can come to understand that they are capable of making their own decisions, a skill that is vital in everyday life.

Hoffman Davis explains that "the arts in education teach students about questions that make use of information but go beyond right and wrong answers to the consideration of 'what do I want to know?'" (71). In addition, the arts allow students to reflect; "arts in education help students to develop skills of ongoing self reflection and assessment, moving beyond judgments of good or bad to informed considerations of 'how am I doing and what will I do next?'" (Hoffmann Davis 71). The visual arts, especially in their tangible nature, encourage us to ask new questions and constantly reflect upon and to determine the direction of our own thinking. Artistic experiences require active participation and; therefore, enable a sense of engagement with the world around us.

Sense of Self

Berger suggests that the artist is not necessarily the creator of a piece of work, but the receiver. We are constantly stimulated by the world around us. If we can allow these stimuli to take hold of us and let them direct us to draw and paint, then we can begin to make sense of the source of the stimuli. Drawing and painting allow us to ingest our experiences. Berger likens an active artist's studio to a stomach. "A place of digestion, transformation, and excretion. Where images change form. Where everything is both regular and unpredictable. Where there is no apparent order and from where a well-being comes" (Berger 71). It is not until the work is satisfactorily completed, that the sense of well-being comes. In order to be completed, we need to be engaged.

Perhaps the most important aspect of artistic experience is that "learning in the arts requires the ability and a willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds" (Eisner). Therefore, as a student learns to improvise in order to create an artistic interpretation of the world, he or she is immersed not only in the world, but in the self. If we are to refer back to Berger's analogy of the artist's studio as "[a] place of digestion, transformation, and excretion" we note that in artistic experience, as in the digestive process, what we take in becomes part of our essence. Developing a sense of understanding of the world initiates a sense of self. The connection between the inner self and the outer world continuously reinforces itself. The arts are essential to this connection because they involve the whole person in the interpretation of the non-self world. Psychologist Rollo May notes that grace, harmony, beauty and balance are part

of many qualities of visual arts. It is the appreciation and value of these qualities that allow people to see new possibilities for themselves and experience themselves in new ways.

Art also encourages us to guess at new possibilities and take chances with new experience because of its ambiguous nature. Malchiodi notes that “because art expression is not a linear process and need not obey the rules of language, such as syntax, grammar, logic, and correct spelling, it can express many complexities simultaneously. Therefore, art can contain paradoxical elements [which] help people integrate and synthesize conflicting feelings and experiences” (Malchiodi 12). Hoffmann Davis postulates that the ambiguity of art is unique to the arts. She explains that “works of art recapture that blurriness between object and idea and self and other; it is the deliberate crossing of boundaries that accounts for their ambiguity” (Hoffman Davis 62). This ambiguity opens up a work of art up to multiple interpretations. Hoffmann Davis goes further to state that “because [a viewer of art is asked to] address the ambiguity [inherent in] works of art, the arts in education introduce children to the idea of multiple interpretations worthy of mutual respect” (65). Thus the arts enable students to see that that there are many equally viable ways in and out of the same subject, to know that even if their views differ from others, ‘what I think matters” (Hoffmann Davis 65). This quality asks us to come in, to question, to have a dialogue and, by doing so, fosters a sense of self.

Appreciation of art helps us to recognize that there is a place for us in this world. It is extremely important for our well-being to know that we, and what we do, serves a purpose. Through actively engaging in the artistic process and

through viewing other people's art; our imagination, our ability to notice and care about the world takes root. Hoffmann Davis notes that, "beyond the acquisition of information, artistic involvement creates relationships and alternative expressions that clarify our differences even as they join us together as humans who strive to make sense of the world" (23). In doing so, "[a]rts in education excite and engage students' awakening attitudes to learning that include passion and joy; and the discovery that 'I care'" (Hoffmann Davis 76). Once a student realizes that he or she cares about the world around them, any sense of apathy begins to lift and a sense of purpose begins to develop. Hoffmann Davis believes that the arts are uniquely able to nurture this realization in a student. This engagement with the arts is also connected to responsibility, "arts in education connect students to others within and beyond school walls, helping to awaken a sense of social responsibility and action because 'I care for others'" (Hoffmann Davis 76). The student no longer sits inactive in the world but becomes an awakened participant.

Another vital aspect of art making is that it allows us room for expression and encourages empathy. Hoffmann Davis notes that the "arts in education give students the opportunity to recognize and express their feelings [and to] acknowledge 'this is how I feel'" (58). The arts provide students with both medium and opportunity to shape and communicate their feelings. Without the opportunity to communicate emotions, it is possible to become detached and to feel isolated, unable to make sense of one's own emotions and those of others. The ability to recognize and express our emotions and recognize the emotions of others is very important for preventing depression, isolation and apathy. The ability to acknowledge one's own feelings allows us to identify with and consider another's

feelings; “building on the notion of ‘what if’ and ‘I feel’ when considering a work of art by someone else invites the consideration ‘what if it were me? How would I feel?’” (Hoffmann Davis 60). This is an empathetic perspective, which encourages social responsibility and therefore confidence, because ‘I can’ and ‘I empathize’ develop a sense of the self and of others.

We define ourselves in community. Charles Taylor in his Massey Lecture “The Malaise of Modernity” borrows George Herbert Mead’s term “significant others” (Taylor, Malaise 33) to describe the people in our lives (family, friends, political figures, teachers, etc.) who have an effect on who we become. We negotiate our identity through dialogue with others. The dialogue may be spoken, written, or take place abstractly through imagery. Therefore, to draw and paint is to communicate and relate to each other. Taylor points out that “no one acquires the language for self-definition on their own” (Taylor, Malaise 32). It is important that we develop effective dialogues in order to be able to understand and manage the influence those significant others have over us.

An important aspect of artistic endeavor is the self awareness of the individual to his or her own processes. In the process of making art, emotional self awareness is passed through the artist to the art itself and this gives the outcome personal meaning. Without this personal awareness, the creative process is not health enhancing or growth producing. Art can especially give us a sense of having a voice in the world when we bring our own unique experiences forward to make authentic expressions of ourselves. If we dare ourselves to take the risk of being authentic, then we open ourselves up to make sense of the world and our place in it. We allow ourselves to be awakened and begin to

understand what it is we actually believe. “[D]uring a creative moment, [one] recognizes the limitations of [one’s] present way of thinking, which requires a lot of courage” (Malchiodi 65), and having the courage to break free and develop a new understanding is extremely satisfying and empowering. The arts clarify reality and they can take us into new and unexpected worlds.

Restorative Effects

One of the most wonderful things I experience during artistic endeavor is the sense of stillness that envelops me when I become truly engaged. For me, experiencing a sense of calm or stillness is vital to a sense of well-being. We are constantly confronted with ‘to do’ lists and bombarded by all sorts of suggestive imagery. Sitting and painting or drawing creates the conditions whereby one can remove one’s self from the hectic day-to-day experiences and simply be still. I have found that when I am truly engaged in a creative or artistic process, I am at one with myself, my mind and body are connected and my thoughts do not impose upon me. I am free and alive. I am awakened to my self and to my place in the world.

Malchiodi notes that there is a link between creativity and health. She explains that when embarking on an artistic process, one is also embarking on a creative process where the mind and the body are connected. Blood flow to the brain is increased during creative thought and any creative activity that is enjoyable is said to give rise to alpha wave patterns which are typical of restful alertness. This is the relaxed, but aware, state found in meditation. The level of serotonin, the chemical that alleviates feelings of depression, is also increased

during creative activity. Therapeutic art programs in hospitals have been found to provide many benefits. For example, stress is decreased, there is an increased capacity to communicate, and improved blood pressure, heart rate, and respiration. Art therapy has also been reported to boost the immune system. In addition, creative participation has been found to enhance brain function and structure. Gene Cohen has observed that creative self-expression in older individuals can actually increase the number of connections between brain cells, including those for memory and reaction. In this way, art is shown to be not only intellectually and emotionally health inducing, but physically beneficial too. If we are physically more alive and attuned to the world, then spiritually we will be receptive to experiencing a better quality of life.

Malchiodi notes that art has probably been made by individuals within groups of people since the beginning of time. She provides examples of churches, mandalas, and Navajo sand-paintings. West Coast First Nations art is particularly rich in imagery. Malchiodi observes that art therapy groups have curative potential in that their interactive nature is linked to health and well-being. Therapy groups instill a sense of universality because people in these groups can see that others have similar problems, worries, and fears which reduce their sense of isolation. They also provide an avenue for catharsis in as much as the group has an altruistic intent when they help each other which provides healing for both the giver and the receiver.

As a student doing coursework toward a Masters in Arts Education, I was called upon to create my own work as well as comment on the work of my peers. I found myself feeling extremely vulnerable while presenting and while

commenting on a peer's work. At the same time, I felt extremely alive and connected to everyone in the room. Everyone had different things to contribute, whether it was their works of art, or their comments to others. It was a very supportive environment, and there was a sense of universality. I felt as though my thoughts were important and relevant both to myself and to others. I felt validated. I felt less isolated and more prepared to explore not only my inner self, but the world around me. As Malchiodi notes, art has been practiced in groups for all time. It has become a universal experience; thus, the classroom is the ideal place to encourage art as a means for initiating social and self awareness.

Malchiodi mentions that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes what he terms as "flow": an experience of being so engrossed in an activity that one actually loses track of time. It is "a unique state of concentration when you feel positive, energized, focused and totally absorbed in the present moment. Everything around you except the task at hand is forgotten while awareness and action become one" (Malchiodi 75). Malchiodi also remarks upon Daniel Goleman's thoughts on 'flow'. Goleman believes that 'flow' is emotional intelligence, a self-awareness of one's feelings, self-motivation, as well as empathy for the emotional experience of others, at its best. He also believes, Malchiodi notes, that "emotional intelligence is essential for creativity and is an ability one can cultivate through flow. During the flow state, people are more productive because they are focused, calm, and self-satisfied. Like the experience of meditation, brain waves are actually in a state of relaxed alertness that facilitates inspiration and calmness" (Malchiodi 75). In order to reach such a place, Malchiodi suggests that there are some things we must do to prepare ourselves. To begin, we must

have a permissive attitude; that is a willingness to let go and trust that something will emerge. We must relinquish our concerns about what other people might think. We must let go of self-criticism. We must accept that there is not a right or wrong answer. We must develop an intentionality, that is we must work at something intentionally and passionately, and we have to be willing to commit to the process. By doing these things, which all take time and energy, we can reach a place of flow, which in turn allows for a sense of confidence and control.

While creating art, we can “have a temporary mental release from actuality” (Fowler 63). One of the most empowering aspects of artistic endeavor is that it always creates a place that we can retreat to. Fowler reminds us that “all of us benefit from having a respite from the trials and tribulations of our everyday lives. The experience of entering a different universe gives us new perspective on our own existence” (63). When the world is too overwhelming, we can bring about a sense of control by involving ourselves in art; “the paradox is that in losing ourselves, we regain self, a being refreshed and renewed by the simple act of diversion” (Fowler 63). To do this, to be awakened; we must have patience.

My yoga instructor once enlightened me, as I lay in Savasana, also known as corpse pose, on the floor of her studio, by saying to me that this place of calm was a place I could always return to, it will always be available to me, I just have to allow it in and practice patience. In the same way, we can always return to our selves through artistic endeavor and make peace with the world around us.

Concluding Thoughts on the Importance of Art in the Classroom

The arts are vital to humanity. They should be, therefore, vital to education. The arts offer a means to be awakened and to become active participants in the world around us. In fact, the visual arts go further than simply making sense of themselves and the world around them, they provide opportunities to access the world and shape the world in new ways. Provided with the opportunity to be awakened artistically, a student will be more excited and self-motivated by the possibilities of existence. They will have a firmer understanding of who they are in their relationship to their selves and the world around them. They will be able to communicate effectively on more than one level and they will have a clearer hold on what is important to them, while still acknowledging the voices of others.

If we have a stronger sense of self, we can understand how we fit on a more universal level. This can be accomplished through artistic expression. Students need to find their own relationships within themselves and the world around them. So often, people are unaware of their own abilities and importance, which creates a sense of isolation and despondency. If we give students the tools, they can be vitally aware of themselves and others throughout their existence and fully realize their importance and relevance to the greater whole.

THIS IS HOW A HUMAN BEING CAN CHANGE:

There's a worm addicted to eating grape leaves.

Suddenly he wakes up, call it grace, whatever, something wakes him and he's no longer a worm.

He's the entire vineyard,
And the orchard too,
The fruit, the trunks,
A growing wisdom and joy
That doesn't need to devour.

Rumi

A Marriage of Nature and Art

Romantic Notions of Nature and Art and the Idea of the Creative Genius

August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, German thinkers of the Romantic era, believed that the “rationalists of recent times...had made a fatal separation between the mind and the body” (Vaughan, Friedrich 56). They argued that “[m]an is not just a thinking animal. Man is a complex psychological being for whom feeling and imagination are as important as thought” (Vaughan, Friedrich 57). The German Romantics had a strong interest in the visual arts because they “saw the visual as communicating at a deeper and more primal level than words [...] They were obsessed with the function of symbol – the visual image (literal or imagined) that held a meaning that transcended the rational” (Vaughan, Friedrich 59). They were also influenced by Wilhelm Wackenroder’s idea that nature was the language of God and art was the language of man. They deeply believed in the creative inner self.

The German artist Caspar Friedrich was influenced by their ideas. He believed that artistic expression was an expression of the self. Many of his paintings interpret his direct experiences of nature and thereby demonstrate his perceptions of the world. For example, his paintings *Times of Year* (1803) are not only beautiful descriptions of the earth as it goes through the seasons, but also “demonstrate the way in which the contemplation of nature [can lead] us to understand the deeper meaning of things” (Vaughan , Friedrich 66). For Friedrich, direct experience in nature was his means of gaining insight into his

life. His paintings provided him the medium through which he could transcribe his insights into meaningful ideas.

Friedrich was also influenced by the idea of subjectivity in Romantic thought. (It is for this reason that he did not title his pictures or write about them in a way that would lead viewers to interpret his paintings in a specific way.) Two of his paintings, when viewed as a pair, entitled *View from the Artist's Studio, Left Window* (1805) and *View from the Artist's Studio, Right Window* (1805) bring the idea of subjectivity to the forefront. They are of the same open window seen from two different perspectives. The view, although of the same window, is different dependent upon where it is viewed from. This demonstrates to the viewer not only that things look different depending upon the angle from which they are observed, but also that our perceptions of reality are limited. These paintings seem to stress that "what is perceived is also dependent upon the situation and nature of the perceiver" (Vaughan, Friedrich 86).

Another painting that seems to draw upon similar ideas of subjectivity is Friedrich's painting *The Chalk Cliff in Rügen* (1818). This painting offers a view of the sea that disappears into the horizon between white cliffs and two trees. Included in the foreground of the painting are also three rückenfiguren atop what appears to be a steep cliff. Each rückenfigur appears to be focused upon different things. The figure on the right is leaning back with his arms crossed taking in the vista. The figure in the center of the three is down on his hands and knees, his hat off and his cane on the ground, peering over the edge of the cliff as if searching for something lost or perhaps contemplating the steepness of the cliff. The third figure is of a woman off to the left of the painting sitting down, holding

on to a branch as if to secure herself on the cliff while she points toward something unknown beyond the cliff's edge. Each rückenfigur appears to be responding to the natural setting in a different way, again stressing "that what you see before you is dependent upon what is within you" (Vaughan, Friedrich 203). Through these paintings, Caspar "makes it clear that subjectivity is not a matter of arbitrary whim: it is rooted in the actual situation in the relationship between the viewed and the viewer" (Vaughan, Friedrich 83). Subjectivity is the expression of individual viewpoint.

The idea of subjectivity was very important to the Romantics. Rousseau and Kant's ideas about it are still influential today. Instead of deriving moral understanding from God and the outside world, "the source of unity and wholeness...is now to be discovered in the self" (Taylor, Sources 362). Rousseau believed that in order to lead a life that is worthwhile, we must adhere to the "voice of nature within us" (Taylor, Sources 362). By becoming sensitive to this voice, which is unique to each person, we can find our moral being without being dependent on others to reach this understanding. Kant takes this idea of subjectivity further. We cannot simply rely on our inner impulses to lead us toward living as moral beings. Taylor explains that: "moral law is what comes from within; it can no longer be defined by any external order. But it is not defined by the impulse of nature in me either, but only by the nature of reasoning" (Taylor, Sources 365). It is up to the individual to determine what is morally appropriate and the individual's moral action is not "marked by its outcome, but rather by the motive for which it was undertaken" (Taylor, Sources 363). This new

moral concept compels us to act as morally responsible beings in accordance with our innate natural impulses.

It is for these reasons that the subjectivity found in Friedrich's paintings is so important. His paintings not only acknowledge the subjectivity of existence, but that it is our responsibility to consider our motives especially as they are so subjective. His art is a reflection of his personal views. It seems that his paintings are not simply emotional responses to his environment, but considered responses to his inner reflections and the impact that they might have on their viewer. The fact that many of his paintings incorporate the natural world to present his ideas also reflects the notion that although man is part of nature, he is also a rational being who can consider his own morality.

Johann Herder, a German philosopher, extended Rousseau and Kant's ideas about the individual and morality. Rousseau and Kant believe that our personal concepts of morality follow the voice of nature within us and that it is therefore our responsibility to decide for ourselves how to live instead of "being shaped by external influences (Taylor, Malaise 27). Herder went on to expand on these ideas and reached the conclusion that "each of us has an original way of being human" (Taylor, Malaise 28). This was a revolutionary concept because previously "no one thought that the differences between human beings had this kind of moral significance" (Taylor, Malaise 28). This new concept of individuality put the onus to actively explore and divine what it is to be one's self squarely on the individual: "being true to myself means being true to my own originality and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself" (Taylor, Malaise 29). It became morally crucial for each person to

take the time to consider who he or she really is. For the Romantics this most often meant using the backdrop of nature to aid in turning inward to explore and express a sense of self.

In his book *Sources of the Self* Charles Taylor explains the development of the concept of the creative genius as a heroic figure during the Romantic Era. Taylor demonstrates how the relationship between nature and art came to be such a powerful one. Taylor explains the importance of Herder's belief that "nature [works] as a great current of sympathy, running through all things" (Sources 369). Nature, for Herder, "is an inner impulse or conviction which tells us of the importance of our own natural fulfillment and of solidarity with our fellow creatures in theirs" (Taylor, Sources 369). This idea of human inner impulses being part of the natural state calls upon human beings to act according to how they feel. If one does not act in accord with one's inner voice, the voice of nature, then one cannot be considered morally responsible because, for Herder, nature was God's creation and following the voice of nature was therefore following God's plan. It was through feelings, then, that humans could become morally aware. Therefore, it was important to "open ourselves to the élan of nature" (Taylor, Sources 370) for this is how human beings could begin to acknowledge their inner selves and fulfill God's plan.

By acknowledging our inner voice, we can begin to come to terms with what the voice of nature guides us toward. In this sense, each of us can begin to learn what it means to be 'me' as an individual. To learn what it means to be 'me', we must not only pay attention to our inner voice, but also articulate what we find inside. To articulate our inner voice is to give expression to it. Through

articulation or expression of our inner voice, we are “tak[ing] something inchoate and partly formed and giving it specific shape” (Taylor, Sources 374). We are creating or “bringing something to be” (Taylor, Sources 374). Taylor further explains that the “direction of this élan wasn’t and couldn’t be clear prior to this manifestation” (Sources 375). In other words, without paying close attention to what we are feeling, we cannot fulfill our own nature and come to an understanding of what it means to be ‘me’.

Articulating and giving expression to the feelings that manifest themselves within allow ‘me’ to give “my life a definite shape” (Taylor, Sources 375). In this way, what each person finds within is unique to that person. We can see that each person is constituted in such a unique way that they will be inevitably internally directed to live his or her life differently. The expression of our inner voice becomes important because through it we can show ourselves to be moral beings. It becomes an “obligation of each of us to live up to our [own] individuality” (Taylor, Sources 375). The trick is that until we search within and articulate or give expression to what we find, we cannot know what it means to live one’s own original life. It is important to note that this life has not been lived by anyone else and has no model to guide it. There is no precedent or model to follow that can replace our own inner voice of nature.

These ideas are what made the artist the hero in the Romantic Era. The creative genius is expressing and thereby formulating and shaping what he or she finds within to its utmost extent. Through this expression, the creative genius is living his or her life completely. This is a major change in importance of the status of the artist. The artist is now called upon to create reality whereas

previously the artist was called upon to imitate reality. For the Romantic, there was a difference between “reproductive imagination, which simply brings back to mind what we have already experienced [...] and the creative imagination which can produce something new and unprecedented” (Taylor, Sources 379). For example, Caspar Friedrich’s paintings, which “build on a sense of the affinity between our feelings and natural scenes[,... were...] trying to say something for which no adequate terms exist and whose meaning has been sought in his works rather than in a pre-existing lexicon of references” (Taylor, Sources 381). Through this example of bringing a fresh reality to life, we can see how the artist becomes a role model for how a person should live his or her life.

It is ideas like these that influenced the Romantics to elevate the concept of the creative genius to the highest esteem because “behind the creative genius was the belief that man’s innate gifts were to be valued above all else” (Vaughan, Rom. and Art 66). Ludwig van Beethoven was considered a classic Romantic figure because he dedicated his life to what came from within himself. Berlin describes him as:

The figure who dominates the nineteenth century [...] the tousled figure [...] in his garret. Beethoven is a man who does what is within him. He is poor, he is ignorant, he is boorish. His manners are bad, he knows little, and he is perhaps not a very interesting figure, apart from the inspiration which drives him forward. But he has not sold out. He sits in his garret and he creates. He creates in accordance with the light which is within him, and that is all a man should do; this is what makes a man a hero. (Berlin 13)

Instead of being concerned about the ideas and opinions of those around him, instead of dedicating his talents to the further idealization of the musical perfection of his time, he completely gave himself over to his inner impulse, which was to compose passionate, powerful music.

John Constable an English painter of the Romantic period was also guided by his creative impulse. Constable, who is known for his depiction of sky and cloud, sought not to study clouds that he might classify them, rather he “sought to gain a close knowledge of those transcendent moments that attracted him” (Vaughan, Rom. and Art 203). He used a combination of scientific enquiry and emotive response to create his paintings. For instance, after the death of his wife he uses his experience in nature to artistically express his depression. His anguish can be seen in his sketch “*Hadleigh Castle* [where] the paint is laid on almost savagely with a palette knife, and the whole surface is flecked over with white highlights [...]. Constable fully accepted that it was an inner turmoil that was being expressed in these canvases. [Vaughan quotes Constable as saying]: ‘How for some wise purpose is every bit of sunshine clouded over in me. Can it be wondered that I paint continual storms?’” (Vaughan, Rom. and Art 206). Although his paintings depict the agony of his despair, Constable also was restored by his artistic creations. Constable wrote that “[s]till the darkness is majestic and I have not to accuse myself of ever having prostituted the moral feeling of Art...My canvas soothes me into forgetfulness of the scene of turmoil and folly and worse” (Vaughan, Rom. and Art 206).

Today the emphasis on feeling and the examination of our inner selves is not reliant on the belief that the natural world is representative of God's plan. Nor is it reliant on the belief that the current of nature runs through all things. Instead emphasis is placed on the Romantic notion that the articulation of what manifests itself within allows us to gain an understanding of who we are as individuals and what life means to the individual. As Taylor notes: "[i]f I am not [true to myself], I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*" (Malaise 29).

Our Classrooms

I intend for our students to gain deeper insights into who they are as individuals and how they fit into the bigger picture. I want to provide them with ample opportunity to engage their imaginations by encouraging them to respond and reflect artistically to personal experiences in nature. By entering nature, I mean taking time daily to get out of the classroom and explore the more natural world outside. This could include the vacant lot, the corner park, the ditch, the green space, the boulevard or the garden bed at school depending upon what is available. I want to be clear that the artistic response of the student is based on his or her personal experience as it uniquely happens around them. It is not a test either of their imagination or their artistic skill. It is, instead, an encouragement toward an awakening to the existence of the cosmos and their connection to it. Students should be free to draw life as it appears to them. Their experience will be influenced by all the senses including the smells, the rain, the heat, the wind. It is important for them not to feel restricted. I state this because, when I initially requested that my students go into nature and respond to it, many were defeated

by the idea of having to draw because 'I'm no good at drawing'. On my next request for them to step into nature and respond to it, instead of asking them to respond artistically, I asked them to respond personally: what are your mind and body feeling and telling you? Show me. And they did. And, as they did, they began, perhaps unwittingly, to embark on a journey of awakening through the world and through the self. It began a self-perpetuating continuum of connection and understanding. These experiences are not meant to remain as a self-exalted feeling, but as viaducts to connecting and understanding the self in the world.

In addition, I must also note that in order for students to fully appreciate and benefit from this type of experience, they need to be provided with the tools they need to interpret their world. When the teacher leads them into nature with the intention of encouraging an artistic response to it, it is important that the teacher introduces students to different types of tools, techniques, and media for expressing themselves recognizing that learners have different ways of making sense of their environments. In this way, the students will be more able to grow and develop as they analyze and interpret their discoveries. They will come to realize that not only are their ideas inexhaustible, but also their means of presenting them are inexhaustible too. By exploring and developing their skills, students will have more access to their inner selves and the outer world around them. In this way, the process of awakening will be more fulfilling and accessible to each student.

In order to encourage creativity, the creative environment needs to be one that is approachable so that the production of art becomes a voluntary and enjoyable experience. This does not mean that there is no longer a distinct

educational aim; instead, the educational aim will simply be placed in the ownership of the student. Friedrich Froebel puts it this way: “the children [need] employment in agreement with their whole nature, to strengthen their bodies, to exercise their senses, to engage their awakening mind, and through their senses, to bring them acquainted with nature and their fellow creatures; it is especially to guide aright the heart and the affections, and to lead them to the original ground of all life, to unity within themselves”. In doing so, we will not be teaching students what to think, but how to think. It is essential that responding to nature artistically is a first-hand experience that is evoked from within.

First-hand experience is integral for the development of introspection. By responding artistically to his or her natural surroundings, the student will be experiencing nature and artistic development first-hand. As Jenny Matthews, an artist who “even as child was thrilled by the variety and form, and the way flowers can appear in all sorts of unexpected places”, is very aware that “[y]ou need to see a flower in real life – so that you can look at it from every angle, witness how the light plays off its petals and leaves, and observe how it grows...real life gives you the third dimension to work with, [it gives you] more information” (Matthews 34) than a photograph or another person’s artwork. Not only will a student drawing from nature be able to gain all sorts of information and knowledge (color, lighting, physics, etc.) by taking the time to carefully consider an aspect of nature, but also the student will be able to slow down and allow his or her mind to be consumed by both nature and his or her personal response to it.

During his time at Walden Pond, Thoreau frequently comments on the importance of first-hand experience. It is through this sensual and immediate

experience that a person can begin to discover what it means to be alive for one's self. First-hand experience, according to Thoreau, is much richer than depending on another person's perspective. Although great truths can be found in another's work, it takes immediate experience to truly comprehend what life means to an individual. Nature provides that immediate experience. In order to truly make sense of an experience in nature, Thoreau leans on his imaginative capacity to reveal truths.

The imagination is a phenomenon that bridges the gap between the unyielding world of reality and our sense of how it could be. Everyone has the capacity to imagine. Peter London notes that “[y]ou do not have to teach a person how to dream or imagine, or intuit, or to have a subconscious; these states of mind come with being born human” (307). Imagination is engaged when it reflects on the world and delivers a meaningful personal response. The Romantic thinkers ardently promoted the development and use of the imagination. This is an important concept, especially since it liberates every person to take responsibility to put meaning into their own lives. Taking responsibility also requires the individual to acknowledge that life is constantly shifting and changing. The imagination is called upon to make sense of this continual flux. By encouraging students to cultivate their imaginative abilities, teachers will be enabling students to take responsibility so that they can personally make sense of the world.

It is through his imaginative capacity that Thoreau comes to the conclusion that he is at the center of his universe. And, he realizes that if he is at the center of his world, then he can give order to his own life and the world around him. By

encouraging students to have intimate and immediate experience of nature and requesting an artistic response, the teacher is enlisting the students to draw upon their imaginative capacities and thereby begin to develop a strong sense of self and a sense of how this self is related to the world around him. The student will be able to begin to essentially create his or her own world. Here we can see and draw upon Kant's influence. By being self-cultivating and self-aware, students would be choosing and, to an extent creating, a moral code by which to live their lives. Students would not be simply relying on codes passed down from generation to generation. If students realize that they have ownership over their lives and their thought processes, they will become empowered.

Thoreau's use of metaphor throughout *Walden* demonstrates his reliance on imagination to make sense of the world. He uses metaphors drawn from nature to emphasize his inner growth. Through these means, the natural world reflects Thoreau's perception of himself. Birds indicate moments of inspiration, the seasons periods of growth and dormancy, the pond as periods of purification and rebirth. The natural world, just like our own, goes through periods of recession and procession. By using metaphor, Thoreau is advocating the use of the imagination. Nature, especially as it is non-judgmental, seems to provide the perfect backdrop. If students use their imaginations to create metaphors for their personal response to nature, then struggling to portray these thoughts artistically will create the insight to analyze themselves within the bigger picture. If a student is awakened to the discovery of what it is within himself, then he can begin to shape his life in the direction that is particular to his being.

The contemplation of nature and the subsequent transformation of observation into art compels the person involved to see things with a new perspective. In nature, people are often confronted with situations that need immediate resolution as demonstrated by my previous example of the stream turned river. The natural world dictates that how people are to make their way in it, and, in doing so, encourages problem solving skills. In the same manner, artistic endeavor promotes problem solving skills. For instance, understanding how a particular artist's tool works requires that the student make many decisions such as which tool to use, how to compose the image, or how to position his or her body for the appropriate use of the tool. By joining experience in the natural world with artistic endeavor, not only will they have to confront or relive their experience, but also learn how to rationally translate their experience into art. It will not only allow problem solving skills to evolve, but it will develop into a sense of ownership over the process.

The natural world is ever changing, whether it is the seasons, time of day, or area chosen. As Constable notes that "[n]o two days are alike, not even two hours; neither were there ever two leaves alike since the creation of the world" (Vaughan, Rom. and Art 197). The transience and individuality found in nature provides limitless opportunities to explore the natural world and the self. Instead of finding the enormity of nature frightening, the student, like the Romantic, can embrace the inexhaustible nature of things and be creative without end.

Through exposure to the reality of nature, a student may be forced to relinquish some suppositions he or she already has about a particular aspect of nature. For instance, deprived of the opportunity to venture out into the natural

world, and forced to obtain all knowledge from books or other media, a student may not realize the incredible variety that exists in nature. Simply the way a particular stem holds up a particular flower, or the way a cedar tree scatters its seeds are lessons in themselves. A student may not realize that each tree, flower, sunset, and creature is unique. A student may not realize without making repeated visits into nature that nature, like us, changes from day to day and moment to moment. These experiences lead to the realizations that will build a student's confidence in his or her own uniqueness and lead to the recognition that everyone else is unique too.

Robert Bateman, a renowned wildlife artist and former high school teacher, used to "insist that his students learn the basic nature vocabulary of the place they were living [...]. He expected them to be able to identify the twenty most common birds, trees and herbaceous plants" (Archbold 27). He asked them to partake in this activity because it is his belief that "you can't respect what you can't even name" (Archbold 27). Students with hands on knowledge of the tangible world would naturally be more connected to the place they lived and to themselves. Bateman personally became "acutely aware of the infinite particularity and variety of nature" (Archbold 22) by watching and monitoring it. As a young boy he was initially fascinated by bird identification. Through his sketching and painting of the natural world, he came to realize that "[e]very living thing, [...], is a unique individual" (Archbold 22). Our students too, should have the opportunity to make these connections for themselves and develop the awareness that they, as living things, are unique and that is quite a natural way to be.

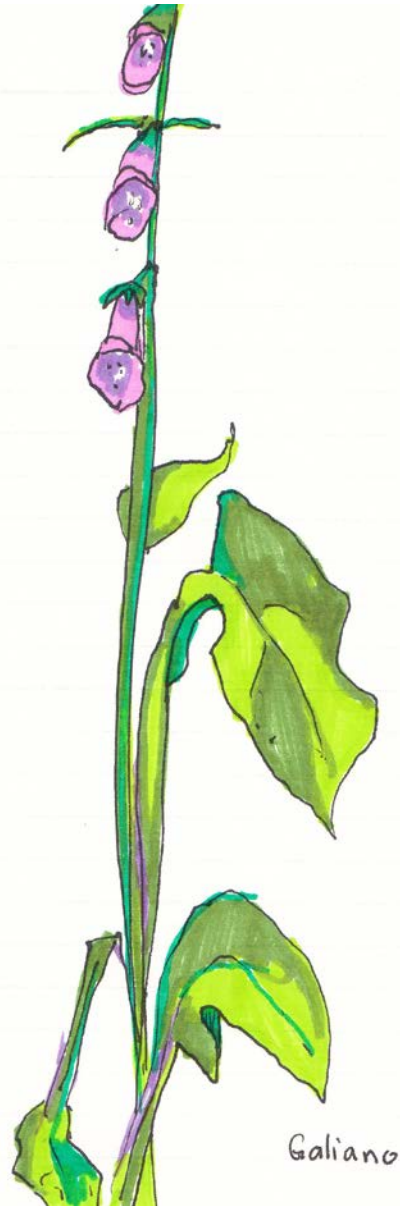
Students will learn to embrace not only their uniqueness, but the uniqueness of others on an equal plane. By becoming aware of the complexity and interdependence of every part of nature, the student will develop the awareness that individuals, cannot and do not have to know everything. They will become more able to absorb the things that are important to them and reject the things that are frivolous or unimportant.

The more frequently a person is in contact with nature and artistic endeavor, the more satisfying his or her artistic responses will grow to be as they become increasingly adept at using their interpretive tools. Expressing an encounter with the natural world artistically is a constructive experience and the student will be left with a tangible reminder of it. This artifact is useful because it will be a physical reminder of and gateway to engaging moments in nature. Through our memories, we can return to over and over again to these places. A tangible artistic product of such a moment will provide later opportunities to reflect on that bygone instant. Cathy Johnson, a painter, author and teacher from Missouri, comments that her art work of a particular place provides a visceral memory for her. She notes that “I can go back to my sketches and remember everything – not only what I saw, but what I heard, what birds were nearby, what scents were on the air, what I was wearing, who I was with – years later. Looking back through them makes me feel like I’ve really lived. As if time stands still.” Johnson is expressing how connected she feels to herself and to the world through her art. This is particularly possible because she has a tangible reminder that she can reflect upon.

Keeping an artistic journal is another tangible way to create a record of a student's personal development. The journalist would see that, with constant practice, his or her artistic and observational skills grow. This growth, especially as it can be substantiated in a tangible form, may become a source of pride and ownership for the student. There is no better way to overcome the fear of the blank page than by drawing every day. In essence, overcoming the fear of the blank page is also an exercise in overcoming the fear of other people's opinions. Whether or not the page is artistically perfect or able to express exactly what the student wanted is irrelevant because it is recognized as a jumping off point, a place of experimentation and development and not a final statement in itself.

Nature and art must take on an important role within the curriculum throughout all stages of learning and development. Through the exposure to nature and the interpretation of nature through art we can create positive and accessible means to guide our students toward becoming passionate individuals working to create a meaningful existence. Nature and art together lay the ground work for developing mind, body, and soul. Exposure to both art and nature are attainable and readily possible. Through art and nature every person will have the opportunity to recognize that he or she is unique, while realizing that others are unique too. This understanding is valuable not only to the individual, but to society as a whole. Instead of finishing each school day unexcited and unattuned to the possibilities the world has to offer, students will be equipped and ready to explore the possibilities of existence with excitement. These lifelong resources can be accessed and augmented at any time. I acknowledge that, although this process is extremely valuable, it can also be extremely frustrating.

There will be times when it may seem that self understanding and connection is utterly impossible, but I encourage students to persist. The journey is immeasurably worthwhile. I leave you with the following personal anecdote.



An Awakening of My Own

When it comes to art or experience I often have to fight voices. My voices and voices of others around me. Will what I create have any meaning? Hasn't this been done before? So many are better than me. Sometimes the voices are so loud I lose my way. But I have learned that I can find my way if I give myself the gift of being still.

One day in June I ran away from the voices. I climbed on my bicycle, I hopped on a ferry and disappeared alone to Galiano Island. I rode and rode and rode twelve kilometers of winding road to a little place on the edge of the sea. I unpacked myself onto the little bed and lay

there in silence. I lay like that for the rest of the day and into the next day. I hardly moved. I barely breathed. I thought of nothing. I only felt empty.

Sometime the following afternoon, my stomach started to growl enough for me to know I had to move. I climbed back on my bike and rode nine kilometers back to the nearest store. Up and down, weaving amongst the trees I rode. I wove through the trees unaware of the beauty that encapsulated me. Unaware of its glory.

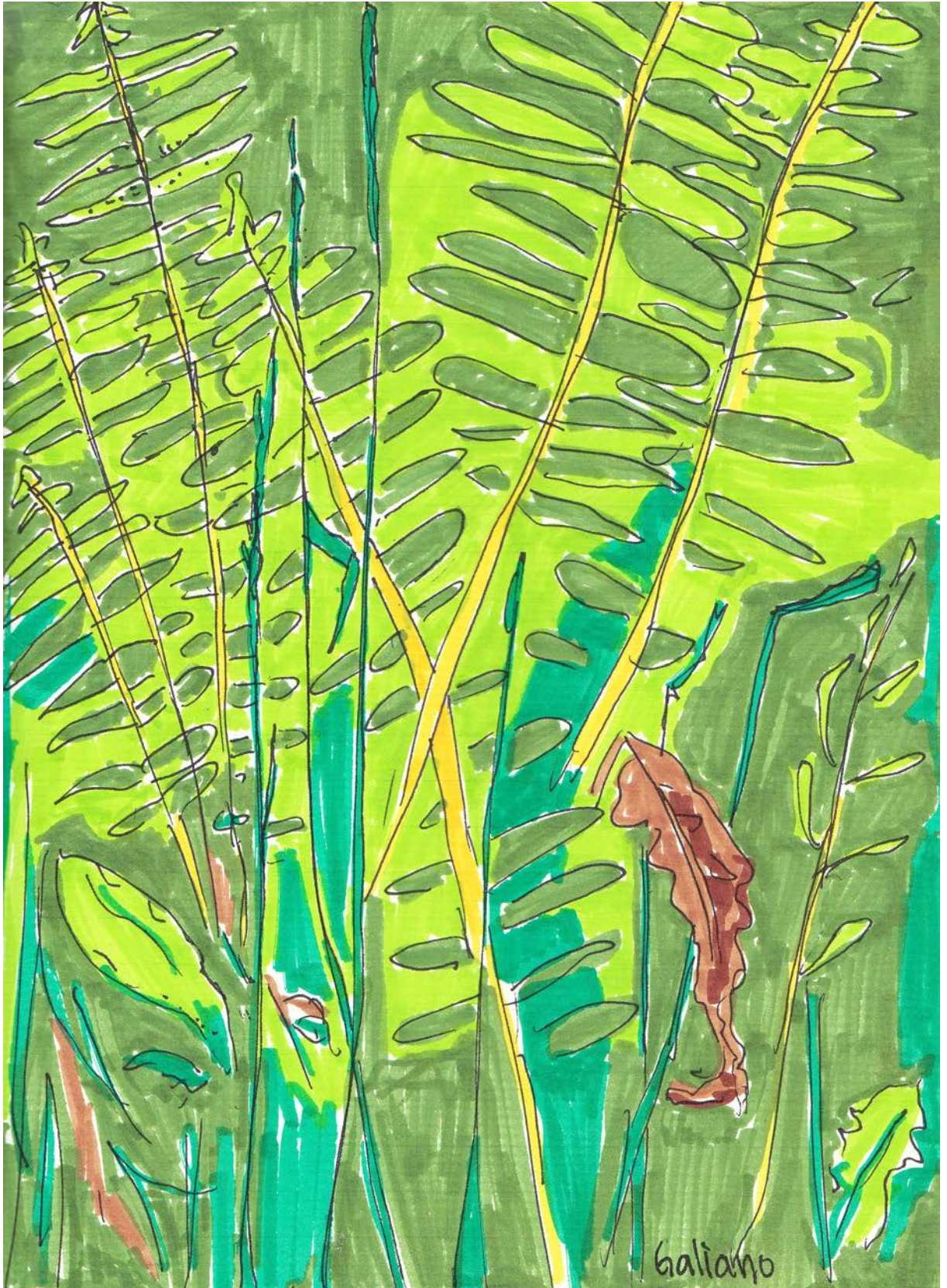
That is until fed. As I began my bike ride back toward the edge of the sea, my body began to reawaken. It led me off the road and into the trees. Into a clearing. My body lowered itself onto a tree stump among the grasses and ferns and wildflowers. It sat there until my senses began to unite with my mind. I breathed deeply. I stretched out my limbs. I reached into my backpack and pulled out my journal. My hands began to draw. My eyes took in the ferns in front of me including the dead little dangling pieces. My nose smelled the coolness of the day. My ears heard the rustle of the birds, the shift of the great trees. A picture began to form on the page. My hands intuitively selected colors to represent this beauty that I had neglected to acknowledge. Slowly, a dawning.

I closed my journal and put away my felt-pens and climbed back onto my bicycle. Further down the road, my body pulled me up a chained off pathway and sat me on the rocky ground. My hands and eyes began to draw the foxglove that stood before me looking down, goading me on. I drew and I colored. I climbed back on my bicycle and rode again. Now excited by the possibility that my body might draw me in to another experience. Again a secluded spot. This time fireweed.

Much later, my bicycle and I swooped to my resting place, the little log sanctuary at the edge of the sea. I unloaded my journal and gazed at what I had drawn. I felt alive. No longer empty. But most importantly, I knew that my drawings were okay. They were mine and they were moments of an awakening. I am part of it all. That is all I need to be.



At that moment, no longer did I worry whether my artistic experience mattered. Of course it has been done before. There are thousands of photos, paintings, drawings, and poems that reflect an experience with nature. So what! All I knew was that a new calm had come over me. My body, mind, and spirit were still, yet resounding with life and energy. This life and energy experienced through an intimate and artistic encounter with nature.



Galiano

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