


Editorial



For at least two thirds of the 20th century, art was considered a separate discipline in education, and what constitutes art, who should produce art, and what art means were predicated on formalist conceptualizations (Broudy, 1972). According to Broudy, and others who endorse a modernist perspective, the aesthetic experience is derived from exposure to exemplary works of art. This limits access to art, experience with art, and the potential of using art forms in everyday life for mediating understanding in different ways (Eisner, 1991). This perspective has had a longstanding impact on how art and education intersect. The advent of postmodernism, or belief in multiple realities, inclusionary practices, and relational ways of being and knowing, has changed and continues to change the concept of art and its relation to education. Dewey's (1934) notions, that art is connected to everyday life, and that aesthetic experience is derived in the doing of art and what it reveals in the process, have been dusted off the shelf and gained an increasing foothold in schools, preservice teacher education, and research. These ideas have been bolstered by the realization that learners have multiple intelligences and ways of communicating (Gardner, 2000), some of which are better suited to certain learners than others, and by the increasingly visual and digital world in which we live. We have come to an exciting moment where in many places art is functioning as a way of reflecting on, understanding and representing thinking and values, and as a way of opening up spaces for social action and change. The very interesting and compelling articles in this issue illustrate the immense potential that exists when art and education meet in stimulating, varied, accessible and embodied forms and practices.

We are honoured and privileged to have commentaries from Maxine Greene and Elliot Eisner, two visionary and eminent scholars who have made an astounding impact on education and the arts in both schools and research. Greene touches the reader with a plea and poignant excerpts from artists, urging us to open

our imaginations to the possibilities of an aesthetic education that unites, engages, and awakens the senses to the “wonders of appreciation.” Eisner posits eight maxims for how education can improve by learning from the arts. He argues eloquently and persuasively about the inextricable fusion of form and content. He highlights the importance of nuance and surprise, and the need for savouring through the senses and argues that the arts push the limits of language, value intuition and embodiment, and above all, open up the imagination.

Leggo, a poet and education professor at the University of British Columbia, Prendergast, a faculty member in the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences at Lesley University, and Boyle, a musician and Ph.D. candidate in education at McGill University, show the power and magic of poetry and music. From very different vantage points, we glean as both readers and listeners, the special nuances of experience that their messages reveal.

Grugel and Thomas each show how art can create sites for community outreach and new understanding. Grugel, who is a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin, shares the work she did with elementary students as coresearchers in documenting the creation and sustenance of a community garden. She and the individual children each collected photographs of their experience of developing and maintaining their gardens, and then used the pictures in discussions together to elicit their thoughts and ideas. The equality they experienced being coresearchers, the proximity they felt with nature as a result of their work, and the new understandings they gained by using photography empowered them and made them more reflective about themselves and attuned to their natural surroundings. Thomas, a professor at the University of Prince Edward Island, discusses an integrated arts inquiry approach she uses with preservice teachers in conjunction with local community artists. Her work shows the transformative nature of art, and how this form of inquiry opens up space for critical thinking, and creates powerful avenues for social change.

Hafeli and Bourassa both work with adolescents. Grenier is an honour student in the International Baccalaureate program at Heritage Regional High School in St. Hubert, Quebec. Hafeli describes the visual arts course she teaches during the summer at SUNY in Brockport, New York. She makes a compelling case for relinquishing a primary focus on the technical, formal, and perceptual functions of art, and concentrating on the narrative aspects of students’ lives and the meaning this holds for them in their art forms. She argues that engagement, critical reflection, and increasingly sophisticated works of art develop when the personal, social and cultural worlds of the students are welcomed and embraced in art. Bourassa is at Heritage

Regional High School where she teaches English and dance. She reminisces vividly about her own school experiences and how these, coupled with 30 years of teaching, have helped her to make her “classroom a studio” and her “studio a classroom.” She describes, with compelling visuals, the way she embraces multiple ways of doing and knowing in her high school English classes, and promotes inclusive and collaborative approaches so that all students take risks, enjoy and learn in her dance courses. Grenier discusses her experiences at Centauri Summer Arts Camp where she has been involved in theatre, dance, photography and film with other adolescents from around the world. She discusses how the aesthetic experiences at camp not only teach the campers new skills, but also “release the imagination” (Greene, 1995) and create a special connection among the group in what is an atmosphere of safety, honesty and creativity.

McKay, a Ph.D. student and part-time instructor at the University of Alberta, describes how she uses performance, in this case readers theatre, to bridge the boundaries between reading and drama, engage her preservice teachers, and show how literacy learning can extend beyond the goals of fluency. She examines the pedagogical underpinnings of readers theatre and provides some helpful guidelines for introducing it into the classroom, illustrating how it enhances learning, deepens reading response, and motivates students.

Leitch, Troussas and Uhrmacher, Dillon, Myer, and Norris all use various art forms with preservice teachers and teachers to tease out values and assumptions that form teacher identities and raise critical awareness and understanding, or narratives of the self. Leitch, a senior lecturer at Queen’s University, Belfast, uses “self-boxes,” any form of box-like container, that are decorated and filled with each teacher’s visual artwork, poetry, artifacts and other memorabilia and represent important facets of their lives. The engaging act of making the self-box and the subsequent dialogue and sharing with others can “stimulate re-conceptualizations” that have an impact on both individual and collective teacher understanding and development. Troussas, a doctoral student, and Uhrmacher, a professor, both at the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, use what they call reflective art inquiry—a three-part process that involves imaging, reframing and enacting. The teacher participants form an image in their minds then translate it into some material medium such as collage or Play-Doh, then discuss their art form with each other, and finally react to both their products and processes. These authors show with individual cases how the unconscious is brought to consciousness through the art medium, and in some instances change is initiated as a result. Dillon, a professor of education at McGill University, describes how he uses Forum Theatre with his students. Forum Theatre is

an art form created by Boal (1979), which is used as a vehicle for community social action. The process includes dramatizing a controversial event and then improvising possible interventions, thereby bringing social action possibilities to the fore. They build the dramas around personal, everyday experiences in which they have felt oppressed. These reenactments have revealed an increased level of consciousness, albeit largely at an individual level, and a high level of engagement. Dillon suggests that to build on this to develop critical pedagogy and group-oriented approaches for social action, students also need to be immersed in community projects and service learning initiatives that are strongly committed to social justice. These are important considerations for planning or revising teacher education programs. Myer, a recent Ph.D. graduate from McGill University, describes how in a qualitative study on bullying and other forms of harassment in schools, she used found poetry, the process of taking participant words from transcripts and transforming them into poetry, to distill and portray succinctly and poignantly the narratives she had constructed from her interviews with a number of teachers. She suggests that the personal and professional identities of teachers play an important role in how they perceive and react to harassment incidents and patterns in schools. Found poems help to preserve and nuance concisely the complex aspects of identity, while retaining the “signature” of the particular participant. Finally, Norris, a professor of education at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, shows how by building on the notion of multiple intelligences, he has encouraged his graduate students to choose from a variety of art forms accompanied by a “metacognitive log” to use as a vehicle for developing their topics of inquiry for his courses. He argues that involvement in art making enhances their understanding of the course. The learners amalgamate course content, media, previous knowledge, and skills coupled with creativity as they translate their ideas and course material into new forms. He uses their process and products as an authentic form of assessment that is powerful, insightful and student-owned. The added value of these manuscripts is how all authors have made their processes transparent, so that their approaches are readily adaptable to other educational contexts.

Gannon is a senior lecturer in education at the University of Western Sydney in Australia, and Davis is a collage artist from Montreal with an M.A. in education from McGill University. Both use art in self-study. Framed by the Prime Minister Rudd’s formal apology speech to Aboriginal Australians in 2008, Gannon articulates her “sorry story” by revisiting her first teaching experience as a white and “unqualified” teacher at an Aboriginal school in remote Australia. Using biography and visual art she is able to both reconstruct her memories and then deconstruct them to show the silencing that occurs among invisible “Others” when “whiteness” reigns. Davis explores the history of collage and suggests the powerful way the juxtaposed

fragments and reconfigured whole change perception and bring tacit understandings to the surface. Through five poignant and compelling collages, she pulls the viewer through the agony, ecstasy, and irony of our media-driven society and its exertion on bodies, self-image, women, and in particular anorexics, suggesting how arts-informed methodologies open possible spaces for “learning and healing.”

It is appropriate to end this issue with the work of Bresler. She is a musician and professor at the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who has pioneered much work in merging education and the arts in schools and research. She suggests how the process of producing art, in this particular case music, mirrors the inquiry process in many important ways. Thinking metaphorically about inquiry as music, she eloquently describes ways for ascertaining how researchers shape, and are shaped by their research. An “aesthetic inquiry” changes the nature of the work, the relationships formed in the process, and what is revealed. Her lens for inquiry provides an interesting avenue for looking back on this issue of LEARNIng Landscapes, and looking forward to imagine new possibilities.

L.B.K.

References

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