

**Aesthetic Dimensions of Education:  
Exploring a Philosophical Pedagogy Using  
Dialogue with Arts Learners and Educators**

by

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M.A., Norwich University, 1994

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## Abstract

This thesis makes the claim that aesthetic experience is of fundamental significance in how we learn. Two basic questions are thus explored: 1) what is the meaning of aesthetic experience in educational contexts and 2) how do arts learners and educators understand and conceptualize aesthetic experience in relation to their own sense of artistic learning? Though the questions are posed separately, and may be seen as distinct orientations within theory and practice respectively, for the thesis they inform interdependent explorations of how aesthetic experience connects with how we learn.

The thesis begins with an introduction and review of literature examining theoretical connections between aesthetic experience and education. This is followed by a description of an educational program called *Exploring Aesthetic Experience*. The program was developed using a dialogical approach with the aim of helping students a) probe the significance of different philosophical quotations on aesthetic experience to deepen their understanding, and b) make meaningful connections with their own artistic learning. The program was implemented with 10 senior secondary students attending a fine arts school, and separately with 16 educators completing a master's degree in arts education. A qualitative study involving interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to explore the dialogical encounters of arts learners and educators during the program and the concepts of aesthetic experience and connections with artistic learning that emerged. The findings demonstrate how learners and educators were able to engage in deep and meaningful reflections on their own aesthetic experiences through dialogue, thus providing both a conceptual exploration of aesthetic experience and a philosophical-pedagogical exploration of the learning process (or of 'engaged learning').

Three main discoveries emerged. First, these arts learners and educators, who presumably are immersed in aesthetic and artistic experience, had little initial understanding of what aesthetic experience is or how to conceive of it. Second, conceptions of aesthetic experience that gradually emerged from participants corresponded closely both to their own descriptions and to educational theorists' conceptions of genuinely engaged learning. Third, the learning process of the educators was startlingly resistant and 'conceptual' compared to the younger learners, pointing towards the possibility of some important implications about the status quo patterns of our learning in higher education and the need for further study of the aesthetic dimension of our education.

**Keywords:** aesthetic experience; understanding and conceptions of aesthetic experience; artistic learning; dialogue or dialogical engagement; how we learn; philosophical pedagogy

*For my Mum and in memory of my Dad,*

*(July 2, 1929 – November 17, 2014)*

*With my deep gratitude for your constant love and support*

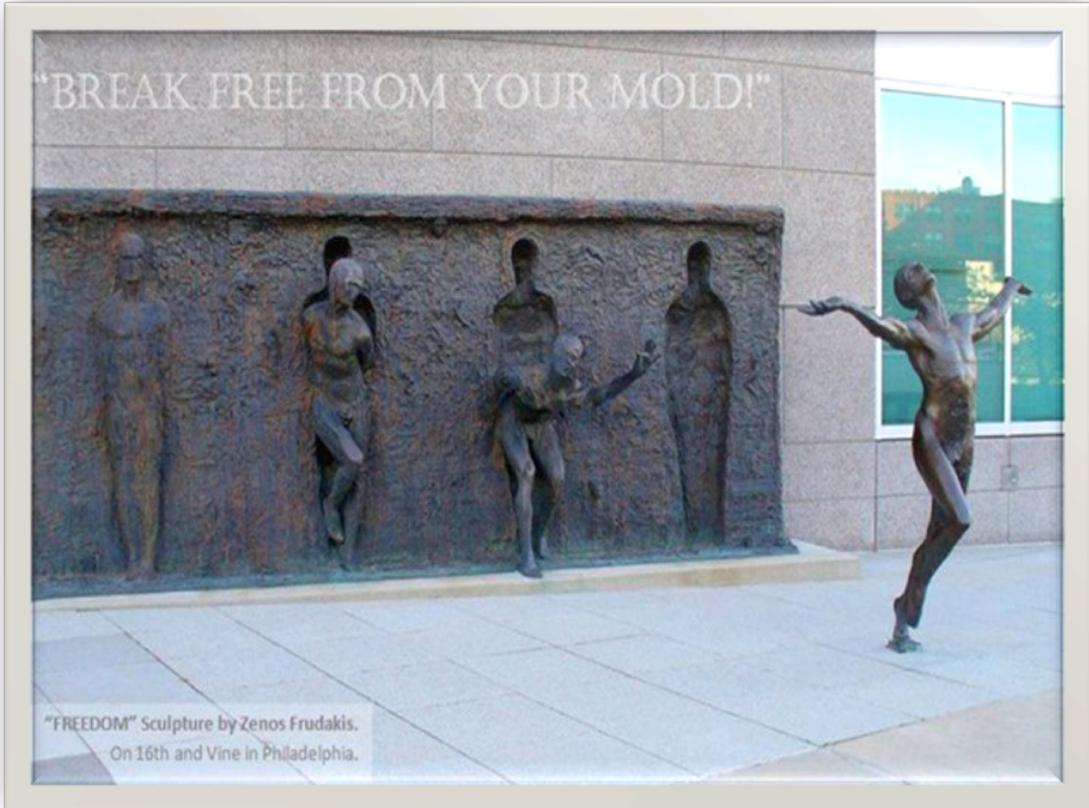
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"FREEDOM" Sculpture by Zenos Frudakis.  
On 16th and Vine in Philadelphia.

# Chapter 1.

## Problematic and Context

### 1.1. Prologue

In my early 20s, I was introduced to the work of Canadian philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984). Reading the introduction to his major work, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, I immediately felt a kindred spirit. After years of being privately preoccupied by questions about understanding, truth, and morality (I was endlessly puzzled by how we can know whether what we *think* is right or good really is), I was struck by the precision of his words and by a resounding sense of personal authenticity in his thinking.

My 'bent toward philosophy' probably began very early, as perhaps it does in all of us. As a very young child, my internal world was permeated by a deeply 'aesthetic' awareness (though I only began to realize it was aesthetic as an adult). I remember walking home from a neighbourhood ballet class when I was about five years old. It was dark, very quiet, no one around, maybe 5 or 6pm on a late fall evening. Walking along the sidewalk, I was intensely aware of and present to the night sky, the dusk, the trees, the quietness, all suffused with a hushed reverence. I felt peacefulness, solitude, closeness, a sort of relishing or cherishing of me-being-present-to-the-mystery-of-the-world, that somehow the world was charged:<sup>1</sup> alive, dark, yet warm and cosy.

This aesthetic mood pervaded my early childhood, from well before the age of five, and has lived and grown in me to the present. From a very young age, it gave me

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth's words capture the mood I felt, the earth and every common sight taking on the glory and freshness of a dream ("Intimations of Immortality").

an orientation to the world that was profound: the world is an intimate and friendly place full of mystery, and my relationship to it is one of being drawn in, wanting genuinely to understand more. For me, aesthetic awareness and understanding walk hand-in-hand; the one fuels, inspires, prompts, and urges the other. Feelings of reverence gave me a kind of spirit of scientific acceptance about the natural world, so that I was openly curious about all that I cherished and revered: what it was, how it worked.

Learning happens in many different ways, and this pervasive aesthetic experience shaped my entire poise toward learning. It opened the world to me. It deeply affected my outlook. It was *already* a form of learning in that, in an embodied way, it affected my entire conscious stance in the world. *I was* open inquiry and a natural flow of questions. It initiated, activated and aroused my desire to understand, oriented me not only to the 'outer' world around me, but also to the 'inner' world of my inquiring spirit. I was always curious, always intrigued, always asking questions, always wanting to understand, if not always out loud, at least inwardly. I believe it was, as Aristotle so wisely said, the beginning of science for me, of my scientific spirit of inquiry and understanding.<sup>2</sup>

So when I read, in my early 20s, the words of Lonergan (1957/1992) inviting me in a personal and yet scientific spirit of inquiry to "understand understanding" itself, I felt I had come home. Not only was I intrigued about the natural world, and still am, but even more so I was intrigued about the private yet shared world of human understanding and meaning. This was the world Lonergan's philosophy invited me into. As he makes clear in his introduction to *Insight*, his philosophy rests on a self- or personal appropriation. "The aim is not to set forth a list of the abstract properties of human knowledge but to assist the reader in effecting a personal appropriation of the concrete dynamic structure immanent and recurrently operative in his/[her] own cognitional activities" (p. 11). This pedagogical approach to philosophy by its very nature is gradual and only takes place through "a slow assembly of its elements, relations, alternatives, and implications" (p. 11). In Appendix A, I have included a diagram of these elements, though of course their

<sup>2</sup> My first undergraduate degree was in Kinesiology. Coming from an active background in dance and sport, I have always loved movement and have been fascinated by the workings of the human body.

functioning and the relations between them require much exploration and explanation that goes well beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>3</sup>

What is important to my thesis is how Lonergan's perspective and approach of personal appropriation grounds my meaning and orientation. So, for instance, words like 'experience,' 'consciousness,' 'wonder,' or 'mystery' include for me the elements of consciousness as diagrammed in Appendix A. When I speak of a 'flow of experience,' I mean (along with Lonergan) the flow of sense and perception *as well as* the flow of our whole concrete dynamic structure of conscious elements and acts (again, please refer to Appendix A). When I speak of 'wonder,' I do not mean the noun, as in the 'wonders of the world;' I mean the active verb that refers to the conscious activities immanent and recurrently operative in our thinking and learning. 'Consciousness' is a functional set of 13 verifiable acts or elements that, broadly speaking, consist in our sensing and perceiving, understanding and knowing, planning and deciding and doing (once again, please see Appendix A for a detailed outline of these acts). This perspective dominates my thinking and meaning in the thesis.

Likewise, the spirit of personal appropriation influences my writing, especially in the opening two chapters. Where a reader might expect a traditional literature review, for the sake of coherency and consistency I have found it necessary to write within the spirit of personal appropriation that has encompassed my life and my work in philosophy, and that I employ in my two empirical research studies with arts learners and educators. This style of writing is one that naturally tends toward open exploration, raising questions and presenting ideas that are intended to be evocative for the reader in the spirit of appealing to her or his own desire to understand. (If at times the tone is unconventional and odd sounding, I can only assure the reader that no arrogance whatsoever is intended, and in fact, just the reverse. My passion and deepest desire is that others will find themselves drawn into wanting to understand the unusual approach and ideas put forward here).

<sup>3</sup> In follow-up research work, one of my passions is to carry out studies similar to the ones conducted here but focusing on the full dynamic of human cognition rather than solely on aesthetic experience. This work would require a much more in-depth time frame and commitment from everyone involved.

Finally, by some stroke of good luck, the aesthetic stance that shaped my early life was not diminished, and perhaps was even strengthened, by the contrasting experience of what learning was so often considered to be in school: a series of informational bits to be memorized, rules to be followed, concepts or propositions to be taken in without reference to their background meaning. Where was my experience of being alive? Where was my questioning stance? Where was my desire to understand? The two almost diametrically opposed experiences have gradually taken shape in me to form a great puzzle about education and how we learn. And so I arrive at my topic for this thesis and to an overview of its content.

In this introductory chapter, my aim is to set the stage for my thesis, which rests on the claim that aesthetic experience is of fundamental significance in how we learn. My research thus explores two basic questions: 1) what is the meaning of aesthetic experience in educational contexts and 2) how do arts learners and educators understand and conceptualize aesthetic experience in relation to their own sense of artistic learning? Further, this research consists in both a theoretical development and an interrelated program development component and qualitative study.<sup>4</sup> I see my research as filling a gap in the areas of education and aesthetics, respectively. In the field of education, there have been many theorists who recognize the value of arts and aesthetics *in* learning, yet as far as I am aware, an explicit connection between aesthetic experience and how we learn has not been made. Likewise, in the field of aesthetics, a wealth of scholarship exists on aesthetics and aesthetic experience in relation to various art forms, but again, as far as I am aware, the explicit relationship of the subjective orientation of aesthetic experience as connected to how we learn has not been explored. In exploring this claim, then, I believe I am adding to research in both fields and, perhaps, forging new ground in bringing these elements of the two fields together in this particular way.

<sup>4</sup> In discussing this study, I refer often to the field of arts education (with the plural use of 'arts'). My use of the plural denotes all the art forms, but at times the singular term (art) appears. In these cases, it is sometimes referring to visual art proper, and at others times being used by others to denote 'the arts' generally. The context normally determines the particular meaning.

My thesis begins, then, with an introduction to the educational problem in its broad context and an exploration of theoretical connections between aesthetic experience and education (chapters 1 and 2 respectively). This is followed in chapter 3 by a description of a) the educational program developed with arts learners and educators called *Exploring Aesthetic Experience* and b) the qualitative study involving interpretative phenomenological analysis used to explore the dialogical encounters of arts learners and educators and the concepts of aesthetic experience that emerged during the program. In chapter 4, findings demonstrate how learners and educators were able to engage in deep and meaningful reflections on their own aesthetic experiences through dialogue, thus providing both a conceptual exploration of aesthetic experience and a philosophical-pedagogical exploration of the learning process (or of 'engaged learning'). Chapter 5 concludes by bringing together theory, program and findings, and their implications for pedagogical theory and practice and for further research.

To set the stage, then, ultimately, my thesis urges the need for an effective long-term change within education in the form of its vital and crucial enlargement. The word *vital* alludes to the aesthetic and to the significant role I give it in my perspective. Indeed, I use the word *vital* to emphasize the degree to which the aesthetic guides our living. As Marcuse (1964) points out, our technical, industrial modern societies have their own aesthetics, and it is these aesthetics that grip and restrain our educational systems and institutions. The word *crucial* refers to the fact that such change is desperately needed for our future generations and, indeed, for the dignity of humanity. It also reflects the fact that such change is no small or short term task. My starting point in this urge for longterm change is an identification of the ways in which education is presently constrained and limited within our social context. From this beginning, we can later move to an effective future visioning of our selves, our living and our learning.

In this chapter, then, I am exploring five interrelated ideas. First, educational systems rest within a larger social context and, second, schools mirror the social contexts in which they are situated. In speaking about a 'problematic of education,' then, paradigm assumptions operative in this larger social context need to be considered in their effects on education (Brookfield, 1995). Third, the consequent educational problematic includes a status quo settledness that contributes to: an overall reluctance

to change, a lack of longterm visioning or emergent evolutionary perspective, and a missing sense of purpose that our learning is part of a larger evolving human process. Fourth, another aspect in the educational problematic is the fact that our education systems are situated in societies that include capilitalism, consumerism, materialism, and individualism. Fifth, the resulting constraints that these 'isms' impose on education and learning include an overemphasis on: instrumental, technical and mechanical forms of learning, heavy on memorization; achievement, competition and 'success' as measurable quantities; and a notable loss of experiences of awe, curiosity, aliveness in school learning. This chapter explores these topics in an integrated and interrelated way as a precursor to subsequent explorations of aesthetic experience as fundamentally significant in how we learn.

## **1.2. The Social Context of Education**

A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress. [In this civilization,] domination has its own aesthetics, and democratic domination has its democratic aesthetics. (Marcuse, 1964, pp. 1; 65)

Educational systems are not separate entities, though we tend to imagine them in just that way. In fact, our educational systems are embedded in political and economic systems of government everywhere around the world, whether local, provincial/state-wide, or national. When we talk about educational systems and institutions changing, we cannot escape the realities of our actual economies and of our actual governments that make the decisions and delineate the kinds and degrees of changes to be put into place. In our Western world, "concentration of capital led to the formation of giant enterprises, managed by hierarchically organized bureaucracies.... The individual worker and clerk become a cog in this machine; their function and activities are determined by the whole structure of the organization in which they work" (Fromm, 1960, p. 6). Teachers and administrators are subject to this whole societal mechanism. Budget decisions, for example, influence everything from the types of classes offered (maths, sciences, languages, humanities, arts, and so on) to class size and composition (numbers of students in one class and the inclusion of special needs students). They tend to reveal the societal (or governmental) value placed on education: budget cuts often result in the

loss of the “less important” subjects, such as the arts, or in the increase of class sizes or the inclusion of special needs students without support workers. In the case of class size, any parent with two or more children at home knows well the challenges of maintaining a steady equilibrium let alone of fostering curiosity and learning. A single teacher with 20 to 30 students in a class, some of whom may need very special care and attention, is faced with a set of challenges way beyond reasonable demand. So the hierarchical web that controls teachers in the trenches and government administrators, whom many believe have little real idea of how education works, can become a notoriously troubled mine field. Education, then, needs to be considered in relation to its actual societal and economic factors.

Further, as Herbert Marcuse (1964) emphasizes in the opening quotation, in our advanced industrial and technological civilizations, West and East, a comfortable, smooth *unfreedom* prevails and an artistic and aesthetic alienation develops. This unfreedom affects all aspects of our living, not least of all the mood of our perception, our openness and our capacity for aesthetic appreciation: “The physical transformation of the world entails the mental transformation of its symbols, images and ideas” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 66). The everyday domination of our senses by mechanized, technical sights and sounds becomes the new norm so that we lose and have lost a sense of mystery and grandeur in and from our surroundings. “Obviously, when cities and highways and National Parks replace the villages, valleys and forests; when motorboats race over the lakes and planes cut through the skies – then these areas lose their character as a qualitatively different reality” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 66). Along with our feelings for the natural world, our feelings of romance and eroticism are diminished. The pin-up girl replaces Aphrodite (Lonergan, 1957/1992) and the settings of our love-making change drastically. “For example, compare love-making in a meadow [with love-making] in an automobile, on a lover’s walk outside the town walls and on a Manhattan street” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 73). An intensified sexual energy, with its cruder images and symbols, replaces the subtler experience of the erotic, and our very ideas of romance and love-making diminish. In turn, a narrower sense of love affects our love for learning.

Romance is characterized perhaps most poignantly by our openness to a sense of mystery, to a sense of and desire for the unknown beloved; learning, too, can be

characterized and experienced as this openness to a mysterious unknown that is captivating. Yet this captivating sense of the unknown is in stark contrast to what we have come to call 'the status quo,' the norm, the usual. In education, the unknown is now commonly a threat to students, as well as to many teachers. The feeling, literally, of not having an answer has become an increasingly unsettling one, replacing an intellectual openness to the unknown with a mental dis-ease and impatience characteristic of our 'modern' age. Math, for instance, particularly when it is presented as problems-to-be-solved rather than series' of technical steps to carry out, is often a much-feared subject. And educators continue to exert the need to 'bring learning alive':

...one of the disturbing findings of CEA's [*Canadian Educational Association*] *What did you do at school today?* research: that many successful students who appear to be engaged in school say they are not engaged intellectually. Rather, they say they've learned how to "do school" in order to get good grades. (Bennet, 2013, p. 6)

This comment from successful high school students reveals the "disengaged and instrumental modes of thought and action, which have steadily increased their hold on modern life" (Taylor, 1989, p. 495). The great German poet and philosopher, Friedrich Schiller, in 1795, wrote about his own fragmented society as "an ingenious piece of machinery [with] a vast number of lifeless parts" and humanity itself "eternally chained to only one single little fragment" (1795/2004, p. 40). More recently and more vibrantly, David Abram (1996; 2010) writes of the disconnection of self from the animate world. All of these views can be seen as rooted in a set of dualisms that became explicit with Descartes in the mid 1600s.

Here, though, when I think of that word *instrumental*, I think of technique – the physical manipulation and 'how to' of a thing. There is nothing wrong with technique – we need it for almost all aspects of our lives: cooking, eating, reading, writing, politicizing, sport, arts, lovemaking, religion, technology, on and on. Technique and technology have enormous benefits. A problem only arises, as Douglas Sloan (1983) has made clear, when technique and technology begin to dominate a culture, to carry an ethos and a mood that overshadows us, stressing "means rather than meaning; process rather than purpose; efficiency rather than the richness of experience" (p. 27).

As Sloan (1983) notes, means, process and efficiency are the strengths of technique. Just think of a highly skilled athlete, musician or tradesperson, for instance. She or he has developed the skills, or the means, to be able to perform his or her 'work' with utmost efficiency. But what if technique alone dominates? We end up with students who have learned simply how to "do school," to play the game and get good grades. In these technological and instrumental times, it seems the aim of school is primarily to learn skills and get jobs in our consumer-driven society. "Guided and checked by broader goals and purposes, technique can be of immense value" (p. 27), but as a stand-alone, where does it leave us? Larger concerns and questions about our lives and our living tend to be dismissed as ultimately not useful, "wholeness and unity are dissolved away" (p. 12), and our thinking becomes fragmented.

In this instrumental ethos, we have lost the ability and willingness to pause in question-poised openness and to struggle through hours or days toward a slow dawning comprehension. Quickly given formulas, terms and definitions replace questing openness and the loss of awe, wonder and a sense of mystery, especially as students progress through the higher grade levels and into post-secondary education. This is a problem that haunts educators. Boredom, lack of interest, lack of curiosity and motivation is a commonplace concern among teachers and a topic written about in countless educational books and talked about at conferences.

Yet the organization of educational institutions revolves around this status quo norm of instrumentalization. The structure of classrooms and buildings, the hierarchies of administrations and teachers, the production and availability of textbooks and resources, the funding of projects and special events, the political and economic flow underpinning systems of education, are all meshed into this technological and instrumental ethos. How this ethos affects our school environments and our experiences of learning is something we need now to consider.

### **1.3. Schools, Learning and the Larger Social Context**

So we begin to see how the environment is intricately and inextricably part of the experience of any student and teacher and educator, the 'learning environment' no less

than any other environment in which we find ourselves. In the broadest sense, 'the environment' includes both the physical spaces and places in which education happens, as well as physical resources, like textbooks, provided for teachers and students. Each of these things is a large topic in itself. And each has its own special effect on the inner world of sensing-imaging-questioning of any given student or teacher. Simply mentioning and imagining a textbook can have the effect on many people of discomfort, dislike, disharmony, dulling the flow or stream of their experience. Associations of heavy feats of memorization are often linked with the mention or image of standard school textbooks. It is not simply the physical appearance of them, but the way in which teaching with textbooks so often eliminates entirely the possibility of questing wonder or insight to arise; the emphasis instead is so often on 'learning (read 'memorizing') the concepts' – words and terms already given before any question has had a chance to ripple the molecular surface in the within of the student.<sup>5</sup>

Then there are the physical environments of schools, classrooms, hallways, gymnasiums, buildings, and school grounds. How do they affect experience for students and teachers? Do these spaces and places offer an environment that invites the potential liberation of our consciousness to a felt and lived sense of the known unknown? The question is an open question, not a matter of shoulds and musts, but a question of how, in fact, does *this* school affect the inner sensibility and wonder of its occupants. This is a question that each of us, teachers, students, parents, friends, and community members can reflect on. The French philosopher and phenomenologist, Gaston Bachelard, would likely have much to say about such a question. In his book, the *Poetics of Space* (1969), he thoughtfully and creatively examines different types of spaces and the psychological associations of them in our inner lived experiences. Nests, for example, he says, are images of places that evoke deep feelings of security. "Would a bird build a nest if it didn't have its instinct for confidence in the world?" (p. 104). Our own houses thus become symbolic extensions of nests in our world. Our school

<sup>5</sup> This refers to a question of "whether concepts result from understanding or understanding results from concepts" (Lonergan, 1990, p. 336, fn 1). This topic is enormous and needs much fuller treatment than I can give to it here. Nevertheless, this question (and my stance embracing the former position) implicitly underpins my thesis. This topic is one I wish to pursue in my future writing and research.

buildings, where we spend nearly a third of our lives, could also offer nurturing shelter, providing us with the kind of security and confidence in the world that could liberate our longing for openness.

Such questions help us explore openly the significance of architectural and environmental design to education. Architect Mark Dudek (2000), in his opening chapter on origins and significant developments in the history of school architecture, puts the issue clearly: “Whilst school systems in some shape or form had been developing throughout the world from the earliest part of the enlightenment, there was no coherent idea as to the educational needs of teachers and the school environment” (p. 11). Uncannily echoing Bachelard, Dudek draws on the work of architects and environmental psychologists to describe the need of young children to have a necessary haven or shelter, “formed out of a piece of furniture or a garden bower,” that allows students to withdraw into their own fantasy world. He supports the idea that this is necessary not only for young children, but also for high school students. “This implies that the role of the interior of the school takes on a more profound psychological significance than simply the machine for learning in” (p. 38). Indeed, in his exploration of specific spaces, external areas and environmental comfort generally, Dudek realizes “not only can these areas contribute significantly to the well-being of the school community, they can also transform the architecture into a pedagogical ‘instrument’ in its own right” (p. 101). Once we are aware of the vital significance of our own desire to understand, we can transform architecture to become an ‘instrument’ for our yearning and learning. The aesthetic – in the sense of both outer and inner – becomes a good in itself.<sup>6</sup>

The need for such a perspective seems pressing. In *Changing Spaces of Education*, Molly Warrington (2012) examines UK based schools from the perspective of government equity policies. She finds that even though “there has been an

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Read (1958), in agreement with Wittgenstein, states: “The possibility that an identical basis may be found for ethics and aesthetics has been discussed positively by Schiller and negatively by Kierkegaard. I must here merely declare myself on the positive side of the argument...” (p. 268). The question of the value, or the good, of aesthetics in education is another whole region to be explored. See also the article by Yaroslav Senyshyn and Danielle Vezina (2002). Wittgenstein, Collingwood, and the aesthetic and ethical conundrum of opera. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 10(1), 27-35.

unprecedented emphasis by governments on education in the last three decades” actual equity remains a distant reality. Despite a major focus of equity reform being to raise the standard of the geographical locations and conditions of inner city schools, after nearly 30 years of activity, no significant progress has occurred. Linked with Dudek’s (2000) observations, also from the UK, this lack of progress can be seen to have definite aesthetic and psychological effects on the members of those schools. “Children ‘read’ the landscape of school and see powerful, often negative, messages ‘written’ in its tarmac spaces” (p. 111). Later in this article, Warrington (2012) speaks of a research project with students from inner city schools (this one with an inner-Manchester school), and notes how the rough community ethos permeates the school environment and affects the students: “...what was striking there was the way in which the surrounding locality clearly impinged hugely on the school itself. Particularly apparent was the notion of fear which permeated the students’ writing” (p. 106). Can open curiosity and understanding be encouraged or sustained when children are reading this kind of landscape?

Similarly, what about a school environment that includes a high security presence? Nicole Bracy (2011) studied “Student Perceptions of High Security School Environments” and found that “many students at Vista and Cole High Schools feel like they go unheard, feel like it doesn’t matter what they say when they get in trouble... that, ultimately, it doesn’t matter how a student reacts because there is nothing he or she can do to change the situation” (p. 384). The presence of authority within the inner world of a student’s being has affects on sense, image, and the reach of curiosity so that by the time youth get to high school, they may well experience a more or less permanent ‘turning off’ of their orientation to openness, curiosity, questioning. Gregory Cajete (1994), too, recognizes the dire issues of “the orientation permeating modern education: an orientation that emphasizes extreme profaneness and materialism. This leads to conditioning that engenders a radical destructiveness at the individual, spiritual, communal, and environmental levels of being” (p. 76). How different this orientation is than that of the “primal orientation to spiritual ecology and a deeply internalized sense of place” (Cajete, p. 82). We begin to see and feel how the aesthetic affects us in schools, and most importantly, we begin to feel and appreciate the need for a coherent system of architecture and design that honours our inner drive of inquiry and understanding.

## 1.4. The Status Quo and Affects on Education

The tendency of institutional systems toward fixity and inflexibility leads us to the 'status quo,' the 'norm,' the expectation of settledness and the sense of hopelessness of being able to fight against it. On the one hand, we can feel that 'having a voice' in how our future goes forward is a dream that will never come true. On the other hand, we can be caught in a situation or a society in which only revolution can bring about any hope of significant positive change, yet the turmoil, chaos and violence of revolution brings its own serious problems. As Paulo Freire (1996) urged in his final public interview given to the International Literacy Institute, tolerance of others, dignified education of the oppressed, and an abiding openness of curiosity not only are essential elements for us and for society, but they are our ethical duty in struggling against status quo injustice. "My philosophical conviction is that we did not come to keep the world as it is. We came to the world in order to remake the world. We have to change reality" (International Literacy Institute, 1996).

Such change is not easy when the fixity and settledness of the status quo in leading industrial societies around the world is coupled with the power of those few who 'run the show.' The World Bank, corporate and individual greed, oppression, poverty, and starvation are themes with echoes around the world. As the movie "Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps" (Pressman, 2010) portrays, this power and greed combination increases our sense of helplessness: as life moves on, 'the rich get richer, the poor get poorer.' For anyone who may dismiss such a film as 'only in the movies,' Stephen Lewis (2005) brings home deep issues of greed, depravity and inaction when it comes to global educational concerns enmeshed in world politics and economics.

More and more, then, it is crucial that the strongholds of economic and political power around the world are challenged so that there is hope of bringing about actual change in world situations, in the streets, in living conditions, in communities. Yet, challenge on this scale, to be effective, must go beyond local and even national demonstrations and protests; to be effective in challenging the larger more settled institutional systems of the world, we need to come together as a global people in demand of positive change. Anna Stetsenko (2012) urges us to find:

...a new reality of *human Becoming* where new forces - those of history, culture, and society – reign. According to this view, humans come to be and come to know – each other, themselves and the world – while transforming their world and, in the process, while collectively creating their own life and their own nature, along with their society and history. (p. 148)

To achieve this sort of transformation in our lives and thinking, we need to use collaboration as strength, so that a growing minority of the world's population can begin to create an effective sway, to challenge settled insitutional systems and the fixity of the status quo.

The move toward collaborative learning is more and more coming to the front of educational theories and practises. Yrjo Engstrom's work in the areas of activity theory and expansive learning theory rests on a model of collaboration that has achieved notable results in the health care field. Expansive learning theory grows out of what Engstrom (2001) terms 'third generation activity theory.' This particular adaptation of activity theory focuses on inter-organizational collaboration, bringing together two 'activity systems.' In his research project, Engstrom brings together two health care systems in Finland, along with the parents of children who are dependent on both of these systems for treatment of their particular diseases. The starting point of the research project is a lack of efficiency in the larger health care situation, resulting in fragmented patient follow-up and satisfaction. As Engstrom (2001) reports,

*The learning challenge* in this setting was to acquire a new way of working in which parents and practitioners from different caregiver organizations will collaboratively plan and monitor the child's trajectory of care, taking joint responsibility for its overall progress. There was no readily available model that would fix the problems; no wise teacher had the correct answer. (p. 139)

The aim of the research was thus to bring together health care workers from both systems in order to help them become aware of the larger situation and concerns. Further, the aim was to learn how the fragmented situation is affecting the patients and families, where there are breakdowns in effective communication between the respective health care systems, and work toward a practical, collaborative solution for a new system that could be put into place to address these concerns.

Following along similar lines of Engstrom's work in expansive learning theory and activity theory, Susan O'Neill (in press) has achieved important results in the field of arts education. Like Engstrom, O'Neill's adaptation of activity theory focuses on inter-organizational collaboration, working with a number of 'activity systems,' in this case, a number of different arts organizations in Vancouver, British Columbia. O'Neill's project, Artistic Learning Dialogues (ALD), brought together leaders representing major youth arts organizations along with educators, teachers, administrators, business representatives and youth students, all working in the arts. In this case, participants shared a common goal of providing artistic learning for children and youth or else participating in artistic learning designed for children and youth. All were interested in coming together in focused dialogue, drawing on Bohm's (1996) four principles of dialogue (participant, coherence, awareness, enfoldment) to explore the meaning and participants' experiences of artistic learning, as well as to explore potentials for future collaboration between organizations. The research project thus brought together people who shared knowledge, interest and practice in the arts and in artistic learning.

Further, this approach of researcher-practitioner collaboration brought together two 'systems' of people (arts researchers and arts practitioners) with the goal of expanding their appreciation, understanding and knowledge of the arts and of artistic learning, while at the same time increasing their comprehension of the opportunities for artistic learning within their community. In terms of expansive learning theory, each organization was working more or less individually in their own small 'silos' (and often competing for funding from the same government and private agencies); the aim of the research was thus to learn more about the actual artistic learning situation – "mapping the terrain" – in which artistic learning for children and youth was taking place. Similar to Engstrom's work, O'Neill was interested in discovering where there might be breakdowns in effective provision of artistic learning and how there might be a new and potentially better collaborative system put into place in the future. One aim of the research was to address concerns about access and opportunities for the provision of artistic learning amidst constant administrative funding challenges; a further aim was thus to enlarge community and administrative appreciation of the value of artistic learning; consequently, the research also aimed at exploring, clarifying and articulating

the importance of artistic learning to arts learners and teachers and members of the wider community.

The collaborative work of Engstrom and O'Neill both rest on ideas put forward by Etienne Wenger. In the introduction to his book, *Communities of Practice* (1998), Wenger eloquently portrays the present educational context and problems of our day that call for a radically new perspective on collaboration. I believe the long quotation is worth including:

Our institutions, to the extent that they address issues of learning explicitly, are largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching. Hence we arrange classrooms where students – free from the distractions of their participation in the outside world – can pay attention to a teacher or focus on exercises. We design computer-based training programs that walk students through individualized sessions covering reams of information and drill practice. To assess learning we use tests with which students struggle in one-on-one combat, where knowledge must be demonstrated out of context, and where collaborating is considered cheating. As a result, much of our institutionalized teaching and training is perceived by would-be learners as irrelevant, and most of us come out of this treatment feeling that learning is boring and arduous, and that we are not really cut out for it.

So, what if we adopted a different perspective, one that placed learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world? What if we assumed that learning is as much a part of our human nature as eating or sleeping, that it is both life-sustaining and inevitable, and that – given a chance – we are quite good at it? And what if, in addition, we assumed that learning is, in its essence, a fundamentally social phenomena, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing? What kind of understanding would such a perspective yield on how learning takes place and on what is required to support it? (Wenger, 1998, p. 3)

Wenger recognizes that our ideas about learning are fundamentally involved in the shaping of our institutions and systems of education. If we are going to change our institutional systems, we need to reflect on our present conceptions of learning around which our institutions are built. In our swiftly-growing, globally interconnected modern world, to be concerned about *learning* is totally understandable. “But perhaps more than learning itself, it is our *conception* of learning that needs urgent attention when we

choose to meddle with it on the scale on which we do today” (Wenger, 1998, p. 9). If we want to move forward together as a global human group, collaboratively and in dialogue with each other, collectively creating our own histories, cultures and societies and challenging a world-wide status quo domination of industrial societies around the world, then the kind of re-thinking and re-imagining that Stetsenko and Wenger urge is vital:

A new conceptual framework for thinking about learning is thus of value not only to theorists but to all of us – teachers, students, parents, youths, spouses, health care practitioners, patients, managers, workers, policy makers, citizens – who in one way or another must take steps to foster learning (our own and that of others) in our relationships, our communities, and our organizations. (Wenger, 1998, p. 11)

The creation and implementation of a new conceptual framework of learning that lifts us all beyond the status quo cannot take place without our collaboration. More and more, long-term visioning and collaboration are becoming an urgent need in the world, and increasing technology both provokes and provides for that need with its benefits of instant world wide communication and ‘education without borders.’

Long term visioning is paramount to foster a network of collaboration that could challenge the status quo of any region, let alone grow globally to challenge world power structures of politics and economics and institutional systems of education. “We must... remember that our institutions are designs and that our designs are hostage to our understanding, perspectives and theories” (Wenger, 1998, p. 10). In bringing about change to educational institutions, then, we are talking about the need to bring about change to deeply rooted understandings, perspectives, and values. Such transformation does not happen quickly. Changing hearts and minds takes time and patience, slow steady work to begin to imagine new possibilities of ways of being.

So the topic of long term visioning in itself is a vital first step. Long term visioning enlarges the context of our talk about education and about learning. It lifts our thinking out of the day-to-day and places it in a larger evolutionary context. In a short-term perspective, changes are transitory and often fragmented. One government implements a new policy or set of policies; the next lets them go, or perhaps is forced to keep them despite changes that may render them obsolete or irrelevant. In terms of an ongoing picture of our human living, the end result is a continual series of successive

compromises, a sprinkling of successes amidst numerous failures to meet the needs of those for whom the changes are meant to help. Added to the effects of compromise are the ravishes of group and general bias, so that a cycle of decline ensues: “the social order that has been realized does not correspond to any coherently developed set of practical ideas. It represents the fraction of practical ideas that were made operative by their conjunction with power” (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 249).

In an evolutionary perspective, though, we view the flow of human contribution as an ongoing flow constituting our progress and decline. There is the accumulation of positive and negative ideas that have occurred over generations and that affect our present living; in this long term perspective, all are taken together, and the guiding viewpoint is the future (Appadurai, 2013). The future represents the possibility of selecting out of the totality those actions and plans from our past that have made and are likely to make for positive change, learning, and development in our future patterns of living. And so in this long term visioning, the spread of past and future alive in present time is what we embrace. In this larger evolutionary context, then, we begin to see our living as an emergent creation with us as collaborative creators.

## **1.5. Society and its Constraints on Education**

So far we have considered the social context of education mostly from the point of view of a critique of industrial modern society. Now we turn more specifically to the implications on education and learning. In this final section, we consider the aesthetic ‘feel’ associated with education and learning in our modern society, and end by looking to a hopeful future.

Almost everyone has had a teacher who could ‘bring the subject alive.’ And what a lovely double-meaning there is in that phrase: *bring the subject alive*. This special breed of teacher not only brings the subject alive, be it math or science or English or history, et cetera; she or he also brings the-subject-who-is-the-student alive. The *person* comes alive. In that spirit, Parker Palmer (1998) says in his book *Courage to Teach*, “As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto that of my students, my subject, and our way of being together” (p. 2). Some teachers have a special charisma, character, or

dynamic personality; some teachers have a gift of expertise for communicating their knowledge, along with a deep love for what they do; and some teachers, like Palmer, connect with children or youth or adults through their genuine care for their students' whole experience of life and learning.

Regardless of how it happens, when the subject (in both senses) 'comes alive,' we experience a sort of awakening, or as Maxine Greene (1977) describes, a sense of being 'wide awake.' She develops this notion from Alfred Schutz's work on wide-awakeness. Schutz describes:

By the term "wide-awakeness," we want to denote a plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements. Only the performing and especially the working self is fully interested in life and, hence, wide-awake. It lives within its acts and its attention is exclusively directed to carrying its project into effect, to executing its plan. This attention is an active one, not a passive one. Passive attention is the opposite to full awareness. (in Greene, 1977, p. 121)

And as Greene adds, "that wide-awakeness contributes to the creation of the self" (1977, p. 121). The longing that is so often buried deep inside us surfaces, to be glimpsed and felt by us in moments of aspiration that yet can fade into the normalcy of everyday. It is as if we are connecting with an enigmatic experience that is somehow deeply, humanly familiar to us. Kierkegaard (1846/1992), in his writing about the infinite, captures the mood of our restless awakening. Like the call of the oncoming night,

Sometimes one would like to interpret it as an invitation, persuaded by the night wind as it monotonously repeats itself and searches the forest and fields as if it were looking for something, persuaded by the distant echo of stillness in oneself as if it had a presentiment of something. (pp. 56-57)

Our restless longing for our place in this universe echoes within us. Such longing, enigmatic and almost unreal in this world of practical busy-ness, is readily thrust aside in our lives, in our teaching, and in our ideas about education and learning.

Instead, it is far easier for us as students and teachers to read facts and memorize names and dates about cultures and peoples and histories, about the movements of the human group. And yet, if we pause and ask ourselves the personal

question, “*do I feel myself a part of the larger flow of humanity-in-the-universe?*”, the answer we probably have to give is “*no.*” In our times, education is being challenged to move out of its long habits of treating human beings as passive observers of an already-existing self-contained “subject/topic-oriented” world. Instead, in a transformative stance on education, “the world itself is seen in its *human relevance* – as a dynamic uninterrupted flow of actionable human deeds stretching through time, as a flow of practice brought into existence and enacted by people” (Stetsenko, 2012, p. 149). One broad aim of education, I believe, ought to be to feel ourselves part of the long, larger flow of human evolution, the rise and fall and rise and fall, like the tides, of tribes, groups, empires, cultures, civilizations. Do we live with a feeling of being an *active* participant, contributing to our vast ocean of human wayfinding (Davis, 2009)? If we each raise and answer such questions honestly, I suspect our sense of belonging would be found wanting.

We need to undertake “...this exploration of the human place within this world” and to write, as Linda Hogan (1995) has done, our own spiritual histories of “the alive and conscious world, ...showing us both our place and a way of seeing” (p. 12). We need to do this as we transition to a much larger, global sense of communal becoming. For in the midst of this transitory evolutionary time in humanity, many of us have lost the feeling we once might have had for ‘my people.’ For instance, when I was young, my family (parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins) would get together regularly at my grandparents’ country house. In the evenings, we would gather in the dark wood-grained living room, the stone fireplace lit, and listen to my grandmother and grandfather’s stories, usually funny, sometimes sad and occasionally eerie. But it’s only now that I’m beginning to appreciate much more deeply how these stories provided me with a sense of who I am, of my (scattered and broken) ancestry. They were random stories, entertaining and fun at the time. Now they leave me wondering about my people, my roots, and my history, and the stories I heard were only a very small taste.

For the most part, these were stories of individuals. They weren’t stories of a whole tribe or culture or people together because in my North American colonial family, our tribe or clan (large part Scottish and large part French) had long since disintegrated, split up and travelled to other parts, lost touch with each other, with the ways of their

heritage, with the native surroundings that originally nourished them. We had integrated with other clans and other peoples over long generations, and gradually we had come to this day and this place of mixed heritage and lost roots – a place of new and evolving beginnings. Our family stories were of individuals living out their lives, making new histories.

So in my own family history, there is the loss of an aesthetic feel for our larger ancestral movements, for the stories of how we came forward together as a group or tribe. And all around the world, in different ways, we are witnessing the loss of peoples living together and growing together in shared community, the seeming smallness and localness of life somehow allowing for the larger communal continuity of ideas, hopes, dreams, visions. Modernity with its conflating of cultures and peoples brings with it great possibilities for enlarged visioning and enlarged dreaming of better ways of living together, but it presents broad challenges in how to communicate our visions and dreams among disparate groups.

The loss of feeling for human and cultural evolution is an aesthetic and educational loss, a loss of learning. Cultural anthropologist, Wade Davis (2009) in his book *Wayfinders*, the published CBC Massey Lectures, speaks of the loss of ancient cultures around the globe. Younger generations lose skills and knowledge that their parents and grandparents possessed, and cultures and languages die out and are lost to a modern world in which such skills and wisdom appear to be no longer needed or relevant. My own appreciation of the loss of a culture comes from work I did for two years with First Nations youth in an educational outreach program in Vancouver. The program, and my intimate contact with the secondary students in it, gave me an inside appreciation of the loss of the First Nations culture in British Columbia. I am no authority on the topic, but what I can say with conviction from my brief experience is that Caucasian culture and people in North America have *much* to learn from First Nations cultures. And looking for improvement, ways to be better at what we do as human beings, is something that lurks in our enigmatic human call of ‘coming alive.’

In the *Wayfinders*, Davis speaks not only of the loss, but also of the importance of preserving ancient wisdom and culture in these in modern times. He recognizes that

“all these peoples teach us that there are other options, other possibilities, other ways of thinking and interacting...” (p. 2). And he deeply appreciates the array of cultural gifts to be cherished and passed on through our long journey of human evolution:

Together the myriad of cultures makes up an intellectual and spiritual web of life that envelops the planet and is every bit as important to the well-being of the planet as is the biological web of life that we know as the biosphere. You might think of this social web of life as an “ethnosphere,” a term perhaps best defined as the sum total of all thoughts and intuitions, myths and beliefs, ideas and inspirations brought into being by the human imagination since the dawn of consciousness. The ethnosphere is humanity’s greatest legacy. It is the product of our dreams, the embodiment of our hopes, the symbol of all we are and all that we, as a wildly inquisitive and astonishingly adaptive species, have created. (p. 2)

But as Linda Hogan (1995) asks, how do we discover and preserve and pass on “the different histories of ways of thinking and being in the world?” (p. 12). Enlarging education, then, presents practical problems: of how to conserve and pass on wise ideas from all our cultures; and of how to come alive to our own aesthetic capacity and liberation, which in its openness seeds our practical liberation to potentially embrace our own globally evolving family as an intimate and integral part of this universe.

In our present educational context, these practical problems are daunting. Personally, I wrestle daily with the contrasting smallness of our institutional school systems. What happens when we corral children from an early age into groups called classes, confine them for long hours to school buildings in rooms that literally box them in, separate them from sunshine, fresh air and community, stifle their curiosity with habitual routines – when to listen, when to read, when to run, when to play, when to eat, when to be curious, when to ask questions. What kind of ‘learning’ comes about from these sorts of routines? The social behaviours and conventional responses that develop suppress our capacity for aesthetic liberation and for creatively collaborating our own future paths of becoming. Opposed to this oppressive routine is the kind of listening and learning that arises from genuine curiosity, from our own inner desire to understand, from ‘being alive.’

Alfred North Whitehead, addressing the Educational Division of the International Congress of Mathematicians in 1912, just over one hundred years ago, spoke about 'The Aims of Education'; in each of many such addresses at this time, he spoke of a single theme: "The students are alive, and the purpose of education is to stimulate and guide their self-development. It follows as a corollary from this premiss, that the teachers should also be alive with living thoughts" (Whitehead, 1967, p. v). He spoke strongly against "what I will call *inert ideas* – that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilised, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations" (1967, p. 1). This sort of "dead knowledge" (p. v) often produces "a merely well-informed man... the most useless bore on God's earth" (p. 1). One hundred years later, education has changed somewhat and is changing. But "dead knowledge" is something countless students still suffer through, with heavy emphasis on memorization (for written tests and exams) of terms that remain lifeless on a page of a text, and the merely well-informed, smoothly articulate student is still very often prized at the end of the process.

John Dewey, contemporary of Whitehead and another of the United States' most important philosophers of education also urged a broad view of education and a view of learning as dynamic experience. He grasped "the potentialities of education when it is treated as intelligently directed development of the possibilities inherent in ordinary experience" (Dewey, 1938/1998, p. 114) and recognized the necessity of freedom of internal thought, desire and purpose when linked directly with the external freedom of action and movement. These ideas echo Whitehead's (1967) talk of a "rhythm of education" (p. 31) in which learning follows a rhythmic three-stage natural pattern of a) open curiosity and inquiry, b) practice leading to competence, and finally passing into c) the personal possession of a wider-scope general understanding and knowledge. This rhythmic process alternates cyclically: freedom, discipline, and (ultimately) greater freedom.

Yet Grant E. Marie, director of the 60th Anniversary Edition of Dewey's book *Experience and Education* (1938/1998), asks readers to "consider how widely Dewey's ideas have permeated our current notions of education." He follows this statement immediately with, "consider also how few of these ideas have been implemented, how proponents of the status quo – in the interest of cost-effectiveness, order, or politics –

have kept true educational reform from putting the needs of the learner first and foremost” (p. iv). As a teacher on the ‘inside,’ I see evidence of both sides. It is uplifting to meet the many innovative teachers and administrators in my own community, as well as at conferences on education, who are creating learning that is alive and vibrant. And it is sometimes desperately discouraging to witness the massive changes in attitude and understanding needed on all levels of our society so that the larger reach, dynamism and vision of education – like our experiences of ‘coming alive’ – is not something merely random, achieved by a handful of teachers here and there, or now and then. The slowness of implementation and the settled-ness of the status quo need to be challenged, somehow.

The catch is the *how*. John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead, Herbert Read, Maxine Greene, and countless others: *how* do we preserve and pass on these vital, vibrant progressive ways of thinking and being in our world of education? It seems imperative that we carry forward such good ideas and implement them, as well as discover and learn systematically from other cultures around our global community. It seems to be a pressing need to begin to see our selves as one human family working together to share our bright ideas. There are colleagues doing good things individually in school programs and innovative projects. There are teachers in various districts teaching in creative and imaginative ways. There are reports that rave about the educational methods, creativity, and successes in Finland. All around the globe, there are many good things being done by creative individuals and groups. They come and go and their ideas, for the most part, come and go with them. As Grant E. Marie observed of Dewey, inspired ideas fade and are lost, or push up against proponents of the status quo and are shunted away. So we must find ways to implement and carry forward, effectively, the valuable wisdom and inspiration from our past and present, ways to enlarge our education, and our *understanding* of education, so that we embrace and make ourselves an efficient ongoing flow of creative innovative humanity in our universe.

Perhaps more now than ever, this challenge is important. Many agree that our modern times are among the most fragmented in all of history. “As technology advances we are compelled to admit...that instead of transformation into a harmonious society, we tend inevitably towards a social disharmony or schizophrenia to which the name

*alienation* has been given” (Read, 1966, p. 177). The great challenge of our times is to strive for a seriously efficient harmony and collaboration in the world, to fight against the idea that progress is not possible. In the midst of this challenge, our aesthetic and artistic capacities, with their liberation of consciousness and their intimate connection to leisure, are paramount:

History is transforming the question of reorganizing human society and human nature in the spirit of play from a speculative possibility to a realistic necessity. The most realistic observers are emphasizing man’s increasing alienation from his work: the possibility of mass unemployment – i.e. liberation from work – given by modern technology; and the utter incapacity of human nature as it is today to make genuinely free use of leisure – to play. (Read, 1966, p. 199)

Coming to know and appreciate who we are in our aesthetic dimension and capacity, as Read envisions, means embracing our selves as subjects leaning forward, creative of history, changing the future. And on a similar note:

What I want to communicate in this talk about art is the notion that art is relevant to concrete living, that it is an exploration of the potentialities of concrete living. That exploration is extremely important in our age, when philosophers for at least two centuries, through doctrines on politics, economics, education, and through ever further doctrines, have been trying to remake man, and have done not a little to make human life unlivable. The great task that is demanded if we are to make it livable again is the re-creation of the liberty of the subject, the recognition of the freedom of consciousness. Normally, we think of freedom as freedom of the will, something that happens within consciousness. But the freedom of the will is a control over the orientation of the flow of consciousness, and that flow is not determined either by environment, by external objects, or by the neurobiological demands of the subject. It has its own free component. Art is a fundamental element in the freedom of consciousness itself. Thinking about art helps us think, too, about exploring the full freedom of our ways of feeling and perceiving. (Lonergan, 1993, p. 232)

As we move toward the collaborative possibility of re-organizing human society and making our lives livable again, more and more we need to explore this capacity for the freedom of consciousness. The integral relationship of our ways of feeling and perceiving, and the intrinsic aesthetic foundation of these human capacities and experiences, is something we need to explore further as we head for a future practical vision of our world. In the company of new advances in science, especially in

neuroscience, we can begin to appreciate the aesthetic nature of our being in this world and grasp its significance to our practical liberation of ways of learning and living.

## Chapter 2.

### Aesthetic Experience and How We Learn

In this chapter, my aim is to explore the question *what is aesthetic experience?*, particularly in relation to learning and educational contexts, with the intention of illuminating some of the key characteristics of aesthetic experience, both in itself and as related to our learning.

#### 2.1. Aesthetic Experience or Aesthetic Longing?

In his book, *Principles of Art*, R. G. Collingwood (1938/1958) raises the question ‘what is art?’ and very aptly identifies the complexity of the relationships between aesthetic experience and art or artistic experience. He asserts a need for two stages to explore the question: a first stage of usage (how are we using the terms? What are we referring to?), and a second stage of definition. He spends a good deal of time on the former before attempting to move to the latter. This approach strikes me as being highly sane and valid, and so I begin this chapter by trying to illustrate and illuminate my meaning of *aesthetic experience*, or as I prefer, *aesthetic longing*.

Why *aesthetic longing*? Before answering this question, I believe it is important to notice a distinction between the actual flow of our experience and *talk about* that actual flow of experience. Expressions like “that was such a wonderful experience” or “I had a remarkable experience today” speak of particular experiences that stand out and have significance in the ongoing flow of our lived experience. Again, when we want to speak about our common human experiences of seeing or hearing, remembering or imagining, thinking or feeling, we use words and phrases to identify these particular experiences. We speak of “an experience of seeing” or “an experience of hearing,” we say “I remember” or “I imagine,” and we talk about “my thoughts or my feelings” in regard to

particular events and people in our lives. Such identification is akin to what Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) call a “hierarchy of experience. At the most elemental level, we are constantly caught up, unselfconsciously, in the everyday flow of experience. As soon as we become aware of what is happening we have the beginnings of what can be described as ‘an experience’ as opposed to just experience” (p. 2). It is necessary to abstract from the flow in order to express and communicate with each other these particular different kinds of experiences. Yet, we do not regularly advert to this fact, that in such speaking we are always abstracting from the *whole*, from the organic flow of experience that is our constant state of being alive. “No doubt, we are all familiar with acts of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling. Still, such acts never occur in isolation both from one another and from all other events” (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 205). Though we can speak abstractly of an experience of seeing or of hearing, in actuality we cannot separate our seeing from our hearing, our kinesthetic sensing, our smelling, our bodily movements, and so on. And we are never apart from *what* we see, *what* we hear, *what* we smell, taste, touch and so on.

To speak of an experience as *aesthetic*, then, is an abstraction from the organic flow of our actual experiencing. It is the recognition of a particular kind of experience to which we give certain qualities and characteristics. In some sense, all our experiencing is aesthetic. All experiencing involves our senses, our feelings, our memories and our imaginings. All experiencing is of the world around us, others, our social and cultural milieu in space/place and time.<sup>7</sup> So when I say I prefer the term *aesthetic longing*, I am trying with this phrase to evoke the natural bent of our whole flow of experiencing, and to shift away from the notion of aesthetic experience being a single separate isolated event in our day or week or month. More than that, I am also trying to evoke what I believe to be a core characteristic of our experiencing: the capacity, and indeed the *need*, for vital aesthetic enlargement, transformation and growth. The word *longing*, in this sense, is an attempt to capture that human capacity and craving for enlargement, liberating the tendency in our molecules for openness. Like the acorn that in its core ‘longs’ to be the

<sup>7</sup> This broad initial approach to aesthetic experience will gradually gain greater specification as the chapter proceeds.

mighty oak, we also are a capacity, indeed an *aesthetic* capacity, to be ‘mighty oaks,’ increasingly open to the wide flow of the world around us.

In the rest of this section, then, let me try to deepen this meaning of aesthetic longing with further illustrations and explanations. I find it helpful to begin and to orientate us with two quotations:

What more, you may ask, do we want? Ah, but we want so much more—something the books on aesthetics take little notice of. But the poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else, which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. (Lewis, 1941, p. 8)

“What I want to communicate in this talk about art is the notion that art is relevant to concrete living...” (Lonergan, 1993, p. 232)

First, “art is relevant to our concrete living.” In these modern times with so many of us living in modern cities, we might spontaneously tend to imagine and associate the word ‘concrete’ with the literal concrete of city life – the sidewalks and buildings of our last 100 years (so often lacking in imagination compared to the buildings of older, especially European and Asian, descent). It seems that these concrete buildings have come to symbolize our larger ‘concrete,’ or day-day-day, ordinary living in cities around the world, a way of life that in large measure has itself become, almost without our noticing it, rather cold, drably routine, and boxed in, so that we now ‘vacate’ to breathe life into our living again. For many, the escape is not a luxury but an absolute necessity.

This sense of necessity brings me to the other opening quotation by C. S. Lewis (1941): “We want something else, which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it” (p. 8). In other words, we crave and long for not only the ‘what’ of aesthetic experience (the music, the painting, the dance and so on), but also for that enlargement of experience that lifts us out of the dullness and routines of daily living. Nature – among other things – can provide this enlargement. When I hike, for example, the experience of ‘receiving’ beauty is what I want more than anything else. At the top of a mountain, on a gloriously sunny day, with the ocean stretched out far below and mountains ranging into

the distance, I cannot simply rest a few minutes and move on. I need “something else, which [can] hardly be put into words.” I need to pay attention to a deep inner calling that is alive in me. It calls me to listen not only to this place, to my surroundings, to the land and sea and sky, but also to my inner resonating, my need to let this place speak its music to me and allow myself to feel its melodies in my molecules. I realize I want to participate not only in this place, *but also in my own inner wanting or longing*: “to be united with the beauty [I] see, to pass into it, to receive it into [myself], to bathe in it, to become part of it.”

Children seem to have little hesitation in allowing themselves to be aesthetically open; they “stretch into aesthetic life without even knowing it” (Richmond & Snowber, 2009, p. 69). The relevance of the aesthetic and the artistic to their concrete lives is everywhere to be found. They skip, run, dance, wiggle, shout, yell, sing, play; their aesthetic exuberance bursts through. They are spontaneous seeds of all the art forms with their natural mimicry and copying of things that fascinate them, seeing and desiring to be, to do, to create, and to become “like that.” For instance, at a Korean traditional performance here in Vancouver (July 2013), I watched children watching a lion. The lion was a long, black and white striped, two-person costumed creature, with shaggy long black ‘fur’ and a huge round expressive face. It moved spiritedly around the stage in loping strides, rolling its long body and turning its head to watch the audience. When it loped down into the aisles, you could see the children’s spontaneous fascinated excitement and everyone’s fascinated delight. Somehow, children and adults alike, we were not simply ‘watching’ the lion; we were lifted naturally and spontaneously, without even knowing it, stretched into *becoming* the lion, feeling in our own skins and delighting in its movements. For children, certainly, and for most of the adults in the audience that night, too, the dramatic artistry of the lion, and of the Korean musicians and dancers accompanying it, lifted us to life in an exhilarating transformation of our everyday worlds. Arts, indeed, are relevant to our concrete living, evoking possibilities of new and different worlds.

Arts are relevant to our living because they call out the aesthetic longing that is present in us already. And it is through children that we see this aesthetic longing most clearly. “In preschool, imagination and exploration are prevalent modes of being in this

world. This being in the world includes tucking in and tucking out of reality as a part of the life of a four-year-old” (Eisner, 2002, p. 119). Children’s daily concrete lives, we realize, are so different than adults. Children possess a freedom, a kind of liberation, which at its very core is aesthetic and artistic. “Watching preschoolers even as young as two and a half or three reveals a capacity for intense focus during their work. They often lose themselves in their activity, a condition that Dewey regards as central to aesthetic experience” (Eisner, 2002, p. 116).

When children play, their spontaneous immersion *is* aesthetic, and their play echoes the major art forms. They experiment with sound and vocalization, creating different pitches of voice, repeating words they particularly like or listening to themselves, often recording themselves, making random sounds, high-pitched squeals, singing, humming, yelping delightedly. Children wiggle, jump, skip, dance, and move their bodies in creative rhythms of all sorts. They giggle, laugh and tell stories, fantastic and imaginative, or they detail the events in their day that have surprised, delighted, captivated or puzzled them. Children play house and create imaginative spaces, dens, nooks, secret hideaways and passages, cozy private corners and tents, forts and houses with cardboard boxes or ‘Lego.’ They play at baking, cooking and entertaining, creating imaginary or real tea parties or dinners. At beaches, children form sand castles, and at home they model and shape and sculpt using clay or play dough. They act out parts and roles of babies, other children, parents, siblings, relations and authority figures, and they mimic social interactions between themselves and others or between social groups they have seen together (doctors, nurses, firemen, postal workers, and so on). Children play with colour and shape and visual designs of all sorts, noticing details in things that adults forget or no longer take time to see. For children, play opens a world of possibilities that we may think of and dismiss as ‘not real.’ Yet, the human capacity to imagine and fantasize is very much real.

Strangely, though, we do not think spontaneously of calling children “aesthetic.” Calling ourselves “aesthetic” isn’t something we normally do. Yet we are so spontaneously aesthetic in our humanness, aesthetic in the broadest way: open to the uplift and expansiveness that we so long for in our being. As Lonergan (1957/1992) says of the aesthetic pattern of experience:

There exists in man an exuberance above and beyond the biological account books of purposeful pleasure and pain. Conscious living is itself a joy that reveals its spontaneous authenticity in the untiring play of children, in the strenuous games of youth, in the exhilaration of sunlit morning air, in the sweep of a broad perspective, in the swing of a melody. Such delight is not, perhaps, exclusively human, for kittens play and snakes are charmed. But neither is it merely biological. One can well suspect that health and exercise are not the dominant motive in the world of sport; and it seems a little narrow to claim that good meals and fair women are the only instances of the aesthetic. Rather, one is led to acknowledge that experience can occur for the sake of experiencing, that it can slip beyond the confines of serious-minded biological purpose, and that this very liberation is a spontaneous, self-justifying joy. (pp. 207-208)

The exhilaration and joy, the surge of exuberance, the *wow* of experience that children so enviously possess, the freedom, the looseness of dynamic molecular imaging and the expansiveness of our inner world are thus to be recognized as subjective and dynamic elements in our aesthetic experiences.

Yet this dynamism of aesthetic longing tends to evaporate as we move into adulthood. Why is it this innate capacity slowly dies off? “And of course this leads to the question of why education becomes somber when children enter grade school” (Eisner, 2002, p. 119). Yet some people and some cultures retain this sense of aesthetic longing more than others. My First Nations building manager, for instance, has a way of speaking that reveals this inner presence. In a conversation we had recently, he mentioned driving to his hometown of Merritt. He “sauntered” there on Monday, taking the old road “because the new highway is sterile and sanitary. There’s nothing to see on it; it has no history.” As I listened to him speak of his place, the land and his childhood, I could feel his “breathing in” of the aesthetic, a presence nestled in his molecules. The natural joy he feels for the beauty of his surroundings has lived in him for a lifetime, continues to be alive in him.

My conversation with him made me appreciate more profoundly that in each one of us, in every human being, there is a deeply rooted reach or longing that *is* aesthetic. I am not talking about something so profound that it only occurs in rare moments; I am referring to an inner life that is constant. Aesthetic longing is like breathing; it is our way of connecting with what is around us, with the beauty and ugliness of our human-made world, with the minuteness and grandness of the natural world all about us, with good art

works and bad, with music and sound, taste and smell, texture and touch – with all that we interact with day in and day out. Aesthetic longing, it seems to me, is a fundamental human orientation; *if we aren't 'seeing' aesthetically, then somehow we aren't being human*. It is our inherent capacity to breathe in and to take within what is outside us, “to bathe in it, to become part of it” (Lewis, 1941).

This view of what I am calling *aesthetic longing* takes us beyond the realm of the purely subjective and into the much more complex world of interaction between subject and object, a sticky educational and philosophical topic that I am merely touching on here. As Dewey (1934/2005) asserted, “aesthetic understanding – as distinct from sheer personal enjoyment – must start with the soil, air and light out of which things aesthetically admirable arise” (p. 11). When we take this more complex view of an inner aesthetic orientation, Dewey points out that we begin to be faced by large questions:

If artistic and aesthetic quality is implicit in every normal experience, how shall we explain how and why it so generally fails to become explicit? Why is it that to multitudes art seems to be an importation into experience from a foreign country and the aesthetic to be a synonym for something artificial? (p. 11)

As a quality-of-being implicit in every normal experience, it strikes me that aesthetic longing is our capacity for mediating between the outer world around us and the inner world of our being, and the arts help us give expression to the magnificent complexity of that intimate continual interplay of object and subject, of what we take in and how we take it in. Through the practice of the arts, not only can we give reign to our inner world and ‘let our longing out’ freely, exuberantly, excitedly or quietly, in our imagining, striving, reaching, daring, risking, adventuring, opening ourselves to the possibilities of being, but also we can grow in our appreciation of *what* it is we are celebrating, admiring, imagining, striving for, daring to achieve, risking to gain, opening ourselves to.

This inner capacity is our way of listening to the universe around us and of finding our way to a balanced, harmonious connectedness with what it has to say to us. Arts then, build on this normally aesthetic experience and, as Herbert Read (1957) ventured, becomes tremendously significant: “Dare we affirm that the practice of the arts is... the only way to achieve spiritual equilibrium” (p. 30). Daily, we place ourselves in

uplifting environments in all sorts of ways: simple and quiet in a city park, or adventurous and rigorous on mountainsides. Some push themselves beyond endurance, beyond their comfort zone, in order to experience the artistry of the cosmos; others stroll through city streets admiring grand buildings or visiting museums and galleries to fulfill this inner desire for expansiveness, to allow new rhythms and patterns to speak to and enliven their inner rhythms. It is the same inner desire that takes some to the extreme places of our natural world and takes others into parks or city streets and museums; the main point is that we seek these things to enlarge us and to converse with our “molecules of emotion” (Pert, 1997).

So the aesthetic, and our longing for the aesthetic, is highly relevant to our concrete living. More than that, our surroundings speak to us not only with expansive affects but also with narrowing affects. We are constantly, aesthetically ‘in play’ with all that is around us, whatever it may be. The dull spread of a rainy day, a grey, colourless downtown core, intermittent flow of traffic, noise and construction speaks to us no less than the patterned rhythms of parks, trees, gardens, clouds and sunsets. Homes and furniture, private and commercial spaces and buildings speak to us. The spaciousness of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum, for instance, can actually open the lungs and enlarge the breathing of those who venture into it. And the de Young Museum, in San Francisco’s expansive Golden Gate Park, can cause our molecules to dance with the “dramatic copper façade... perforated and textured to replicate the impression made by light filtering through a tree canopy, creating an artistic abstraction on the exterior of the museum that resonates with the de Young’s tree-filled park setting” (de Young Museum website, 2013).

The aesthetic is everywhere we are. “Not only is man capable of aesthetic liberation and artistic creation, but his first work of art is his own living” (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 210). We don’t just exist in homes; we furnish and decorate our homes with colour and design, texture and fabric to ‘make them our own spaces’; we garden and landscape to create inviting outdoor facades; we turn to urban design to try to create cities that are efficient and environmentally responsible as well as beautiful; we cook and present food, whether simply or elaborately, that is attractive and appealing to look at, to smell, to taste; we enjoy dining out where surroundings are warm, artistic and inviting

and where food is presented with care and creativity; “we adorn ourselves” (Schiller, 1795/2004, p. 136), we dress with style and colour and texture in mind. Everywhere we turn we can find evidence of the fact that, in our very core, we simply are aesthetic in our lives and in our living. Even the slums of cities, the barren lots of abandoned properties, the cacophony of street noise – chaotic sights and scenes that do little to lift our sensibilities and emotions – affirm this actuality, since these are generally noted for their *lack* of concern with or nurturing of that aesthetic capacity and reach within us.

## **2.2. Aesthetic Longing and Education**

Education, then, plays a major role in the nurturing of children and youths and adults. At its best, it can help stimulate, inspire, motivate and challenge us to explore who we are, what we want, and where we are going. It can help us realize the inner aesthetic bent that we each have, to nurture the openness we long for and are oriented toward in our very molecules; it can help us discover that learning can become a love affair (Eisner, 2002, p. 196).

Mike Fleming (2012), in his book *The Arts in Education*, includes a chapter titled ‘Influences on Teaching the Arts.’ In this chapter, he discusses the progressive movement from Rousseau through to Dewey and other progressives in the century that has led to the cultural theory of our recent decades. He raises many significant questions about the philosophy of arts-and-education, the connection of arts and life, the role of arts in society, distinctions between ‘high arts’ and ‘low arts,’ and the interplay of technique/form, aesthetic and artistic development and enjoyment. Recognizing the strong influence of cultural and philosophically driven ideas on our teaching practices, he asks: “How might/do teachers unwittingly damage pupils’ engagement and enjoyment of art?” (p. 34). I know that much of the education I experienced in my past seemed anything but progressive, completely disconnected from my aesthetic longing (and from the aesthetic longing of our professors, I dare say). It seems both art and traditional education today also has little in common with Dewey’s forward-looking “views on aesthetics which asserted the connection between art and life” (Fleming, 2012, p. 37). It seems instead to be just what Dewey was opposed to: “Teaching art is not just a matter of cold analysis of form, nor is it just a matter of learning about art history in a

mechanical way” (Fleming, 2012, p. 39). Perhaps more than anything, it leaves out our reach to *become*: that dream inside us (itself aesthetic), that is us-seeking-to-be-more.

In fact, a context of appreciating our capacity for enlargement generally seems not to be present in education, particularly in relation to working collaboratively. The collaborative aspect of learning can be tremendously enlarging: there is something highly challenging yet thoroughly uplifting about breaking through barriers of shyness or insecurity, fears of criticism, by having to reveal one’s ideas and work to others in a class; of having to put oneself forward knowing that everyone else is taking the same risks; of being able gradually to laugh at one’s mistakes and admire others’ talents; of learning from each other; and most of all, of sharing and *recognizing* together each other’s inner striving in process.

Programs as a whole, though, rarely seem to have that collaborative perspective. What strikes me is that, while curriculum is very carefully selected and thought out with content in mind (for example, in music: skills leading toward composition, skills leading toward performance, skills leading toward a knowledge of the facts of musical development in the Western world), what can often be missing from curriculum planning and teaching is the explicit awareness of each person – student and professor – as an embodied aesthetic longing, an integral capacity for transformation and growth. In her expansive work on Vygotsky and personhood, Anna Stetsenko (2012) gives tremendous credence to this collaborative transformational capacity of the person. In pushing Vygotsky’s ideas of active adaption, she has coined the phrase *active collaborative transformation of nature*. With this phrase, she recognizes the shift away from the meaning of human adaption connected to naturalistic biology - more akin to that of an animal adapting to its habitat - and toward the much larger worldview of human beings creating their historical, cultural and social environment through their own collaborative actions of Becoming, not unrelated to Hannah Arendt’s ideas on *becoming* (Arendt, 1958). If such a view of personhood and learning could be present and grounding the educational programs we teach and take part in as learners, I think all of us, students and professors alike, could experience our own collaborative leap to freedom rather than suffer under the rigidity of fixed aims and goals of ‘achievement.’

Yet, I believe this view of personhood and learning is still missing generally in education: learn the “object” to be learned, known, mastered, but leave yourself, leave ourselves, aside. It seems to me an inescapable reality that our capacity for transformation is itself aesthetic; our aesthetic longing is the stepping stone, the foundation for all our expansiveness, the basis that provides us with our volition, inspiration and motivation. This idea is confirmed by Vygotsky (1994) in his study of adolescents, and in more common sense fashion, it also seems to be readily confirmed in the many recent television shows that feature local and national talent – singing, dancing, cooking, and so on. *So You Think You Can Dance*, *America’s* (or Britain or Australia) *Got Talent*, *Voice*, and so on, are filled with hundreds of people who have hopes and dreams that reveal our aesthetic transformative capacity. Presumably, this longing is not simply for ‘being famous’ (though perhaps for some it is), but more often it seems to be a reach of the entire person in imagination, in dream, in volition, in molecule and muscle, in plans and will, commitment and effort needed to grow in talent; it is an awakening of their inner spirit of striving to be the best they can be, whether in dance or song or cuisine. From such longings and images of our future selves, we move into all areas, not just “the arts,” but also mathematics, science, technology, history, politics, economics... Whatever it is, the beginning point is our personal aesthetic expansiveness of fantasy, of imagination, of feeling. It is the reach in hopes, dreams and plans for the future me, or the future us, for our Becoming.

In other words, it seems to be a fact that our strivings for the future are inescapably aesthetic. And adolescence, it seems, is the time in our lives when this capacity blossoms:

...it is, precisely, within the realm of fantasy that, for the first time, the adolescent has a chance to discover the course his life is to take. His strivings and obscure drives are cast in the mould of specific images. In his fantasy, he anticipates his future and consequently also comes closer to its creative construction and realization. (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 285)

Whatever our future longings are, superficial or grand, they are an image of an upcoming me, of what I want to be doing or how I want to be living in the next days or weeks or years ahead. Whether for new clothes or furniture in our homes, for vacation or adventure, for intellectual pursuits such as science, medicine, chemistry, physics, or for

any of the arts, in our longings, we imagine ourselves at some time yet to come, perhaps hearing and seeing the lives of others (living or dead, humble or great) who have influenced us and spurred us forward. We imagine our own achievements, our own progress, the paths of our possible development: where we might be, who we might be, how we might live – patterned hopes and dreams of our future.

So aesthetic longing is foundational to all “subjects” (people *and* topics-to-be-learned) and tied to all areas of education, not because the topics can all somehow be artistic, or be taught through the arts, but because the beginning of growth and understanding lies in the senses, in imagination and memory and the rich momentum of feeling that these experiences carry for us.

...man has a fundamental need to assimilate all his experience, both of the external environment and of his internal psychological process. Failing to do so is like not properly digesting food... Similarly, psychological experiences that are not properly “digested” can... produce a “snow-balling” state of ever-growing disharmony and conflict, which tends to destroy the mind as effectively as unassimilated proteins can destroy the body. (Bohm, 1996/2004, p. 33)

In his book, *On Creativity*, physicist David Bohm (1996/2004) sees the fragmented state of humanity mirrored by the fragmented state into which the arts, sciences and religions have fallen in our age. As he notes, the “art of self-knowledge” has become a vital area of questing, and Bohm suggests that “science can now help us to understand ourselves in this way by giving factual information about brain structure and function, and how the mind works” (p. 37). In this endeavour, he sees the role of arts as being highly significant, “not [merely] to provide a symbolism, but rather to teach the artistic spirit [integrally related to the religious and scientific spirit] of sensitive perception...” (p. 37). Finally, Bohm offers hope in an unexpected channel: that of beauty.

...most scientists (and especially the most creative ones, such as Einstein, Poincaré, Dirac, and others like them) feel very strongly that the laws of the universe, as disclosed thus far by science, have a very striking and significant kind of beauty... Here, then, is a possible link between science and art, with the latter being centrally oriented towards beauty... In science, for example, one sees and feels the beauty of a theory only if the latter is ordered, coherent, and harmonious with all parts generated naturally from simple principles, and with these parts working together to

form a unified total structure. But these properties are necessary not only for the beauty of a theory, but also for its truth. (pp. 37-39)

Along similar lines, Herbert Read (1932) defines beauty as “a unity of formal relations among our sense perceptions” (p. 5).<sup>8</sup> Even the most abstract mathematics or physics are represented aesthetically in formulas, elegant images on the page, some of which are more efficient to the understanding than others. For example, “both Newton in England and Leibniz in Germany independently discovered [the] limits” of calculus, but “where Newton used Calculus to establish a new physics, it is the notation of Leibniz [d/dx] that better represents the quantities involved and suggests further mathematical results” (Quinn, 2002). Further, we cannot escape the fact that even the remotest of formulae are meant to signify some aspect of the workings of our universe, the motion of planets and galaxies as much as the motion and growth of plants. The integration of science, arts, life and curiosity about our world is implicit: we may long for flowers in our gardens for the beauty they bring to our yards, but we may also dream of understanding the beauty of how the flower grows, how our planet revolving around the sun nourishes the single flower in our yard. The aesthetic inextricably connects us to and grows out of the world around us. And, in our aesthetic reach, we are invited to enlargement, growth, expansiveness and learning that is never apart from our surroundings and their ‘speaking’ to us. The reason why aesthetic longing is foundational to all learning is because we *are* aesthetic beings, inescapably, innately, inevitably.

### **2.3. Exploring Aesthetic and Artistic Experience in our Learning and Living**

“Not only, then, [are we] capable of aesthetic liberation and artistic creativity, but [our] first work of art is [our] own living.” (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 210)

<sup>8</sup> Read (1932) further emphasizes that beauty and art are not synonymous, and he claims that this definition of beauty provides an essential base from which one can build an inclusive theory of art. Questions of beauty, arts and connections with science I hope to further explore as follow up to my thesis.

How is the aesthetic crucial to learning? What role does it play in education? These questions open out to broad ideas: about the many theories of aesthetic experience; about aesthetic experience as different from other kinds of experience; about aesthetic experience and artistic creation as processes whose functioning we can appreciate, understand and know in a personally appropriated way; about artistic thinking as a liberation of intellectual creation; about the role of insight, imagination, and fantasy in aesthetic and artistic creativity, and the vast significance it has for the potentialities of our living; about the way in which the aesthetic and artistic suffuses our school environments (the design and creation of school buildings and grounds, textbooks and resources) – a topic we have touched on already; and most of all, about *the profound need for a much deeper cultural understanding of aesthetic and artistic experience and how deeply it permeates ourselves and our living*. Out of this wide array of nesting ideas, three key issues seem to emerge for my thesis: 1) Lonergan's and others' approaches to aesthetic experience; 2) aesthetic experience and the liberation of consciousness (Lonergan, 1993), especially in regard to its implications for education; and 3) the significance of understanding aesthetic experience in relation to learning.

Lonergan's quotation above offers a spacious beginning. "Our first work of art is our own living." Everywhere around us there is artistry: in our homes when we decorate our tables, arrange our rooms with furniture, choose patterned colours and textures, consider shapes and sizes of objects, display paintings and prints and photographs, shells or rocks, collectibles or miniatures; "Clothes are not a simple-minded matter of keeping warm. They are the coloured plumes of birds as well as the furs of animals. They disguise as well as cover and adorn" (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 210). Adornment transforms the merely biological while conventions of dress and deportment help establish an aesthetic and artistic dignity in our living, adapted to and by the people of each locale and culture. The adornment of our homes in our communities transforms the basic need for shelter and dignifies the habits of our daily living. "To lack that dignity is to suffer embarrassment, shame, degradation; it is to invite amusement, laughter, ridicule" (p. 211). Everywhere we turn, we can discover the artistry of our own living.

Art is one of those things which, like the air or soil, is everywhere about us, but which we rarely stop to consider. For art is not just something we find in museums and art galleries, or in old cities like Florence and Rome.

Art, however we may define it, is present in everything we make to please our senses. We shall see presently that there is a kind of hierarchy in art and that many qualities go to make a work of art of the highest type. But there is no genuine work of art which does not *primarily* appeal to our senses – our physical organs of perception – and when we ask: What is art? we are really asking what is the quality or peculiarity in a work of art that appeals to our senses. (Read, 1958, p. 15)

Artistry and the aesthetic are like the air we breathe, the soil and earth we trod on. They are inextricably an expression and a need of our humanness, entwined in sense, memory, perception, imagination, emotion, bodily movement and volition. However we define art, it is who we are.

The aesthetic and artistic so deeply permeate our living that surely it is worth asking about it in a way that invites us to come to appreciate and understand for ourselves, and *in* ourselves, the vitality of this way of our being human and its significance to education and learning. If we so little notice the artistry around us, we also tend to overlook our own aesthetic and artistic impulses and capabilities. We often allow ourselves to be overshadowed by the 'Greats' in arts, not recognizing or valuing our own spontaneous aesthetic and artistic needs and capacities. Again, we can be overwhelmed by the many theories and definitions of arts and aesthetics, feeling ourselves outside the sometimes-recondite philosophical circles that pronounce on art. Or, we can turn to our own experiences as beginning points to explore the question: what makes an experience 'aesthetic'? This latter approach based on personal questing, observation and appropriation is the approach taken by Bernard Lonergan. Still, he is not claiming, nor is it valid, that each person's experience or thought happens to be sufficient. Instead, as with any decent empirical science, the aim is to try to pull out the aspects of aesthetic experience common to our human experiences of the aesthetic. From this common fund of shared experiential 'data' we can gradually move toward discerning characteristics of aesthetic experience that seem to be humanly shared.

### 2.3.1. Lonergan's Approach to Aesthetic Experience

Lonergan's (1957/1992) approach to aesthetic experience, as his approach to all philosophical inquiry, is to invite us to reflect on our own personal experiences – *what am I doing when I am in an aesthetic experience?*<sup>9</sup> I therefore pose the question in the experiential spirit Lonergan intended: What is aesthetic experience? What makes an experience 'aesthetic'? We can come to appreciate the aesthetic and artistic in our living through Lonergan's invitation of personal appropriation. One of the deepest difficulties of this kind of reflection is holding in awareness the difference between *talking about* an experience and *being in* the experience. At each moment of reflection, we need to attend to just what we recall about being *in* the concrete moment. If we fail to do this, we can easily move into wordy abstraction that is lacking authenticity. The demand, the hard work is in describing our own experience in as much detail as possible before then lifting that description up for examination, reflecting on 'what was going on for me during this experience that might have made this aesthetic'? In this way, the move toward theory is experiential and empirical (in the best and widest sense possible) and is a slow concretely personal business.

### 2.3.2. Reflecting on Experience

Before reflecting on aesthetic experience, we need to consider *experience* itself. There is a vast range of ideas about experience and books written solely on this topic, and no doubt it is immense. But Lonergan (1957/1992) would like us to nurture a self-presence, so to speak, a noticing of our experiencing. Particularly, he wants us to attend

<sup>9</sup> As well as in the studies for my thesis, this was my aim for a graduate class in arts education in which I participated by invitation from Dr. Susan O'Neill. My part was to lead a weekend intensive workshop exploring aesthetic experience, and the exploration was meant to be experiential. Using Lonergan's reflections as our guide and take off point, we spent Saturday and Sunday mornings reflecting on our own experiences of the aesthetic, trying to draw on our own illustrations and personal encounters. Students spent afternoons freely exploring the city and recording aesthetic experiences through use of iPads. This study was presented as Gillis, A., & O'Neill, S. A. (2013, June). *Capturing aesthetic experiences with iPads: Representing and communicating multimodal meaning making*. Paper presented at the symposium on multimodal and digital media multiliteracies in and through the arts (Symposium Convenor: S. O'Neill), Annual Conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE), University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

to the fact that our responding is a complex sensitive integration of our surroundings. We respond with a sensible-neuro-chemical-molecular resonance, the inner patterning of sensibility, if you like, and there are different ways in which sensibility is patterned. *Patterns* of experience, then, are what we are concerned with, or experience as a patterning of sensibility and consciousness. A somewhat lengthy quotation here will help:

No doubt, we are all familiar with acts of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling. Still, such acts never occur in isolation both from one another and from all other events. On the contrary, they have a bodily basis; they are functionally related to bodily movements; and they occur in some dynamic context that somehow unifies a manifold of sensed contents and of acts of sensing.

Thus, without eyes, there is no seeing; and when I would see with my eyes, I open them, turn my head, approach, focus my gaze. Without ears, there is no hearing; and to escape noise, I must move to beyond its range or else build myself soundproof walls. Without a palate, there is no tasting; and when I would taste, there are involved the movements of the body and arms, of hands and fingers, of lips and tongue and jaws. Sensation has a bodily basis, and functionally it is linked to bodily movements.

Nor is this all. Both the sensations and the bodily movements are subject to an organizing control. Besides the systematic links between sense and sense organs, there is, immanent in experience, a factor variously named conation, interest, attention, purpose. We speak of consciousness as a stream, but the stream involves not only the temporal succession of different contents but also direction, striving, effort. Moreover, this direction is variable. Thales was so intent upon the stars that he did not see the well into which he tumbled. The milkmaid was so indifferent to the stars that she could not overlook the well. Still, Thales could have seen the well, for he was not blind; and perhaps the milkmaid could have been interested in the stars, for she was human (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 205).

To these words on sense and experience, add acts of imagination, of memory, and of emotion, and indeed all conscious acts, not only sense and perception but inquiry, insight, formulation, reflection, verification and judgment. The flow and orientation of consciousness is intimately, immanently, involved in every act of human experiencing, in every particular patterning of our experience.

In speaking of experience, then, I will try to emphasize with a Buddhist Zen-like awareness the concreteness of experiencing. As philosopher and scholar Heesoon Bai

(2003) writes, “Zen as a practice is about re-animating our consciousness. Zen arts are concrete, sensuous ways to accomplish this re-animation of the self and of the universe” (p. 52). And so I try to evoke the lived-ness in our skins, our being seething like the surging tides of an ocean, responding rhythmically to our surroundings. I will also try to emphasize the integration of inner and outer. What is around us also is in us. Places ‘converse’ with our senses, and our senses with them; we interact mutually, where the word interaction “assigns equal rights to both factors in experience – objective and internal conditions” (Dewey, 1938/1998, p. 39). On the other hand, “when the perceived is not seen as alive, then, by association, the perceiver herself tends to become devitalized” (Bai, 2003, p. 51). Being present to where we are, to what is sensed and, most poignantly in our post-modern times, to ourselves in our sensing, involves a continuous interacting on all levels of our being, bringing the without, within.

Another, blunter, way of saying this is “sense in act is the sensible in act” (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, q. 14, a. 2c). There is an identity of object and subject. As Rilke (quoted in Bachelard, 1969, p. 201) expresses more beautifully in his poetry:

“...Silently the birds

Fly through us. O, I, who long to grow,

I look outside myself, and the tree inside me grows”

The tree outside me is somehow also inside me, not literally or even figuratively, but intentionally and neurodynamically, a reality of the movements and functions of my optic and aural nerves and neurons, of patternings of molecules in my brain and my body, allowing me not only to see the tree, or hear it, but to kinaesthetically feel its movements, to move with it, to become it, in my own being. The seeing and the seen are one. I cannot see without seeing *something*. Likewise, all my prior knowledge of the growth of trees is with me. “Our knowing is dynamic in another sense. It is irretrievably habitual... All we know is somehow with us; it is present and operative within our knowing; but it lurks behind the scenes and reveals itself only in the exactitude...” with which we need it (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 303). Our senses are alive; we do not live in a vacuum. We take in what surrounds us. As French writer Noel Arnaud asserts, “*Je suis l’espace ou je suis* [I am the space where I am]” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 137).

What do these ideas mean for our learning? The aesthetic flow or liberation of consciousness is an animation of our very being that orients us to openness. The freedom of consciousness means we have the capacity to be how we will: like Thales preoccupied with the stars, like the milkmaid preoccupied by her chores, or just ourselves, aesthetically free and open to seeing and feeling all there is to be seen.

### **2.3.3. Patterns of Experience**

Just as experience is an internal integration of our worlds, so there are different patterns of experience corresponding to our different human volitions, interests, doings, situations, places.<sup>10</sup> As Dewey (1934/2005) observes, “an experience has pattern and structure” (p. 45).<sup>11</sup> The patterning of experience when we are sick, for example, centres on the biological: an upset stomach, an aching head, nausea, or sore plaguing muscles. In an ‘intellectual’ pattern of experience, such as doing mathematics, our senses, imagination, perception and the whole of consciousness is commandeered for problem-solving. When we concentrate on a mathematical problem, we are focused on the given images or diagrams, the equations, or the figures that represent a complexity of mathematical meaning and process. In this pattern of experience, our senses and imagination are at the service of our mathematical curiosity, held in check by the cyclic rhythms of question, insight and imagination that feed the search for possible solutions. In everyday living, there is a dramatic quality to our experiencing that is quite different than the quality of experience in doing mathematics, for instance. When I am shopping for groceries, going to the post office, or cleaning the house, not only is my experience aligned with these tasks, but also I am constantly interacting with others. The patterning of my sensibility, what I see, hear, smell, taste, notice, attend to, imagine, remember, is shaped by these practical tasks and people I encounter. When I am conversing with friends, at a party, out for dinner, at a movie or a theatre or a club, the pattern of my

<sup>10</sup> In *Insight* (1957/1992), Lonergan identifies the biological, aesthetic, intellectual and dramatic patterns of experience as broad indicators of categories of patterned experience. This is not meant to be an exhaustive account of types of experience, but a general explanation of the sensitive integration characteristic of experiences.

<sup>11</sup> Dewey (1934/2005) goes on to give illustrations of the relationship between ‘doing and undergoing’ that forms the patterning and the structuring of experiencing.

experiencing once again changes, so that what I am seeing, or hearing, or smelling, or tasting, what I notice and attend to, inquire about and try to understand, is shaped by the people I am with, the colours and sounds, the atmosphere and mood of the places I am in and our inter-subjective interactions. So there are different emphases in the patterning of experience, different drives or directions through which, and by which, experience is formed or shaped.

#### **2.3.4. The Aesthetic Pattern of Experience: Liberation of Sense and Perception**

In an aesthetic pattern of experience, there is a *freedom* or *liberation* of experiencing. I am somehow free to just be, to be present to what is, to the 'suchness' (the 'such as it is'-ness) of the place or thing I am attending to. "In this twentieth century, to stop rushing around, to sit quietly on the grass, to switch off the world and come back to the earth, to allow the eye to see a willow, a bush, a cloud, a leaf, is an 'unforgettable experience'..." (Franck, 1973, p. xx). I am free to find that, as David Abram (1996; 2010) expresses, every place has its own distinct textures, shapes, colours, odours, scents, contours, sounds, tastes that are continually speaking to all my senses at once, and to the whole of my conscious experience. They shape how I move and breathe. As in each of us, surging beneath my skin is the complex sensory integration of physical-chemical-neural response; I move and breathe and tense and relax with the rhythms of 'this place.'

This *freedom*, or liberation, of experience is characteristic of aesthetic experience. It is, in Lonergan's (1971/1990) words, a purely experiential pattern.<sup>12</sup> A pattern is said to be "purely experiential [when] it is of the colours that are visible and not of the stereotypes that are anticipated. It is of the shapes as visible..., of the sounds in their actual tone, pitch, and volume..." (p. 62). In aesthetic experience, I am just myself, liberated from the dictates of other patterns of experience; the aesthetic character of experience lies in its "purely experiential" element. The purely experiential pattern "lets

<sup>12</sup> Lonergan (1971/1990) draws on Susanne Langer's *Feeling and Form* (1953) for his definition of art and aesthetic experience.

experiencing fall into its own proper patterns and take its own line of expansion, development, organization, fulfilment” (1971/1990, p. 62). There is a freedom, a liberation of sense and perception *from* the everyday, *from* the practical, *from* the theoretical, *from* the instrumental and dramatic influences that continually shape us. I am free to allow experiencing to follow its own rhythms, to find what delights, soothes, inspires, calls, speaks to me in my inner being.

\* \* \*

*Evening arrives at the mouth of the cave and the land turns blue. A soft mist is raining... Clouds rise up from where it touches ground. A creek moves through this place; it smells of iron and tastes of earth's blood. The land is open, receptive, and it is very young in terms of geological age, having just begun to move and shift. The elements of earth are patient and take their time to grow and collapse (Hogan, 1995, p. 29)*

\* \* \*

Just as the land is open and receptive, we too are open and receptive when we are in an aesthetic pattern of experience. There is a patience, and a slowing down. “If there is any lesson the arts teach, it is the importance of paying close attention to what is at hand, of slowing down perception so that efficiency is put on the back burner...” (Eisner, 2002, p. 207). Slowing down perception, noticing, *feeling* in our innermost being what is at hand: the significance of this open receptivity to learning is in orientating us to further questioning, relaxed and rhythmic in exploration and understanding. To stand at the mouth of the cave and feel its presence, to allow the inner rhythms of sense, perception, and imagination to take flight, simply to be, to breathe, to take in, to delight in, to celebrate, to resonate in open curiosity with your surrounds. Such freedom, such liberation of inner rhythms of molecules can happen anywhere – a neighbourhood field at sunset, mountains silhouetted in dusk light – at any time.

Yet, as Lonergan suggests, it is not only the wild mysteriousness and beauty of nature that can lift us into “the strange skin-tingling sensation” (Abram, 2010, p. 261) of

aesthetic openness, but arts also call us into this liberated world of the purely experiential. For,

The meaning of an experiential pattern is elemental. It is the conscious performing of a transformed subject in his transformed world. That world may be regarded as illusion, but it also may be regarded as more true and more real. We are transported from the space in which we move to the space within the picture, from the time of sleeping and waking, working and resting, to the time of the music, from the pressures and determinisms of home and office, of economics and politics to the powers depicted in the dance, from conversational and media use of language to the vocal tools that focus, mould, grow with consciousness. As the world, so too the subject is transformed. He has been liberated from being a replaceable part adjusted to a ready-made world and integrated within it. He has ceased to be a responsible inquirer investigating some aspect of the universe or seeking a view of the whole. He has become just himself: emergent, ecstatic, originating freedom. (Lonergan, 1971/1990, p. 63)

To be 'just ourselves' originating freedom seems a crucial aspect in being alive, and a necessary condition for engaged learning. The "pattern [of experiencing] arises out of the subject" (Lonergan, 1993, p. 215). Experience is no longer dominated by practical, instrumental, or technological demands, by intellectual striving, is no longer under the influence of theories of psychology or philosophy or the questionable motives of personal, financial or utilitarian gain. Instead, experience is "of the seen as seen, of the heard as heard, of the felt as felt. [It is] accompanied by a retinue of associations, affects, emotions, incipient tendencies that are part of one, that arise spontaneously and naturally from the person" (Lonergan, 1993, p. 214). What emerges is a key characteristic of aesthetic experience: the liberation of consciousness, that is, the liberation of *me* in my transformed world, where the transformed world is somehow more real and more significant than we might (especially in our everydayness) think. It is precisely this liberation or openness of sensibility that is central in arts education: learning to *attend* to these colours or tones or movements or volumes as they *are* in the

concrete pattern of the artwork.<sup>13</sup> For “the concrete pattern consists in the internal relations of colours, tones, volumes, movements...” and there is a freedom in responding to “...these colours, these tones, these volumes, these movements” (Lonergan, 1971/1990, p. 61).

Aesthetic experiences require conscious participation in a work, a going out of energy, an ability to notice what is there to be noticed in the play, the poem, the quartet. Knowing “about,” even in the most formal academic manner, is entirely different from... entering [this world] perceptually, affectively, and cognitively. To introduce students to the manner of such engagement is [to help] learners pay heed – to attend to shapes, patterns, sounds, rhythms, figures of speech, contours, and lines – and helping liberate them to achieve particular works as meaningful. (Greene, 1995, p. 125)

In practical pedagogical terms, learning is the conscious participation of aesthetic experience, entering into the ‘strange world’ of the poem, the music, and so on. Arts and a being-in-the-aesthetic invite us to be in that world. For instance, it means inviting students to *notice* and care about what is going on in a poem like Josephine Miles’ “Reason” (1955), to sketch or draw their vision of the poem’s events so they can begin to become acquainted with who is speaking, how many people are present, what is happening, and why and how it is humanly significant. It means being possessed by and entering into the world of the poem, the film, the dance, the painting in these fully human ways.

### **2.3.5. Everydayness and the Aesthetic**

To speak of ‘entering into’ the world of dance or drama or music or nature somehow emphasizes the profound difference between our everyday living and

<sup>13</sup> Here I am touching on complex issues of arts education and particularly on what might be called the ‘normalizing’ effects of culture on sensibility. Dr. Michael Ling’s (personal communication, February 1, 2015) work in this area of neuroanthropology and aesthetics is fascinating. He makes “the fundamental claim that culture is always an aesthetic act and process” (n.p.). This claim rests on both the neurophysiological apparatus that ‘makes’ us aesthetic beings and the adaptive apparatus that ‘makes’ us culturally evolutionary. It seems to me that when technology and utilitarian concerns dominate a culture, as is the case in our modern North American world, sensibility too can be dominated to such an extent that as a community we are less and less capable of being lifted by arts or nature into an aesthetic way of being.

aesthetic experience. To walk out of the theatre, walk out of the world of the film, or the dance, or the drama, and be suddenly hit by the everyday world in which we live (walking to the parking lot to retrieve the car, for example), reveals how quickly the inner world of aesthetic experience fades from our psyche, our being. How quickly we are back in the 'normal' everyday world around us, in our normal everyday patterns and rhythms of sensibility. David Abram (2010), in *Becoming Animal*, gives a dramatic illustration of this shift out of aesthetic experience and back into the oh-so-familiar practical/instrumental pattern of everyday experience. He vividly describes the sudden and jarring shift out of the desert world which had wholly, sensibly and fascinatingly absorbed him and into the blunt stark reality of the everyday. His words help illuminate clearly the shifts in our own inner being, in our perception, in the rhythms of our own sensibility and openness and inquiry.

By noon I was thoroughly, blissfully lost in the sculpted immensity of this place – a small two-legged insect making its way between the toes of giants. Each corner that I peered into seemed a world in itself, and if I ventured in to explore further, that nook would expand around me and I'd find myself enveloped within its intimate expanse, held within the hugeness of a realm composed of worlds within worlds within worlds.

And so I'm in the grip of this strange, skin-tingling sensation of my own insignificance as I climb the steep slope of a butte, a peninsula of sorts jutting out from a larger escarpment into the desert air.... As my eyes rise above that crest, a white shape juts into view, close by, too perfect in its right angles and hence completely incongruous in this place. It takes me two more steps to recognize, startled, that I'm gazing at a metal sign set atop a wooden post....I climb onto the ridge and these letters emerge from behind what I now see is a metal garbage pail:

PLEASE DEPOSIT

WASTE HERE

As soon as I see these black words on the white rectangle, the weirdest thing happens. The entire landscape deflates, like a pricked balloon (not with a pop, yet with an almost audible *whoosh*), shrinking abruptly down to about a fourth of the size it just had.

I toss into the garbage pail a scrap of paper scavenged while hiking and follow the asphalt path toward whatever restroom or information booth or parking lot waits to receive me. (Abram, 2010, pp. 261-2)

In this moving passage, Abram (2010) illustrates three key elements in our reach for an understanding of aesthetic experience: the liberation of consciousness, “lost in the sculpted immensity of this place,” which I have spoken of so much already, the shifting of sensibility (“with an almost audible *whoosh*”) from aesthetic to other dominant patterns of experience, particularly practical, instrumental and technological which weigh so heavily on us in these ‘modern’ times; and finally, something we will explore in section 2.4, the liberation of our integral inner orientation to mystery and the humility it brings, as well as its radical “sense of being held and sustained by powers far larger than anything we can comprehend” (p. 262).

For many of us at this time in our daily educational experiences, the norm is to live in a “very human-scale terrain” of learning, in which the elemental power of resonating openness is deflated, reduced to size. The humility that we feel in the presence of ineffable immensity is, too, reduced. We are comfortable in having control of our lives, our selves, and our routine patterns of learning, happy in our normalness. The vastness and mystery of the world around us is shrunken. Much more significantly, the vastness of our rhythms of resonating molecules is shrunken too. Like David Abram’s vision of the square white sign and its printed message, the vision of the everydayness that surrounds and engulfs us shrinks the elemental power of our experience and deflates our aesthetic reach of openness.

### **2.3.6. Aesthetic Experience and the Liberation of Consciousness: Implications for Education**

In a seminar on ‘topics in education’ given in 1959, Lonergan concluded his talk on art and aesthetic experience by emphasizing the liberty of the subject, the recognition of the freedom of consciousness and its vital role in artistic and aesthetic experience:

What I want to communicate in this talk about art is the notion that art is relevant to concrete living, that it is an exploration of the potentialities of concrete living. That exploration is extremely important in our age, when philosophers for at least two centuries, through doctrines on politics, economics, education, and through ever further doctrines, have been trying to remake man, and have done not a little to make human life unlivable. The great task that is demanded if we are to make it livable again is the re-creation of the liberty of the subject, the recognition of the

freedom of consciousness. Normally, we think of freedom as freedom of the will, something that happens within consciousness. But the freedom of the will is a control over the orientation of the flow of consciousness, and that flow... has its own free component. Art is a fundamental element in the freedom of consciousness itself. (Lonergan, 1993, p. 232)

Lonergan speaks here of the freedom of consciousness being “a control over the orientation of the flow of consciousness” and he identifies arts (and aesthetic experience) as being fundamental to this freedom. Our flow of consciousness in an aesthetic way of being is one that is open, free. Freedom is not simply the freedom of will in our ability to decide and choose. There is also a freedom in our very orientation to the world. Aesthetic experience teaches us a way of being human that liberates our molecules and minds to concretely imagine, think out and plan as-yet-undreamed of possibilities. This freedom connects powerfully to Anna Stetsenko’s notion of collectively creating our future and becoming who we want to be as a human race.

Since the Industrial revolution and the attempts to “remake man,” as Lonergan (1993) says, this aesthetic, open orientation seems to be less and less a part of our living. As a lovely Russian student said to me once, “some people look at tree and see just a tree; but some people look at a tree and see something more.” Many people are caught in a ‘scientific rationalist’ way of thinking, and then “to think of the moon as just earth and the clouds as just water, of the mountains as thrown up by contractions in the earth’s surface and of rivers as just part of the earth’s circulatory system is to drop something away from reality, away from [our] world of experience” (Lonergan, 1993, p. 222). For within our experience, we can be aware of a larger openness in ourselves that parallels a sense of unknown in the world. We are a yearning, a longing, for this larger unknown, an aliveness in our very questions and inquiring spirit, a desire to understand the world; we are “looking for the something more that this world reveals, and reveals, so to speak, in silent speech, reveals by a presence that cannot be defined or got hold of” (p. 222).

The loss of this sense of the unknown and our yearning reach to participate in it is perhaps the greatest most devastating loss of our time. It is this resonance with the unknown that can emerge when we are in the aesthetic pattern of experience. The aesthetic opens us to unknown worlds, invites us into those worlds through our sensual,

perceptual, imaginative, inquiring capacities, and when we are present to and experiencing the larger world in its immensity, grandeur, glory, our experience is accompanied by corresponding feelings of “awe and fascination... openness to adventure, daring, greatness, goodness, majesty” (Lonergan, 1971/1990, p. 62). Along with the liberation of sense and perception, the aesthetic also brings about a liberation of our potential plans, actions and deeds.

We can put it another way. Abram (2010) speaks of the gravitational pull of the Earth and prevalent notions of being weighed down, dragged down, by this pull. “Yet this gravitational draw that holds us to the ground was once known as *Eros* – as *Desire!* – the lovelorn yearning of our body for the larger Body of Earth, and of the earth for us” (p. 27). This is not metaphorical but an actual physical yearning. And I would push this to say that the lovelorn yearning of the body is matched by a lovelorn yearning of the ‘mind’<sup>14</sup> for the larger mystery of the cosmos, the world and all our histories, the universe. We yearn not only to feel and touch and hear and see the earth, the biosphere, the cosmos, our world, but also to understand it, to come to know it, to discover its secret workings: “...how the low spread of a mountain’s shadow alters the insect swarms above a cool stream, or the way a forested slope rejuvenates itself after a fire” (Abram, 2010, p. 133). We are a stretch and a reach and an *Eros* of ‘mind’ toward the great mystery in which we live, toward the as yet unknown.

Though the mood of this yearning reach is obscure, the yearning itself, the reach itself, is not ambiguous but firmly grounded in our own unending questioning. “Though the field of mystery is contracted by the advance of knowledge, it cannot be eliminated from human living. There always is the further question” (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 570). When we realize this fact to be true in and for ourselves, we are forced “to recognize the paradoxical category of the ‘known unknown’... For our questions far outnumber our answers, so that we know of an unknown through our unanswered questions. It is this desire, not in contemplation of the already known, but headed towards further

<sup>14</sup> I prefer to say ‘integral self’ to indicate that body and mind are not separate. I anticipate that the recent study of neuroscience in this field will play a central role in future. Antonio Damasio (1994) and Candace Pert (1997) both have contributed much to this question of integral (‘bodi-mind’) being, and I look forward to exploring much further the works of other such neuroscientists.

knowledge, orientated into the known unknown” (p. 555) that Lonergan calls “the pure unrestricted desire to know” (p. 665). Grossly overlooked, infolded in our bodily embrace, this desire makes itself known to us in our questioning yearning for what is beyond us, for what is yet to be known. Every further question reveals us in our ‘home’ orientation. When this desire is open and alive, we experience a felt awe “that deeply and powerfully holds our sensitive integration open to transforming change” (p. 570). We are mesmerized at the infinitely mysterious universe, suspended “in the grip of this strange, skin-tingling sensation of my own insignificance... blissfully lost in the sculpted immensity of this place” (Abram, 2010, p. 261), or endlessly fascinated by the minute workings of some part of it.

That there is a drive in us to understand, a drive that reveals itself in questions, restless and haunting, a drive that carries us forward to explore what we have yet to understand, to know, to discover, a drive toward the unknown, may *seem* obvious or evident. Yet it is so intimate a part of what and who we are, we can and often do overlook its concrete unfolding in us. Our questions, in fact, are endless; and in that fact, each one of us is a reach, a quest, for a learning that participates in the vast mystery of what lies beyond us.

## **2.4. Liberation of Consciousness and the Romance of Education**

This unrestricted questioning, with its mood of awe and mystery, is the core of who we are as ‘learners.’ Still, this orientation is perhaps most evident *outside* of formal education. Nevertheless, it is this more profound character of aesthetic experience that is crucial to education and to *all* our learning. Scattered throughout *Insight* (1957/1992), from the earliest pages to the 770 page end, Lonergan steadily refers to “the detached and disinterested desire to understand” (p. 9); “the primordial *Why?*” or “the pure question” (p. 34) in us; “an intellectual drive, an *Eros* of the mind” (p. 97); “the desire and drive to understand... operative within” (p. 247); “the unrestricted drive of inquiring intelligence and reflecting reasonableness” (p. 380); “the notion of the totality to be known through all answers” (p. 381); “prior to the understanding that issues in answers,

there are the questions that anticipate answers” (p. 417); “the pure unrestricted desire to know” (p. 665).

Now listen to Alfred North Whitehead (1929/1967) in his speech-essay “The Rhythmic Claims of Freedom and Discipline”:

But let us now examine more closely the rhythm of these natural cravings of the human intelligence. The first procedure of the mind in a new environment [perhaps imagine yourself in a Hawaiian cave, for example] is a somewhat discursive activity amid a welter of ideas and experience. It is a process of discovery, a process of becoming used to curious thoughts, of shaping questions, of seeking for answers, of devising new experiences, of noticing what happens as the result of new ventures. This general process is both natural and of absorbing interest. We must often have noticed children between the ages of eight and thirteen absorbed in its ferment. It is dominated by wonder, and cursed by the dullard who destroys wonder. (p. 32)

Similar to Lonergan’s “unrestricted drive of inquiring intelligence, Whitehead speaks of “natural cravings of human intelligence.” Just as Lonergan speaks of curiosity, questions, and understanding that issues in answers, so Whitehead emphasizes wonder, discovery, and seeking for answers. Think of young children with their endless, restless *what* and *why* questions. Both Lonergan and Whitehead seem to recognize a primordial questioning orientation in us, call it what you will (*Eros*, desire, drive), that is present as a constant and guiding ‘light’ before any particular question arises or is spoken by us. Both seem to recognize a rhythmic process of learning that revolves around inquiry and understanding. The liberation of this orientation is the key characteristic of aesthetic experience to which I appeal now. For aesthetic experience is not merely the liberation of sense and feeling; it is also and more significantly a liberation of our questioning, inquiring, and understanding, the orientation of us in our proper home: our own unrestricted desire to know.

Whitehead is someone who has not only ideas about education, but also a *feel* for education, for learning, for rhythms of questing and for what works. He has a view of who we are as human beings, of what we need from education, and of how we can and should be striving to meet those needs in our educational endeavours. Though his words are a century “old,” what he says carries an aura of authenticity, of truth, of hitting things

right, particularly his emphasis on the rhythm of learning: “I am convinced that much disappointing failure in the past has been due to neglect of attention to the importance of this rhythm” (Whitehead, 1929/1967, p. 31). He is appealing strongly to the inner rhythm of curiosity, of questioning, of the dynamism of active wonder. In his appeal, we can think of Aristotle’s words: ‘wonder is the beginning of all science’ and recognize ‘wonder’ to be an active verb rather than a static noun, referring to a question-presence within us. As with another great educator of the 20th century, this internal, innate dynamism is something we are gradually beginning to recognize as central in learning. “The trouble with traditional education... was that it paid so little attention to the internal factors...” (Dewey, 1938/1998, p. 39). In the time since Whitehead and Dewey urged us to pay attention to our internal experience, as well as the external conditions, there has been a great slow movement toward this self-presence.

Whitehead’s (1929/1967) notion of this rhythm of learning involves a cyclic movement from freedom through discipline to greater freedom.

My main position is that the dominant note of education at its beginning and at its end is freedom, but that there is an intermediate stage of discipline with freedom in subordination: Furthermore, that there is not one unique threefold cycle of freedom, discipline, and freedom; but that all mental development is composed of such cycles, and of cycles of such cycles. Such a cycle is a unit cell, or brick; and the complete stage of growth is an organic structure of such cells. In analysing any one such cell, I call the first period of freedom the ‘stage of Romance,’ the intermediate period of discipline I call the ‘stage of Precision,’ and the final period of freedom is the ‘stage of Generalisation.’ (p. 31)

This quotation reveals what seems to me, at least, to be an impressive thinking-out of the direction of positive (growth-oriented) learning or development. For any given instance of learning, he says, there is (ideally) an initial romance, what I might call a ‘falling-in-love,’ with the thing. This is our great period of question, curiosity, enchantment, fascination, desire-to-know. Yet this period of our fascination only takes us so far. The desire to know has somehow to be followed up with a process of coming to understand, of discovering, of gradually accumulating knowledge of this thing – *all the time keeping the mood of the initial romance alive and well*. Finally, learning how to utilize this new-found knowledge, whether in practical terms or in the formation of new principles that guide our living, allows us to be in the world in wisdom, and not simply

with a larger collection of static, inert ideas. This three-fold process occurs again and again, cyclically, rhythmically, so that a picture can form of a learning that is alive: my horizon of experience and wisdom steadily growing (in concentric enlarging circles) larger and larger. Aesthetic experience is significant in that it both orientates us in the 'romance,' liberating our further rhythms of inquiring and understanding, and seeds a practical liberation of who and how we want to be.

What is fascinating to me is Whitehead's use of the word *romance* in this first stage of the cyclic movement and its close associations with Lonergan's 'pure unrestricted desire to know.' Romance is so often associated with personal relationships, with that mysterious experience of 'falling in love.' When we 'fall for someone,' we are captivated, fascinated, mesmerized by him or her; we enter into that spell of mystery: *who is this?* The person is a vast unknown that we deeply desire to come to understand and know. We desire to be with them, to discover the secret world that is theirs and that makes them who they are; we somehow feel ourselves, like Abram, in the grip of something larger than ourselves. We experience "a sense of being held and sustained by powers far larger than anything we can comprehend" (Abram, 2010, p. 261). In short, the experience is not unlike that of the aesthetic experience, the 'purely experiential pattern' that I have described and tried to characterize. Aesthetic experience. Falling in love. And a 'romance' that is somehow *vital* to learning. All three have in common the strange spine-tingling openness, the lift of our molecular desire, our curiosity, our yearning to understand and to know.

Still, this is not some starry-eyed romantic idealism. I am not saying we all need to be walking around in some spiritual haze. This openness, as I have already said, is rooted in the reality of our questioning selves. And as both Whitehead and Dewey insist, there is discipline needed to guide and direct that initial romance of intellectual desire. Experience, as Dewey (1938/1998) insists, is a complex internal process, and its continuity is positive when and "if an experience arouses curiosity, strengthens initiatives, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over dead places in the future" (p. 31). Further, as Whitehead (1929/1967) points out, "the child is heir to long ages of civilisation" (p. 33) and needs guidance to help find her or his way through the maze and welter of ideas. Finally, as Lonergan (1957/1992)

explains, “The light and drive of intelligent inquiry unfolds methodically in mathematical and empirical science. In the human child it is a secret wonder that, once the mystery of language has been unravelled, rushes forth in a cascade of questions” (p. 197). The bursting excitement and impatience of young active questioning wonder can only develop into the more mature questing of youth and adulthood if it is tutored, helped, guided, and ‘disciplined,’ in the sense of being given direction, fostered, nurtured, encouraged.<sup>15</sup> For “our intellectual careers begin to bud in the incessant What? and Why? of childhood. They flower only if we are willing, or constrained, to learn how to learn. They bring forth fruit only after the discovery that, if we really would master the answers, we somehow have to find them out ourselves” (p. 197). As one arts learner expressed, “In theory class we learn something like the F minor 7th chord, but we don’t really know what that is, what it feels like. Where does it go? Artistic learning occurs most when we’re playing with other people, free playing. We get to apply, for example, the F minor 7th chord, or the Dorian mode, and try it out. We get to find out: what does that exactly mean?”<sup>16</sup> They are able to learn for themselves not just the words or the idea of an F minor 7th chord, but how it works, what it sounds like in different keys, how it shifts the mood and feel of a song or jazz piece.

#### **2.4.1. The Aesthetic and the Role of Image and Insight**

Learning, then, is a process of questing inquiry and discovery, of having to find out for ourselves. It depends on our internal interest, on the *romance* that Whitehead identifies, on our *desire* to understand and to learn. Being engaged, curious, open, desiring to learn in this vital way propels us naturally into this orientation of consciousness in which we explore, question and find out for ourselves. This is our inner process of discovery: the vital role of our unrestricted desire to know existing and operating in us. We can come to be aware of, to notice this capacity and orientation of our own humanness in those moments when we are caught – however fleetingly or

<sup>15</sup> I believe Whitehead’s (1929/1967) notion of discipline and its relation to our innate structure and dynamism of questing is in itself worth exploring in great detail.

<sup>16</sup> Comment made by a student from the Langley Fine Arts School, speaking at a dialogue session on Artistic Learning encouraging youth’s ideas on the topic. Simon Fraser University, March 13, 2013.

simply or dramatically - in the romance of the mystery of some thing, be it a place, a dance, music, mathematics, literature, history, another person, or the infinite workings of our biosphere. “For here, everything is expressive, a thunderstorm no less than a hummingbird (Abram, 2010, p. 265). This is the mood in which ‘learning comes alive.’

\* \* \*

The artist... is the unspoiled core of every [person]...before [we are] choked by schooling, training, conditioning...Yet...that core is never killed completely. At times it responds to Nature, to beauty, to Life, suddenly aware again of being in the presence of a Mystery that baffles understanding and which only has to be glimpsed to renew our spirit and to make us feel that life is a supreme gift. (Franck, 1973, p. x-xi)

\* \* \*

As Frederick Franck says, being in the presence of Mystery is being present to some thing that baffles our understanding and so brings alive our active wonder. What is sensed, perceived or imagined evokes our curiosity so that we spontaneously exclaim “*Wow!*” or “*What?*” or “*Why?*” We are in the aesthetic zone, and the aesthetic is intimately inextricably tied to sense, image, imaging, imagining. We are sensing animals who house in our skins a restless questing orientation, and we are in continual interaction with what is around us: unless we are blind, we see; unless we are deaf, we hear. There is a constant flow or stream of conscious contents in the within of our sensing and imaging. So images and imagination are a ground-in-us.

When I speak of images, though, there is a distinction that needs to be made.<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, there are the images that correspond to actual sensing and sense organs: I form a retinal image of what I see, or an aural image of what I hear, and so on for all the sense organs, kinaesthetic included. On the other hand, there is the imaging and imagining that correspond to artistry – fantasy, creation, the making up of something new: a purple dog, a spotted house, what have you. Both are highly relevant to our

<sup>17</sup> This is an enormous topic, one that needs further connection to an exploration of neuroscience, image and insight.

learning: the images that correspond to our sense organs and neurochemistry form the capacity that allows us to create and enter into new possible ways of being.

The inseparability between image, curiosity, and insight is certain. Though we can say that what we see, hear, taste, touch, smell is what moves and propels us to understand, nevertheless what moves one person may not move another. For me, the cave in Oahu or the sight of the lowering sun caught between the arms of neighbourhood trees evokes questioning wonder and inspires my desire to understand, but other and different images inspire others to wonder and understand. Whatever it is, it is clear that sense, image and imagination are a cornerstone that opens us to an aliveness of questioning wonder, to the *Eros* of the mind that is so intimately ours.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) speaks convincingly of this relationship between image and insight (or image and understanding). To discover that Aquinas, writing in the mid 1200s, was asking (in a highly systematic way) a question like “Whether we need a diagram, or a phantasm, to understand?” was a delightfully surprising find. In his major work, *Summa Theologica* (Ia, q. 84, a. 7), then, Aquinas asks whether the intellect can actually understand without turning to images. He answers that it cannot. His first explanation of his negative answer is a dense, difficult, purely logical one, but he then adds:

Secondly, because anybody can experience this in himself, that when he wants to understand something, he makes some images for himself, in which he may, as it were, grasp what he is eager to understand. And that is also why, when we want to make somebody else understand, we offer him examples, from which he may be able to form images for himself, in order to understand.

It is worth noticing that Aquinas was paying careful attention to his own and others’ personal experiences of sensing, imaging and understanding. One further excerpt from Aquinas’ answer is of significance to us:

...through such natures of visible things it rises to a certain knowledge of things invisible. Now it belongs to such a nature to exist in an individual, and this cannot be apart from corporeal matter: for instance, it belongs to the nature of a stone to be in an individual stone, to the nature of a horse to be in an individual horse, and so forth. Wherefore the nature of a stone or any material thing cannot be known completely and truly, except in as

much as it is known as existing in the individual. Now we apprehend the individual through the senses and imagination. And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual.

This particular excerpt is more complex with many underlying philosophic issues woven into it that are too complicated for us to enter into here; the question of universal natures existing in individual things has a long history.

There are, however, three main points to home in on: 1) “anyone can experience this of himself, that when he tries to understand something, he forms certain phantasms to serve him by way of examples”; 2) “it belongs to the nature of a stone to be in an individual stone, to the nature of a horse to be in an individual horse, and so forth”; and 3) “we apprehend the individual through the senses and imagination.” The first point is that we spontaneously refer to, or create, or draw on phantasms (images, diagrams) when we are attempting to understand something. Think of asking for directions or finding your way around a new city. Quite spontaneously, we look to a map, or to a stranger who may draw for us a small map. If the directions are given orally, we ourselves imagine the places mentioned, the left turns, right turns - or the NSWE directions - and possible landmarks to watch for. Again, we might describe our house to a friend and sketch a little layout of its rooms; or describe a person’s appearance so that someone else can imagine them and perhaps recognize them on sight. In mathematics, images are of utmost help in solving word problems; even the ‘simple’ definition of a circle, without an image or diagram to hold on to, is difficult, if not impossible, to understand (though it can certainly be memorized). Once we start noticing how fluidly we rely on images for our understanding, we begin to see that what Aquinas wrote in the mid 1200s matches pretty accurately our own innate habits. These observations reveal the importance of the role of the aesthetic in textbooks: images in typical school textbooks ought to bring our curiosity alive, lift and initiate our desire to understand.

Yet there is a larger significance in the relationship between image, curiosity and insight. It involves the 2nd and 3rd points and is strangely connected to what David Abram (2010) points to in his *Becoming Animal*: that there is Mind in the World. The world is animate, alive, and we respond to its aliveness in and through our innate

unrestricted desire-to-know, our yearning or craving to grasp and understand the secrets of the universe, whether minute or infinite. If we are to grasp “how the low spread of a mountain’s shadow alters the insect swarm above a cool stream” (Abram, 2010, p. 133), inevitably we begin with our senses and imagination – the observation of this change in environment is *already* a result of sense, image, and desire to understand working in tandem. We *desire* to understand what we notice, each of us noticing different things, whether it is the stone or the horse or the shadow’s effect on the insects. We *desire* to grasp its nature, to explain it, to know how it works, what it is, why it does what it does. Further, as we heard from Aquinas in the above quotation, it is inescapable that “we apprehend the individual [thing] through the senses and imagination. And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms.” Our humble human achievements of understanding, whether common sense or scientific, rise up from what we experience, imagine, sense, see, hear, taste, touch, smell. Granted, with specialized scientific equipment, the sensing and imaging become highly refined, yet they remain.

The dependence of insight on image and sense thus reveals a deeper significance of aesthetic experience. As human beings with a capacity and desire to learn, to understand, the spontaneous imaging of peoples through time show us our aliveness, both in the walls of our places as well as in the walls of our nerves and muscles. The cave and I are alive. My animate *Eros* of mind is alive to the world around me, to what I sense, image, imagine here and now. There is in me a desire and drive to understand; it is alive in my accompanying feelings of fascination, awe, wonder. It is my wholly molecular lift of *Wow!*, *What?*, *Why?* to this world. This animated aliveness is my aesthetic rhythm of longing.

## **2.5. Summary of Ideas**

It is time now to bring together the many ideas about aesthetic experience and learning that I have presented in these opening two chapters. At this stage, it might help to recall my two research questions: 1) what is the meaning of aesthetic experience in educational contexts and 2) how do arts learners and educators understand and conceptualize aesthetic experience in relation to their own sense of artistic learning? In

regard to the first question, these opening chapters have gone some distance in addressing the meaning of aesthetic experience in educational contexts, and the main ideas from these chapters need to be highlighted.

First, then, aesthetic experience has been conceived as a vital subjectivity, an animated state in which we experience a liveliness and expansiveness of our inner molecular dynamic. Further, aesthetic experience is not a mere lift of sense and perception; it also includes an orientation of inquiry and understanding. This open orientation corresponds to the inner lift of psyche and intellect that we feel and experience as *aesthetic experience*, or *aesthetic longing*. Thus, the liberation of consciousness has its echo in the lift of our innermost desire to know (Lonergan, 1957/1992). Lastly, aesthetic longing is a vital factor in our own becoming, both as individuals imagining our collective and collaborative part in society and as a human group imagining and creating our evolutionary path forward in history.

Second, education in our modern industrial and technological societies is found to be disturbingly instrumental and mechanical and to mirror the paradigm assumptions and biases (Brookfield, 1995) of the societies in which it lives. As a reflection of capitalism and consumerism in a world driven by global economics and politics, education suffers from greed and an overly instrumental and technical orientation. Despite changes in pedagogical practices through the last century, learning remains dominated by dull patterns of memorization much more so than by lively, animated engagement. The need for a re-animation of education (Bai, 2003) is pressing. As educational theorists have been saying for more than a century, learning and learners need to be *alive*, engaged, animated, and free in their rhythms of open curiosity and understanding. While some of the foremost educational theorists have come to these conclusions, much learning and educating in today's schools still fails to echo their ideas.

And so we turn our attention to my second research question: how do arts learners and educators understand and conceptualize aesthetic experience in relation to their own sense of artistic learning? The purpose of the program and study devised for and carried out with arts learners and educators was to attempt to answer, at least

partially, this question; the following chapter gives a detailed description of both program and study. Also, my research question above begets further questions: for instance, do arts learners' and educators' accounts of aesthetic experience correspond to the theoretical perspectives of philosophers and educational theorists? What, if any, reflections on, and connections to, learning do arts learners and educators make in their accounts of aesthetic experience? Chapter 3 describes my account of exploring aesthetic experience with arts learners and educators and illuminates the pressing need for the integration of theory and practice.

## Chapter 3.

### Method

This thesis makes the claim that aesthetic experience is of fundamental significance in how we learn. Central to my thesis is the interdependent exploration of two main research questions: 1) what is the meaning of aesthetic experience in educational contexts? and 2) how do arts learners and educators conceptualize and understand aesthetic experience in relation to their own sense of artistic learning? This chapter describes a study designed to further address these questions using an interrelated program development component called *Exploring Aesthetic Experience* and a qualitative study involving interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the dialogical encounters of arts learners and educators engaged in the program. The program was developed in collaboration with my thesis supervisor while I was a graduate research assistant with MODAL Research Group (Multimodal Opportunities, Diversity and Artistic Learning). The program and studies were part of a large-scale research program funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada entitled *Understanding Artistic Learning and Youth Arts Engagement in a Digital Age*, which was awarded to Dr. Susan O'Neill the Principal Investigator, Director of MODAL Research Group, and thesis supervisor.

In order to present this research work in as coherent a form as possible, I have divided this chapter into three main sections: Program, Study, and Analysis. *Program* provides detail about the collaborative development of the program *Exploring Aesthetic Experience*. It includes my account of the use of dialogue (adapted from Bohm, 1996) and of a philosophical-pedagogical approach (based on a version of Lonergan's method of self-appropriation, 1957/1992), the philosophical sources I drew on for the study of aesthetic experience, the two groups I worked with, where we were and what we did in each session. *Study* provides detail about my study of the program implementation with

arts learners and educators. It includes my account of the permissions obtained, ethics approval, consents given, data collected, recordings and transcribing done, and my reflections on the overall process. *Analysis* provides detail about the method of analysis that I have used, its background, connections to my own theoretical perspective, and the process of analysis undertaken. Although the actual research work was of course an integrated process of both program and study, I have separated them here for ease and clarity of discussion.

### **3.1. Program**

#### **3.1.1. Dialogue**

As a way of inquiry (Wells, 2009), dialogue is highly complementary to Bernard Lonergan's ideas on insight and understanding, which form the basis of my theoretical work. In *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, Lonergan (1957/1992) identifies and characterizes the act of direct insight as the central moment in our interior process of coming to understand. It is through insight that the tension of inquiry is resolved or relieved; it is from insight that we move on to formulate or conceive our understanding, pulling together what insight has grasped. This 'triad' of elements of learning (question, insight, and formulation or conception) are what compose our full activity of understanding, according to Lonergan. Understanding as a full holistic activity is thus emergent in that it grows or emerges naturally and organically from questions that arise within us as prompted by our interaction with others and with our surroundings or environment.

In contrast to this holistic perspective of understanding, both Bohm and Lonergan speak of fragmentation. Bohm (1996), in his book *On Dialogue*, refers to a present day problem of the fragmentation of thought, the idea that our thinking not only has been and is creative and constructive in the world, producing sciences, cultures, and vast human systems of politics and economies, but also it has a destructive 'down side' of having become increasingly fragmented. Instead of respecting and holding the 'whole' of our thinking in mind, we tend more and more to the analysis and 'breakdown' of thinking that isolates fragments of ideas from a perspective on the whole. One of the major problems

in our present day thinking, then, is that “things which really fit, and belong together, are treated as if they do not” (Bohm, 1996, p. 56). Lonergan (1971/1990), in his book *Method in Theology*, comments on the much the same problem in his search for a collaborative method (Functional Specialization) that could make progress ‘sustainable’ in our evolutionary and global human thinking. Fragmentation for Lonergan is represented most clearly in the way each discipline has become more and more specialized with less and less of a holistic perspective being held by the majority.

As time passes, as centres of learning increase... it becomes increasingly difficult for scholars to keep abreast with the whole movement in their field. For good or ill a division of labour has to be accepted, and this is brought about by dividing and sub-dividing the field of relevant data... to make the specialist one who knows more and more about less and less. (p. 125)

The retrieval of what might be called a ‘holistic heuristic’ is his aim in battling fragmentation and in establishing a practical collaborative Method for our ongoing human thinking.

The aim of dialogue, then, is in full support of a holistic thinking. In his recent book, *Meaning Makers*, Gordon Wells (2009) devotes a chapter to the use of dialogue in the classroom. By using dialogue, there is the collaborative practical intention of purposeful understanding that both honours and respects the whole of the meaning that emerges from the participants involved and also creates its own new meaning, a new holistic perspective from which the group can learn and grow. Based on the contributions of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, this form of learning has powerful potential for adding to the spirit of holistic understanding.

Combining Bakhtin’s emphasis on dialogism with Vygotsky’s emphasis on semiotic mediation leads to two further insights. First, when I contribute to joint meaning making with others, I also make meaning for myself and, in the process, extend my own understanding, both through the process of discovering what I think and want to say and through the feedback I receive in the responses of my interlocutors. And second, the dialogue I have with others can be internalized and the search for understanding continued in the dialogue of what Vygotsky (1987) called ‘inner speech.’ (Wells, 2009, p. 269)

As well as honouring the holistic spirit of understanding, dialogue also respects the fact that “all genuine learning involves discovery” (Wells, 2009, p. 260), as identified in the 1975 UK Bullock Committee report on language and learning. In keeping with Lonergan’s (1957/1992) ideas about understanding, in which questions are the inner restlessness that drives us toward insight and later formulation, dialogue allows for spontaneous questions to arise in each participant within the fuller context of the group’s exchange of ideas. A ‘holism’ is thus preserved, both in the content being explored through dialogue as well as in the questioning activity of dialogue itself leading to purposeful understanding.

One of the primary aims of Bohm’s (1996) work in dialogue is to promote cohesion amidst the extremely challenging situation of fragmentation and destructiveness in our modern living; he believed the collaborative aspect of dialogue could promote this aim. Bohm’s ideas about dialogue arose from and were inspired by his work in anthropology, in which he first became aware of the collaborative power of dialogue:

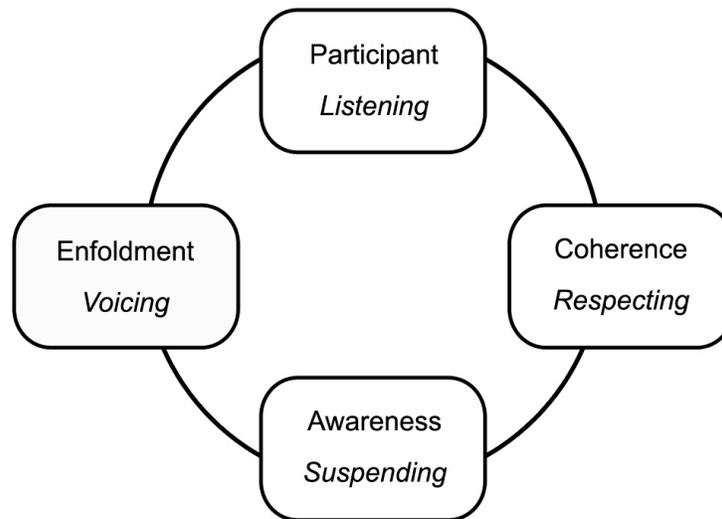
Some time ago there was an anthropologist who lived for a long while with a North American tribe. It was a small group of about fifty people... Now, from time to time that tribe met like this in a circle. They just talked and talked and talked, apparently to no purpose. They made no decisions. There was no leader. And everybody could participate. There may have been wise men or wise women who were listened to a bit more – the older ones – but everybody could talk. The meeting went on, until it finally seemed to stop for no reason at all and the group dispersed. Yet after that, everybody seemed to know what to do, because they understood each other so well. Then they could get together in smaller groups and do something or decide things. (Bohm, 1996, pp. 16-17)

Dialogue thus creates change collectively, and cohesion is attained through collaborative effort at purposeful understanding. The power of the collaborative spirit of dialogue is contrasted by Bohm’s (1996) illustration of Ping Pong style discussion, frequently found in everyday conversational circles and academic discussions, in which opponents bat ideas and perspectives back and forth, each trying to win the point. Collaboration in dialogue, on the other hand, emphasizes a goal of unity, of coming to a fuller and more deeply nuanced understanding. As Lonergan (1957/1992) points out, “talking is a basic human art. By it each communicates to others what he knows, and at the same time

provokes the contradictions that direct his attention to what he has overlooked” (p. 198). The spontaneous collaboration of shared understanding thus includes the differences in viewpoint that each brings to a dialogue, or focused conversation (Romney, 2005). As a collaborative enterprise, dialogue embraces this diversity of different viewpoints, and dialogue’s purpose of increasing understanding means that these contradictions are recognized as valuable in provoking further questions and promoting a cohesive move to fuller understanding.

Bohm (1996) identified four principles of dialogue (*participant, coherence, awareness, and enfoldment*). These principles were later reframed by Isaacs (1999) to focus on core activities, as shown in the following summary and figure by O’Neill and Peluso (2013):

- a) *Listening* focuses on the art of listening together, where listening embraces an awareness of one’s own thinking and limitations, as well as working towards mutuality and interdependence. There is a shift in perspective towards becoming ‘an advocate for the whole’ – not just listening from your own or another’s perspective.
- b) *Respecting* leads to a focus on ‘coherence,’ where participants engage in a space of commonality and inclusivity, not to reach a consensus, but to embrace the ‘between’ of differing perspectives.
- c) *Suspending* means examining your own opinions, certainties (e.g. “I know exactly how you feel”), judgments and thinking so that we can enter into dialogue in a way that can deepen understanding, illuminate new possibilities and allow for (and make possible) change.
- d) *Voicing* places the impetus on finding and speaking your own authentic voice and listening to your internal voice. Isaacs (1999) explains that authentically voicing in dialogue can break down the automatic response of speaking rehearsed messages that we are familiar with in our daily lives, and consider what really needs to be expressed.



**Figure 1. Concepts of dialogue based on Bohm (1996) and Isaacs (1999)**

Note: [reproduced from O'Neill & Peluso (2013) with permission]

### 3.1.2. Philosophical Pedagogy<sup>18</sup>

Alongside dialogue, the program component of the research centred on a kind of philosophical pedagogy that is founded on an experiential and phenomenological process of learning. In the introduction of his major work, *Insight*, Lonergan (1957/1992) introduces the idea of self-appropriation, that is, the personal appropriation of one's own elements or activities of learning. Self-appropriation is a gradual process of identifying, verifying and personally possessing the various elements that constitute our full activities of knowing and doing. While these 'elements' can be identified separately, their functioning is never isolated but is always part of the whole (and holistic/organic) structure that constitutes the ongoing cycle of our knowing and doing. Moreover, that cyclic pattern of knowing and doing that Lonergan identifies is the fully concrete patterned functioning of our *actual* knowing and doing, to be found within each of us.

Self-appropriation thus requires a sort of phenomenological 'first person' activity of becoming aware of *my* seeing, *my* hearing, *my* imaging, *my* questions, *my* insights,

<sup>18</sup> I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Susan O'Neill, for this term and for her conceptualization of the teaching process I was carrying out with arts learners and educators as a 'philosophical pedagogy.'

*my* formulations', and so on, as they occur. *My awareness* of this dynamic structure can then blossom into *my verification* of a structure of knowing and doing that is present and operative not only in me but in all people. Just as the anatomy of the human body is both a universally recognized human structure and a unique actuality in *my* body and *your* body, so the 'anatomy' of our thinking, as Lonergan (1957/1992) claims, is both a universal human structure to be found in all of us and a particular unique actuality in *my* body-mind and *your* body-mind. Our thinking is, then both subjectively present within us and objectively verifiable through its operative patterned actuality. A simple summary of this recurrent structure is given below:

1. Sense, memory, imagination, perception, emotion, conation
- 2a. Factual questions for understanding (what is it? why is it?) - direct insight - formulation
- 3a. Factual questions for reflection (is it so?) - reflective insight - judgment of fact
- 2b. Practical questions for understanding (what is to be done?) - direct insight - plan
- 3b. Practical questions for reflection (is it to be/ should it be done?) - reflective insight - judgment of value

The full framework of this method of self-appropriation is what Lonergan (1957/1992) calls Generalized Empirical Method. The name is taken from the world of empirical science in which verification of actualities operative in nature are methodically and systematically realized within a scientific community. The discovery of the periodic table in chemistry is one example of empirical method in action; Marie Curie's discovery of polonium and radium is another instance; a school child's experience of looking wondrously at single-celled organisms in pond algae is the beginning of scientific method, and this scientific method of observation, questioning, understanding, formulating and verifying (or, judging the correctness of one's understanding) is, of course, taught in schools around the world.

The name 'empirical method' for the scientific process of discovery is a name given to the methodical procedure that scientists follow. *Generalized* empirical method, as the name implies, looks not only at the 'step by step' procedure of scientific method, but also at the thinking activities 'behind' it that form the basis of that procedure. It aims to make these thinking activities explicit to all of us who use them so implicitly.

Generalized empirical method thus names and identifies the general activity of inquiry and discovery that goes on in human beings not only when they are inquiring and discovering scientific realities but at all times (though with different emphases on different aspects and elements according to differences in the patterning of consciousness – scientific, practical, common sense, aesthetic and so on).

Self-appropriation therefore refers to the explicit personal appropriation and affirmation of our full structure of thinking, or of consciousness to use the broader term, in its recurrent state of operations within each person. My work with participants in the two studies I carried out did not explicitly employ self-appropriation in this meaning. I did, however, encourage an explicit personal ‘meta-cognitive’ exploration of the pattern of aesthetic experience and how it operates within each person. This exploration, since it occurred primarily through dialogue, was shared between participants so that the meta-cognitive process was a group process as well as an individual one. Participants were encouraged repeatedly and consistently to reflect on and be aware of their own experiences of ‘being aesthetic’ as well as to relate (question, explore, compare, contrast) any philosophical ideas we discussed to their own experiences. This philosophical pedagogy thus emphasized a *personal* discovery of the meaning of aesthetic experience through *personal* insights arising from reflection on *personal* aesthetic experiences and in conjunction with reflection on philosophical ideas about aesthetic experience presented from philosophers past and present. The aim, as the emphasis indicates, was to approach learning in an experiential and holistic way that embraced personal discovery in a slowly emerging growth of fuller, deeper and more nuanced understanding for the participants (and myself).

As is evident, meta-cognitive reflection is a key component of this philosophical pedagogy, in which an experience that has been spontaneous and implicit now becomes the object of attention, awareness and reflection so that its characteristics and qualities can become explicit. As the revered educational theorist, John Dewey, explained about this kind of reflective thinking:

Thinking is thus a postponement of immediate action, while it effects internal control of impulse through a union of observation and memory, this union being the heart of reflection. What has been said explains the

meaning of the well-worn phrase “self-control.” The ideal aim of education is creation of power of self-control. (Dewey, 1938/1998, p. 75)

One of the aims of education, then, is to educate people in reflection and judgment for the purpose of making explicit to them the operations of their own learning, as well as the significance of that learning. In education generally, there is a common recognition of the fact that, as I quoted earlier (Wells, 2009), all genuine learning involves inquiry, questioning and discovery, yet there is little awareness of the *significance* of this fact. Why is this fact so important? By becoming aware through self-appropriation of the explicit structure of our thinking, we become aware of selves who share a universal human desire and capacity to understand, know, decide and do that nevertheless operates particularly and individually in each person. While such a statement may sound ‘obvious,’ there is a radical shift here that allows us to embrace and resolve problems of particularity and universality. Another significant aspect of this meta-cognitive type of reflection and affirmation is the recognition that our questions are endless, connecting us and opening us out to the wider ultimate (infinite) horizon of “everything about everything” (1957/1992, p. 375).

On the basis of such personal meta-cognitive yet humanly significant reflections, the value and aims of education take on an intrinsic freshness that can, perhaps, compete with the instrumental and monetary aims so often dominant in educational institutions and systems. Further, an explicit awareness of the role and significance of aesthetic experience has the power to potentially and finally turn our learning around, or perhaps more pertinent, upside down so that inquiry is realized as a beginning, an inner restlessness, questions are asked without answers already in mind, and freedom is given to explore in a spirit of openness leading to fuller holistic understanding.

My approach of philosophical pedagogy therefore allowed for key theoretical ideas to be ‘applied’ in an active ‘hands on’ learning situation: the integration of personal experience and knowledge through meta-cognitive discovery; the growth toward fuller holistic understanding through introduction to traditional and modern philosophical perspectives in combination with reflection on personal experience and knowledge; the allowance for an emergent curriculum based on the spontaneity of insight and emergent

understanding; and finally, a development of meaning and an affirmation of self as an aesthetic being through the reflective exploratory learning process.

### **3.1.3. Philosophical Quotations**

For the two iterations of the program *Exploring Aesthetic Experience*, I selected a total of six philosophical quotations to be used as prompts for the exploration of the question ‘*what is aesthetic experience?*’ While some of the quotations were identical between the two study groups, some of them differed either slightly or completely. For the first group of senior secondary students from the Langley Fine Arts School (arts learners), I chose shorter quotations, usually only a few lines in length, partly because of time constraints in working with this group and partly because I was trying to be mindful of their youthful life experience and educational context. For the second group of arts educators/graduate students completing a graduate course EDUC 848, Ideas and Issues in Aesthetics and Education (educators), I chose longer quotations, often expanding on the same authors and quotations used for the LFAS group. The rationale for the longer quotations was based on the greater life experience and broader educational context that the graduate students possessed: I wanted to make sure they were challenged enough in their thinking about aesthetic experience. The ‘line up’ of quotations and philosophers followed the same basic pattern: classical to modern. The arts learners began with Plato and Aristotle, moved into Maxine Greene and John Dewey, and ended with Susanne Langer and Bernard Lonergan. Similarly, the educators began with R. G. Collingwood (as contrasted with Roger Scruton’s classical/traditional view of aesthetic beauty), moved into Maxine Greene, Elliot Eisner, and John Dewey, and likewise ended with Susanne Langer and Bernard Lonergan. A table containing each set of these quotations may help:

<b>Arts Learners</b>
<p>Plato: "...not only does painting - or rather representation in general - produce a product which is far from truth, but it also forms a close, warm, affectionate relationship with a part of us which is, in its turn, far from intelligence. And nothing healthy or authentic can emerge from this relationship" (Plato, <i>Republic</i>, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 356).</p>
<p>Aristotle: "The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance" (Aristotle, <i>Poetics</i>).</p>
<p>Greene: "...participatory involvement with the many forms of art [and natural beauty] can enable us to <i>see</i> more in our experience, to <i>hear</i> more on normally unheard frequencies, to <i>become conscious</i> of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed" (Maxine Greene, <i>Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts and Social Change</i>, 2000, p. 123).</p>
<p>Dewey: "If artistic and aesthetic quality is implicit in every normal experience, how shall we explain how and why it so generally fails to become explicit? Why is it that to multitudes art seems to be an importation into experience from a foreign country and the aesthetic to be a synonym for something artificial?" (John Dewey, <i>Art as Experience</i>, 1934/2005, p. 11).</p>
<p>Langer: "Artistic training is, therefore, the education of feeling... Few people realize that the real education of emotion is not the "conditioning" effected by social approval and disapproval, but the tacit, personal, illuminating contact with symbols of feeling" (Susanne K. Langer, <i>Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art</i>, 1953, p. 401).</p>
<p>Loneragan: "Art is an objectification of a purely experiential pattern, ...a recollection of emotion in tranquility. The process of expression or objectification is an idealization of the [original] experiential pattern. It grasps the central moment of the experience and unfolds its proper implications, apart from the distortions, the interferences, the accidental intrusions that would arise in the concrete experience itself. It is the pattern of internal relations that will be immanent in the colors, in the tones, in the spaces [of the art work itself]" (Bernard J. F. Loneragan, <i>Topics in Education</i>, Chapter 9: Art, 1993, pp. 217-219).</p>

## Educators

Collingwood: "When these aestheticians want to use the word [beauty] as a name for the quality in things by virtue of which we enjoy an aesthetic experience in connexion with them, they want to use it as a name for something non-existent. There is no such quality. The aesthetic experience is an autonomous activity. It arises from within; it is not a specific reaction to a stimulus proceeding from a specific type of external object. ... For to say that beauty is subjective means that the aesthetic experiences which we enjoy in connexion with certain things arise not from any quality that they possess, which... would be called beauty, but from our own aesthetic activity" (R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, 1938/1958, pp. 40-41).

Greene: "There are some who watch a ballet only for the story, not for the movement or the music; some who fall into a reverie at concerts or focus only on appending pictorial illustrations to what they hear. The point is that simply being in the presence of art forms is not sufficient to occasion an aesthetic experience or to change a life. Aesthetic experiences require conscious participation in a work, a going out of energy, an ability to notice what is there to be noticed in the play, the poem, the quartet. Knowing "about," even in the most formal academic manner, is entirely different from... entering into it perceptually, affectively, cognitively. To introduce students to the manner of such engagement is to... [help] learners to pay heed – to attend to shapes, patterns, sounds, rhythms, figures of speech, contours and lines... At the very least, participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to *hear* more on normally unheard frequencies, to *become conscious* of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed" (Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts and Social Change*, 2000, pp. 125; 123).

Eisner: "As I indicated earlier, most perceptual activities are instrumental in character; we see in order to use the content of sight to get somewhere else... We look for our house in order to know that we have arrived home. Our seeing is practical, and practical perception is not usually designed to provide delight in what is seen, to challenge our beliefs, or to generate questions that lead to productive puzzlement. Most of what we do when we see does not have as its primary outcome a new way to view the world. The arts, however, do this with regularity. What does it mean to view the world within a frame of reference? A frame of reference is a frame that defines a point of view. ... A geologist looking at the Grand Canyon ... sees in terms of geologic interests. But the "same" rock formations are quite a different form of experience for the real estate agent, the poet, and the painter. ... Each person bringing a different frame of reference reads the so-called same image differently. Seeing the rock aesthetically, or hearing a wonderful piece of music, or experiencing a fine play is more than becoming aware of its qualities. It is a way of being moved, of finding out something about our own capacity to be moved; it is a way of exploring the deepest parts of our interior landscape. In its best moments it is a way of experiencing joy." (Elliot W. Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, 2002, pp. 84-85).

Dewey: "If artistic and aesthetic quality is implicit in every normal experience, how shall we explain how and why it so generally fails to become explicit? Why is it that to multitudes art seems to be an importation into experience from a foreign country and the aesthetic to be a synonym for something artificial?" (John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 1934/2005, p. 11).

Langer: "A dance, like any other work of art, is a perceptible form that expresses the nature of human feeling – the rhythms and connections, crises and breaks, the complexity and richness of what is sometimes called man's "inner life," the stream of direct experience, life as it feels to the living.

What is expressed in a dance is an idea; an idea of the way feelings, emotions, and all other subjective experiences come and go – their rise and growth, their intricate synthesis that gives our inner life unity and personal identity. What we call a person's "inner life" is the inside story of his own history; the way living in the world feels to him. This kind of experience is usually but vaguely known...

Yet subjective experience has a structure; it is not only met from moment to moment, but can be conceptually known, reflected on, imagined and symbolically expressed in detail and to a great depth. Only it is not our usual medium, discourse – communication by language – that serves to express what we know of the life of feeling. ...The important fact is that what language does not readily do – present the nature and patterns of sensitive and emotional life – is done by works of art. Such works are expressive forms, and what they express is the nature of human feeling.

...This image, though it is a created apparition, a pure appearance, is objective; it seems to be charged with feeling because its form expresses the very nature of feeling. Therefore it is an objectification of subjective life, and so is every other work of art" (Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art*, 1957, pp. 8-9).

Artistic training is, therefore, the education of feeling... Few people realize that the real education of emotion is not the "conditioning" effected by social approval and disapproval, but the tacit, personal, illuminating contact with symbols of feeling" (Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*, 1953, p. 401).

Lonergan: "Art is an objectification of a purely experiential pattern, ...a recollection of emotion in tranquility. The process of expression or objectification is an idealization of the [original] experiential pattern. It grasps the central moment of the experience and unfolds its proper implications, apart from the distortions, the interferences, the accidental intrusions that would arise in the concrete experience itself. It is the pattern of internal relations that will be immanent in the colors, in the tones, in the spaces [of the art work itself]" (Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, 1993, pp. 217-219).

I decided to begin with Plato and Aristotle for the arts learners as a way to introduce and give these young senior secondary students, without any background or experience in philosophy, a taste of classic Greek philosophy through two of its most renowned philosophers. On the other hand, in approaching group of educators, two factors influenced my decision to begin with Collingwood rather than Plato and Aristotle. The

first factor was the notion that classical Greek philosophy may have become ‘well worn’ for graduate students and may have not been the most stimulating or challenging way to begin the research study; the second factor was the context of the classroom environment and the desire to blend with planned curriculum. My research study began at the beginning of the semester in the first class, and the introductory topic for this graduate course was the video by Roger Scruton on aesthetics and beauty. I therefore decided to choose Collingwood’s quotation, which presented an opposing idea contrary to that of an ideal (aesthetic) beauty; in this way, I thought I would be able to offer a challenging contrast to Scruton’s classical/traditional view of aesthetic beauty and a stimulating beginning to the research study.

The next sets of quotations were chosen based on the progression of ideas I was aiming to foster. Greene, Eisner and Dewey were chosen because of their connections to education, and specifically to the arts in education. As well as offering an educational perspective that hints at larger issues of the significance of the arts and aesthetic experience in learning and in education generally, they also presented valuable contemporary issues of societal constraints surrounding aesthetic and artistic experience.

The final set of quotations I chose were based on the desire to have students begin to reflect on connections and distinctions in and between aesthetic and artistic experience. My thesis focuses on the broad educational (and societal) implications of the significance of aesthetic experience, but since aesthetic experience is closely, indeed, intimately related to artistic experience, and since the students I was working with were all educated and trained in the arts, I wanted to be able to explore the similarities and differences between aesthetic and artistic experience and see if there were any important or valuable relations to education and learning generally. Both Langer and Lonergan, in their quotations, offer challenging philosophical ideas and positions that explore the artistic process within a context and understanding of aesthetic experience. What makes both these quotations particularly challenging is the usage of the term “objectification” – both understand this term to be rooted in the subject’s thinking process (as related to artistic creation). Indeed, Lonergan’s own aesthetic philosophy was deeply influenced by Langer, and he appropriated and adapted some of her ideas to place them

within his own philosophical context. My main rationale in choosing these final quotations was, then, the ability to explore the combination of artistic and aesthetic experience in an existential context that placed the subject's creative thinking in a central role to be discovered and appreciated in itself and in its significance to our daily life and learning.

### **3.1.4. The Study Groups: Arts Learners and Educators**

For both of the two studies, participants explored the question '*what is aesthetic experience?*' within the context of six different philosophical quotations using dialogue as the primary means of reflection and exploration. Dialogue was rooted in an experiential framework of philosophical pedagogy, as discussed in section 2.1, that encouraged open exploration leading to a holistically developing understanding of the nature of aesthetic experience in relation to participants' sense of their own aesthetic experiences. For both studies, I worked with students in arts education: 1) senior secondary students at the Langley Fine Arts School and 2) graduate students in the Master's in Arts Education program at Simon Fraser University. Both study groups followed a 6-week program, meeting once a week during that time frame, and each study ended with a 7th 'final presentation' session. Finally, as well as taking part in dialogue, both study groups also did private individual journal writing as part of their reflections on aesthetic experience.

#### Each Session Included:

Introduction to and Coaching in Dialogue Principles and Practice  
Dialogue (employing philosophical pedagogy)  
Journal Writing  
Debriefing

#### Final Sessions Included:

Final presentation of dialogue work

### **3.1.5. Study Group 1 – Arts Learners**

**The Participants:** The participants were a lively select group of grade 12 (and one grade 11) students from the Langley Fine Arts School (LFAS). They were selected and invited to participate in the study by their teacher based on their eagerness and

enthusiasm for the project, their potential to benefit from participation in the study, and their overall commitment in the school. There were a total of 10 participants for the study, six female and 4 male, representing each the different major arts specialisation areas: 3 visual arts majors, 3 music majors, 2 writing majors, 1 photography major, and 1 dance major. Dr. Jim Sparks, choral director and teacher at LFAS and fellow PhD colleague at Simon Fraser University, was the teacher liaison for the study. He coordinated between the students and myself, and arranged for meeting time and space each week.

**The School:** Langley Fine Arts School (LFAS), opened in 1993, is a K-12 public school in the Langley School District of the province of British Columbia, Canada. The school is unique as being a fine arts ‘magnet’ school for the district, offering an emphasis on fine arts training throughout the K-12 educational experience within a fully academic environment. It is a relatively small school with approximately 400 elementary and 400 secondary students and a long waiting list. During elementary school years (K-5), students are exposed to a majority of the major art forms (dance, drama, film, photography, visual art, music, literary arts) and required to take part in each of them. By middle school (or junior high school), students choose 3 major arts areas in which to focus their interest, and by senior secondary (11-12) students are honing in on one major arts area as their focal interest (with electives in other areas). A balance of academics and arts are the two offerings at the school, and as students progress, arts training is in depth and rigorous. The school’s purpose, as stated on their official web site, gives an indication of their overall aims: “to provide a comprehensive education for students, while focusing on the development of aesthetic intelligence through programs in the Visual Arts, Literary Arts, Dance, Drama and Music” (LFAS, 2015).

**Time and Place:** This project took place in April and May of 2014, at the school. We were able to coordinate students’ schedules so that they met during a free ‘study break’ period each week, which meant not having to miss any class time to take part in the study project. Due to variety in students’ schedules, we had to alternate the meeting time each week, 9:30am one week and 10:30am each alternate week. The study break period was for precisely one hour, which was quite a tight timeline, so we had to be in place ready to go and work efficiently together during the one-hour time slot – students

were enthusiastic and completely helpful in this regard. We met in a large music practice room that conveniently had three separate individual size practice rooms at the back. These individual practice rooms were used for small group dialogue breakout sessions.

**Dialogue:** Dialogue groups typically were small (3 or 4 each). I normally held two short dialogue activities per week/session, lasting for about 10-15 minutes each time. Group members changed each week for variety and exchange of ideas.

**Journal Writing:** Journal writing was done during brief 5-minute intervals in-session; the students did not take their journals home. This decision was reached relatively easily because of their already busy schedules. I did not want to add to the amount of schoolwork already in place for the students, since this study was not part of a class but an extra volunteer endeavour. Journal reflections focused on the philosophical quotation for that week and were normally about half a page in length, more or less. Participants were encouraged to write in free flowing narrative and/or to use any other means of expression comfortable to them (illustrations, poems, and so on).

### **3.1.6. Sessions**

**Week 1:** Dr. O'Neill, Dr. Sparks and I were all present for the first session. In this introductory session, our aims were threefold: to introduce ourselves and the project to participants; to introduce, review and practice dialogue (some of the participants were already familiar with dialogue from participating in earlier studies with MODAL research group: *Arts Matter and Artistic Learning Dialogues* in 2012-13); and to have students do an initial journal write and dialogue focused on their spontaneous thoughts about aesthetic experience.

We began the session by having students introduce themselves, speaking about their area of major in the Arts program and their future hopes. We then gave students an 11-page handout on dialogue, adapted from "Speaking Together: Applying the Principles and Practice of Dialogue" (Jones, 2007), which outlined in practical terms the four major principles of dialogue practice. Dr. O'Neill introduced the idea of dialogue to the students to orient them toward its spirit and goal of purposeful understanding, and for this first introductory session, we focused on introducing the first major principle of Listening.

Our brief introduction to dialogue was followed by my introduction to my research work, what I was doing in this project, and how and why their participation in the study would be helpful to me. After hearing about the intent and aims of the study, I then asked students to spend a short time writing in a journal (provided) about their immediate impressions, thoughts and questions in response to the phrase *aesthetic experience*; due to the tight timeline, we kept to a strict 5-minute writing time. At this beginning stage, my aim was to get a genuine ‘unadulterated’ sense of what students already knew, or thought they knew, about aesthetic experience without any significant prompting or influence from myself or from other sources or quotations. For this reason, I gave very little lead in to the journal writing, only mentioning the term *anaesthetic* as a possibly helpful contrast to *aesthetic*.

Following the journal writing, Dr. O’Neill led the students in dialogue practice using their journal writing reflections as basis for their first tentative dialogue exploration into the meaning of aesthetic experience. We divided students into small groups of 3 (one participant was sick) and each group dialogued in front of the rest of the participants for a few minutes. Dr. O’Neill followed each groups’ efforts with various coaching tips on what to do when ‘stuck’ in dialogue: using the technique of reflecting back (repeating or paraphrasing what someone else has said or asked), asking questions, and ‘pulling threads’ from others’ contributions (picking up on ideas someone else has said that trigger further relevant ideas or questions to pursue). Each group took a turn practicing dialogue in this fashion, taking the majority of the hour time frame, and followed up by a short de-brief for questions about dialogue based on what the students had experienced so far.

We ended the session by going over the schedule and plan for the following sessions, outlining the idea of a final ‘Round Table’ discussion session to be held at the end of the program in Simon Fraser University and open to the public – an opportunity for the students to ‘showcase’ what they had learned during the study. We also arranged for one of the students to set up an online private contact page (Facebook or Google) for group contact. Finally, we gave out the philosophical quotation for the following week’s dialogue session. Journal books were collected, and I took them home with me to read over.

**Weeks 2-6: Overview** In sessions two through six, I led and facilitated the dialogue sessions, and Dr. Sparks assisted by video recording. I aimed to follow a pattern of activities similar for each session. I began with a brief recap of the previous week's dialogue principle and then introduced the current week's principle, giving illustrations from 'everyday life' to try to give the principle a concrete foundation for practice in their group sessions. Next, I introduced the week's quotation and asked the students to do a short (5-minute) journal write on it. The quotation introduction included a few 'fun facts' on that week's philosopher that we asked students to research and contribute, if they had time. From there, we moved into the two (time allowing) dialogue sessions on the quotation, the first dialogue session focusing on the content of the quotation itself, and the second one focusing on reflections and connections to their own aesthetic/artistic experiences as related to the quotation. The questions I typically used to facilitate these dialogues were 1) *'what meaning did you get from this quotation?'* and 2) *'how do you see the ideas in this quotation connecting to your own aesthetic or artistic experiences?'* Each dialogue session was followed by a short whole group de-brief (no more than 5 minutes) in which students shared highlights of ideas and questions from their groups' dialogue. Finally, I gave out the quotation for the following week's dialogue session and collected journal writings.

Order of Events:

Recap of previous dialogue principle; introduction of new dialogue principle

Introduction of quotation

Journal writing reflections

Dialogue Activity 1; Whole group debrief

Dialogue Activity 2; Whole group debrief

Closing summary, quotation for following week, collection of journals

**Week 2:** In this week, I recapped the first dialogue principle, Listening, and introduced the second one, Respecting. For this first 'formal' dialogue activity, instead of moving directly into the quotation, I asked students to recap their ideas about aesthetic experience from the previous week's session. I wanted them to have this opportunity to dialogue freely about aesthetic experience in their smaller private groups in contrast to being 'on the spot' in front of the whole group as they had been in Week 1's practice activity. The group divided into two groups (normally we had three smaller groups of 3 or 4 each, but one iPod, which was used for recording the dialogues, was missing this

week). I had made a bubble map using their own words from the previous week to highlight key ideas and gave them this map as a prompt for dialogue. We followed up this first dialogue activity with a whole group debrief. I then introduced the Plato quotation and asked students to journal about it. The second dialogue activity focused on the Plato quotation and was done with the entire group participating, as we were running out of time for breakout groups. As a final send off, the quotation for week 3 (Aristotle) was provided and journals were collected.

**Week 3:** In this week, I recapped the second dialogue principle, Respecting, and introduced the third one, Suspending. This week's dialogue activity went off track. Rather than go with the planned (Aristotle) philosophical quotation for the first dialogue activity, I asked students to dialogue about the similarities and differences between aesthetic experience and artistic experience. This notion arose from transcribing and reading their previous weeks' reflections, which were a fascinating mix of both aesthetic and artistic thought. I felt the need, then, for some attention to be paid to the idea of distinctions between the two types of experiences. Students were given paper and asked to sum up their dialogue ideas using two columns: one for aesthetic experience, and one for artistic experience. Debrief of this dialogue activity went much longer than planned, and we did not have much time to reflect on the quotation for this week. Journal writing was given only a couple of minutes and student dialogue contributions (whole group) were given only 5-8 minutes. The quotation for Week 4 was provided at the end of the session and journals were collected.

**Week 4 and Week 5:** These weeks stayed on track with the planned order of events. I recapped the previous dialogue principles and introduced the new principles, Suspending and Voicing; we introduced the week's philosopher and philosophical quotations; journal writing; dialogue activity 1; debrief; dialogue activity 2; debrief; gave out quotations for the following week and collected journals.

**Week 6:** In this week, Dr. O'Neill returned in order to outline the planned Round Table event at Simon Fraser University. We followed the normal order of events for the first half of the session, doing a dialogue activity on the philosophical quotation and a whole group debrief. During the second half of the session, we focused on giving

students an idea of what to expect for the Round Table event and time to plan their group presentations for this event.

**Week 7: SFU Round Table** For this final session of the study project, we met together at SFU for a Round Table discussion and presentation. Upon arrival at SFU, students were immediately asked to fill out the questionnaires on aesthetic experience and dialogue. We then moved into dialogue. I briefly summarized and reviewed the dialogue principles (now quite familiar to students), introduced the final philosopher and philosophical quotation (Lonergan), asked the students to reflect on the quotation in their journal writing, moved into (two) dialogue groups, and did a short whole group de-brief of dialogue. Students then had time to go over their Round Table presentations.

As students reviewed their presentations, we also began interviews. We set up two video cameras in separate areas of the meeting room and interviewed two students at a time while the others went over their presentations for the Round Table event.

The Round Table discussions followed a lecture given by SFU professor Dr. Yaroslav Senyshyn and open to graduate students and professors in the university. Students presented their dialogue work on aesthetic experience in a public university forum, giving them a taste for academic university life. To prepare for the Round Table, students were asked to choose one quotation from the six they had worked with (some groups requested to work with two quotations) and to speak about four key things: the philosopher they'd chosen (very brief background), why they had chosen this quotation, what the quotation meant to them, and how the quotation connected to their personal aesthetic and/or artistic experiences. Students were encouraged to express the main ideas they felt they had learned through the six-week study and any significant questions they came away with or wanted to explore further.

### **3.1.7. Study Group 2 – Educators**

**The Participants:** The participants for this study consisted of the students attending a Master's course in Arts Education. There were a total of 16 students, and the majority of them were teachers of various arts forms in public schools, either elementary or secondary. The age range of students was relatively wide; there were two or three

younger students in their 20s, following on from undergraduate studies, but the majority of the group were students in their 30s and 40s, established teachers and professionals in their arts areas. The gender mix favoured women: 12 female and 4 male. The various art forms represented in the group included visual arts, literary arts, dance, drama, and music.

**The School:** ED848, Ideas and Issues in Aesthetic Education, is part of a two-year Master of Arts Education program offered at SFU. The course runs for one semester, thirteen weeks in length. The program is somewhat unique in that it accepts students from all areas of the arts and integrates them into a single stream. The approach to arts and aesthetics is thus a unified one rather than an isolated focus on separate individual art forms. The instructor for this course was Dr. O'Neill.

**Time and Place:** This study took place in the Fall Term of 2014, September to December, at Simon Fraser University. We began the study on the first night of class and met for the following 7 weeks. The course took place on Wednesday evenings from 4:30-9:20pm each week. We allowed an hour for the *Exploring Aesthetic Experience* program and more time whenever needed. Since the study formed a significant part of the required content of the course (30%), we needed substantial time to work on dialogue principles and practice, to go into dialogue groups, to debrief and to integrate the content of the study with other aspects of the course material. We met in the assigned classroom, a large modern room with access to various other study spaces, hallways and classrooms that could be used for break out groups.

**Dialogue:** Dialogue groups were conveniently sized at 4 students per group. We held only one dialogue activity per session, but each dialogue ran for 15-25 minutes. Group members changed each week for variety and exchange of ideas. Since we were able to ask students to reflect and write substantially on the philosophical quotations ahead of time, we were able to focus class time on dialogue principles and practice. Students were asked to practice each dialogue principle that had been introduced that week and to reflect on its value in dialogue and in their lives generally.

**Journal Writing:** For the group of educators, journal writing was assigned as homework to be done each week, copied and handed in to me the following week.

Journal reflections focused on the philosophical quotation for that week and were normally about two pages in length. Participants were encouraged to write free flowing narratives that could incorporate any other means of expression comfortable to them (illustrations, poems, and so on). The journal writing was evaluated for grades in the course.

### **3.1.8. Sessions**

**Week 1:** As an introduction to the course and a source for dialogue introduction and practice, we showed the BBC documentary video “Why Beauty Matters” featuring philosopher Roger Scruton. We also viewed a PowerPoint presentation on dialogue and briefly introduced the four principles of practice. The students then went into their own practice groups to try dialogue. Finally, one group, composed of one member from each practice group, volunteered to dialogue in front of the rest of the class for the purposes of being coached by Dr. O’Neill. The quotation for the following week’s dialogue was handed out and expectations for journal reflection and writing provided.

**Weeks 2 – 7:** As with the LFAS study, these weeks followed a steady order of events in which I introduced the philosopher and philosophical quotation for the week, recapped, introduced and discussed the dialogue principle(s) for the week, separated into breakout groups and facilitated dialogue, led a class de-brief on both the content of dialogue and the practice of dialogue, and collected journal writings on the philosophical quotations. During the first three-four sessions, journal writings were posted (anonymously) on the walls for all students to read and comment on. An exception to the order of events occurred in Week 6. By this time, after reviewing the transcripts of the previous week’s dialogues, we felt students were not fully appreciating the exploratory and open spirit of dialogue in its aim of purposeful understanding. Dr. O’Neill decided to begin the class with an ‘exposition’ of Heidegger’s opening pages to the book, *What is Called Thinking*, encouraging students through this example toward the idea of allowing their thinking to be thoughtful, expansive, layered and nuanced.

**Week 8:** For the final week of the study, students were asked to report individually on one of the quotations from the study, detailing why they had chosen that

quotation, what the quotation meant to them and how they saw it connecting to their personal aesthetic and artistic experiences. They had also been asked to write in their journals a follow-up 'summary' reflection on this quotation, tying together the ideas they had learned from the study project.

### **3.2. Study**

**Ethics:** As this study formed part of the larger program of research being conducted by Dr. O'Neill within MODAL Research Group, ethical permission for these two studies was submitted under the MODAL umbrella. Since MODAL Research Group had carried out research projects at LFAS for two years prior to my own study, the Principal and parents, as well as a number of the students who participated in my study, were familiar with Dr. O'Neill and her work. A detailed ethics proposal was submitted to SFU's Office of Research Ethics and approval was granted for both studies before they began. Further, my employment as a professional teacher with the Vancouver School Board since 2006 meant that I entered into the studies with a considerable awareness of ethical concerns of students and of student-teacher relationship dynamics.

**Permissions:** Permission for these research studies had to be attained from a variety of people. For the study with arts learners at LFAS, a written outline of the proposed study was sent to the principal and written permission to conduct the study was obtained from him, as well as from the Langley School District. Parents were informed in writing about the study, its purpose and aims, schedule, participation expectations, and its part in the larger research by MODAL Research Group under the supervision of Dr. O'Neill. Students were likewise informed about the study, both in writing and verbally. Written consent was obtained from parents before the study began, and students provided me with written consent at the beginning of the study. Parents and participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and that pseudonyms would be used instead of their actual names.

For the study with educators at SFU, verbal and written permission was obtained from the instructor of the EDUC 848 course (my supervisor), Dr. O'Neill. Participants were informed verbally and in writing about the study, its purpose and aims, schedule,

participant expectations and its part in the larger research by MODAL Research Group. Since this study formed part of the students' graduate coursework, special care was taken to explain to participants the voluntary nature of their participation: while every student was required to take part in the study program content as part of their course work (30% toward their final grade for the course), consent to use their contributions anonymously as part of my research work was entirely voluntary. I obtained written consent from all participants at the beginning of the study.

**Data Collection:** Data for both studies was collected through three major media: video recordings, audio recordings and journal writings. For the study with arts learners study, each full session was video recorded and all the dialogue sessions were audio recorded. Students were provided with iPods to record their small group dialogue sessions (with me overseeing the process); I created full verbatim transcriptions from the audio recordings each week before the next session. I also collected and read student journals each week (these writings provided evidence that students were reflecting on the quotations; however, they have not been included as part of the data analysis presented here).

For the study with educators, all dialogue sessions were audio recorded (none were video recorded). Again, students were provided with iPods to record their small group dialogue sessions (with me overseeing the process). As before, I produced full verbatim transcriptions for each session during the week following. I also collected and read student journals each week (these writings also provided evidence that students were reflecting on the quotations, however, they have not been included as part of the data analysis).

### **3.3. Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as the method for analysis of the data. A description of the method and how it was used is provided below.

### 3.3.1. What is IPA?

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is becoming an increasingly popular method of qualitative analysis. It was established in the UK by researcher Jonathan Smith with the publication of his doctoral work in psychology in 1996 and is best known in that field, especially as applied to physical and mental health psychology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Smith's use of this method forged a successful attempt to 'stake a claim' within psychology to recognize the validity of experiential and qualitative research in a field that was dominated by quantitative research approaches. It is currently gaining recognition around the world in human, social and health sciences, including a growing number of studies in educational research, and is slowly spreading to non-English speaking research as well.

As a method, IPA is committed to examining "how people make sense of their major life experiences" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). There is, in fact, a 'triple-layered' facet to this approach. A first layer is the recognition of experiences that are lived, or in other words, *the flow of experience as we are immersed in it*. A second layer is the recognition of *our reflection on lived experience*, something that tends to take place when an experience takes on significance for us. "At the most elemental level, we are constantly caught up, unselfconsciously, in the everyday flow of experience. As soon as we become aware of what is happening we have the beginnings of what can be described as 'an experience' as opposed to just experience" (p. 2). Our awareness and concern with experience can range from simple events, such as feeling sharp pebbles underfoot as we head for a swim, to major life experiences, such as undergoing grief, pregnancy or major surgery. A swim for someone who has undergone major surgery, for example, might take on the significance of an event marker, indicating a step on the road to recovery. Anticipating a swim for this person could thus have connections to important or significant events in their past lived experience.

A third layer is the recognition of *the interpreter's process of making sense* of the participants' meaning making of her or his life experience. For this reason, IPA involves what Smith calls a "double hermeneutic" that is preoccupied with "trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 3). This double activity reveals the dual role of the researcher and, in my

opinion, one of its strengths: the researcher is cognisant of and engaged in the same human process of reflection that the participant(s) is engaged in, though obviously using a much more systematic approach.

The cognitive aspect of IPA forms one of its central theoretical axes. “IPA shares the view that human beings are sense making creatures, and therefore the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 3). The interpreter’s account, then, is a ‘second order’ account in that it can only access participants’ experience through the participant’s own reflection and account of it. What is crucial or central is the cognitive aspect of IPA; cognition and the mental processes of participants take on a central concern in the analytical activity for the researcher and thus link IPA to a broader cognitive paradigm. IPA is thus “interested in examining how people think about what is happening to them” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 54), an interest that I share in my own research work.

Studies using IPA typically focus on either one person or a small group of participants. The reason for this focus rests mainly in the need for a detailed analysis of transcripts that follow the ongoing process or progress of participants, and this analysis is a time consuming and painstaking endeavour. The aim for the researcher is “to say something in detail about the perceptions and understandings of this particular group rather than prematurely make more general claims” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 55). Though IPA is not opposed to generalizations, it is rather focused on discrete and particular findings that nevertheless may carry important human implications. IPA is thus described as “an idiographic mode of inquiry” (p. 56), not a nomothetic approach that deals with large populations and probable claims.

### **3.3.2. Rationale for Using IPA**

The theoretical foundations of IPA seem to make it an ideal method for analysis of my research. There are three major theoretical underpinnings to IPA: the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, the tradition of hermeneutics and the idiographic mode of inquiry just touched on. Since I have already discussed the idiographic aspect, I will turn now to the philosophical and hermeneutic aspects. How do

each of these foundations connect to my thesis research and why are they important to it?

As the P in IPA makes clear, this method rests on the philosophical tradition of phenomenology. Key philosophers in this tradition relevant to IPA are its founder, Edmund Husserl, his student, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Paul Sartre (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As founder of the movement, Husserl's idea in phenomenology was to pay careful attention to our own human experiences, or as he famously urged, to "go back to the things themselves" (p. 12). As Smith makes clear, this statement referred to paying attention to the experiential content of consciousness. Husserl's 1927 description of this process is helpful (in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, pp. 12-13):

Focusing our experiencing gaze on our own psychic life necessarily takes place as reflection, as a turning about of a gaze, which had previously been directed elsewhere. Every experience can be subject to such reflection, as can indeed every manner with which we occupy ourselves with any real or ideal objects – for instance, thinking, or in the modes of feeling and will, valuing and striving. So when we are fully engaged in conscious activity we focus exclusively on the specific thing, thoughts, values, goals or means involved, but not on the psychical experience as such, in which these things are known as such. Through reflection, instead of simply grasping the matter straight out – values, goals and instrumentalities – we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become 'conscious' of them, in which (in the broadest sense) they 'appear'. For this reason, they are called 'phenomena,' and their most general essential character is to exist as the 'consciousness-of' or 'appearance-of' the specific things, thoughts (judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, decisions, hopes and so forth.

In being phenomenological, then, we are intentionally turning our attention to the experiences in which we were (or are) immersed and becoming aware of these experiences as experiences (or as 'an experience,' in Smith's terms). Husserl employed the term 'intentionality analysis' for this process of reflective awareness, which describes the relationship between the conscious act (seeing, hearing, remembering, questioning, etc.) and its intended object.

I have limited myself to looking only at Husserl rather than the other philosophers mentioned by Smith, and the reason for this limitation lies in the close connection of

Husserl's work to Lonergan's. Lonergan's (1957/1992) notion of self-appropriation, as outlined earlier in this chapter, is itself closely related to phenomenology. Indeed, it may not be an exaggeration to say that Lonergan's idea of self-appropriation aims to fulfil Husserl's dream of a "transcendental reduction", that is, the examination of the nature of consciousness *per se* (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 14). In self-appropriation, Lonergan encourages a sort of phenomenological awareness, though the final aim is different. It is an experiential process in which the subject, you or I, becomes aware of her or his own activities of consciousness (as diagrammed in Appendix A) for the purpose of affirming and verifying them as a whole process constituting the dynamic structure of knowing operative in the self. Lonergan gives the name "self-appropriation of the knower" to this process. While this is indeed a grand scheme, my research was much more limited: I asked participants to become aware of only one small part of a full process of self-appropriation, that is, to become aware of their own aesthetic experiences as a subjective human process or capacity that is operating particularly in them.

As is evident from this summary of phenomenology, IPA as a method was highly conducive to my study. First, it recognizes the vital aspect of lived experience that in my study forms the basis of participants' own aesthetic experiences. Second, it recognizes and makes central the cognitive aspect of participants' reflections on their lived aesthetic experiences. And third, it recognizes and respects a hermeneutic process that rests on accounts of subjective experience that are both discrete and particular in nature.

Hermeneutics is a tradition that has its roots in biblical scholarship and has come to play an important role in philosophy and the human sciences (especially history and literary analysis) where interpretation is a major aspect of understanding human meaning. Two points about hermeneutics are important to my study: Gadamer's (1960/2004) contribution of dialectic and the spirit of openness required in interpretation and the hermeneutic circle that works on the constant relationship of parts to a whole. In their account of hermeneutics, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) mention the philosopher Hans Gadamer (along with Schleiermacher and Heidegger) as an instrumental figure in the development of hermeneutics, especially as the latter overlaps and connects to phenomenology. Gadamer speaks of how the interpreter engages with

a text when she or he is interpreting, picking out the key element of the spirit of openness as being essentially important:

Only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning which involves being able to preserve his orientation towards openness...it requires that one does not try to *argue* the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion...Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, p. 27)

Gadamer's words could well be used to describe the spirit of dialogue, central to my research. It is clear that the spirit of interpretation in its essential openness echoes the spirit of dialogue in its essential openness as well. Further, the hermeneutic circle, which is based on the continual and constant relationship of parts to a whole, plays out on a number of levels (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009): for instance, the individual meaning of words depends on their use in the sentence, and the meaning of sentences depends on the accumulation of words in the entire dialogue session. What is important about this circular relationship and dependency of meaning is the full holistic perspective it embraces, echoing the cohesiveness of the spirit of dialogue urged by Bohm.

### **3.3.3. The IPA Process of Analysis**

The process of analysis for IPA typically involves several steps: "close line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns and understandings" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 79) of the participants; the identification of emergent themes or patterns based on this experiential material; the development of interpretive meaning arrived at through 'dialogue' (as in the spirit of Gadamer above) with the data; the development of an overall structure that illustrates relationships between themes; the organization of data into a final structure of themes that can be traced through the entire process; supervision of the interpretation to ensure its cohesiveness and plausibility; the development of a theme-by-theme narrative that guides the reader through the interpretation; and reflection on my process of interpretation, my perceptions and conceptions.

My first step was to read and re-read the transcripts, getting familiar them. This process was enhanced by the fact that I had done all the transcribing myself and could 'hear' the participants' voices and tones as I was reading. I then entered into the process of selecting significant words, statements and meanings, a selection shaped by my research questions as detailed in chapter 1. My selection also followed the suggested approach of the IPA method, that is, I looked for three categories of meanings: descriptive statements, linguistic patterns and conceptual statements (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). These I highlighted using colour coding. Further, I made notes alongside all meanings that seemed important or relevant (e.g., "describing aesthetic experience" or "repeated use and emphasis of the word *feelings*" or "questioning societal value of aesthetic experience/feeling").

It is also important to bring out one difference in this study with arts learners and educators from other studies typically analysed using IPA method. Usually, IPA is used to analyse data from studies done with individuals, and they generally take "a psychological focus on personal meaning-making in particular contexts" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 79), for example, a study of life transitions experienced by a pregnant woman. In my case, I was analysing data from studies done not with an individual but with different small dialogue groups of usually four arts learners or educators in each group. The process of meaning making that I analysed therefore did not reside in any one individual's position but in the group as a whole in 'the between' (Buber, 1967) of meaning-making that emerges through their dialogical encounters. "Buber called the essence of human relationship the sphere of *the between*, located not primarily in either partner but in their interchange, their intersubjective communion" (Ross, 2002, p. 409). This process of analysis required that I treat the transcript as 'one voice.'

My second step was to identify emergent themes. As notes accumulated, repetitions and patterns began to surface and these gradually took shape as themes related to my research questions. I organized this material by considering how ideas from the participants were connecting. For example, as Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) advise, "Themes are usually expressed as phrases which speak to the psychological essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual" (p. 92). In the end, "themes reflect not only the

participants' original words and thoughts but also the analysts interpretation" (p. 92). Further, they "should feel like they have captured and reflect a [crucial] understanding" (p. 92). In this process of analysis, then, I listed the theme headings, placing corresponding meanings from the transcripts beside the theme heading in related groups, each coded by transcript number and page number (e.g., T1 13). Finally, following the guidelines of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), I considered connections between themes to see if any wider or 'superordinate' themes or categories were evident. These could take a number of different forms: "Abstractions, Subsumptions, Polarizations, Contextualizations, Numerations or Functions (pp. 96-98); for my research, I found the categories of Abstractions, Polarizations and Contextualizations to be most relevant.

The following table provides one example of a theme (Aesthetic Experience is Being in the Present Moment) that emerged from the transcripts. In this case, a particular sub-theme, 'Out of Body,' also emerged. Gradually it became clear that this theme, when joined with others in which participants were describing and identifying qualities of aesthetic experience, could form part of a larger superordinate category: Conceptions of Aesthetic Experience. A few specific transcript excerpts from this theme heading are provided in the table below to give a sense of how the process of analysis took shape.

Theme Heading	Transcript Excerpts
<p style="text-align: center;">Aesthetic Experience is Being in the Present Moment (Out of Body) (T2 1-2)</p>	<p>On listening to slam poetry: Anita: I feel like it's an out of body thing, connecting with emotions that they're talking about or experiencing, but um, yeah, both in a sense, it does feel out of body sort of</p>
	<p>Erin: I completely agree, I think, with... you're completely connected with that person but you're also kind of separate from them, there's kind of two levels there and you can't really tell where the division is... which is interesting because it's, you're so completely immersed in it that you're thinking but you're not thinking because you're so focused....</p>

Theme Heading	Transcript Excerpts
	Anita: I agree with that, cause that kind of goes with Connie with the out of body experience as well as being connected, ... you're so much in the present moment that it's almost foreign
	Connie: I hadn't really thought about it until all of you said that, but I can kind of relate to that with singing. I've had times where I'm really like focusing on the technical, trying to sing properly, what are my notes, what's my role, can I hear this can I hear that, blah, blah blah, but once you kind of get past that aspect of it, there's kind of like this embodiment kind of thing that we talk about all the time. It's kind of like you just lose.... You're not thinking about anything, you're not thinking about whether you're doing things properly it just kind of happens...

My third step was to consult with my supervisor on the process and to move towards an overall structure that coherently linked together all the themes. As recommended in the IPA text (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), I created a graphic representation/table (similar to the one above) that showed the various superordinate categories, themes and transcript passages. Once this large overarching structure emerged, I composed the theme-by-theme narrative that connected my analysis to my theoretical perspective.

Finally, I reflected on the research process in the reflective-reflexive component of my study. As Watt (2007) soundly demonstrates in her narrative article on qualitative research, “the value of reflexivity as a powerful learning tool” (p. 83) should not be underestimated, especially for beginners like myself. The process of analysis can be a daunting task especially at first, as Watt appreciates, and the need to be reflexive is paramount in establishing the trustworthiness of analysis. It helps reveal and support my own “deeper understanding of the nature of the qualitative research process” (p. 98). In undergoing the reflexive process, then, I followed Watt’s recommendation for “identifying personal, practical and research purposes” (p. 86) in my research work. First, then, I engaged in critical reflection on the participants and their interactions (practical), drawing on journal notes I kept for each session as it took place; second, I reflected critically on

the research work as a whole, where it is situated in the field of education and my overall goals in it (research); and third, I carried out a reflexive critical analysis on the personal influences that I brought to the study, my role as a teacher, and my role as researcher in each study. Again, I drew on personal journal reflections that I wrote ongoing throughout the study. What, then, were my findings?

## Chapter 4.

### Findings

#### 4.1. Overview

My findings gradually took shape into separate themes, which I was then able to organize thematically in larger superordinate categories. The themes for the two studies overlapped in places and in other places differed in startling ways. In this chapter, I simply present the categories and themes from each of the two studies and leave discussion of the emerging main ideas for my final chapter (Conclusion). Quotations from transcripts appear in brackets with transcript number and page number, (T2 14) for example. The table below shows the major categories and sub-themes for the two studies, allowing a visual view of similar and differing themes.

ARTS LEARNERS	EDUCATORS
<p><b>Conceptions of Aesthetic Experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aesthetic Experience is Subjective</li><li>• Aesthetic Experience is Emotionally Enhancing</li><li>• Aesthetic Experience is Pure (Free, Open, Natural)</li><li>• Aesthetic Experience is Pure (Intangible Awe, Gratitude, Appreciation)</li><li>• Aesthetic Experience is Being in the Present Moment</li><li>• Aesthetic Experience Can Come From Anything</li></ul>	<p><b>Conceptions of Aesthetic Experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aesthetic Experience is Subjective</li><li>• Aesthetic Experience is Spontaneously Emotional</li> <li>• Aesthetic Experience is Engaged in the Moment, Present</li><li>• Aesthetic Experience is Not Limited</li><li>• Aesthetic Experience is An Attitude or Way of Perceiving</li></ul>

ARTS LEARNERS	EDUCATORS
<p><b>Connections Between Aesthetic and Artistic Experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aesthetic and Artistic Experiences are “Interwoven and Circular”</li> <li>• Technique Allows for Aesthetic Experience in Artistic Learning/Performance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Oppositions in Conceptions of Aesthetic Experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aesthetic Experience is Critical and Intelligent</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conceptions of Education: Traditional Academic Learning &amp; Arts Education (Comparisons and Contrasts)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technique Dominates Arts Education and Traditional Academic Learning</li> <li>• Routine Living Affects Aesthetic Experience</li> <li>• Freedom of Thought and Feeling (Arts Education versus Academic Learning)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Conceptions of Education: Traditional Arts Education (Positives and Negatives)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical Interferes with Feeling in Arts Education</li> <li>• Arts Education Limits Aesthetic Experience</li> <li>• Arts Education Enhances Human Development</li> </ul>
<p><b>Aesthetic Experience and Artistic Experience in Society</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aesthetic and Artistic Experience Provide Authenticity in ‘Numbed’ Society</li> <li>• Routine Living Affects Aesthetic Experience</li> <li>• Societal Perceptions of Aesthetic/Artistic Reveal Need to Control, Define</li> </ul>	<p><b>Aesthetic Experience and Artistic Experience in Society</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critique, Judgment Inhibits Aesthetic and Artistic Experience/Growth</li> <li>• Aesthetic and Artistic Experience Are Not Valued in Consumer Society</li> </ul>
<p><b>Artistic Experience and Implications for Learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aesthetic and Artistic Experience Evoke Passion, Purpose and Deeper Meaning</li> </ul>	

## 4.2. Arts Learners

### 4.2.1. Conceptions of Aesthetic Experience

**Aesthetic Experience is Subjective:** Aesthetic experience is characterized as being subjective; Collingood (1938/1958) reasons that aesthetic experience cannot be both objective in nature and subjective in nature; if there is an objective aesthetic

'standard' in objects, then everyone would perceive them, but clearly not everyone does. We then get into the position of having to say that if there is an objective aesthetic quality in things, then some people have been 'educated' to perceive it while others have not. Once we have taken this path, it is then a complex tangle of ideas strewn along the path: how do we decide what objects have this aesthetic quality and who gets to make these decisions. Cultural difference soon make it clear that what some declare to be 'aesthetically pleasing or beautiful' are not what others claim to be so. And so, the path of the subjective, according to Collingwood, and I would agree, must be recognized as the more consistent one.

Aesthetic experience thus is subjective in that it is "different for different people" (T1 4), it "arises from different things for different people" (T6 9), and our responses often depend on our mood or state and what has gone on in that day (T6 9). So there is a personal subjective context that characterizes aesthetic experience. As well, our emotional responses, though they can be similar when experiencing the same thing, are also to be recognized as having a subjective context, and so "we all feel differently" (T1 4, T2 10). The following quotation from the second session blossoms into a flowing narrative on the subjective aspect of 'aesthetic experience':

I think, just to go off of that, I really agree with that, and then it also mixes with [Kevin] and the word authentic ... I think that the word authentic and the word aesthetic tie in very closely with each other because it's hard to say; like [Kevin] said, how can you tell someone that that's not authentic to them, or that it's not truth to them, um, when you're not the one experiencing it, and that's when the aesthetic word comes in because they [pause] I think that proves the authenticity to someone, when you have that aesthetic experience with whatever you're addressing, and if you can share that with someone (T2 11)

**Aesthetic Experience is Emotionally Enhancing:** It is not enough to say that aesthetic experience is 'emotional;' students consistently spoke of the character of that emotion as an enhancement of their state of being, somehow an enlargement and uplift from the everyday (T4 9). Along with statements of aesthetic experience being "emotionally impactful" and "feeling alive" (T1 1), students also spoke passionately of "being deeply moved" (T2 10). For them, aesthetic experience meant an experience that was "close, warm, affectionate, deep – the most beautiful thing you've ever experienced"

(T2 10). Further, a physiological-psychological connection, or body-mind relationship, was recognized: the aesthetic was said to be “raw and unhindered” (T3 3, 6); it “satisfies and connects on a subconscious level” (T4 11) while being “a change in your inner environment” (T5 4-5) that doesn’t depend on place: “You can have an aesthetic experience eating a sandwich on a mountain top or in a beautiful kitchen” (T5 4-5). Not only that, but aesthetic experience was also recognized as promoting an enhanced awareness and fullness of feeling (T6 11), and an experience that allows empathy to develop: “you can approximate to an understanding of another’s feelings, experiences”; “you slowly either gravitate and feel it yourself or you can just appreciate it” (T6 14). Finally, not only is aesthetic experience a deeply personal, body-mind transformation, the transformation is such that it lifts one out of the everyday, bringing “feelings that you realize are different from normal experiences” (T5 7).

**Aesthetic Experience is Pure (free open natural):** Students describe aesthetic experience as *pure* (T3 10) in two different and hierarchical senses. First, it is pure in the sense that it is said to be experienced as a “natural flow” (T3 6, 10), “not artificial” (T5 13), and “free” (T1 2) in a variety of ways: arising freely, that is, suddenly or spontaneously (T3 9,11, T4 11); freely uninhibited “letting your spirit be in the moment” (T2 2); and free from distractions of everyday, practical demands, having to think of things that have to be done (T1 2, T5 22, T2 3): “You’re so in the moment time becomes irrelevant; you have no really [*sic*] sense of time” (T5 20). Like snowflakes, it is also unique, “fragile, non-repeatable, can’t be recreated” (T2 6, 8) and “different every time” (T5 11); again, students repeatedly characterize aesthetic experience as being “open” and “free” (T1 2) this at once molecularly, psychically and mindfully, resonating bodily in an openness to the unknown or intangible: “The beauty of art and aesthetic experience is in the vast unknown of what happens” (T5 14); it “invites openness to the unknown” (T5 15).

**Aesthetic Experience is Pure (intangible awe, gratitude, appreciation):** Students describe aesthetic experience as being pure in another, “higher” (T2 2-4, 8, 10) or “deeper” (T2 6,8 T3 5) sense, a “highest life experience” (T2 3-4, 10). The repeated use of these words “higher and deeper” seem to point to students’ perceptions of aesthetic experience as of a deeper and higher nature than ordinary experience. In this

thematic grouping, aesthetic experience is itself intangible and “difficult to understand” (T2 8), characterized by feelings of awe, gratitude and deep appreciation: in aesthetic experience, “the normal becomes abnormal” (T3 2). “There’s an indescribable amazement” (T3 4), “awe” (T3 7), “pure awe” (T5 17); “aesthetic views foster love and appreciation” (T3 9). Again, the “purely aesthetic is gratitude” (T3 10), “a different heart” (T5 3) that “allows you to see things you don’t normally see” (T4 2); “it’s a change in perspective that allows you to appreciate more” (T5 5). It is “a spiritual, higher place” (T2 2), “deep and meditative” (T2 6) that “brings you into a deeper place, personal and intimate” (T3 5). Finally, it is an “epiphany that is “inspirational” (T1 4) and “promotes love, passion and striving” (T4 5): “being artistic and seeing things from a different creative perspective is like an aesthetic experience. You’re seeing something that’s not then norm; it’s making you think about something you’re not used to; it gives you the opportunity to experience something new, the opportunity to *be* different” (T4 9).

**Aesthetic Experience is Being in the Present Moment:** Whether considering “aesthetic experience as smaller, every day” (T3 10) or as more profound (personal accounts and examples ranged throughout the transcripts from all participants), as arising from observing or from participating, the arts learners consistently characterized aesthetic experience as having qualities of ‘being immersed’ and being ‘out of body.’ So, performing music or riding a horse, for example, can easily become an aesthetic experience, and when this shift happens, it is described as a “pure experience” (T2 5, T3 2), “in the moment, embodying the music, not focusing on technique” (T3 4); it is “an intense focus; you’re doing without thinking” (T3 6), “completely in the present” (T3 3), “hyper aware and super-in-the-moment” (T4 1). Again, “you’re completely in the moment, absorbed, in the zone, focused” (T2, 3, 7, 8), “in the moment, no distractions, a pure experience” (T2 5, T3 2). At the same time, this quality of experience is called “out of body” (T2 1-2, T3) by a number of different participants at different times throughout the study. Coupled with the “out of body” expression are phrases such as “not *there* but so in the moment” (T5 18), where “there” indicates the physical location of time and place in which the experience is happening. Awareness of this ‘out there physical reality’ is overtaken by full immersion in the experience itself (whether inspired by nature, music, arts and so on). More than this, the fact that aesthetic experience is being described ‘out of body’ has important implications for Descartes and the ‘mind-body split.’ Students

repeatedly and consistently refer to an 'out of body' experience in which they are "not thinking" but "just *being, feeling*, in the moment, immersed in the present, embodied" (T2 1, 2, T3 2,3); there is a "sense of just being, not thinking about anything" (T4 8). It "has no thought at all; you're too full of what you're experiencing to be able to think" (T3 15), and again, a "true aesthetic experience you're not really in control of your own thinking; it's not so much about thought" (T3 14). The implication is strong: students use the term "out of body" to describe an experience that is being completely immersed in the present moment in a way that is embodied and focused and what I would deem to be very much 'in and of the body.' Why, then, is the phrase 'out of body' given to this deepest, most intimate of experiences? The answer seems to be in the negation of this experience as principally a thinking experience. Students are trying to make it clear that this experience is not primarily about thought; it is not a 'thinking' experience. By implication, 'thinking' thus seems to be associated with an experience that is *not* embodied or focused or deep or intimate or immersed or any of the above attributes given to the aesthetic. 'Thinking,' it seems, is rather intensely identified as something fragmented from these qualities.

**Aesthetic Experience Can Come From Anything (potentially in all things):**

Students conceived aesthetic experience as coming potentially from anything around us. It "is connected to art forms" (T1 1), but it "isn't limited to art" (T1 4, T2 7). Along with arts, aesthetic experience can arise through sport (T1 4, T2 7, T5 12), nature (T1 4, T2 7, T5 16, T7 3), and everyday objects (T3 7, 9, T5 10) or experiences (two students were seriously involved in gymnastics and horseback riding respectively that they shared throughout the sessions, for example). Aesthetic experience can arise "from something very mundane, like drinking a cup of tea" (T5 10) – which makes me think of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Times Past!* Numerous instances of aesthetic experience were described, such as this sequence from three different students in their session:

Susan: ...on my ride to school, I come in from Abbotsford every day on the way to Langley, and every day the field that we see, it's just farmer's fields and then mountains in the background, and everyday it looks different, like every single day, but I don't know, I've really come to love that view, and I appreciate it everyday, like whether there are clouds and no mountains, or the mountains are gorgeous, or sometimes I have my glasses on and sometimes I don't...

Karen: I was thinking sort of along the same lines... like if you're driving somewhere and you go past things and sometimes you don't notice things but then suddenly you say 'I've never noticed that before,' 'I really like that there,' like just a tree, or something, and it's really nice...

Simon: In art, we have personal sharing, and that was part of my focus, cause I had to post everyday, and I thought it was pretty much a waste of time at first, cause we had to do it everyday, so I started noticing little details, like a piece of garbage, or when I was passing someone I would notice a face that I started to find... interesting... so, it's how I kind of relate to this, cause I started noticing beauty.... small things... so... (T3 9)

And, from a creative writing major:

...the last thing I just wrote was about how I'm going into Englishy stuff and leaving science – well, temporarily leaving science – and I wrote it as a break up... Well, I find it a lot easier to write about science as a person, like personifying. And the idea from that came about from an aesthetic experience when I walked outside after doing work for a long time, and I stepped on the grass and it was sunny for the first time, and like the feeling of grass, and I forgot what that felt like. That was a really aesthetic experience. And I started writing that and I took that moment and I put in raspberry bushes and I put in other details that I didn't actually notice then, but that I felt added to the meaning...(T7 3)

Further, students recognize a personal element in the evocation of aesthetic experience; "it depends on your passion" (T4 5). Ultimately, it depends on "what you find meaning in" (T3 3) and "on your relationship to what you're doing" (T5 12).

#### **4.2.2. Connections Between Aesthetic and Artistic Experience**

**Aesthetic and Artistic Experiences are "Interwoven and Circular":** My main interest in this thematic category is in showing that the meaning of aesthetic experience and artistic experience for this group of students is spontaneously interconnected. Since they are arts based students in a school that specializes in the arts, their ideas of aesthetic experience are constantly meshed with their own artistic experiences of creation and performance, and yet not limited to these experiences. Further, students were clear on the fact that artistic experience is not the same as aesthetic experience, though the two types of experiences share many commonalities, and they went as far as to categorize the two experiences as related to each other: artistic experience as a

'subgenre' of aesthetic experience. This passage from the third dialogue session gives a sense of development toward that idea:

Erin: so I was thinking, I think that the aesthetic experience is more the appreciation of an already created art, I think, and then the artistic experience would be the creating of the art.

Kevin: I almost think that it's the experience that comes before the creation of the art, like the inspiration towards the art... the... (*coughing*....) lost my train of thought...

Connie: I kind of agree with that, I feel like, um... I was thinking of aesthetic experience as 'real life' isn't the word, but kind of situational, I guess, and artistic experience more to do with art. I think they contribute to each other, like you can have an aesthetic experience during an artistic experience, or an aesthetic experience could lead you to an artistic experience... kind of like what [Kevin] said with the inspiration. But also that aesthetic experience is related to artistic experience in that you could have an art that could lead you to have an aesthetic experience... (T3 1,2)

And then, after some talk about "inner and outer" experiences, these exchanges lead up to the idea of the artistic being a sub-genre:

Kevin: Yeah, I think the two coincide, where one leads to another in the sense of you have an aesthetic experience and that can go towards creating an artistic; or vice versa, you have an artistic experience that goes into an aesthetic one. You're working with a group of people on the art form and then you guys all just kind of click, and that goes from an artistic but then it also gradually turns into an aesthetic experience where you're all just 100% engaged in the moment of something that has nothing to do with art.... Then something clicks and that turns into an artistic experience where you get a 'eureka moment' or you're inspired by what you're doing at that moment and that influences something that you do with the art...

Anita: What if an artistic experience is more like a sub-genre of an aesthetic experience? Where the aesthetic is 'up here' and the artistic can link to the aesthetic – it could be considered very similar but the artistic is say different than, say, an athletic aesthetic experience, like when you were talking about your gymnastics ages ago (like three sessions back), but I feel like they're both aesthetic as much as they're artistic and athletic, but then they can't meet there, like the artistic and the athletic are

two different experiences. What if it was a branch of the aesthetic experience rather than two different things, you know? Like they're very connected... (T3 1, 2)

Dialogue continues with agreement on this idea, and then moves into the question of whether deeply emotional experiences, like love and death, which inspire so much artistic creation, are themselves aesthetic experiences.

One further passage reflects the interconnectedness of the two types of experience as a circular sort of relationship.

Sean: when you say it [aesthetic experience] is like the base for a bigger idea, what do you mean by that? Is that just the experience part of it...? Or is the experience....? (T1 4)

Simon: ...holism... I felt I could it could connect to you... um... what I felt was like one experience can evoke another thought; I felt that if you could take that thought long enough, another (experience?) will connect to it, and so it sort of gets that everything has that one thing turning – like a circle...

Kevin: yeah, that kind of interweaving pattern but kind of based off that one initial

Simon: yeah

Kevin: like a spider web with that one initial (thread?) but then it's sprawling outwards with all the connecting ideas. (T1 4)

These few excerpts show how closely intertwined aesthetic and artistic experiences are for these students. It also shows how deeply they were delving into the exploration of aesthetic and artistic meaning, exploring how they are related and how they are different.

**Technique Allows for Aesthetic Experience in Artistic Learning/Performance:** In this theme, technical training in arts fields is connected with its larger purpose, that of expression. It is explicitly recognized as being merely an instrument (or merely instrumental), and students agree that it is through technical competence that one then has the capacity to 'get lost' in aesthetic experience of 'being

artistic.' Thus, artistic learning can itself become aesthetic when technique is in place as a supporting embodiment.

Sean: And it's how I've felt my entire life... practicing is not about being perfect, it's about learning how to...

Eric: approach it differently

Sean: well, it's also about learning how to master something so that you don't have to think about it and then you can get into that education of feeling...

Eric: mm hmm, mm hmm

Sean: you can express more because you don't have to worry about anything else...

Connie: yup...

Eric: you need to first learn the skills and the training first of all, and then once you learn the language you can speak... (T6 5)

And shortly afterwards in the same group, this idea gets connected more specifically to artistic practice:

Connie: I think that goes back to what you guys were saying about how you have to learn the language before you can speak it. It's like if you don't have the technique to portray that emotion, than you can't portray the emotion. It's like if I put it in dance terms, if I can't do that backhand aerial that's going to make me portray the fact that I'm falling, no one's going to get that, right? (T6 7)

And from a different session:

Sean: It's interesting that you would talk about Mr. P. solving a difficult [math] problem as that becoming an aesthetic experience... because that makes me think that anything, when you get to a certain level, when you can really focus on it and really concentrate on every little detail, would make it an aesthetic experience...

Kevin: I think it comes to the point when you have all the basic technique of something, you can make it aesthetic. First of all, I wouldn't really say that music starts off as an aesthetic experience, but once you master the

technical aspects of any art, that's when it becomes aesthetic... same with sports, once you master the technique of something, then you have room for it to become aesthetic... (T4 12)

In a broad educational sense, the ideas from this theme connect technique, and the kind of instrumental learning required for technical competence, to the realm of its larger purpose in life, in this case, the artistic expression not only of emotion but of one's whole being. It's notable that the students also connect their thinking and experiences to academic learning (math), not only to artistic experiences. It seems to me that in education generally, if the reason for technique is clearly associated with its broader purpose, then learning has room to become aesthetic. As the next section makes even clearer, this finding points to a broad need in education for the sense of a larger purpose for our learning, beyond a merely instrumental and technical competence and beyond being a cog in the economic machine (Fromm, 1960).

#### **4.2.3. Conceptions of Education – Traditional Academic Learning and Arts Education (Comparisons and Contrasts)**

##### **Technique Dominates Arts Education and Traditional Academic Learning:**

As the previous section pointed to, findings here show that a focus on the technical, without the clear or explicit awareness of why it is needed, or simply as an end in itself, is identified as a major problem in academic education, sometimes even in arts subjects. Students express deep dissatisfaction about the degree of emphasis placed on tests, and about learning as a technical competence simply to perform and 'regurgitate information' on tests and exams. Thinking in math and sciences is identified as technical and instrumental in the limited sense of a set of instructions or a how-to step-by-step.

Erin: Yeah, I think - I'm going to go to school because that's what I usually do (*laughter*) - but I feel like in school we obsess over the technicalities a lot; comparing how we learn the arts and how we learn, like math: in math class, we learn something for a test, we get tested on it, that's your grade, you're done. You don't ever experience the beauty of the fact that people created these equations to try and understand the universe. I think in [creative] writing, x (*teacher*) is fantastic at it. We learn all the technical stuff, we learn about line breaks, and how the last word should be the most important, we learn how to put in metaphors, all that stuff, but really, the feeling you get out of writing class is all that stuff helps, but what's important is appreciating each other's writing and appreciating the world,

and learning all that technical stuff **so** you can communicate an idea better. And I feel like a lot of the time in the other classes, that aspect is lost. You're not taught the appreciation of what you're learning. You're taught all of the little details so you can be graded on it. And I think that's why aesthetic experiences more often happen in art because you're allowed to think of them in your own way and you're allowed to question more, so you start to think of them in a deeper way, I guess... (T3 4)

Academic subjects are said to narrow thinking down to this basic imitative way of thinking while arts subjects more generally are expansive and widen thinking out to a larger human scale:

Anita: ...I think the deeper thought is a huge one under the aesthetic where it really brings you into a deeper place, or a higher level of thinking, or a deeper kind of, again really personal or intimate, where you're tossing an idea over in your head and trying to pull it apart and analyze it and things, whereas in the practical there are instructions, there is the task, and then you're done. It's kind of like what you were saying about math, and I think that was a really, really good point, because I think that's *the* main difference – it's a very basic way of thinking, like you're (learning?) instructions, basic instructions in your head, and then you're following through with them, rather than exploring all aspects of the thought, you know...

Kevin: Yeah, I think that's one of the big things is the expansion of a thought rather than (??) – [a lot of laughter]

Erin: Yeah, like in art you're building out, getting bigger and bigger like in math and science and you have all these concepts and they're like 'no, it's this equation', so you're narrowing it and you have like one little teeny concept so you can do it right on the exam, but then in arts it's like 'no, look at the world so you can actually take a chunk of that and...' (T3 5)

And later on:

Erin: well, I was saying that cause in math there is an answer and there's a right answer and that's what you should get if you're doing the equation properly. But in English there are still right answers, like if you read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and you think that Atticus is pro-slavery you're just as wrong as if you think that  $2+2=7$ ... but there's more room in English, I think... I don't know... I think we aren't taught to appreciate mathematical thinking in school, we're taught to appreciate... well, they're hoping that we appreciate how to figure out the steps so we can get it right on the exam, but in arts you're more likely, I think, to have aesthetic experience in arts, because that's how we view them, we view them as a way to find

meaning and to connect with people, while math and science are to get a good grade a lot of the time...

Anita: I feel like the math and science is more instructional in the sense that you're being instructed on how to do the steps, and art is more intellectual and deeper thinking, there's like surface thinking and then higher level thinking and they're like different levels of thought... (T3 13)

Even in their arts subjects, students find an overemphasis on technique.

Sean: one time that I really felt this was in the orchestra workshop last year in Whistler with D...

*[strong agreement from others]*

Sean: it was like that was the only thing that I was focused on, there was nothing else running in my mind. Everything he was saying and what we were doing was right in the moment.

Eric: It felt like a movie because it was just so perfect...

Sean: yeah, it was... and I've never felt so focused...

Eric: and there were no distractions; it was just pure experience.

Sean: yeah... yeah, 'pure experience'; I like that.

Karen: How was that one different from all the other ones you've ever been to?

Eric: all the others were basically like "okay, you guys need to work on your shaping, blah, blah, blah"; they were so technical, right? They focused on technicalities of the music, but they never really... there wasn't really any feeling that was brought into it... and that's what comes with a great (conductor?) – they bring out the actual music, not just, like, the technicalities. And I don't know, I feel like at the school we're focused a lot on the technical...

Sean: too much on the technicalities...

Eric: ...like, too much on the technical, and there's no actual real learning about... so I don't know if the students are just getting what they want out of that, but it just feels like there's not even aesthetic experience *here*.

Sean: yeah... I've never had it at this school. (T2 5, 6)

Students not only make the connection of artistic technical competence allowing for aesthetic experience; they also clearly value the larger human context and purpose for technical learning.

**Academic Learning is Routine and “Inhuman”:** A strong theme to emerge was the routine of traditional academic learning as compared to artistic learning. Routine is said to be boring and mindless and is particularly strong in math as well as sciences and most academic subjects. Routine interferes sharply with aesthetic experience and “educational routine obscures learning,” making learning repetitive and dull. Ultimately, routine is seen as inhuman and students are adamant in asserting that academic learning should be more aesthetic and more varied like the arts-based learning they receive.

Erin: So, I wrote about – we never really know what to expect in writing, and I think the fact that you're never really in a routine – well, you're in a routine enough so that things get done but not so much that things stagnate, so you're always doing something different, so that allows you to experience different things more fully...

Sean: it breaks the routine...

Erin: exactly...

Sean: I believe that that's how education should be...

Erin: I think that's why arts education works better...

Sean: Yeah, I agree with that... In music, we do a lot of routine – like the way we break off every day to go into our groups is routine – but I don't think the way we approach our music is routine... that's why...

Eric: It's totally different every single day... and that's why you get so much more out of it - every single day you see it differently, you wake up and work with your music...

Sean: Yeah, like I have a piano piece that probably took my four months to master, the technique of it, but I've been playing it for a year and a half and it'll grow with me until I'm 90 and it'll change the entire time... that's

why art's different, like a math equation is always the same but art is always different... it breaks that norm, that routine...

Erin: And that parallels what goes on the classroom too... like you guys were saying, even though you go to the practice room everyday and you do all that the same... in math class, you go the classroom, you open your binder, take notes, you do the practice problems, you're done – every time... (T4 10-11)

And a bit further along in the same dialogue:

Kevin: Yeah, and when you break that habit, that routine, you change a variable in the habit, you connect to the human side of it...

Erin: that's really interesting...

Simon: ... We're reading 1984 right now, and we've talked about how the normal everyday people are kept busy to not make them think, and so you have that, you don't connect with the actual human side of yourself, and you don't see the actual, the real... I don't know... you're occupied by different tasks, without trying to think about...

Eric: ...what's really important...

Simon: Yeah...

Erin: Busy work as opposed to mindful work, I guess... [*general agreement*] (T4 11-12)

The mention of not connecting to the “human side” of self implies quite strongly that routine obscures holistic learning, especially when it is placed in contrast to the life-long growth associated with artistic learning.

**Freedom of Thought and Feeling in Arts Education but not Academic Learning (potential of it in academic):** Along a similar vein, aesthetic experiences happen more often in arts classes and lead to expansive freedom of thought because students are allowed to think in their own ways, make their own connections, and explore the ‘higher, deeper’ human side of life (T3 4, 13, 14); overall, students feel that aesthetic and artistic learning is a deeper experience than the more shallow way of thinking typically found in many academic subjects.

Likewise, students appreciated the freedom of thought as important in education generally, and that expansiveness is for making connections between people, events, and life situations (T3 16, 17). As we saw in some of the quotations above, students feel strongly that there is a narrowness in mainstream educational learning that tends to be limited to testing and instrumental ways of thinking, memorization for tests and exams, and perhaps is more for convenience of marking in systems that value measured results.

#### **4.2.4. Aesthetic Experience and Artistic Experience in Society**

**Aesthetic and Artistic Experience Provide Authenticity in ‘Numbed’ Society:** Students felt that aesthetic and artistic experience offer a “bigger truth for humanity,” as their dialogue on Plato showed:

Pam: yeah, so, I had the same idea...so what I got from this, he’s basically referring to, he’s saying art is far from truth, far from intelligence and nothing healthy or authentic, so he’s basically calling art not authentic, but what I define art as is ‘art is someone’s soul and experiences,’ and how can someone else say that it’s not their truth, and being able for an artist to be able to connect to somebody else, and being able to have that relationship with somebody else, even without them knowing it, um, is very powerful and truthful, I feel, so I don’t understand why Plato would think that...

Susan: yeah ...and so it [aesthetic experience] is something that is close and warm and affectionate, and deep, and it just seems like the most beautiful thing you can ever experience, really, and it can’t really be healthy because it seems too good, it’s almost like he [Plato] would much rather be, have intellect than experience that.... And so I get that, and I feel like a year ago I would have agreed with that more, but I don’t think, I mean, it’s a way of looking at it, but I think you’re losing a lot, and it’s just like there’s a bigger truth in the art world and you’re missing out that half of the truth... (T2 10,11)

Students also feel aesthetic and artistic experience somehow define human authenticity (T2 11) and the “unscripted” nature or character of these experiences is especially important in our society that is “anaesthetic and numbed” or dulled. These exchanges are prompted by Dewey’s quotation on aesthetic experience and art being for so many “an importation from a foreign country” (1934/2005, p. 11).

Erin: Yeah, and then, that level of art can be so intimidating too, if you don't have any education in it, cause you don't really get it, and you're like, 'why do people find all this meaning out of this, I don't get what's happening here', [*agreement*] and then, so, it's so big and daunting that you just don't bother with it...

Kevin: and I guess that would be an artificial experience from something aesthetic to others, that if you're imported into another culture, what is normal and capable of aesthetic is strange, daunting, artificial almost... but then I think that would almost differ from person to person, *if you train to immerse yourself then you can eventually, you break down that barrier of new culture and the whole anaesthetic numbing that we talked about at the beginning...* (T5 14)

What these students reveal is the idea that aesthetic and artistic experience have significant value both in education and in societal living as well. Since education mirrors society, this finding is not surprising, though it makes it clear that our living and not just our educational systems are in need of expansive uplift out of an anaesthetic numbed reality.

**Routine Living Affects Aesthetic Experience:** Indeed, rhythms of living are repeatedly described and identified as "routine and robotic." Students recognize that many are trying to escape this routine, robotic way of life, looking for outlets, but nevertheless they see it as being inhuman and scary, and certainly inhibiting aesthetic freedom.

Simon: well, it's kind of like all art are aesthetic experiences but not all aesthetic experiences are art... but I don't know when this quote was said but it's kind of like what a lot of people are trying to break out of the norm... like hipsters, but that's kind of generalization, you know, how a lot of people are just so tired of everyday life and how we're pretty much robots almost – it's kind of aggravating almost – and people are trying to... I mean it's great that people are trying to not be robots anymore – like we're being aware outside of ourselves and our bubble of life...

Erin: There's also a lot of artists who have said the worse thing you can do to an audience is bore them. You can make them mad and you can make them really upset with your art and that's okay, but if you were bore them then you're not being an artist, that's the worse thing you can do to them. And I think that comes with the routine and everything too – how you get used to it and it's not aesthetic anymore... (T4 2)

Paiden: Which really comes back to the whole routine idea, which is really cool, like how if you're in a routine or a slump it just gets boring and there's no opportunity to create something new and to move forward... (T4 3)

Finally, they recognize the fact that it is difficult to break out of routine but state that if you are able to do that, the change is freeing. They strongly characterize arts and aesthetic experience as breaking routine, resting on variety, contributing to the human side of self, and allowing us to connect with what's important.

Pam: I think the whole breaking with the habit or seeing something the way you always see it, so when you were saying, seeing something from a different angle or a new perspective can really bring a new light and add this creativity to it and really like it to the aesthetic experience, in a sense, seeing something that's not the norm, like you and the hole in wall, like you came home and it's like "what?" so it kind of caught you off guard and it made you think about something else that you're not used to...

Karen: It gives you an opportunity to experience something new and different that you wouldn't have had if you kept with the same routine and didn't decide to change it... [*general agreement*]

Connie: I've always found that my art is really therapeutic almost, like when you're working through it just almost helps you think about other things or get rid of things or whatever, and I think that's kind of the same thing, you know, you have the opportunity to kind of be different and that's what makes it aesthetic...

Sean: Yeah, I think that's what makes this quote for me, cause I was thinking about my morning routine, the same every morning, and I would love be able to change it and be "okay, I'm going to do something else", but it's almost kind of scary because it's like, I don't know how, what else would I do?... And I wonder if society has made it that way and why would you go against any other way than what you're used to. And I feel like that's almost part of the problem today, of people not being different than what they're acclimated to... it's almost like sad... (T4 9)

**Societal Perceptions of Aesthetic/Artistic Reveal Need to Control, Define:** It is commonly agreed among the group that aesthetic experience is not known to most people and most people are barely aware of it, let alone know what it is (T5 2, 7). Though people may experience it, they don't know how to identify it or talk about it, and it is therefore not valued in society generally (T5 7, 13-14, T6 4). Moreover, the majority

of people tend to think of aesthetic experience as within the narrow confines of the 'aesthetically pleasing' and are unaware of the deeper emotional connections as well as the "deeper" or "higher way of thinking" associated with aesthetic and artistic experiences (T6 4, 5). Finally, people generally find it hard to believe in the emotional fulfilment of aesthetic and artistic experience, believing it to be "too good to be true," idealistic and unrealistic (T2 10). The world of aesthetic experience and arts tends to be "foreign to most people" and thus vaguely feared (T6 12).

The result of these limited perceptions of aesthetic and artistic experience is a general fear of the unknown and the need to "box-in, categorize, define, limit" arts and aesthetic as being 'not useful' in education or in society (T5 8-9, T6 12). This vague fear of the unknown is identified in fact as "society's biggest problem" (T5 8) and is noted as perhaps one reason why arts are neglected and undervalued. Not only that, but the repercussions on emotional life are significant: society is found to want and "need to control emotions" through "social conditioning," and students note that art is sometimes used in this way as a "shallow" form of artistic learning.

Susan: ... in my last group, discussing the John Dewey quote, we were talking about, well, maybe, it [aesthetic experience] is so abstract and so different to so many people that it can't be explicit, and humans just have an issue with it; you know, we really like putting things in boxes and categorizing or whatever and so... I think that's why so many people try to condition emotion, which is like conditioning art, but you can't really...

Anita: that's a good point cause we are always trying to put things in boxes and trying to learn how to recreate it, I think, in that sense. Like by defining it, there has to be some method of reaching it through definition and through...

Simon: methods....

Anita: ... really understanding it; it can't be conceptual, just purely theoretical for us; it has to be, ah, instructional, like a how-to, a step 1, 2, 3 kind of thing...

Susan: I think it has to do with fear cause we're scared of the unknown, so if you can kind of define it as something solid and almost tangible then it's not as scary...

Anita: it's like dangerously curious, like constantly find differences and stuff... but I think that can be artistic as well – the curiosity of trying to define things can open the door to other artistic experiences... T6 12)

#### 4.2.5. Artistic Experience and Implications for Learning

**Aesthetic and Artistic Experience Evoke Passion, Purpose and Deeper Meaning:** It becomes clear from the study of arts learners' dialogue work that aesthetic experience is closely tied to, though not limited to, their artistic endeavours, which they firmly and unhesitatingly claim as their passions (T4 2, 4-6, 8). Aesthetic experience feeds and inspires their commitment and drive and striving in their areas of passion, whether those areas are artistic, academic, nature or sport (T8, 9). In turn, the passion and commitment to their work in these areas circles around and allows for a growing technical competence that itself invites aesthetic experience in and through learning (T4 5, 6). More than driving their passion in this reciprocal way, these aesthetic and artistic experiences are identified as being life-changing, inspiring and guiding direction in life (T4 5, 8, 9). Finally, passion and commitment to the directions chosen in life again bring deeper meaning and allow students to connect to their "human side" and "to what's important in life" (T7 9, 10). The following somewhat lengthy passage captures the sense of how deeply these students feel about aesthetic and artistic experience as their passion in life and how it drives and moves them forward.

Sean: I think it's how involved you are in the art as well. Like some people sing or play guitar and stuff, but they're not super, really in deep in the art... yeah [*to someone else whose comment was inaudible*] exactly, it's not their passion, I think that's a better word...

Anita: And to create is a lot different than to appreciate when it comes to art... like having the will to create something is quite different than being able to appreciate... I think that's where the passion comes from... wanting to make something out of your passion rather than just being able to appreciate something else someone else has created, cause then it just kind of comes from...

Sean: yeah, some people say that they love music or they love those things, but it's a different kind of love...

Eric: Yeah, it sounds good...

Sean: Yeah, and I don't think it would enhance their life in the same way that it enhances ours...

Kevin: there's also a sentence of you can be passionate about something but the passion doesn't really flourish until you strive for it... you can be passionate about something but not be willing to put in all the effort to get better, and then that passion just sits there until you push it forwards...

Anita: It is that passion that moves you forward as a thinker...

Eric: What role does aesthetic experience play in your day-to-day life? [This question the group discussed earlier] Well, you know, it drives you to do the actual thing we've been doing for the past while. I don't know, it gives me the sense of purpose that, you know, why does an artist do what they're doing? They strive to create experiences with others or with themselves that will change them in ways that will last for a life time...

Anita: Do you find that's because your experiences come from your passion for the most part?

Sean: Yeah, I would agree with that... I mean, I don't have an aesthetic experience every day, right, [this participant's conviction took a complete 'about face' in the following week's session with the Dewey quotation] but it is what pushes me to keep going in music because I know that that is the only thing that will give me that experience. I know that if I was to study math, I wouldn't have one of those experiences where... that nothing else can match... I don't enjoy practicing all the time, I don't enjoy sitting down playing the piano for hours, but it's the drive to know that if I do that, then maybe I'll get that experience again at some point and that's worth it.... (T4 4-5)

These ideas are further illustrated by a number of students who sang together in choir. The students shared profound aesthetic experiences during their practices and performances of a one particular piece on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.<sup>19</sup> Their reflections also illustrate how aesthetic and artistic experience has the power to inspire, motivate and direct life experience into artistic striving and determination. Again,

<sup>19</sup> The piece described here formed part of Dr. Jim Sparks' (2014) doctoral dissertation on transformative music engagement. Dr. Sparks spent many hours working with the choir exploring their connections to and experiences with SIDS from their families. The sharing of personal experiences in relation to the meaning of the piece absolutely transformed their performance of it. I was one of the fortunate people to hear it performed at SFU and almost three years later I am still moved to tears remembering it.

students do not limit this way of thinking to art. Their passion could likewise inspire, motivate and direct them and other learners into other areas of educational endeavour as well. The fact that aesthetic experience is not limited to art but can be found to occur from any walk of life means that the presence of aesthetic experience as a regular part of academic learning would do much to inspire the sort of 'wide-awake' learning that Maxine Greene (1995) and so many others uphold and encourage. Learning itself, then, has the potential to become aesthetic.

### **4.3. Educators**

#### **4.3.1. Conceptions of Aesthetic Experience**

**Aesthetic Experience is Subjective:** As with the arts learners' group, this group of educators also characterized aesthetic experience as subjective, although with some clear opposition that was illuminating. The majority of educators, when they talked about aesthetic experience being subjective, tended to speak of it in connection with arts (most, though not all, didn't spontaneously think of or give illustrations of encounters with nature, for instance). Aesthetic experience is characterized in this regard as being an "autonomous feeling" that "is going to resonate very differently in each one of us" (T1 3) and a recognition that "different art forms move different people in different ways" (T5 9). Some students spoke of the "individual connection" as being "deeply subjective – it takes you into yourself" and it includes "what you bring to the experience" (T3 8; T6 6); it's "also recognizing that you're taking all of your experiences from what you remember, and even what you may not remember, are all coming to the experience [sic] so everything is there to create the experience" (T3 4).

The opposing view was held strongly by a couple of students. In this view, aesthetic experience is "not 100% subjective" (T1 28). Rather, it is "something that is there in the art work itself, like the Golden Ratio, a (universal) standard" (T 1 27, 32) that connects with "something inside our brains" (T1 27), alluding to a physiological basis for the recognition of beauty. This view has its roots in ancient Greece with Plato and others, and it illuminates Collingwood's (1938/1958) claim that it cannot go both ways.

This exchange between group members produces a captivating 'third way' that I think is important to consider.

Fran: ... and when I thought about this there is no such quality as beauty, how can you say such a thing? What is beauty? Okay, so what is ugly - something that the eye's like shutting out, you want to look away from something ugly, but something beautiful your eyes can rest on, and that's where the Golden Ratio for me, the eye can rest on the beauty, and it's the same with - I wrote it down [looking through notes] with colours for example, where the eye see the orange... the right orange next to the right blue, it's something that is physically in our brain considered to be beautiful and considered to be um... aesthetic... So it *has* to be. Like, he's saying "the aesthetic experience is not an autonomous activity [sic]; it *is* an autonomous activity because it *is* something like the Golden Ratio, it is something that is there... I hope I did understand...?"

Mary: He's [Collingwood] saying that it IS autonomous; it's... "the aesthetic experience *is* an autonomous activity", not is NOT an autonomous activity...

Fran:... So maybe I did....

Mary: So I think you're arguing that...

Fran: No, the aesthetic activity is not an autonomous activity because... no... I just remembered...

Mary: You're saying it's not...

Fran: I'm saying it's not... because if there is the Golden Ratio it is autonomous... do you understand what I'm saying....?

Tina: Are you saying that there's a standard... like it's not subjective...

Fran: It's not subjective!

Tina: Okay....

Fran: It might be subjective in minor things, because if you all look at a bee hive you will all be, you'll look closer and closer with our eyes, we will sharpen our eyes, and we will see all the small details... something beautiful!... a lot of aesthetics and you will drawn to these

Mary: Which is the point that I was making when you see [Fran interrupts excitedly: Yeah, exactly!] but I think what it is, is my beauty might be different – I might be attracted to this face whereas you might be attracted to that face – so maybe that part is like in the same way like how I react to this painting might be different from how you react. I might see that as interesting or beautiful or wow! and somebody else might go “What is that?!” So maybe that part is the autonomous part. It’s within us to see beauty, it’s within us to feel the creativity, but maybe it’s, mmm, subjective experience as far as what we’re attracted to...

Fran: I think it’s just like... it’s also a cultural thing but it’s also something that’s within us, inside our brain when we take aesthetic and beauty, and it’s not something that is 100% subjective in an individual (T1 27-28)

The ‘third way’ proposed here rests in the idea that aesthetic experience or aesthetic attraction is both a universal human capacity and a particular functioning for each person depending on background, culture, experience, and so on. This idea strikes me as an important one to follow up, and I believe the field of neuroscience has and will have significant discoveries for us. On a somewhat related point, neuroscientist Anne Fausto-Sterling (2005) works with dynamic and developmental systems approaches and in the nature/nurture ‘argument’ suggests that we are always 100% nature and 100% nurture, a unifying idea that echoes the educators’ exchange of ideas.

**Aesthetic Experience is a Spontaneous Emotional Connection:** In this thematic category, the educators characterized aesthetic experience as an emotional experience, noting both its physical aspects and touching on some of its ‘spiritual’ aspects. Emotion as a physical response was spoken of as a “visceral reaction” (T2 12): “something happens inside you” (T1 1). It is a “physical emotion” that is “spontaneous, not searched for, surprising,” and “takes my breath away” (T2 14, T3 9). It is ignited by something “you’re drawn to” (T2 14), as well as being “organic, you don’t think about it, it happens or not” (T3 16). Again, it is called a “somatic response” that “gives goose bumps” (T3 12), for instance, and the sensory elements of “touching, holding, smelling, feeling” are mentioned as a way of cherishing something: in this particular instance, one educator was recalling a young blind girl holding a classroom textbook, an item the participant herself realizes she treats as everyday with no aesthetic feeling at all:

Jackie: I had – I don’t know if this relates, but ah my - for whatever reason, this is so bizarre that we had this ah quote [Eisner] and then my

classroom's changing a lot too and anyway, I have never had a visually impaired student in my life and this is the first time I have one and she cannot see at all, and she has you know a 'braille-ist' with her and everything, so just getting into her world, and she's coming from absolutely no vision, I've been watching her experience and yet her braille-ist tells me she's very happy and excited to be learning and blah blah blah, but watching how she can take the simplest – like she asked me for a text book and I know hers is coming; it's in braille, and I offered it to her and she just held it and smelled it and felt it and put it on her cheek and then gave it back to me after and I just really yeah, she's really having an aesthetic experience with this everyday thing that I just never pay attention to and drop on the floor and everything, so I don't know it's been really I guess not random, that's what I wrote about in my reflection, how from my point of view what could be just really, 'I'm looking at it 'eh' I use it every day' but now I'm just really taking it in, I can't do that obviously for everything that I look at, but making it a bit of a practice like... let it - sounds corny - land on me somehow in a different way, anyway.... (T3 6)

There is also some mention of a more powerful sort of emotional connection. That is, the aesthetic experience is seen to be “magical” and “transforming,” an experience in which you are “feeling alive.” There is an “emotionally powerful, inexplicable connection” experienced as “truthful” or “beautiful” that can “make the impossible seem possible” and even be “life changing” (T2 16; 20-21; T3 3), and this “experience of feeling alive is an experience of mystery” (T5 10).

These ideas about aesthetic experience characterize it as a vital emotional response that is not only a physical ‘visceral’ sort of reaction but also can be said to have a powerful subjective ‘spiritual’ kind of connection that lifts or transforms one’s whole being. As the findings will show throughout this study, the participants who formed these conceptions of aesthetic experience are overshadowed by the majority of others who conceive of aesthetic experience either as a primarily intellectual process of interpretation, analysis or critique, or else have outright confusion as to ‘how we ought to respond,’ whether to arts or nature or everyday sights and sounds. The educator’s reflection on the blind girl’s experience in the above passage, for instance, was followed almost immediately by another educator’s reflection on aesthetic experience being the same as “looking at the world critically and intelligently” (T3 7).

**Aesthetic Experience is Engaged, In the Moment, Present:** As well as being spontaneously emotional and subjective, aesthetic experience is conceived of as being “in the present” (T2 7, 11, T3 4). Some educators talk of a focus in which they are “being present in life, attending, being awake, wide-awake, open and aware” or “just being” (T3 9). Aesthetic experience is “taking time to stop and see” and “really taking it in,” “savouring” (T3 3, 6, T4 2). Again, our sensory involvement is noted in that when in an aesthetic experience you are “in tune with your senses” (T4 14). There is said to be a “spark of engagement” in which you are “being absorbed and truly engaged” (T6 25) that is “unscheduled” and has a “timeless” quality about it (T3 14). Finally, aesthetic experiences involve “being immersed in a world separate from ‘real life,’ “being taken away from the distractions of real life” (T5 9, T6 14).

From an educational perspective, the quality of absorption described above as characteristic of aesthetic experience is coincident with that of students when they are genuinely engaged in learning. As Eisner (2002) noted, this absorption is one that Dewey considered to be central to aesthetic experience. Maxine Greene (1995) also describes our need to strive pedagogically to have our students enter a fully-absorbed state of being “wide awake.” It seems that learning itself, as engaged and immersed in the moment, aims to be and is aesthetic.

**Aesthetic Experience is Not Limited:** As with the group of arts learners, this group too identified the potential of aesthetic experience to come from experiences other than arts. Aesthetic experience can “come from everyday objects” such as “holding a book” (T3 6) from “science” (T4 16), from “observing social interactions” (T3 2) or from “creating a room environment” (T3 13). It is “not limited to the grandiose, such as seeing the Taj Mahal” but can come from “every day things” (T3 2, T5 8). This identification makes aesthetic experience a broader category than arts, although no one in this group of educators explicitly alludes to that idea. I share the passage relating science and aesthetic experience for its valuable contribution to ‘normal’ educational experience:

Cindy: I also wonder maybe so often we don't have the tools so um so.... You know we're not – oh, going back to this consumer, you know, we're used to having things just given to us and you know we're not necessarily used to having to look at something and use... and try and understand. We haven't really developed the tools to be able to develop fully, to be...

Jackie: To be awake, to be awake! To even notice it! and notice something has, you know [pause]. And I wonder – oh sorry go ahead

Alisha: No, I talk too much

Jackie: ...in our first term, my first year, so last year at this time, there was elective students, one of them a biologist – science, math chemistry everything – and here he is doing an arts ed, and something I'm fiercely alert to is science and it just always terrified me and in school, I just barely passed, in high school, right, anyways he presented everything so beautifully, poe...[sic], like in the language of art as a scientist...

Cindy: interesting!

Jackie: in a moment of showing a cell, he focused on you know, he, there was something in beauty, implicit beauty, you know, there's this 'here's your cell and it's very clear,' but he used poetic language, he sometimes didn't paint it, but it was always like a work of art, and there was one particular class where I really got that cause I'd never really seen or perceived anything scientific in a creative, you know, artis...[sic] through that lens, and you know, he presented it that way and he invited us to do that, and I was actually moved like to tears [exclamations 'wow'] cause I'd never had that happen – it just shook me up - and really, wow!, I do, I know I'll always remember that moment, so *he* invited, *he* presented that opportunity, *he* made it possible to release, you know, that um that implicit, that beauty, that aesthetic experience in something that, you know, normally....[ends] (T4 16)

I find it fascinating that this participant cuts herself off from certain words, such as “poetic” and “artistic” in connection to how the scientific ideas were presented. Also, this personal reflection makes it very clear that science, at least for this person, is rarely taught in an aesthetic creatively engaging way. I also find the response immediately following important:

Nancy: So there's still that kind of notion of someone kind of like creating a frame even if it's maybe not another person, if we see something beautiful in our everyday life it's because we're creating that frame for it (T4 16)

This response seems to bring out two different important aspects: first, “creating a frame” would seem to indicate the pedagogical skill of *presentation*, presenting something scientific in an aesthetic creative way; second, the further statement (“if we

see something beautiful... it's because we're creating a frame for it") strikes me as trying to get at the idea that aesthetic experience is an awareness, a 'way' of seeing or noticing, or as Lonergan (1957/1992) describes, a particular patterning of consciousness.

**Aesthetic Experience is an Attitude or a Way of Perceiving:** As mentioned above, one of the outstanding findings from the study with the educators is the opposing conceptions of aesthetic experience that emerge; they will be discussed explicitly in the following section. Here I simply want to mention what I found notable. Most of all, what was striking was that many of the educators possessed a way of speaking about aesthetic experience that was somehow in contrast to the characteristics so far identified: subjective spontaneity and autonomous emotional connection. These latter characteristics seem to speak more of an uninhibited freedom of response whereas many educators tended to be more careful or cautious in their statements about aesthetic experience, reflecting their idea that it is more of a 'calculated' or 'prepared' attitude or way of perceiving. While the contrast is not sharply delineated (there are some few participants who clearly do see an open, uninhibited element to aesthetic experience) it seems to point to a dominant tendency in this group to conceive of aesthetic experience from a more 'intellectual' sort of standpoint. Also, it seems striking to me that conversation so largely stayed on the theme of perceiving art works (and didn't often enter into the spontaneity of other sorts of experiences previously mentioned as 'aesthetic').

In this more 'intellectual' stance, aesthetic experience is said to be "how you encounter a work of art, an *attitude* (not judging) of open-mindedness" (T1 23, italics mine). Aesthetic experience therefore "depends on how you perceive an artwork" (T1 25) so that "you either get it or you don't, and I think that if you don't, you're not able to find the beauty in it" (T1 24). Aesthetic experience is also described as "a *willingness* to enter into an experience with art, or with the mundane" (T3 14-15, italics mine). Further, emphasis is given to the way in which "perception is shaped by family, background, education, culture, and place" (T3 4, T3 15), so that arts are "a way to view the world" (T3 15). The aesthetic experience hence includes our ethical values and how we live (T6

6-7). This quotation captures the mixture and confusion of different ideas about what aesthetic experience is:

Bob: Yeah! I can speak to that a bit [*becoming aware of other art forms*]. I think for me it's other art forms plus everything else that for me would be considered an aesthetic experience, so for me it could be sculpting or appreciating that form and understanding the knowledge or what I'm experiencing in that or what I'm getting out of that experience but it also could be, let's say this room and the sound qualities or the carpet or the bell tone, it's like choosing... making makeshift teepees, it's like creating our environment or critically looking at this environment and in some ways being able to interact with that in a way that gives me pleasure and control, in a sense [laughs], and so how much I actually participate in terms of doing the art form or just responding to it and thinking about it, I think it varies, but I think for me it's a broad definition (T3 13).

To repeat, however, not all participants shared this view. Some few participants spoke of the aesthetic experience as a more open and human sharing: "requiring trust, risk, vulnerability, and a raw human sharing of perspectives" (T3 16-17).

#### **4.3.2. Oppositions in Conceptions of Aesthetic Experience**

**Aesthetic Experience is Critical and Intelligent:** I could have put the findings here with the previous category, simply noting opposition in the way participants conceived of aesthetic experience. However, because this conception (or perception) of aesthetic experience tended to dominate the entire study with the educators, it seemed more appropriate to give it its own theme category. Also, there was a compelling ambiguity present in this group: probably a minority of participants ascribed to the rather extreme "intellectual" perspective put forward here. But the majority were either too inhibited to speak up for a contrasting perspective, or else they found themselves in a state of confusion (as exemplified in the previous quotation) about what they believed or thought in regard to aesthetic experience.

As a result, there was a lack of genuinely engaged dialogue that freely explored the open-ended question, *what is aesthetic experience?* I think both of the above reasons (personal inhibition or confusion) for this lack of engaged-encounter have strong validity among this group of participants, as some of the findings will later reveal. Moreover, it is striking that, according to my reading of the transcriptions, not one of the

participants in the group of educators actually raised the explicit question for them personally: *what is aesthetic experience?* Throughout the research project, there was an underlying unspoken assumption that 'we already know what it is,' and only a few participants on rare occasions challenged this notion when they implicitly admitted confusion or questions about aesthetic experience. This exchange from the fourth dialogue session is one of the first real instances to arise of questioning about aesthetic experience:

Paul: I guess the word aesthetic experience is still something I'm grappling with like if I look at that little stand over there and analyze it for 3 minutes would that be considered an aesthetic experience because I've kind of really looked at the form, or I've looked at the shading and see how it compares with the whiteboard so um... like is it something that is deliberate because if we know it's art we're going to spend the time you know gravitating towards that, yeah, I guess if we make something with an intentioned idea I guess we're going to enter into an aesthetic experience with that...

Tina: But it seems like you did, because in those three seconds you actually pointed to certain elements of that stand... you did have an experience where you're describing it... And it is art (cause?) someone designed it... just cause it's functional doesn't mean it's not art you know...

Mary: But is it an aesthetic experience to notice it and to pay attention to it without being moved... is that ... to me it's not an aesthetic experience unless you're moved by it some way, that's what it seems to me... [*agreement from Paul*]... so I can notice it and describe it, observe by it, but am I moved by it?

Tina: That's an interesting element – if you're moved...

Paul: Yeah, if you feel some kind of...

Tina: even if it's revulsion...

Mary: yeah, that's being moved...

Anna: That's helpful... cause I'm not always sure what aesthetic experience is...

Paul: I think it's great to talk about these doubts and through that, and to hear what other people think about what it actually means, like have we had many of them today? Or have we just had one or two? I guess they could have been around us... (T4 5).

This passage evokes, I think, the hesitant mood and also reveals the significant 'pause' that comes about in response to the mention of aesthetic experience as something that 'moves you.'

In this perspective, the educators' idea of aesthetic experience can be summed up in this participant's statement:

Charles: I think like art necessarily does what you're talking about it's necessarily requires some subjective experience some participation from like whoever's experiencing it, of course we all agree, that's what Collingwood said, that's what Greene said, we can all agree on that, but yeah, just that I didn't get a clear, *I don't think there's a clear distinction, I think looking at the world critically and intelligently and engaging in it that way is really the same as engaging with it aesthetically*, and of course we're naturally bound to bring our own subjective you know credentials with us, but that's just going to happen by default so you know everyone has a different personal experience yeah um oh sorry (T4 7, italics mine)

This statement followed on almost immediately after the statement we heard earlier from one educator describing her experience with the blind girl cherishing the textbook. It provides a starkly intellectual contrast to the poignant description of the blind girl's aesthetic experience. This mood of intellectual starkness lurked throughout the entire study with the educators. So, for instance, aesthetic experience is also described as an "ability to bring different life experience, culture and taste to an *interpretation* of art" (T2 12, italics mine) and "is an opportunity to learn" (T2 22). It is recognized as "sensory, but really it appeals to the cognitive aspect of who I want to be as a person" (T2 22). The wording "who I want to be" is noteworthy in the fact that it reveals a cognitive way of being that is almost the polar opposite of being spontaneously open and intrinsically responsive. Again, aesthetic experience is found to be "looking at the world critically" (T3 7) or "critically examining an environment" (T3 13).

Another important aspect to this more intellectual conception of aesthetic experience is the need for an understanding of art forms. Aesthetic experience is

“understanding knowledge of an art form” and “interacting with art forms in a way that gives pleasure and control; thinking about it” (T3 13). In this view, “aesthetic experience is not really different than ordinary discourse” (T5 7). More explicitly, education is needed *before* you can appreciate a work of art aesthetically: “you can’t appreciate a great work of art without the tools to recognize its beauty; it doesn’t ‘just happen’” (T5 19-20). This statement was followed up by a hesitation and retreat: “Well, sometimes it does, I suppose, but there’s something to be said for being able to recognize, um, what is beautiful” (T5 19). I was surprised to hear this statement in its classicist overtones of aesthetic experience and traditional beauty, something that the educators as a whole firmly rejected in their first dialogue session after watching Roger Scruton’s video, “Why Beauty Matters.” Finally, the role of feeling and emotion takes a convincing backseat: aesthetic experience is an encounter with arts that should be “making me think about how I *should* be feeling, or what it means really” (T4 12, italics mine). This statement can be interpreted in two ways: one, it is meant as a negation of the validity of our spontaneous feelings and emotions; or two, it is the recognition of the value of arts and aesthetic experience in revealing human emotional life and prompting us to reflect on our human selves. I lean toward the second interpretation from the context of the dialogue, but I would note the curious absence of talk about the spontaneous uninhibited human emotions that the group of arts learners so powerfully described as a fundamental quality of aesthetic experience.

#### **4.3.3. Conceptions of Education: Traditional Arts Education (positives and negatives)**

**Technical Interferes with Feeling in Arts Education:** This small thematic grouping consists of only four statements, however, these mentions seem relevant as leading into the next theme group (on Arts Education) in its specific connection to the technical aspects of arts training and the ‘taboo’ of emotion/feeling in higher level arts education.

The first thing that needs to be said is that participants readily acknowledged and gave credit to the role of technique in the arts: technique allows for fuller artistic growth (T2 2). Having said this, they also acknowledged a tension between the need for

teaching and learning technique and the need for the expression of feeling. It was recognized that the emphasis in post-secondary arts education was more on competition, technical competence and achievement (T5 2) than on feelings. Moreover, talk about feelings and emotions as a valid part of arts education was taken to be “trite, out-dated, and taboo” (T5 2). Teaching art should involve teaching feelings, but technique interferes: ““We’re teaching them feelings, we’re teaching fine arts as feelings, [but] it’s so funny that we’re talking about that being the core, right? Of art... it’s funny that they [students] miss, they get so hung up on technique” (T5 5). Ultimately, technique and emotional expression need to be balanced: “sometimes the technique gets pushed aside too much I think in my room, right? So it’s hard to balance of all of that, except my kids are expressive” [laughs] (T5 6).

What strikes me as noteworthy in these statements and in the dialogue exchanges overall is the lack of detailed discussion about how technique allows for the expression of feeling or emotion. It is also noteworthy, I believe, that connections were not made linking skill, emotional expression and aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience as part of artistic creativity or performance is very rarely mentioned in this group. As a group of arts educators, it seems surprising, to say the least, that these connections are missing in a six-week dialogue project exploring the meaning of aesthetic experience.

**Arts Education Limits Aesthetic Experience and Uninhibited Self Expression:** A much more explicit critique of arts education emerged throughout the dialogue sessions as participants gradually began to share their own experiences of being students in arts education programs and of teaching in the field of arts education. *A disturbing trend emerged of the neglect of feeling and emotion in arts education, especially in higher post-secondary levels but also as a trend throughout secondary and even at times in elementary arts education.*

As the educators brought out, arts education tends to be training for critique, judgment, and evaluation, as this exchange shows:

Anna: ...Yeah, I think we were trained, we were trained to be really critical, and that’s interesting you’re saying that because I’ve always

thought of it [*being critical*] as just being wide awake to noticing those things and for me I'm always like 'oh, how did they do that?' cause I want to then apply it, but then I think in that I'm also being critical of 'did they do it well, did they do it not well?' – there's a judgment there that maybe isn't part of wide-awakeness that I...

Joanne: I am really interested in general about the role of the critic and critique in the arts and how that influences the art, how it manifests in art education. It's a very interesting topic to me because it's um can be a very scary thing, and it can be something that turns people away from the arts, and yet it can also be, or at least it's generally understood to be what keeps quality of art, and so, is it necessary for art... (T2 11)

And

Anna: last week...someone in our group gave an example of watching a choir and not being able to even enjoy the aesthetic experience of the choir because all they could hear was that the sopranos were too... high? Low? I don't know, I don't know music, they were too something and therefore the aesthetic experience couldn't be enjoyed or experienced because they knew *too* much about the art, and that critic... couldn't stay away, like that judge was part of the training and of who they were, and it wasn't like they were looking to be um judgmental of the work but they just couldn't help but be evaluating of the work because it was what they knew

Paul: So we're saying an aesthetic experience means non-judgmental or is there some grey area where we're maybe making judgments about certain things and we're taking note of aesthetic experience...? (T4 2)

Again, the educator mentioned above reflects on arts training as analytical, which connects to an issue of elitism.

Cindy: Also our frame of reference changes a little bit, like I kind of went on a tangent um when he mentions frame of reference and thought about how when you become educated, as an example as a musician, we are, can become, much more analytical about what we hear, so our frame of reference becomes much more about having been um having that analytical thing going ... so an example I used was tuning, or an example would be hearing a beautiful piece from a choir and I just cannot get over the fact that the sopranos are, every time they go to the g they're flat, I can't get past that, so my frame of reference is that analytical and is that inhibiting me from going into an aesthetic experience where I might not rise to be able to really experience joy from that performance but my frame of reference is limiting

Paul: Yeah. And that's interesting cause I do try and purposely get out of that, you know, I do try and embrace community music making so and there's some people with training in music who just can't listen to anything unless it's absolutely you know highest level of performance if they're listening to classical music, whereas actually I find sometimes hearing somebody who's a bit imperfect in their music making or let's say hotel musicians playing sort of more in a relaxed fashion than like in a higher club or so, so um where am I trying to get with that... I think it's a willingness also just to try and get to understand that art has different purposes for different people... (T3 13)

At some points educators venture that strong identification of formal qualities of arts and elitism of performance is not about aesthetic experience (T2 14), and these perspectives in arts education can inhibit and limit aesthetic experience (T3 13), as well as wreck the joy and magic of aesthetic experience (T2 10). More than that, an overriding ethos of elitism in arts learning generally, even as early as grades 3, 4, and 5, can diminish self-confidence and self-esteem not only of students but of the general population (T3 19-20). On a different note, educators spoke of restricted curriculum and funding for teaching arts and how that limits opportunities for creating aesthetic experience: "that's the whole dilemma of you know our system is that it's funded in a certain way... how do you practice to create that aesthetic experience given those conditions of money and funding... there are so many limitations hitting you, it's kind of depressing" (T2 2). Educators agree that to encourage aesthetic experience, alternative hands-on learning is better:

Cindy: ...not just sitting and letting something reach you... you need to somehow be involved and that involves more of your senses and that can be movement, it may involve using more of your body and a more tactile kind of learning rather than the traditional way that the curriculum is set up to be sitting at your desk and having information fed to you, it's very interesting I think and I think it definitely relates to this, you know, you can't just let knowledge come in a wave over you, you have to reach out and get involved with your full body, it's very interesting! (T2 3)

Yet colleagues and administration often do not support such alternative teaching (T2 4-5).

Finally, educators realize that the discussion of and reflection on emotion and feelings in their own arts education experiences was not supported or encouraged:

Paul: What she's [S. K. Langer] talking about dance, for me I'm thinking about music, and she says the word 'feelings' here a lot so that for her is very important, feelings and emotions a lot. For me, I think about it, for music, that's always been a central aspect of ah music, is the feelings I have for it or the emotional response I get when I listen to music and also the emotional response I get when I'm performing music and it just kind of resonates and sounds good and I'm just kind of prepared, just, or it comes across in communication with listeners. That's something myself I've always kind of like, I've kind of wondered why that's not always talked about much. It seems maybe kind of trite or outdated to talk about feelings in art, you know, it's easy to get caught up in the philosophy or techniques in the (teaching?) of art. I kind of struggled with that cause I got into music that emotional response that I appreciated, going to study at a higher level, you know, that tends not to get thought about as much or talked about, you know, emotional, you know, it's more about sometimes the competition, or how good you are in a certain aspect, or the philosophy behind your art, so... which I believe is all intertwined but I believe it has to be an emotional, an emotional ah response, feeling behind it

Val: It does sometimes feel like almost a taboo to talk about feelings, right?

Paul: That's what I've encountered, so... (T5 2)

It is clear that these educators feel that emotion has to be included as part of arts education, and others declare that classical, traditional perspectives on arts and arts education are dangerous and can "close minds" so that, like Roger Scruton, you end up "questioning with the answer already in mind" (T1 29). Thus, in teaching arts education non-traditionally in this climate and context of traditional education, we are asking students to risk and trust and be vulnerable, and "that's a huge thing to ask! And so to understand that, to understand the weight of that" in our society is important (T3 16).

**Arts Education Enhances Human Development:** In the midst of some strong criticisms of arts education, there emerged a few strong positive statements with a single theme: arts education enhances our full human development. Thus, "arts education is a way of "finding out something about our capacity for being moved and a way of thinking about the whole experience of joy" (T3 16); "a whole other part of being human becomes educated when you learn to appreciate art" (T5 20).

Arts education is seen to contribute to the fullness of human development, especially as a much-needed way of giving dignity and respect to the role of feelings and emotions in our lives and in our living. As the next theme category makes clear, these observations on the state of arts education, and the needs it could fulfil, tend to mirror the state of society as a whole and the need in society as well as in education for a lift in our feeling-ful, wholehearted, holistic aesthetic engagement.

#### **4.3.4. Aesthetic Experience and Artistic Experience in Society**

**Critique, Judgment Inhibits Aesthetic and Artistic Experience/Growth:** As with the arts learners, the group of educators recognized that we have a persistent human need to categorize, put things in boxes, judge and measure (T1 4), as well as a need to define and to have an answer for everything (T1 20, 24). They feel that aesthetic experience diminishes with an analytical perspective (T3 12), and affirm that a “false real world” is “this kind of anti-feeling, anti-emotion; maybe that’s why we have so many people feeling so anxious, I don’t know...” (T5 14). Also, the intrinsic value of aesthetic feeling is less apparent to us because we are socialized out of empathy through rewards (T2 16). Educators recognize that some parts of society have made arts “elitist and hallowed” (T4 2), noting that aesthetic experience is “framed for us” in galleries and museums (T4 16). Further, society traditionally bestows artistic success (O’Neill, 2015) and declares who is an artist and who isn’t, directing who and what we should respond to and how (T4 4-5). Surprisingly, educators discuss modern art in a way that deems it as promoting insecurity and confusion of response (T6 10-12), something they feel requires an art history education to be able to critique and respond adequately.

Nancy: And so, yeah, like, I wonder, the same sometimes for modern art, you know... I’m just like, I can’t, I don’t know what to get out of this, and I want someone to explain it to me

Anna: I also feel that insecurity, I don’t have an art history degree, I don’t know, and I need a little bit of context in order to say is this something I ready, I’m willing to invest a little bit more thinking time in or is it just another painting that there isn’t a story.

Anita: Especially when you see people around it going “oh! Oh! Look at this!” [*general agreement*]

Nancy: yeah, I'm like, 'I'm not getting the immanent meaning of it!'

Anita: yeah, you feel very uneducated, which... I am! Which I guess is why the Coupland because he's a modern artist there was a lot, you know, some of it I thought 'what is this?!' but I loved the variety (T6 11).

Finally, educators acknowledged that this severe atmosphere of societal judgment and critique can and does inhibit aesthetic experience and artistic growth for a majority of people (T3 20). Add to this the taboo around feeling and emotion in society that transmits itself to arts and aesthetic experience and, as these educators remark, people can become very stifled:

Anthony: ...um I also think it's a reflection of our society, when you look at arts being an education of feeling, the fact that we as a society don't appreciate *feeling*, we always say that we don't appreciate arts, but I think it's more that we don't appreciate feeling and emotion as a strength in people; it's almost seen as a weakness

Joanne: Right, so the value of art, the value of feeling, because we don't value feeling, we don't tend to value feeling, and doing exercise is doing art activity - I even see art going through every subject matter where you're still getting to know yourself, you're getting to know like what makes you feel this way or that way, you're getting to know the resistances, what are your resistances um, that's not valued really either. Like in, there's just no time to really invest in that sort of self-exploration

Mary: I'm not so sure I would articulate it as it's not valued, I think, I wonder if it's just a given that we're not too, we're so busy intellectualizing everything that there's not room for expressing it, but I don't know if someone would articulate, I don't know, not valuing it, just...

Anita: Do you mean intellectualizing to the sense that if you were a painter you have to look at colours, and shades and lines, and if you were dancers you'd have to look at steps or like musicians or – oh, I just lost my... I can't work in a room like this [*a lot of noise in background*]

Mary: No I'm talking about other people, not people who are artists doing art, yeah, I'm not talking about doing art

Aiden: But when you look at what society, capital S Society, deems successful to me I see someone like a very type A almost robotic person, just goes out and makes a lot of money, like that's what I see a lot of policy makers just want education to be preparing students for, like going into the 'real world' where no one cares about that cause no one thinks

about things like that, you just go and do your job and you make your money and, I don't know

Anita: And [Aiden], you just touched on something too, the '*real world*'. I mean how many of us as artists or actors were ever told or heard 'oh, you know, this is nice for now, but you're really going to have to get a real job, you can't support a family on acting, or whatever' but you're doing something that makes you so intrinsically happy and fulfilling, yes there's responsibilities, but to stifle that.... (T5 12-14).

**Aesthetic and Artistic Experience Are Not Valued in Consumer Society:** In this consumer, capitalist society, educators claim, arts and aesthetic experience are taken as status symbols (T4 14, 16, T5 11, 13, 15). Routine and practical demands dominate our perceptions (T2 18, T3 12), busy-ness prevents us from noticing and taking time for aesthetic experience (T4 1) and the demand to make money dominates (T5 13) so that the intrinsic value of arts and of aesthetic experience is not recognized in its own right (T4 15, T5 13). Of perhaps deeper significance, reflection on aesthetic experience and arts is not valued and does not happen (T5 14) so there is a huge challenge to try to explain the value of arts to others who simply don't appreciate it (T5 12). Since we fail to talk about everyday experiences of beauty (T4 15) there is a greater need for free joy, or in Lonergan's (1957/1992) words "the spontaneous self-justifying joy of aesthetic experience" (p. 208) in the world (T6 4, 14). This powerful passage from one educator on the need to speak about aesthetic experience in our lives seems a fitting way to conclude my findings for this group.

Jackie: Um, I tried to answer that first question [Dewey: *why aesthetic experience fails to become explicit*] um because I agree there's an essence, implicit beauty, you know, every day normal activities or objects, but how to explain why it generally fails to become explicit, I was lucky enough to be in Florence this summer, and the statues, if you've ever been in the [*Accademia Gallery*], the slave sculptures that Michelangelo, that he carved, sculpted out of rock, and the rock is there, the shape of the rock is there, and then there's the human form coming out, like the bearded slave is the one, and it may have been unfinished, is it finished? I don't know, but there's something being released, there's some beauty being released, and really it's crude, and you know, it's these giant men fighting their way out of this rock, this – you know, it's this sculpture just being born, so that just really resonated for me really implicit the um how beautiful those everyday normal experiences are, *but we don't release them, we don't talk about them, we don't - or I don't, in my classroom, you know, I likened it to that, do I fail to release, to allow the students, to invite*

*them to release what that, that essence, what's not voiced, you know, what's not revealed, so why does it fail to become explicit? Because where are the opportunities to let it become... how? (T4 15, italics mine).*

## **4.4. Summary and Reflexivity**

### **4.4.1. Overview and Reflexive Summary of Research Aims**

**Research:** One of the aims of my research was to illuminate the meaning of aesthetic experience from the point of view of subjective experience and to explore connections between aesthetic experience and how we learn. I believe this aim fills a gap in the field of arts education in that the role of aesthetic experience has not normally been explored as having fundamental significance in the way we learn. There could well be objections to my position, though, since much research has been done that explores the role of aesthetic experience and learning in other ways.

Michael Parsons (2007), for instance, is an arts educator who has spent much of his life questioning and studying the aesthetic in relation to how we understand arts. "I have been interested for some time in the claim that the arts require one to think (as well as to feel). I think it is an important claim for many reasons and yet it has proved difficult to explain or justify" (p. 533). Parsons (2007) explores the creative use of metaphor in the arts as "the creation of new possibilities of thought" (p. 539), noticing that "creativity in the arts has often been associated with freedom of thought and social change" (p. 539). He takes this idea further, I would say, in pushing the boundaries of metaphor in arts: "we always want to go beyond the literal and look for meanings, which I am suggesting are possible only through the use of metaphor" (p. 540). Moreover, Parsons recognizes that the arts hold many levels of meaning and that arts criticism, seen as a collective activity, reveals the multitudinous interpretations possible. "This is a way of saying that creativity in the arts lies not only in the creation of new metaphors but also in reading them in new ways" (p. 540). This ambiguity of interpretation is important, both in the creation of art works themselves and in the 'business' of its interpretation through arts criticism, because "a larger space for intellectual freedom is opened up" (p. 541). Arts and our aesthetic response in the form of interpretation are thus connected to how we learn.

I find this topic fascinating. Metaphor as a creative means of deepening our understanding of arts does indeed nurture the aspect of opening up intellectual freedom. As Lonergan (1957/1992) states, "...the artist exercises his intelligence in discovering ever novel forms that unify and relate the contents and acts of aesthetic experience" (p. 208). Again, "art is a twofold freedom. As it liberates experience from the drag of biological purposiveness, so it liberates intelligence from the wearying constraints of mathematical proofs, scientific verifications, and commonsense factualness" (p. 208). From the artist's point of view, then, creative design and any metaphorical meaning that arises, whether intended by the artist or not, can be seen as a liberation of intelligence and a freedom of the intellect. From the point of view of the 'interpreter,' there is likewise a freedom in the ambiguity of meaning associated with arts. "Indeed, the very obscurity of art is in a sense its most generic meaning. Prior to the neatly formulated questions of systematizing intelligence, there is the deep-set wonder in which all questions have their source and ground" (p. 208). For both artist and viewer alike, "art would show forth that wonder in its elemental sweep" (p. 208). On this point of intellectual freedom, I find our two perspectives to overlap.

I think where we differ is in our orientation toward, and perhaps our meaning of, the term *aesthetic*. Parsons' connection to the aesthetic, in this case, is in considering arts and artworks specifically, while my connection to the aesthetic is in considering the subjective experience in response to anything that can be perceived aesthetically. In other words, my orientation is to give the term *aesthetic* a subjective meaning that is not limited to arts, and I think this specifically subjective orientation is one of the features of my research that fills a gap in this area of arts education.

Another aim of my research was to explore a particular philosophical pedagogy based on an adaptation of Lonergan's (1957/1992) method of self-appropriation. In using this pedagogical approach, my intention was to lead participants toward a (more or less) phenomenological awareness of their own aesthetic experiences and then to have them work toward formulating characteristics and qualities of those actual experiences. This experiential basis formed the major source of meaning from which participants then explored other meanings of aesthetic experience in the philosophical quotations. One of the difficulties, and a possible drawback, in using this pedagogical approach is its

contrast to usual pedagogical approaches found in both secondary and post-secondary schools, or in education generally. While the senior secondary arts learners embraced and welcomed the opportunity to reflect on their experiences from this explicitly experiential stance, the post-secondary educators experienced enormous difficulty with it.

A further aim of my research was to use dialogue as a primary means of exploring participants' accounts of their experiences and the philosophical quotations. Dialogue was chosen to allow for the free and vibrant (aesthetic) flow of questioning and ideas as well as for its aim of deepening meaning through purposeful understanding of each other's viewpoints. It aimed at a holistic understanding of the meaning of aesthetic experience within the context of arts education. A possible criticism of this approach is in the short time frame of each study, a total of six weeks. It could be argued that purposeful and deep understanding cannot be achieved in such a short span of time. More than that, fluid dialogue requires a degree of trust among participants and again six weeks is not really a long time to establish that level of trust.

#### **4.4.2. Study Group 1 – Arts Learners**

**Participants:** As mentioned, trust is a major element in dialogue exchange and it played a major role in what I consider to be the outstanding success of the arts learners' study and program. Students taking part in this study had been attending the Langley Fine Arts School (LFAS) for many years together, and since it is a small school, they had formed intimate friendships and shared classes and performances together on many occasions. They knew each other well and were comfortable with each other. Also, the students were selected for their maturity of outlook and their openness to the study. From the beginning, it was clear that these students were eager to explore the questions posed and open to sharing ideas with each other as well as with me. Coaching in dialogue enhanced this natural openness and uninhibited flow. While there were initial hesitations and concerns during the first session about whether they were 'doing dialogue correctly,' these doubts were relieved by our encouragement and by further coaching in dialogue on what to do if and when they felt 'stuck' or uncertain about how to proceed. The following quotations give a sense of the degree of openness shown, even

in the first session of dialogue where students are exploring their initial ideas about aesthetic experience (prompted only by the contrasting word 'anaesthetic') and what the phrase means to them:

Group 1:

Participant 1: ... looking at something that's very alive and that makes me feel... alive and an experience that has an emotional impact, so yeah, I just kind of connected that with music and how it really, it's like a really emotional process that's all performing...

Participant 2: ...yeah I kind of was on the plane of looking at the aesthetic as compared to anaesthetic, and I didn't really know the words completely through and through, but one felt more man-made, like the anaesthetic, and then one felt like more emotional, like what you were saying, like not really tangible, kind of, like.... (T1 1)

Group 2:

Participant 1: ...I don't know, I thought when she mentioned anaesthetic, anaesthetic experience, I don't know, I related that to a numb, kind of... like a numbed experience would be an anaesthetic experience, and an aesthetic experience would be like a non.... It's not dumbed down and numbed in any way; it's like open and free... no distractions, no obstacles...

Participant 2: ...yeah, I did the same thing actually, I actually wrote the two words down and like drew an equals sign. I had a few like points on like just experience as a word and what it is, and how your experiences make you who you are... that kind of idea, taking, like, separating the two words instead of kind of trying to come up with a definition for them together...

Participant 3: ...that's what I did too... aesthetically, like how we see things, like what it looked like to us, I think, sort of. And then an experience, like what we've done in the past and those sorts of things and what kind of wisdom and knowledge we get from them...

Pause

Participant 2: the first thing I wrote down was "WHAT???" in big capital letters, like WHAT???

Participant 3: yeah, I didn't have any definition of aesthetic in my brain...just going with what I think it means...

Participant 2: I wrote down "feeling?" and then question mark, and I wrote down numbness (reversing?).... (T1 2-3)

Group 3:

Participant 1: I'll start. I actually heard the word before. I never heard it explained, but I assumed it meant 'ideal beauty'. Cause I heard it when I was doing the art, and they use the word 'aesthetic' to describe something that's beautiful. So to me it's something visual.

Participant 2: I know when I hear the word, someone says something is 'aesthetically pleasing' and so I thought it's something appealing to the eye and it's visually appealing to different people. And then when you read, when we were talking about the aesthetic as something more real, we could just look at this room. Things are square, things are not aesthetically pleasing; they aren't real. In nature, nothing's square; things are round and are different shapes that we don't even have names for, and that seems to be what was aesthetic to me. So aesthetic experience was more how, um, how the visuals around you impact how you're feeling about different experiences... when people are outside with nature, it's completely different than being in a square room

Participant 3: I focused more on the whole experience aspect of it. I connected to it as an epiphany. So, a realization of something... I understand this fully as being 100% absorbed in the moment, kind of like the numbing sensation as anaesthetic or the aesthetic of 100% in the zone. ... or even to the point of you're ambiguous on something and then you know what you want to do. Or even writing a composition say, you just get that idea and from there it just blasts off into the entire written symphony, and it starts off from that base idea, which is the aesthetic experience. So I focused more on the 'experience' than 'aesthetic.' (T1 4)

Throughout the study there was a profoundly open atmosphere of uninhibited questioning and exploring, as these quotations reveal, which made the study deeply meaningful to both the arts learners and myself. This openness was demonstrated in dialogue through the many different types of questions posed (what? is? does? do? would? how? why? if? I wonder... my question is...) and through numerous questions specifically asking about aesthetic experience. The following excerpts are a selected representation:

WHAT is aesthetic experience? T1 3

How do you understand or “dissect” aesthetic experience? T2 8

When does aesthetic experience arise? What prompts it? T3 3

What role does aesthetic experience play in your everyday life? T4 5

Why does an artist do what they’re doing? T4 5 [This question was linked to statements about aesthetic experience prompting artistic creation and inspiration]

Does aesthetic experience change your thinking in some way? If not, what is it? T5 4

How does aesthetic experience become explicit? T5 4-5

What makes an experience aesthetic? Or ‘normal’? (Frequency of occurrence?) T5 3, 10

The profound openness was also demonstrated through linguistic patterns, particularly the pattern of picking up on each other’s ideas with sentences that began: “and that’s like what you said about...” or “and that makes me think of...” or “and I feel like....,” as well as by the excitement of tone and voicing. Through the study analysis, I realized that the use of the word “and” and of the phrase “I feel” or “I feel like” as an opener was repeated whenever dialogue flowed smoothly and openly, and with the arts learners, this pattern is almost constant. One of the most moving indications made by the arts learners about dialogue was that they continually commented on wanting more of this kind of learning opportunity where their ideas could be explored and heard. An example is given below from week 5. As the end of the second dialogue session for the day was signalled (we generally did two short focused sessions in the allotted hour), the exchange went:

Participant 1: “I could go on forever”

Participant 2: “I know! I know! I wish we could just like, not use this only 15 minutes... [into the recorder] **Right? Are you hearing this?? We need more time!**” [group laughter] “They’re gonna hear this afterwards and...” [recording ends] (T5 29)

This good-natured exchange between eager young participants shows how engaged they were not only in dialogue but in the project as a whole, and this group’s enthusiasm was mirrored by the other arts learners as well. My journal notes from this week correspond: “Students expressed desire to have more time in dialogue and to be able to continue the philosophical reflecting that they have been introduced to through this project.” Also from my own journal notes on the closing dialogue session and round-table event: “Students expressed strong appreciation for the dialogue project and were

adamant that such reflection should be a regular part of their school learning experience.”

As well as being comfortable with one another, the participants were at ease in their own school environment. Having said this, there were times when their school environment could have been a limitation in speaking freely about their educational experience. Despite this possible limitation, free comments, both positive and negative, about their experiences in arts education at their own school did arise naturally throughout the study.

**Personal Influence (Reflexive Analysis):** As a professional teacher, the practice of reflecting critically on my performance and role in the classroom, on the interactions between students and on the class dynamic as a whole is something I have been trained to do. More than that, I am by nature a highly reflective, open and systematic type of person; it comes naturally to me to assess and evaluate the structure and flow of what I do, whether it is coherent, and how I may have affected those with whom I am engaged.

In this study, I am aware that my influence as a teacher and doctoral student coming into the school to lead a special project about aesthetic experience was a position of authority carrying particular power dynamics. Traditional power dynamics of teaching, especially with the teacher as ‘the authority’ at the head of the class, are something I have been consistently opposed to and uncomfortable with throughout my teaching life. Like Paulo Freire (1970) and many others in critical pedagogy, I believe in respecting and including the students I work with; my motivation for teaching is deeply rooted in my genuine care for the people I meet and teach, for their growth in understanding, and for the collaborative ideas we share in class. At the same time, I am aware of myself as leader and facilitator with particular areas of expertise. Achieving a balance between leading and listening is something I constantly work at and reflect on, and I was aware of struggling in this study to find that balance.

As a teacher in this study, I was in a role of leading these arts learners into an encounter with philosophical ideas on aesthetic experience, yet I wanted the arts learners to work from a position of collaborative existential discovery through

philosophical pedagogy and their dialogue encounters; in other words, I didn't want to lead them to ideas that were more mine than their own. Further, because of the nature of the philosophical pedagogy I was using, as well as the nature of dialogue, the study rested on the basis of an emergent curriculum: ideas that emerged each week helped to determine the direction of the following week's session.

A turning point for me in this study happened during week 3. In this session, the whole group debrief after the first dialogue session became very animated, and I made the decision to let it flow. At the beginning of it, discussion was very lively with some big questions coming up and high-quality depth of reflection. Towards the end, however, I felt it became too much like a typical classroom setting, with students looking to me for confirmation of ideas rather than dialoguing together, and I made a mistake in prolonging that atmosphere by interjecting further questions. This debrief took up the time we would normally have used to do a second break-out dialogue session, so the arts learners didn't have the chance to focus on their aesthetic and artistic connections in relation to that week's philosophical quotation; however, the content that emerged was extremely valuable to the learners' growth in understanding.

This occurrence during week 3 impressed upon me the value of dialogue in allowing students the opportunities to voice their questions and ideas spontaneously and in allowing the mood and spirit of open exploration to permeate their work. Despite this alternative school environment, 'school' inescapably carries the ethos of traditional teacher authority, with students often in the role of passive listener. Both the philosophical pedagogy and dialogue opportunity afforded students a high degree of personal engagement as they wrestled and struggled with new ideas. Further, in retrospect, I can say that I gained a clearer awareness of the fact that no matter how hard I try to be 'neutral,' my own ideas, biases and preferences are something I cannot avoid bringing to my teaching. The key, then, is in my being *aware* of my particular influences and of occasions in which I find myself resisting perspectives that are different from my own.

Added to the above concerns, I was aware of feeling tentative at the beginning of the study since I was relatively new and inexperienced with facilitating dialogue, and the

program was a new one that I had developed and implemented for the first time. Also, the time constraint was an issue. We had barely one hour to accomplish a lot, and the hour was strictly dictated by class schedules before and after our sessions. As a result, I often felt rushed, and I was concerned that my feeling communicated itself to the students and possibly inhibited their performance. I was constantly trying to present a calm, focused demeanour but was never sure how well I succeeded! Finally, my need to record sessions was unavoidable but was no doubt something of an inhibiting factor to students' speaking as freely as they might have without being recorded.

As a researcher, I was and became even more aware of my bias in favour of Bernard Lonergan's philosophical position and of those in sympathy with his position (both other philosophers and participating students in the group of arts learners). My early introduction to Lonergan's (1957/1992) work, at the age of 24, was a major influence in my life, and in reading and working steadily at this major work, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, I became convinced at a relatively young age of its worth. Since then, I have committed my life to pursuing the depth of meaning to be had from his ideas. My research, and the two studies with arts learners and educators in particular, have opened me significantly to the practice of encountering and embracing those who put forward a variety of different perspectives and of striving for a holistic purposeful understanding and deepening of meaning through genuine encounters with differences.

#### **4.4.3. Study Group 2 – Educators**

**Participants:** The study with the educators proved to be a major surprise, though in retrospect, perhaps it should not have been. I was anticipating a similar degree of enthusiasm and openness that the arts learners had shown, but what emerged was almost the complete opposite. In the first place, the group of educators were a cohort of graduate students who had been together for only one year of study; as well, some of them were new to the program and to the course. Accordingly, there was not a comfortable degree of trust among the group. I think more pressing than this factor, though, was a distinct feeling of insecurity about 'how much they knew.' This insecurity seemed to permeate the entire study through the full eight weeks we were together. The

fact that the educators were 'new' graduate students taking a course in aesthetics no doubt played a large part in this sense of insecurity, but that very fact speaks to the issue of a traditional academic ethos which inhibits and oppresses students from openly questioning and exploring *what they do not yet know* rather than 'exhibiting' how much they do know. It was fascinating in this regard to hear and read their own critiques of arts education in which they lament the overriding role of analysis and criticism in arts education, how dangerous it is and how it can close students' minds (T1 16, T3 17). Even more fascinating, though, is their apparent unawareness of just how much this very scenario seemed to be playing out in their own dialogue encounters.

My journal notes from the first session reveal this inhibition:

First and foremost, there was a lot of tension among the group about the journal writing, how much to write, what to write, and how to write. There was a lot of discomfort about struggling with the quotation, where to start, and how to go about it. Two or three students were very anxious about this part of the project and had emailed to ask about it specifically. Likewise, the group seemed to be quite nervous about doing dialogue and again had questions about how to handle the quotation, where to start, and what to talk about (17-09-2014).

The quite extreme tension of the first week did ease in the following week and onward, as we got into the study, but general tension, inhibition and resistance to open questioning and exploration of the meaning of aesthetic experience persisted throughout the study.

By week 4, it seemed a pattern was emerging in which a few educators each week showed openness and a genuine desire for questioning exploration of the quotations, while others in their groups unwittingly blocked their attempts to open dialogue up. My notes from this week state:

It seems that with each quotation, some few people stand out while others crop up to almost block dialogue in different ways. Or perhaps blocking is not what's happening – it's perhaps more that the group doesn't know each other well enough to push beyond their 'conceptual' almost-rehearsed messages about art (08-10-2014).

The resistance to spontaneous, free uninhibited questioning persisted, and as I remarked on in section 4.3.2 already, it is extremely notable that not one participant during the entire study ever openly asked the direct question, 'what is aesthetic experience?' or 'what do you (or I) mean by the words, *aesthetic experience*?' While two or three participants ventured to open up with tentative admissions of uncertainty, the pervasive mood was of a group who either assumed they already knew what it was and what it meant or else were afraid to openly reveal their lack of understanding. In contrast to the arts learners, whose dialogue was suffused with statements beginning with "And..." and "I feel like..." the educators' dialogue showed linguistic patterns that were much more 'analytical' and resistant. In place of "And..." many statements began with "But..." and rather than "I feel like" or "I feel" there was the frequent use of "I think..." It was notable that on the rare occasion when dialogue flowed well, the use of "And..." and "I feel..." began to appear. Furthermore, this mood of insecurity seemed to contribute to a persistent tendency in a number of group members to misunderstand key facets of various quotations and get side tracked in dialogue needing to 'argue' their mistaken assumptions, rather than openly question their resistance and explore a meaning that felt unclear.

In week 5, one possible reason surfaced for the persistent mood of insecurity, inhibition and resistance. The quotation that week (Susanne K. Langer) explicitly raised the topic of arts being an expression of emotion and arts education being an education of feelings. These topics unleashed a relative storm of response. For the first time in the study, the educators risked talking about emotion and feelings, and while this topic of feelings came up for most of them, for many it was linked with either how arts programs discourage talk about emotion and/or how society does not value emotion and thus arts. For me, it was striking to discover such lack of depth in their reflections and observations about the relationship between technique and the expression of feeling compared to the arts learners. Instead, their reflections stayed on the topic of how feelings in arts education are more or less "taboo" (T5 2) and that the overwhelming focus tends to be on arts criticism and analysis. This educational emphasis would at least partly explain their own insecurities in freely revealing their questions about aesthetic and artistic experience, since the valuation present in analysis and criticism can place more

significance on 'how much students know' than on the vital subjectivity of students' questions about aesthetics or arts.

Finally, since this study was conducted as part of a university course, I think this 'taboo' about emotion played a major factor in the degree to which participants were able (or rather unable) to embrace the open holistic spirit of either philosophical pedagogy or dialogue. Nevertheless, important insights emerged from the study about aesthetic experience, and more importantly, perhaps, about arts education and post-secondary learning experiences. A further factor that may have influenced the entire mood of the study was the opening session, which in contrast to the arts learners began by showing a video of Roger Scruton's documentary, "Why Beauty Matters." The documentary set up a critical mood with its polarized ideas of what beauty is and as an opening session, this mood may well have 'set the stage' for the rest of the study. In contrast, the arts learners' first session began with open, unprompted reflection on aesthetic experience and what they thought it was, which set a more open-ended and existential tone for the study.

**Personal influence:** In the first place, I believe the context of this study is a factor that needs careful consideration. My role as a guest teacher and doctoral student in the graduate class meant that I felt myself to be in somewhat of a middle position, not their 'official' teacher yet leading students in a part of their course that was being evaluated. I perceived students as feeling a little uncertain in whom to look to for leadership and 'final authority.' As well, since the instructor of the course was my supervisor, I obviously wanted to perform well. Again, I was very aware of my inexperience as a dialogue facilitator performing in front of my supervisor, who is highly experienced. These factors meant that for the first two sessions, I was feeling my way along and was very tentative in my interactions with the group.

My tentativeness resulted in a couple of awkward situations with participants at the opening of the study. One was a hesitant decision to allow participants to type their journal reflections mainly for the purpose of handing them in. This decision made sense in as far as the journal writing was also an assignment, but it meant that I was receiving edited reflections rather than participants' spontaneous thoughts. Another awkward

situation arose during the first dialogue sessions, when there was a good deal of resistance from participants in the form of uncertainty and insecurity. A couple of participants expressed their desire to take notes during dialogue. My inexperience and tentative stance resulted in a waffling response that I later had to firmly clarify for myself and the students: dialogue is meant to be a spontaneous flow and exchange of questions and ideas, and the point is to enter into the process of learning to trust one's spontaneous thinking. These two awkward situations contributed to the tentative mood of the opening two sessions. It was only in the 3rd session that I found my stride and began to facilitate in a more confident manner, but this opening mood of tentative leadership may have contributed a certain amount to the participants' lack of engagement with the study and with dialogue.

Further, as the study progressed, I became aware of my own impatience and frustration at the lack of open questioning that was happening. It became clear to me that I expected a similar openness of dynamic that I had experienced with the arts learners and it took time for me to accept the fact that a similar openness was not something this group was able to give. Despite emphasizing each week (beginning in the 3rd week) the aim of purposeful understanding of each quotation and the importance of participants' drawing on their own aesthetic and artistic experiences as a base for relating to the philosophical quotations, their resistance to these aims persisted (as noted in the section above). I would say my reaction of frustration was a result of both my feeling of tentativeness in my role as guest teacher and my inexperience with facilitating dialogue, and so I found myself wondering whether participants' resistance was due to my own lack as a facilitator or due to the dynamics of this particular group. Again, my impatience and frustration may well have affected my performance in this study and perhaps contributed something to the mood of insecurity and inhibition of the group.

By the last two sessions of the study, I felt I had gained considerable insight into my role as facilitator. Where at first, and in the previous study with arts learners, I struggled to discern how much I should 'hint' at meanings of aesthetic experience, I began to realize that a more effective way to lead participants to deeper reflection and understanding was to point to and encourage helpful strategies for how to 'dig into' the

quotations. I realized I could be open about the resistance I was sensing and encourage the need to question meanings that were unclear rather than 'argue' their view (a habit and tendency that Bohm (1996) particularly intended to counteract through dialogue practice). Again, strategies of honing in on particular words or phrases that seemed puzzling, or examining and exploring internal resistances, were extremely helpful pointers in facilitating dialogue. By the final session of the study, I was convinced that this combination of philosophical pedagogy and dialogue for teaching is tremendously valuable and important. An excerpt from my journal notes at this time shows my conviction:

Lastly, through this whole process I have learned so much about facilitating dialogue and have so many ideas for being able to use this process as a way of teaching... this experience has been fantastically exciting and illuminating for my own work and growth – particularly in ways that connect the need for reflection to growth and transformation in understanding; the philosophical process is or can be embedded within the dialogue process itself especially with the intent of 'purposeful understanding'... much to explore here! (22-10-2014)

My growing confidence through the final sessions of the study may possibly have contributed to the participants' slightly more open stance in their discussion of emotion and feelings and in their engagement with the final quotations, though this speculation is much more a question than a grounded conviction on my part.

As in my reflection on the group of arts learners, a final reflexive consideration here is my obvious leaning and preference toward the philosophical work of Bernard Lonergan. Both studies helped me become much more aware of how invested I am in Lonergan's position. This experience happily confirmed my commitment to his work. At the same time, the range of ideas that were presented to me through dialogue helped to enlarge my appreciation for my own and others' purposeful understanding of different perspectives. The genuine ability to engage in and open oneself toward *understanding* differences in perspective is one of the key elements comprising the very spirit of dialogue, and I discovered the immense value of this aspect of dialogue through my studies.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1. Summary of Main Ideas**

I began my thesis with two central research questions: 1) what is the meaning of aesthetic experience in educational contexts and 2) how do arts learners and educators understand and conceptualize aesthetic experience in relation to their own sense of artistic learning? These questions arose for me because of my desire and fascination with the epistemological question of how we learn, an area of study that I have long been engaged in, primarily through the work of Bernard Lonergan. My thesis developed from an idea I had that aesthetic experience is of fundamental significance in how we learn. From my own years of educational experience, and as a teacher coming relatively late to the public education system, I was moved towards this work by what I saw to be a persistently entrenched and settled routine in patterns of teaching and learning, despite more than a century of educational 'reform' by significant leaders and theorists. An exploration of this 'educational problematic,' then, formed the first chapter of my thesis. I followed it in chapter 2 with an exploration of aesthetic experience in its connections to learning and education.

As these ideas were bubbling around and taking shape, the opportunity arose to carry out a study with senior secondary students in the Langley Fine Arts School. The study offered me the chance to do a double-layered task: to examine the relations of aesthetic experience to both learning and teaching. I was able to explore the students' meanings of aesthetic experience in relation to their own experiences of (artistic and academic) learning, and at the same time I was able to implement a program of teaching that allowed me to observe and reflect on the students' learning. The philosophical pedagogy was designed to draw out aesthetic dimensions of teaching and learning

through its existentially based (self-appropriation) and collaborative (dialogue) approach. Essentially, I used the topic of aesthetic experience to explore a philosophical pedagogy that I hoped would contribute to the learning dynamic. My idea was that, if students themselves were able to personally appropriate an understanding of aesthetic experience and its significance in their own learning experiences, it would enhance and enlarge their appreciation and understanding of themselves as engaged, aesthetic learners.

On completion of my study with arts learners, the further opportunity opened up to repeat the same study with educators. Having discovered that even the senior secondary students immersed in arts education had little or no idea of what aesthetic experience is, I was eager to explore educators' grasp of aesthetic experience and its role in their learning experiences. Again, the study allowed me to do the double-layered task of examining aesthetic experience in connection to both learning and teaching. As with the arts learners, I was able to explore the educators' meanings of aesthetic experience in relation to their own experiences of (artistic and academic) learning, and at the same time I was able to implement a program of teaching that allowed me to observe and reflect on their process of learning. In this study, although the philosophical pedagogy was designed to draw out aesthetic dimensions of teaching and learning through its existential collaborative approach, the results were not of the animated sort that I had hoped to discover, and this finding surprisingly became a fertile source of unexpected development in my thinking. Through my study with these two groups, then, I was able to challenge and enrich my thinking by putting into practice my theoretical ideas about aesthetic dimensions of learning and teaching.

Several main ideas and conclusions that I feel are important came out of my study. I have presented these in a 'cumulative deductive sequence' below.

### 5.1.1. Arts Learners

#### Implications of Findings

1) *Aesthetic experience* has qualities of embodied, spontaneous, free-flowing organic openness; it is an expansion and animation of one's whole being that is accompanied by feelings of wonder, awe, appreciation, and gratefulness

2) *Genuinely engaged learning* has qualities of being "wide awake," open, organic and free flowing; it is expansive and animated and is accompanied by a sense of wonder, curiosity and "being alive"

3) *Aesthetic experience* is not limited to arts but arises potentially from anything or any situation; nature, sport, hiking, food, daily sights and sounds such as the view of a field on a drive to school, unexpected sights or experiences, collaborative performance such as choral singing or jazz playing, and many other examples, are cited as giving rise to aesthetic experience

4) *Genuinely engaged learning* can arise potentially from or in any experience

5) *Aesthetic experience* is not itself primarily intellectual, yet its characteristic sense of wonder invites and opens us to a fully holistic open understanding that is itself expansive and free in its organic development

6) *Genuinely engaged learning* begins from a point of curiosity, wonder and openness that *leads* towards full holistic open organic understanding

7) Aesthetic experience and genuinely engaged learning possess similar qualities and characteristics

8) Therefore, *when learners are genuinely engaged, learning itself is aesthetic*

9) Our capacity for aesthetic experience and genuinely engaged learning can be inhibited through over-emphasis on technical or instrumental aspects of education and teaching that are employed without connection to fuller human purpose

10) Academic learning, as well as traditional arts education, puts too much emphasis on instrumental or technical competence and fails to reveal the reasons why technical competence is valuable or necessary

11) The over-emphasis on instrumental or technical learning, and lack of opportunities for more organic, engaged and aesthetic learning experiences, means that school not only is often dull and routine but also actively blocks and inhibits vibrant, animated aesthetic learning

12) As with education, society over-emphasizes the instrumental and technical aspects of living so that life is routine, numbed, dulled, robotic and mechanical

13) Many people are trying to break out of this robotic lifestyle but habit and routine have a strong hold in the form of resistance to and even fear of change

14) The rootedness of robotic and routine dullness in society has created societal fear of the unknown, and this fear results in the need to box-in and narrowly define human life and human meaning

15) A key quality of aesthetic experience that constitutes it as authentic is openness to the unknown or unfamiliar. Such openness invites freer and more expansive exploration of thought and feeling about the “higher, deeper, human” side of life. This quality is in stark contrast to societal fear of the unknown

16) Societal fear of change and of the unknown, and its consequent restriction of human meaning, result in a dismissal of aesthetic and artistic experiences and their value in education and in human life

17) Yet in its core qualities, aesthetic experience and aesthetic learning offer a bigger truth for humanity as well as an authenticity of fully integral holistic human experience that would enliven and expand education and enlarge our living

### **5.1.2. Educators**

#### **Implications from Findings**

1) The meaning of aesthetic experience is different for the group of educators than it is for arts learners

2) The group of educators *as a whole* demonstrated a persistent confusion about aesthetic experience, linking it sometimes with an analytical, critical or interpretative experience yet gravitating at other times toward connecting it with a more natural, spontaneous, embodied, organic, uninhibited, uplift or enlargement of experience that the arts learners characterized

3) This confusion of perception and conception of aesthetic experience seems to be directly related to influences of post-secondary education on educators

4) Educators’ own accounts of their experiences in post-secondary arts education reveal a ‘taboo’ around the discussion of emotion or feeling as important to arts

5) Additionally, educators recognize a social 'taboo' in our capitalist and consumer driven society that rejects the value of emotion and feeling in human life generally

6) The societal rejection of the emotional and vital value of aesthetic and artistic experience, educators assert, is rooted in society's rejection of emotion as meaningful or significant in daily life

7) The educators' dialogues reveal not only opposition and confusion over the term *aesthetic experience* but also a lack of open questioning and exploration of what aesthetic experience might mean; the majority of the group were unsure about what aesthetic experience is, yet afraid to openly say so

8) The educators' dialogues also reveal a notable lack of personal illustrations, examples and experiences of aesthetic or artistic experience, with the exception of some few participants. This lack connects to the strong resistance expressed and shown by the group of educators as a whole to both the exploration of aesthetic experience and to the practice of open-ended dialogue, in spite of weekly encouragement to relate and connect personal experiences to philosophical quotations

9) It seems reasonable to infer that the fear of openly exploring either personal experiences of an aesthetic nature or the meaning of aesthetic experience seems to be rooted in educators' own experiences of post-secondary education, which has fragmented and disconnected them from their own aesthetic experiences, emotions and feelings, and ultimately from their own uninhibited subjectivity

10) This fragmentation and disconnection results in a lack of ability to enter into uninhibited, free-flowing open exploration and learning in dialogue. *It is, I think, extremely noteworthy that not once did the explicit question 'what is aesthetic experience?' arise in the group of educators.* The closest any members of the group came to this outright question was in a few tentative admissions of uncertainty by a couple of participants, which were not picked up on or followed through with any depth in dialogue. In contrast, this explicit question formed and continued to be the overriding quest of the arts learners throughout their study.

## 5.2. Findings as Related to Theory

At the beginning of my thesis, I stated the need for an effective long-term change of education in the form of its vital and crucial enlargement. Now, nearing the end of this work, I can only hope I have enriched the meaning of that word *vital* so that it rings and resonates vibrantly in our inner molecules to underpin our meaning of the word *aesthetic*. I hope hearing or reading the word *aesthetic* and the phrase *aesthetic*

*experience* brings a synchronous resonance with the word *vital*, as well as with the words *alive*, *curious*, and *open*, to name a few. And I hope all twine together in an image of incarnate animated engagement that is not only significant to learning but, I claim, crucial to it. Such change of imaging in what we mean by 'learning' and 'education' is desperately needed for our future generations and for the dignity of humanity.

Yet nurturing this kind of *aesthetic learning* and *teaching* is no small or short term task in our modern society. Brookfield (1995) writes and teaches about the way in which larger societal paradigm assumptions carry over into our educational systems and schools. Sir Ken Robinson (2010) suggests that society's shift into the Industrial Age and the influence on industrial models of education is one of the primary reasons why the majority of educational experiences remain routine, mechanical, dull and uninspiring. On the other hand, Ivan Illich (1971) suggests a reverse order in which our institutions of education have had a profound effect on how we think and act in society. He urges us to release ourselves from institutionalized learning and move toward a liberating and more natural way of socially and communally rooted learning.

However we do it, all three of these people and many others in education agree that we need a liberation of learning, and that liberation is perhaps in our identification of an aesthetic dimension in how we learn when we are relaxed and engaged. Aesthetic experience is characterized by an embodied, spontaneous, free-flowing organic openness. These qualities echo many educational theorists, Dewey, Whitehead, Greene, Eisner, Freire, and Lonergan to name a few, who describe learning that is alive, organic, rhythmic, and open, evoking in us that vibrant sense of wonder, curiosity, and awe. As the findings point to, it seems that genuinely engaged learning *is aesthetic*. It was my aim in this thesis to explore the significant role of aesthetic experience in learning, and now I come full circle to unite the two terms in a new phrase, *aesthetic learning*. Of course, this phrase extends equally to pedagogy and the need for animated aesthetic teaching.

In exploring this connection between aesthetic experience and learning, I used philosophical pedagogy and dialogue, both of which have illuminated important ideas for the effective long-term change of education. Dialogue as a way of learning, for instance,

I believe offers tremendous potential for *aesthetic learning*. The Brazilian scholar, J. F. Duarte, Jr. (2000), has this to say about the aesthetic ‘way of seeing’ as compared to the practical ‘way of seeing:’

The practical way of seeing the world is oriented by questions such as ‘what can I do with this?’ and ‘what advantages I can take from it?’ On the other hand, the aesthetic way of seeing does not interrogate, but lets flow, allows the meeting between one sensibility and the forms that configure in it, emotions, memories and promises of happiness (p. 103).

Here we see the idea that the aesthetic way of seeing “lets flow” and “does not interrogate.” Brazilian professor Rita Gomez (personal communication, January 18, 2015)<sup>20</sup> suggests that the aesthetic and artistic in education contributes to “the flourishing of our subjectivity. ‘Lets flow’ and ‘does not interrogate’ allows that that which is daily and constantly silenced has space to come out” (n. p.). In an aesthetic way of seeing, the ‘silenced subject’ is allowed to emerge. Dialogue can also be seen as an aesthetic way of seeing. The goal of dialogue, as Bohm (1996) intended, is to engage in spontaneous and free flowing exchange of ideas: “the collective effort is on the flow and spontaneity of the talk” (Gomes, 2015, n. p.). The mood and intent is not one of interrogation in the sense of picking apart but one of questioning that encourages an enlarged and open growth in holistic understanding, a meeting of subject-to-subject, heart to heart. In my study with the arts learners, this flow of dialogue was readily seen. As the arts learners themselves claimed, their silenced aesthetic selves were allowed to emerge in an academic setting, and that opportunity for uninhibited, free open learning was one they longed to have more of. The arts learners felt strongly that education needs to be much more in this ‘aesthetic way of seeing’ than it normally is now.

Such a free and open way of being, of learning, requires trust. It requires trust in others in a way that society does not encourage. More often, in our capitalist and consumer driven societies, competition and achievement heavily outweighs trust and the ability to be vulnerable with one another, as Herbert Marcuse (1964) makes so apparent. Likewise, as the group of educators revealed, in this societal atmosphere, emotion and

<sup>20</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Gomez for her kind consideration of my work, as well as for her thoughtful translation of Duarte into English and her sensitive and intelligent reflections on his ideas.

feelings are often taboo, and so it is a huge undertaking to ask students to be vulnerable in their experiences of learning (T3 16). As a vehicle for long-term change, dialogue asks just that. It asks us to be vulnerable and invites us to trust each other in the vital sharing of viewpoints. Like jazz music, we must trust “and appreciate each other’s unplanned contribution to performance” (Shaw, 2002, p. 164). Free and open aesthetic learning thus is a vast and adventurous challenge to status quo systems of education and societal ways of being.

The trust that dialogue requires is not only trust of others. It also requires us to trust in ourselves and in the spontaneity and free flow of our curiosity, our questioning, and our thinking. Bohm (1996) visualized a purposeful understanding, and the ‘purpose’ of ‘purposeful’ relates and alludes to the process of dialogical understanding itself. In Bohm’s vision, this process is an enlargement of personal and collective understanding. In allowing for a free flow of questions and ideas, differences in perspective can be shared and gradually understood in a sort of ‘third space’ (Bhabha, 1995). But to get to that point of differences being shared, each person must first trust in their own flow of learning: the rising up of curiosity, of questioning, of thinking. The group of educators, as we saw, especially at the beginning of their study but throughout the whole of it, demonstrated much anxiety and difficulty in trusting in their own flow of thinking, as well as in each other. In fact, two members initially wanted to take notes during dialogue as way of helping them formulate their ideas and ‘take in’ what others were saying. So, trusting in our own process of learning, in its inherent aesthetic vital openness, is something that we seem to have lost in our instrumental and mechanized society.

The idea of learning as a process, indeed as an aesthetic process, leads me into the philosophical pedagogy that I used in my study and the important ideas that emerged from it for the effective long-term change of education. In the broadest sense, this philosophical pedagogy helps us to come to a new vision of learning as a process and of teaching as a vital illumination of this process for and with our students. Ultimately, it helps us come to a new vision of the aims of learning and teaching. It helps us, I hope, to change the orientation and ethos of education, to change what we mean, what we feel and imagine and think of, when we say the word *learning*.

When I speak of learning as a process I am thinking of the contrasting view of learning as a 'product' of knowledge, as Freire's (1970) 'banking' concept of education brings out. In this 'product-oriented' view, knowledge is the product of learning, where 'learning' is strongly associated with a depositing and accumulation of information. This still-dominant view of education is in contrast to the view of learning as a process. As a process, learning is spontaneously associated with a "flourishing of our subjectivity," in which the dynamic unfolding of curiosity, questioning, and thinking occur as an embrace of our vital subjectivity and in that mood of engaged-wonder that the arts learners described. As they brought out, when learning is seen and felt as an accumulation of knowledge, emphasis is placed on technical competence (without deeper purpose or meaning), on testing, achievement and evaluation, and there is a mood of 'performing or displaying our knowledge' for others. The arts learners recognized this pattern in their academic classes in contrast with their arts classes. Further, the group of educators were inhibited by having to expose themselves and confessed to being anxious at times about not knowing enough when it came to discussing arts and aesthetic experience. Yet, as A. N. Whitehead (1967) declared, "a merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth" (p. 1). The purpose of learning, he felt, is not to be well informed, not to be a storehouse of information.

Philosophical pedagogy, then, helps us to realize that the purpose of learning is the process itself. This study and its findings give us much to consider about that process. Just as dialogue aims at purposeful understanding that is open, emergent, holistic and cumulative, so our inner process of learning has that same inherent orientation and aim. Echoing some of the findings from the arts learners, we can say it is circular, expansive, open, holistic, striving for expansive understanding and thinking. Our meaning enlarges with each encounter, each glimpse of an idea, each new thought, so that the dynamic character of our learning is revealed to us. This somewhat lengthy quotation from Lonergan (1997) on learning<sup>21</sup> provides a helpful mood and context:

Only by the slow, repetitious, circular labour of going over and over the data, by catching here a little insight and there another, by following

<sup>21</sup> Lonergan is recalling here his own experience of understanding the work of St. Thomas Aquinas on 'verbum' or 'the inner word,' the topic of his doctoral dissertation in the early 1930s.

through false leads and profiting from many mistakes, by continuous adjustments and cumulative changes of one's initial suppositions and perspectives and concepts can one hope to attain such a development of one's own understanding... (p. 223)

These words might help us come to visualize and imagine and think of learning as a dynamic vibrant aesthetic subjective reality, a circular ongoing process inherent in us and not simply an end result. In the field of the arts, there is likewise the tendency to view arts as merely finished artistic products: the painting, the song or symphony, the performed dance, the sculpture, and so on. Few people, I believe, spontaneously think of 'art' as the process, the vital process that leads to the final product. The group of arts learners had a deep instinctive appreciation of their work in the arts as being a *process*, since it formed and informed their daily lives. Likewise, they cherished the dynamic experience of expansive aesthetic learning that occurred for them during the dialogue study, just as the group of educators, after years in educational systems and wider societal life, felt intimidated and threatened by it. It seems, then, that in and through education we somehow need to make this aesthetic dynamic dimension of our learning more apparent.

Philosophical pedagogy aims to do this: to make our dynamic learning process luminous to ourselves. More than that, it aims to help us discover the vital aesthetic quality of our dynamic learning process. I am thus attributing the qualities of aesthetic experience that enliven us to the enlivening vibrant subjectivity of our meaning-making itself. At the core of our vibrant meaning making is curiosity, the untiring drive of our "primordial 'Why.' It is that tension, that drive, that desire to understand. This primordial drive is, then, the pure question. It is prior to any insights, any concepts, any words. Name it what you please – alertness of mind, intellectual curiosity, the spirit of inquiry, active intelligence, the drive to know. Under any name it remains the same, and is, I trust, very familiar to you" (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 34). It is our lonely wanting, our *longing*, which takes me back now to the reason for my use of the phrase *aesthetic longing*. The dynamic 'Wow' and wonder that the arts learners spontaneously associated with aesthetic experience, is their own core longing, their primordial 'Why?' and 'What?' that lurks in our molecules even before words are formed. Think of a baby in a high chair, pointing. There is in the baby, even before language has been achieved, the light

of an inner questing, “the spark in our clod” (Lonergan, 1971/1990, p. 103), the wonder that Aristotle claimed was the beginning of all science. With language, it bursts forth, as Helen Keller discovered, in endless untiring questions. To give this primordial drive the name *curiosity* is to identify in our selves the core of our humanness.

Many educational theorists in the field of critical pedagogy speak of the significance of our curiosity, realizing its vital role in our learning and in our human growth, particularly in our adult human growth. It is, likewise, a key quality of aesthetic longing or aesthetic experience where a sense of wonder and openness is evoked. Scientist David Bohm (1996/2004) speaks of an artistic spirit, a scientific spirit, and a religious spirit, each of which are particular manifestations of a fundamental drive of curiosity, present in us as human beings. To overcome our fragmented view of our selves, he feels we must come to know how these different manifestations of curiosity twine in us. His desire is that we begin to realize and understand their fundamental unity and harmonious working within us:

Long before the scientist is aware of the details of a new idea, he may ‘feel’ it stirring in him in ways that are difficult or impossible to verbalize. These feelings are like deep and sensitive probes reaching into the unknown, while the intellect ultimately makes possible a more detailed perception of what these probes have come into contact with. Here, then, is a very fundamental relationship between science and art, the latter evidently must work in a similar way, except that the whole process culminates in a sensually perceptible work of art, rather than in an abstract theoretical insight into nature’s structural process. (p. 46)

Bohm echoes many educational theorists. John Dewey, A. N. Whitehead, Bernard Lonergan, and Maxine Greene, to name only a few, cherish our inner drive and dynamic of curiosity that brings us alive, wakes us up. We hear Paulo Freire (1996) at the opening of his final interview: “If you ask me, Paulo, what it is in being in the world, in you, that calls your own attention to you, I would say to you that I am a curious being.” At the close of the interview, he comes back to this statement:

I am now 75 years old, and sometimes when I am speaking like now I am listening to Paulo Freire forty years ago. Maybe you could ask me, but Paulo, look, but then you think that you did not change? No, I changed a lot! I change everyday! But in changing, I did not change, nevertheless, some of the central nucleus of my thought, the understanding of my own

presence in the reality. ...How for example, could I change the knowledge or the *experience* which makes me know that I am curious. No, I was a curious boy and I am a curious old man. That is, my curiosity never stops. Maybe in the last moments of my life, I will be curious to know what it means to die. (5:54-7:32)

It is Freire's curiosity, as with many other significant and influential thinkers, artists, and scientists in the world, that vitally *drives* his continual growth and change. Aesthetic learning unleashes and lets flow the inner dynamism and drive of our primordial curiosity, or wonder, as the arts learners appreciated.

Kevin: That's one of the things about the aesthetic, is that it's unscripted. It's kind of like the one unmanufactured thing that we have in such a materialistic society and that's the beauty in it, is that it isn't manufactured

Erin: I think that's why you can experience it in things that aren't artistic too, because if you really connect with something like math or science or gym or horse back riding or anything like that, it just depends on what you find meaning in, I think... and then once you connect with something you're more likely to have an aesthetic experience with it... (T3 3)

As Freire asserted, curiosity is the one central nucleus that is constant in our growth and learning throughout our lives.

Similarly, Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset (1930/1985) describes curiosity or wonder as foundational to adult human growth:

To be surprised, to wonder, is to begin to understand. It is the sport and special pleasure of intellectual man. The specific trademark of his guild is to gaze at the world with the wide-open eyes of wonder. The world is always strange and wonderful for wide-open eyes... The man who lives by his intellect goes about the world in the perpetual intoxication of a visionary. His particular attribute: the eyes of wonder, of amazement. (p. 5)

Yet society is based very strongly on the strange norm of adulthood as a settling down. This notion is so pervasive that we actually are *expected* (and so learn to expect ourselves) to lose our wonder, our sense of awe, of excitement and openness and quest. In fact, the words carry a 'fluffy' aura in the academic world. And we are pushed from many directions to focus less on this reality of who we are and much more on the need to 'settle down,' to be financially responsible, to be 'successful' with a well-paying

job, a home, a car, all the material things that spell security in our Western world. We are told to 'pay attention' in school, we are pressured to achieve, to get 'good grades' in order to have better opportunities in an economically driven world. The controlled routine world of schooling with its schedules and classrooms and containment of wonder only reflects the controlled world of economic survival with its job schedules and offices and containments. Not surprisingly, despite rapidly growing neuropsychological evidence to the contrary, "a strong everyday belief about the brain is that its organisation will be found to be supremely logical with its parts in place like those of a well-engineered machine" (Benson, 2001, p. 32). Our lives in this post-modern social and educational world seem not to be in a dominant spirit of alive, questing and open curiosity. Hence, the group of arts learners' conclusion that aesthetic experience is considered "too good to be true" (T2 10) for most people.

In these recent centuries, we have constructed systems of education that are meant to nurture and honour our human longing. Again, I would ask you to reflect on the various physical environments of schools, classrooms, hallways, gymnasiums, buildings, and school grounds: how do you *feel* when you are in them? How, in what ways, do these environments speak to us, whether we are students or teachers, administrators or staff? Do they nurture our longing for the aesthetic, for the expansive uplift, the free openness, the wonder, curiosity, awe, exhilaration? As architect Mark Dudek (2000) realizes, "children 'read' the landscape of school and see powerful, often negative, messages 'written' in its tarmac spaces" (p. 111). Again, as one participant from my study with the group of educators reflected about school buzzers:

Bob: ... It's pretty abrupt, you get it, like school starts, recess, recess ends, lunch, lunch ends, you know, and then you have after school, and announcements [*voicing in abrupt tones*], but even in that, the purpose of that, is that sound to call kids to attention, the utility of that, the aesthetic of that, just looking at that, and um I think for me, what is the purpose of that buzzer? Is it affectively working in these kids where everyday they feel like they're running and walking through life and having this aesthetic experience and all of a sudden 'darr' [*buzzer sound*] and they have to go to the classroom, um, I question, it brings up questions about that... (T3 14)

Do these spaces and places offer an environment that lifts our experience and supports our deep-rooted aesthetic longing and curiosity? The question is an open reflective

question, not a matter of shoulds and musts, but a question of how, in fact, does *this* school affect the inner sensibility, the wonder and longing of its occupants?

Education is the home for our dynamic aesthetic drive of wonder and curiosity, but the design and architecture of school buildings and environments may not feel much like home. As we heard briefly in chapter one, the French philosopher and phenomenologist, Gaston Bachelard, has much to say about spaces and our inner worlds. In his book, *Poetics of Space* (1969), he thoughtfully and creatively examines different types of spaces and the psychological associations of them in our inner lived experiences. Nests, for example, he says, are images of places that evoke deep feelings of security. “Would a bird build a nest if it didn’t have its instinct for confidence in the world?” (p. 104). Our own house thus becomes a symbolic extension of a nest in the world. What about school buildings where we spend nearly a third of our lives, and sometimes much more? Do schools provide us with a sense of security and confidence in the world, a security that could liberate our longing of questing openness?

As school architect Mark Dudek (2000) notes, concerning the development of urban schools during the 19th century, “spaces for education, while necessary, were seen as being secondary to the delivery of ‘instruction’...” (p. 11). Even today, Dudek’s research shows that while teachers and administrators will find social and practical reasons for valuing the design of outdoor school space, “the aesthetic value in and of itself carries little weight” (p. 101). Yet it is clear that the role of architecture and space in the exterior and interior design of schools “takes on a more profound psychological significance than simply the machine for learning in” (p. 38). School spaces speak to students and teachers and all who use them, and, as Gunther Kress (2010) recognizes, the effects of their physical-spatial ‘signings’ should not be underestimated:

Many signs we encounter are in three-dimensional form... In the reception of [these] sign[s] the materiality of modes intercepts with the physiology of bodies. We engage with the objects represented... not only through the modes of image, writing, colour, but also in actual or imagined ‘inner’ mimesis through touch and feel, scent and smell, in action – imagined or real. (p. 76-77)

Again, both the arts learners and educators spoke of their aesthetic responses to classrooms. We already heard in chapter four these words from Sean:

Sean: when we were talking about the aesthetic as something more real, we could just look at this room. Things are square, things are not aesthetically pleasing; they aren't real. In nature, nothing's square; things are round and are different shapes that we don't even have names for, and that seems to be what was aesthetic to me. So aesthetic experience was more how, um, how the visuals around you impact how you're feeling about different experiences... when people are outside with nature, it's completely different than being in a square room (T1 4)

And in this exchange between group members in the educators' first dialogue session, participants (discussing Scruton's ideas of beauty) had these comments about their own learning environment:

Charles: The architecture he brought up too was like the ugly architecture was that super 60s and 70s modern architecture... which is what SFU looks like! [*some laughter*]

Anthony: I can't handle this room though I have to say... I still can't wrap my brain around this... I always thought this room was in the middle of construction but someone told me that someone wanted it to look like this...

Charles: It's like *Trading Spaces* –they got a bad designer....

Anthony: Remember that show??

Paul: But are you thinking if someone thought this is beautiful?

Anthony: I did think that, because someone wanted the room to look like this... or it wouldn't look like this anymore...

Charles: It's probably more to do with you know like being utilitarian with the resources they had... (T1 14)

It should not be surprising, then, as Illich (1971) appreciated, that our feelings, thoughts and ideas could become as controlled, contained, detached, and scheduled as the school environments in which we spend so much of our time. We need a major cultural and educational shift to begin to recognize and respect the real connection of school spaces to our emotional and psychological fullness and wellbeing and to the role they play in nurturing the core of our inner aesthetic of learning.

The aim of a philosophical pedagogy, then, is to restore a profound dignity and worth to words like *wonder* and *curiosity*, and begin to feel their incarnate reality in our educational relations. As Martin Buber (1958/2000) eloquently states, “The primary word I-Thou establishes the world of relation” (p. 21), while the primary word I-It leads to a kind of closed wisdom. “How self-confident is that wisdom which perceives a closed compartment in things, reserved for the initiate and manipulated only with the key. O secrecy without a secret! O accumulation of information!” (p. 21). As the study with the group of arts learners illuminated, collaborative learning in an atmosphere of openness and uninhibited questioning is itself aesthetic. The aliveness of being wide-awake (Greene, 1995) is characteristic of aesthetic experience just as it is characteristic of genuinely engaged learning.

Philosophical pedagogy nurtures our own appreciation of *how* we learn and not just what we learn. Based on Lonergan’s (1957/1992) unique method of self-appropriation, philosophical pedagogy is an intimate personal appropriation of our own aesthetic and dynamic process of learning. It aims to go beyond the instruction of philosophy and toward the engagement of philosophy as an existential activity. In this ‘double-edged’ approach, experiences of learning are personally appropriated as *an integral part of the learning experience itself* and as a means of encountering, comparing and contrasting other theories of learning. “The aim is not to set forth a list of the abstract properties of human knowledge but to assist the reader [learner] in effecting a personal appropriation of the concrete dynamic structure immanent and recurrently operative in his own cognitional activities” (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 11). This pedagogical approach by its very nature must be gradual and take place through “a slow assembly of its elements, relations, alternatives, and implications” (p. 11). As the two studies with arts learners and educators hopefully have shown, though only as a beginning, philosophical pedagogy can affirm for us that the aim of learning is not the end product of an accumulation of knowledge but a vital appreciation of our constant circular dynamic and aesthetic process of learning.

### 5.3. Limitations of the Study

**Arts Learners:** One of the limitations of my study with the group of arts learners was the overall shortness of the program, being six weeks in length. While I managed to complete all the aims and requirements for the study, it was a short time frame in which to be introducing major ideas to the students: the topic and practice of philosophy of aesthetics, as well as the practice of dialogue and philosophical pedagogy, an unusual way for students to learn compared to their 'normal' academic courses. Added to this timeframe limitation was the further limitation of actual meeting times, which as noted earlier were fit into a one-hour block between classes, with pressure on students to arrive quickly after their previous class and leave promptly for their next class. Also, the space we used (a large music practice room) was sometimes occupied in the previous class time, and we sometimes had to wait for stray students to collect their instruments.

Another limitation of the study was my inexperience leading in dialogue and implementing my program of research for the first time. This limitation meant that it took me and us as a group a couple of sessions to begin to get into a rhythm of practice. As a result, the exploration of the early philosophical quotations could have been more in depth.

One further limitation arose from the fact that the study was 'an extra' for students and not part of their regular curriculum or schedule. This situation meant that any reading or thinking outside of the study put extra pressure on the students in the midst of already very busy schedules; almost all of the students were approaching graduation. For this reason, I felt constrained to limit the amount of work I asked of the students to within our sessions, so I wasn't able to follow up with much contextualizing reading or reflecting. At least some background on the various philosophers, if not on their ideas as presented in the quotations, might have added to the depth of the study.

**Educators:** One limitation of the study with the group of educators rests on it being part of their required graduate course in aesthetics. This statement sounds contradictory to what I have just said about the arts learners and since the course setting allowed for the assignment of further reading and reflection. While I think such extra reflection would have been beneficial for the arts learners, and was beneficial for the

educators as well, I also feel that the post-secondary classroom environment contributed to a large degree to the overall atmosphere of resistance from this group.

Further, I think I may have unwittingly added to the rather taut atmosphere from the way in which I began the study. I felt that it would be helpful if I could connect my first session with the students to their opening class, and so I chose an opening philosophical quotation that set up a somewhat contentious and oppositional atmosphere. In retrospect, I feel it would have been much more productive to have begun the study in the same way that I began with the arts learners, that is, by asking for unprompted existential reflection to the question *what is aesthetic experience?*

Finally, a relatively minor limitation of the study came with the lack of privacy for dialogue groups. Unlike the arts learners, who had small intimate music practice rooms to use for dialogue group discussion, the educators had to make do with hallway nooks or corners of the classroom or of the adjacent public student work area. These areas were sometimes somewhat noisy and exposed to public scrutiny, which might have limited the degree of openness the educators felt.

## **5.4. Future Directions**

One future direction that this study points toward is the use of dialogue in education as a collaborative means to aim toward purposeful and holistic understanding of issues and topics to be studied. As Bohm (1996) emphasizes, dialogue's aim of purposeful understanding re-orient us, and so has the power to re-orient education, in a general direction of open, holistic understanding rather than of fragmented opposition and argument winning. As I hope my thesis shows, the need for such open, holistic understanding is critical. In examining dialogue further, I would like to study the meaning and activity of *insight* in connection to the orientation of 'openness' that aesthetic experience raises and to what we might mean by the term 'purposeful understanding.' In my thesis, I have drawn on various theorists and philosophers who speak of the power of wonder and curiosity as the beginning and root of understanding, and my study shows that aesthetic experience connects us directly to the experience of finding ourselves in a stance of wonder and open curiosity. Likewise, I believe it can be shown that our

capacity for understanding has an innate purpose, which is openness. This relationship could prove to be crucial to a vital integration of the disciplines, humanities, arts, sciences, mathematics, and so on. Clarity on the act of insight as “a quite distinct act of organizing intelligence” (Loneragan, 1957/1992, p. 3) toward which we naturally and openly strive could reveal an unexpected unifying principle, closely related to ‘purposeful understanding,’ that literally holds together the disciplines in an organic holism.

Another possible future direction of study arises from the question of *how* to effectively and efficiently bring about change to our educational systems in actual practical terms. Loneragan (1971/1990) spent his final years devoted to working out this practical problem. His discovery of what he called *functional specialisation*, also called *functional collaboration*, is a method that rests on a radical re-visioning of how we go about our ‘doings’ in the academic and educational world (and indeed in our daily living as well). As its name implies, functional collaboration rests on a shift to a functional and collaborative organisation of *what we do* rather than on the traditional subject specialist classification.

As Bohm (1996/2004) points out in *On Creativity*, fragmentation is one of the central issues and problems facing us today. “But man’s essential illness today is his feeling of fragmentation of existence, leading to a sense of being alien to a society that he has himself created” (p. 37). Functional collaboration (Loneragan, 1971/1990) aims to overcome fragmentation by focusing on the specialized *tasks or jobs* that we carry out in the academic and educational world, rather than on the topics and contents (which become endlessly divided and sub-divided). These tasks are the practical and repetitive activities of: doing research, interpreting data, writing histories, and organizing opposed viewpoints. These first four tasks (research, interpretation, history and dialectic respectively) have their ground in the past and in dealing with the ideas, events and products of the past. Four further tasks are: visioning future foundations, revising policies, organizing new and old viewpoints systematically, and structuring the communication and implementation of new ideas for actual use in society. These second four tasks (foundations, policies, systematics and communications respectively) have their ground in the future, that is, in systematically figuring out how to effectively and efficiently implement the ‘best from the past’ in new present adaptations. Focusing on

these practical tasks as a way of operating offers an unparalleled opportunity for unity within in the educational (and global) community since it groups people according to their specialized function(s). It has the further aim and benefit of bringing together theory and practice and so uniting researchers, teachers and administrators in a wholly new collaborative vision. As a future direction, exploring functional collaboration and ways of implementation connects beautifully to dialogue and its aims, and it offers us a practical way to move forward with the ideas for change that arise from all of our various research efforts.

Another future direction emerging from my research is the topic of fantasy and the need to restore the meaning of this term to its former creative and constructive visioning of possibilities from the taboo “childish” undertones it has acquired (Lewis, 1961). Vygotsky’s (1994) work on imagination, especially with adolescents, strikes me as being important in this area. Change requires powerful creative imagination, and it needs the undergirding support of a sense of adventure for bringing about our own future human becoming (Stetsenko, 2012). As C. S. Lewis (1961) advises, “to have lost the taste for marvels and adventures is no more a matter for congratulation than to have lost our teeth, our hair, our palate and finally, our hopes” (p. 72). Aesthetic experience and artistic creation are powerful in their roles of enlarging our experiences of and openness to the previously unseen, unheard, or unknown and of striving for new possibilities in the range of human endeavour. Debussy’s words to Stravinsky make this point fresh and real: “For me it is a special satisfaction to tell you how much you have enlarged the boundaries of the permissible in the empire of sound” (Mitchell, 1966, p. 22). In beginning to shift our appreciation of learning towards its aesthetic dimensions, we could open up room for the dignity of creative fantasy in the adventure of being human.

Finally, the major issue of aesthetic experience in connection to universal notions of beauty is of particular interest to me. Collingwood’s (1938/1958) ideas in this respect are significant, and it would be beneficial to connect this question to the world of science, as David Bohm ventured to do in his work *On Creativity* (1996/2004). Briefly, while Collingwood rejects the Kantian enlightenment (extending back to classical Greece) notion of a universal beauty in things, it is clear that aesthetic experience is stimulated

by our encounters with the world around us. An area for further exploration that I would very much like to explore lies in the notion of the word “pattern” that Lonergan (1971/1990; 1993) uses in this respect. The vibrant aesthetic resonance we experience subjectively is in fact a particular neuro-molecular patterning within us that responds to the perceptual patterning of, for instance, colours in a painting, sounds in music, fields among mountains or ocean waves on shores... In other words, there is a patterning in things that is material and perceptual (rather than universal or ideal). The field of neuroscience is important here. Moreover, our perception alone of such patterns is not enough to create aesthetic experience. The vibrant uplift of aesthetic experience in response to such perception is connected to the subjective and intersubjective *meaning* each person, or set of people, brings to an experience. Thus, the ocean vista that is aesthetically moving for one person may be completely unmoving for another person. So perceptual patterns in things give rise to perceptual patterns in us that either are or are not aesthetically uplifting, depending on the meaning we bring to them. Exploring the notion of *meaning* as *mediating* our encounters with arts and the world strikes me as a relevant and exciting future direction of study.

## **5.5. Implications for Educational Practice**

My thesis gives rise to a number of implications for pedagogical practice. First, then, it seems that there is a move toward and a major benefit to be had from visioning education in a longterm evolutionary perspective. This evolutionary perspective achieves two aims: one, we see ourselves as Stetsenko (2012) describes, as “humans [who have] come to be and come to know – each other, themselves and the world – while transforming their world and, in the process, while collectively creating their own life and their own nature, along with their society and history” (p. 148); and two, our evolutionary vision of ourselves gives education a larger purpose and meaning beyond the instrumental world of economic work. As a new vision, it relies on aesthetic fantasy to imagine new possible ways for us to be in the world, ways that are concretely and materially different that they are now. In this ethos, students and teachers alike can begin to realize the value of our aesthetic learning and meaning in the world as contributing to our own ongoing future.

Second, teaching ought to include an 'embedded' philosophical approach that invites and allows students to consider not only *what* they are learning but *how* they themselves learn. If as educators our aim is always to move toward a more genuinely engaged learning, then it helps us to know what that engaged learning 'looks like.' As teachers, this new pedagogical philosophy invites us to appropriate the aesthetic dimensions of our learning. What we are speaking of is not an add on or an extra. Rather, our recognition of aesthetic longing should be the recognition of an integral constant drive and flow of wonder or curiosity that is at the core of our engaged, vibrant learning. Aesthetic experience and arts are not only a medium for the expression of feeling. Again, aesthetic experience is not only an education of feeling ("not *how* to feel, but *to* feel," as one of the arts learners remarked - T6 11). Much more broadly, recognizing an aesthetic dimension in our genuine engaged learning has the potential to lead us into expansive animated ways of teaching and learning, ways that invite us to a holistic process of understanding that, as the arts learners felt, is "deeper or higher" in nature than merely instrumental ways of learning. Further, as Debussy appreciated about Stravinsky, our appreciation of aesthetic learning "enlarges the boundaries of the permissible" in our educational systems and in our possibilities of being human.

Third, we need new collaborative ways of learning and of working together as teachers and administrators to bring about change. It is only through collaboration that we can begin to confront problems of fragmentation that exist in education. Not only is there a sense that students are 'lost' amidst disconnected subject areas, but as my study with arts learners and educators shows there is also a sense that our learning itself is fragmented and disconnected from our animated subjective home. Collaboration can help us work to implement aesthetically envisioned changes on both educational and social levels and to challenge the status quo.

Fourth and finally, as teachers I hope we can become alive to our own and our students' aesthetic vibrancy, to the freedom and liberty of consciousness (Lonergan, 1993) that is our spontaneous orientation in the world, so that we can begin to teach in a way that illuminates this aliveness of curiosity, these rhythms of questing, for and in our students. "For there is an intellectual desire, an eros of the mind. Without it there would arise no questioning, no inquiry, no wonder" (Lonergan, 1957/1992, p. 97). Again, "to

restore passion to the classroom or to excite it in classrooms where it has never been, professors must find again the place of *Eros* within ourselves and together allow the mind and body to feel and know desire” (hooks, 1994, p. 199). Restoring passion in ourselves, re-animating the aesthetic open desire to know that is always lurking within our within, is my fondest desire for our educational systems and indeed our world in the next few centuries.

Through philosophical pedagogy and dialogue, we have the hope of discovering for ourselves the epistemological truth of Freire’s (1996) statement, “I am a curious being.” In these modern times, our arts reflect our living. As one arts learner observed, “especially just in the last recent 50 years, it’s shifted from the whole realistic, idealistic point of view to... it’s almost like... looking at a bunch of stuff that’s morbid, interpretistic .... I think art has taken a very big shift into the strange, *and that takes us back to the whole unknown aspect, that there is such beauty in something we aren’t really sure about...*” (T5 22, italics mine). Wherever we are headed, we can head there in deep reverent appreciation for our aesthetic longing and its profound orientation in our learning and our lives, opening us to the unknown. Perhaps we can restore a sense of mystery in a strange world. Perhaps we can begin to imagine and conceive of our educational desires in an evolutionary vision that embraces the human dynamic process of aesthetic curiosity and aesthetic learning as the one constant: in ourselves, in others, and eventually in our global educational systems and our societies. I hope my work has contributed in some small way to such a vision.

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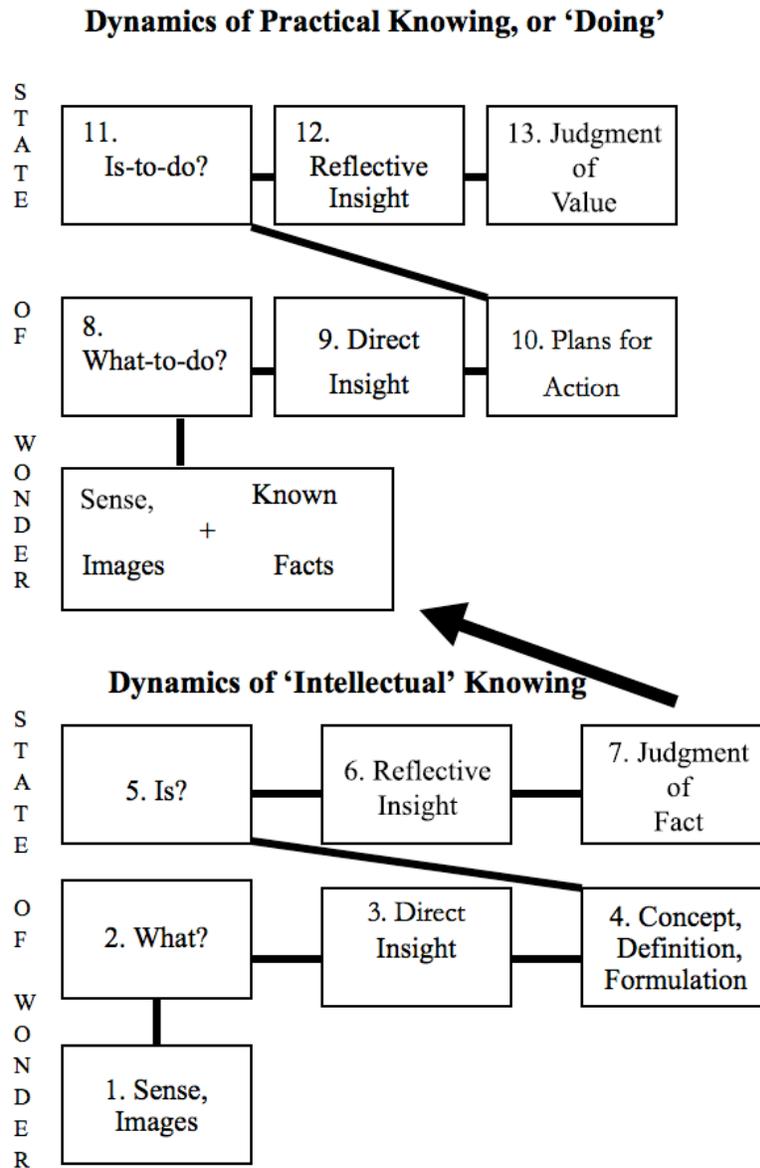
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## Appendix A.

### The Dynamic Structure of Our Wonder\*



\*This image is adapted from one drawn by Bernard Lonergan during lectures he gave in 1957 on phenomenology and logic. It is reproduced in his collected works: B. Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic. Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Vol. 18*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001 (Appendix A). The act of 'decision' is not featured in this particular diagram since it brings in complex further questions of 'the will' and willing. The image is representative of what Lonergan designates as elements of consciousness, the verifiable concrete foundation of a new scientific metaphysics of proportionate being.