AESTHETICS, THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION, AND THE PROCESS OF SCHOOLING

by

CLAIRE AMY SCHULTZ

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty in the Curriculum and Instruction Program of Tift College of Education at Mercer University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Macon, GA
2017
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Dr. H. Anne Hathaway, the toughest teacher I have ever had.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout my time in the Mercer doctoral program, I have been fortunate to have been surrounded by some of the most incredible professors and classmates. There are many who have been instrumental in helping me move forward through this project and the program. Dr. Vincent Youngbauer has offered his unwavering support and, without his guidance, this work would have been left in a taxi several times. His time and, more importantly, confidence in me as a student and teacher is unequivocal. Thank you, Dr. Youngbauer, for being so cool and understanding.

I would also like to especially thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Andrew Grunzke and Dr. Lucy Bush. Both offered their time and support throughout this project. I appreciate Dr. Bush joining my committee after the very sad and untimely passing of Dr. Anne Hathaway. I appreciate your willingness to help me to the end of this journey.

Additionally, I would not be here without the support of my family. First and foremost, thank you to my parents for supporting me unconditionally throughout my life. Mom, thank you for being my biggest advocate, and Dad thank you for always helping me to get back up when I fall down. To my sister, Jeanne, thank you for reading countless drafts and bits of this work throughout these years. Your edits and advice helped me think more deeply about what I wanted to say and how I should say it. And thank you to my brother Michael for giving me the best advice at the beginning of this
long and strange trip: If you are going to eat a whale, you have to eat it one bite at a
time. And now I am so full I cannot stand it.

Finally to Peter, my life partner, and Preston, my son, thank you! I know standing
by me through this was not easy, Peter. Thank you for remaining by my side through the
thick of it to see this through to the other side. And Preston, thank you for being a
constant source of joy in my life and always reminding me to not take myself too
seriously. I love you both.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Aesthetics</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antiaesthetic</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodern Viewpoint</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Context</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 POSTMODERNIST AESTHETIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Aesthetics</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodernism and Aesthetics</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Education, Curriculum, and Instruction</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Dissertation</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unraveling the Problem</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Methodology as Bricolage</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricolage</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutics</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
 Critical Hermeneutics .................................................................49
Cultural Studies ........................................................................51
Methodological Bricolage in Action ...........................................52
Participants ............................................................................52
Data Collection .......................................................................55
Research Strategies ................................................................55
Surveys ..................................................................................55
Interviews ...............................................................................57
Data Analysis ...........................................................................58
Summary ..................................................................................59

4 FINDINGS .....................................................................................61
Procedure ..................................................................................62
Data ..........................................................................................64
Surveys ....................................................................................64
Learning in School versus Learning out of School ..................65
Personalized Curriculum .........................................................68
School and Education ..............................................................69
Interviews ..................................................................................70
Economic Concerns .................................................................70
Relevance of the Curriculum ....................................................72
Familial Pressures ....................................................................74
Personalized Curriculum .........................................................74
School and Education ..............................................................75
Data Analysis and Theoretical Discussions .............................75
Economic and Financial Concerns ..........................................76
Commodification and Fetishization of the Arts ...........................78
Division of the Disciplines and Relevance ...............................79
Conclusions ...............................................................................81

5 FURTHER DISCUSSIONS ................................................................84
National Endowment for the Arts ..............................................84
The Process of Schooling and the Purpose of Education ............86
Process of Schooling ..............................................................86
Purpose of Education .............................................................87
Technology and Education ......................................................88
Curriculum Theory Model .......................................................91
Model Name .............................................................................91
Model Definition .................................................................91
Historical Context .................................................................92
Aims .......................................................................................93
Knowledge ...............................................................................95
The Learner .............................................................................95
Learning ..................................................................................96
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Rhizomatic conceptualization as root system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Rhizomatic conceptualization as neurons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Rhizomatic conceptualization as threads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Hermeneutical approach visualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Visualization of the effects of standardization of schooling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

CLAIRE AMY SCHULTZ
AESTHETICS, THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION, AND THE PROCESS OF SCHOOLING
Under the direction of VINCENT W. YOUNGBAUER, Ph.D.

In the American education system, approaches in schooling methods are closely tied to pragmatic and positivistic theoretical paradigms, relying on universalized and generalized curricula, where the performance of an individual is displayed in quantifiable terms. High-stakes testing and other quantitative performance measures limit pedagogical practices and curriculum theory, resulting in the economy managing curricula. A purpose of this qualitative research project is to initiate and contribute to a conversation about the purpose of education and the process of schooling. This study developed a theoretical framework with aesthetic and antiaesthetic lenses to examine students’ perceptions of schooling and education.

The process of schooling and the purpose of education are discussed in this research through a hermeneutical heuristic in the context of the developed theoretical framework of aesthetics. Data were collected using an open-ended survey instrument. Follow-up interviews with participants helped to clarify some of the responses from the initial survey data.

The results of this research indicated that the student participants conflate schooling and education. Economic concerns were most prevalent in the data collected,
suggesting that the purpose of education and the process of schooling are for the narrow purpose of obtaining employment. This research examines this link and offers insight to shifting the curriculum theories that drive the current trends of pragmatism and positivism in education toward an aesthetic viewpoint.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Don’t be seduced into thinking that that which does not make a profit is without value.”

Arthur Miller

After a long Wednesday of teaching, I took part in a 504/IEP eligibility meeting and parent conference for a student. This student has an interesting and dynamic background. She struggles in her classes and is failing most, including the art class that I teach her. The student was not present in the meeting, only her guardian. The school counselor, her case worker, a school district psychologist, her English and math teachers, and I sat around a school conference table in a stuffy and small room in oversized rolling chairs that add to the feeling that the space is closing in on you. The fact that the furniture is not proportional to the size of the room always gives me the feeling of an Alice in Wonderland-type experience where the furniture is growing and you are shrinking. Schools always seem to have many things that do not quite fit; in this situation: The room, its furniture, this student, these teachers and other stakeholders, and what was said in the meeting just did not seem to fit either.

I arrived a few minutes late to this meeting because on Wednesdays I make time to stay after school to offer more studio time for my Advanced Placement (AP) students. I do this because the counselors, who create the master schedule for the school, schedule my AP students to meet with another class. This, they always tell me, is because my AP
numbers are so small it would be impossible to have them meet on their own time. This annual discussion that I have with the counselors, in which I insist that these AP students are being shortchanged always has a great deal of subtext. They would never, no matter how few students, insist that the AP calculus students meet in the same class as the algebra students. I deal with this type of situation year after year and this year seems to be the worst. My AP class meets with one of my lowest achieving, unmotivated, Art I classes. The counselors refer to Art I classes as a “dumping ground.” The student whose parent conference I am attending happens to be in this class.

As I entered the room, the counselor introduced me to the guardian and other members present. I apologized for running late and had a seat in one of the oversized rolling chairs around the table. This table would probably comfortably seat six people seated in chairs proportional to the room, but there we were, all seven of us in this meeting squeezed around the table. I could not even enjoy the chair’s swivel function because I would knock into the people sitting next to me.

Generally, the conversations regarding this student’s school performance follow a similar pattern: she is very smart, she is capable of doing the work and achieving at higher levels than she is currently. This student, as I mentioned before, has a pretty turbulent personal history. She was taken away from her parents because they were using drugs, put into a group home, and finally placed with a foster family and recently was in court petitioning for the adoption process to remain with the foster family. She moved to the high school where I teach in the middle of the year and has had a difficult time adjusting and finding her place. The teachers around the table discuss some of the issues dealing with her classroom disturbances, off-task behaviors, and aggressive
confrontations she initiates with teachers and other students. The math teacher and I agreed and both shared anecdotes with the others around the table about some of the progress she has made in being able to manage some of her emotional outbursts in our classes. This student has yelled in my face and walked out of my classroom—for nonsensical reasons—several times. Over the course of the year, we had developed a rapport and I could better sense if she is having a terrible day and on-edge emotionally. She has a better handle on her temper and will ask to step outside if needed. While the English teacher did not have similar news, the guardian and others seemed relieved to hear of the slight improvements.

As these meetings usually progress from the general to the more specific, each of the teachers responded to questions from the counselor, guardian, caseworker, and psychiatrist each of whom want to extract a more precise understanding of what was going on in each of our classes. The math and English teachers both gave examples of their curriculum and how the curriculum was tested.

Then I started to speak. In meetings like these, I feel like I am having an out of body experience when I work to describe the differences of visual arts curriculum from what they are hearing from the other teachers. At a point nearing the end of the meeting, the student’s guardian commented after I spoke, “Well, and I am not meaning to offend you” (gesturing directly across the table toward me), “but there are important, real world applications for what she is learning in math” (slow nods begin to show agreement from everyone around the table as I gently smile while clenching my teeth) “she is going to really have to know stuff like that to survive.”
At this point, I am just waiting for the meeting to end. I am not going to change any of these minds about what the arts curriculum is really trying to address or the reasons I believe learning an aesthetic approach through the production of art in my class would give her child the necessary means of appropriately applying the math concepts she feels are more important in real world situations. For over an hour, I was in this meeting, and like many others I have been a part of before, I left frustrated, sad, and confused about what people—including not only parents, but other teaching professionals—think about visual arts curriculum in schools.

Multiple Aesthetics

Appropriations of words and phrases are perhaps inevitable, but something that I encounter often, as an art teacher, is the narrow application of the ideas of aesthetics and art. Aesthetics is a perspective that, if moved from the margins of art education, has the possibility to impact education, curriculum, and theory in a constructive manner. This research explores the idea that aesthetics is a debased approach to viewing and understanding the world. More specifically in the context of education, aesthetics has a marginal existence. In modern human existence, aesthetics are an important, yet underrepresented and possibly underdeveloped, approach and framework of understanding. Reframing curriculum and instruction aesthetically and moving away from the positivist and pragmatist approaches that focus on educating for economic purposes could impact the quality of people shaped by American schools.

This study seeks to gauge the level of understanding students have of the relationship between education and schooling, and whether they feel their time spent in school supports this understanding of the relationship. To discuss the purpose of
education and schooling in this way, I have developed a theoretical framework of aesthetics and examined its relationship to postmodern philosophy. By defining art and aesthetics and further discussing the role of visual arts curriculum from my perspective, I will detail how the students’ voices I collected and studied relate to the established notion of aesthetics. Modern American education is often viewed as an institution in need of a fix, and approaches are many times based on ahistorical ideas and data. This research hopes to produce relevant and historically conscious material to better discuss the issues facing education and add critical contributions to the conversation.

Art

Contemporary notions of art tend to conflate meanings and disregard the historicity of the term to provide a polysemous blanket of appropriated uses. The general and accessible definition of art is the product of expression according to aesthetic principles (Art, n.d.). Within the complex notion of art, there are a variety of modalities and forms this product is able to manifest. The unwieldiness of the term makes delineating art a subjective affair that is further problematized through the industrial age of reproduction (Benjamin, 2008) and technological advances in digital reproduction. Ancient Greek philosophers began the subjugation of the idea and the role of art as a lowly imitation of an imitation that was untrustworthy (White, 2009). Concerned with absolutes and truths, Plato’s concept of art was one that relied on perfection and ideals of beauty (White, 2009), so it could not be a medium of truth (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007).

For Kant (1790/2010) art or the beautiful was the representation of a universal satisfaction. The notion of art for Kant is one of a universal effect with universal validity (Kant, 1790/2010), a concept and effect that are dismantled through a postmodernist
understanding of the term. Kant’s work distances reason from feeling, a preemptive idea to the opposition of science and art expressed in Romanticism (White, 2009).

Hegel (1807/2010) emphasized further the polemic positioning of art and science and maintained the idea of beauty as a primary concern for art. For Hegel, art was a means of truth telling, and the more beautiful an object the more truthful it was (White, 2009). Hegel’s (1807/2010) work inscribed a type of religious authority in the idea of a work of art positing, “now in art-production God is just as operative as he is in the phenomena of nature” (p. 550). Art’s divine existence expressed in Hegel’s work draws an interesting parallel to the historic role the visual arts play in representing interpretations of religious texts created by artists.

The aesthetic principles on which contemporary definitions of art rely (Art, n.d.) indicate a type of structure that while not specifically defined, function as ahistorical uses of the ideas of Plato, Kant, and Hegel. Grenfell and Hardy (2007) indicated a “modernist narrative would see art in terms of movement toward refined expression and technique, the uncovering of the muse, and the social function of art” (p. 51). Art in the modern era, especially the art and artists produced by the Bauhaus school expressed a type of visual reductionism focused mainly on refined use of techniques (Janson, 1977). Bourdieu (1984) also articulated this emerging modernist concern with the social function of art in his work on social capital. For Bourdieu (1984) art was a corporeal experience and “by default, something which communicates, as it were, from body to body, like the rhythm of music of the flavor of colours, that is falling short of words and concepts” (p. 80). From a Marxist perspective, art is a reflection of social conditions, mainly economic concerns (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007), and Bourdieu (1984) explained, “that is why art and
cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences” (p. 7).

Issues of language and meaning also become a concern with the delineation of the idea of art or a work of art. Understanding art as a type of cultural symbol and language with logical and psychological meanings (Langer, 1959) creates space for individuals to create their own patterns of meaning. Meaning is a function, a pattern created of relationships (Langer, 1959). Langer (1959) discussed issues of misapplied meanings to symbols, including works of art; however, a postmodernist cultural theoretical perspective would address these not as an issue, but as a position on a spectrum, and understanding that the patterning is an effect of the individual’s experience with political, cultural, and economic relationships (Pinar, William, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008).

Adorno (1991), concerned with cultural consumption, viewed art as “its own material and forms the technique of reproduction and presentation, actually a technique for the distribution of a real object” (p. 64). And similar to Bourdieu (1984), Adorno (1991) viewed art as something that can become a type of cultural organizer as a product of the culture industry “yet, at the same time, art denounces everything institutional and official” (p. 117). Art then, is a broad and diverse system that relates and reflects specific social conditions of political, religious, and cultural ideologies to communicate, at best, subjective experiences though a variety of modalities. Greene (2001) and Eisner (2002) both advocated for educational experiences through and with art to develop and expand imaginative capacities. Greene (2001) regarded the arts as experiences that will enable “learners to notice what is there to be noticed” (p. 6) and create various meaningful patterns of knowledge.
The production of art seems to be the most widely used example when describing an aesthetic experience (Dewey, 2005; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995, 2001; Langer, 1957, 1959). Considering Langer’s (1959) positioning of the concept of art as a type of language symbol and the issues that may arise through variations of interpretation or patterning, the effect on the aesthetic experience must be discussed. The postmodernist notion of art conflates the concepts of low and high art (Pinar et al., 2008) and shifts art’s existence toward that of a continuum.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics is a term that is often used casually to describe the feeling that a room has or the way something may look to a person. Art historians and art critics frequently use the term to describe a particular style or movement in art. As a schooled artist, I have used it to describe and draw comparisons between my works and others. As a noun, aesthetics is commonly defined as a branch of philosophy dealing with judgments of beauty, judgments concerning a work of art, and the study of the mind and emotions and their relations to beauty (Aesthetics, n.d.; White, 2009). As an adjective, the term aesthetic concerns itself more with the relationship to philosophy, senses and judgments of beauty, and is often described in opposition to pure intellectualism (Aesthetics, n.d.). The Greek term, aisthētikós, from which the modern aesthetic is derived, is generally interpreted to mean dealing with the nature of sensations (Aesthetics, n.d.; White, 2009). The term aesthetics also seems to encompass that of the notion of art (Aesthetics, n.d.).

These uses of the term have become normalized and accepted and work to shape the ways that limit or narrow the potential this word may have. These understandings of the term aesthetics position the meaning as a binary, opposite of intellectualism, and only
capable of dealing with one thing or notion at a time such as beauty or judgment. And even though the archaic meaning is open to the nature of sensations, there is no normalized accepted understanding of the term that approaches the intrinsic interrelatedness of the cognitive functions, which produce multiple patterns that are required to produce a judgment. Philosophers such as Kant and Hegel concerned themselves with the final and universalized judgments as the aesthetic act instead of being concerned with the way in which individuals arrive at a place where they can make a judgment. The pattern making, the connections to and between ideas, forms, and feelings that can be conceived abstractly, as in theory, or in concrete ways with physical objects is also discretely inscribed in aesthetics. This work hopes to express aesthetics emphasizing the ontological significance of the term that is articulated on a continuum.

Kant and Hegel both discuss and structure the notion of aesthetics as a type of process resulting in a creative work and grapple with reconciling universalized values through subjective judgment making and taste or free play (Grenfell & Hardy, 2007). Contemporary philosophers (Eisner, 2002; Green, 1995, 2005; Langer, 1957) move the idea of aesthetics away from a universalized existence and toward one of experiences. Most notably, Greene (1995) and Eisner (2002) discussed the importance of the production of art in the aesthetic experience, minimizing the role of aesthetic applications in other areas. Aesthetics, like art, may be better understood on a continuum or in Deweyan terms as experiences of appreciation, perception, and enjoyment (Dewey, 2005) and those that are not limited to engagements with art.

Aesthetics, as a notion viewed on a continuum, turns the focus away from the universalized Kantian idea of judgment toward the activity of pattern making (Greene,
1995). Understanding aesthetics as a type of process in which the particulars of the pattern matter deemphasizes the final notions of judgment (Kant, 1790/2010) or idea of taste (Hegel, 1807/2010) and refocuses the concept around the pluralistic forms of knowing (Green, 1995; Eisner, 2002). The types of patterns and varying arrangements of patterns an individual can create do not just exist freely, but instead are linked and produced by the effects of discourse on a crisis of representation (Pinar et al., 2008).

Antiaesthetic

Later, I will argue the existence of an antiaesthetic in educational curriculum and curriculum theory. This idea is not a binary opposition to that of aesthetic, but instead it is also situated on the spectrum of the aesthetic. This idea of antiaesthetic is based off of the Deweyan notion of the anaesthetic (Dewey, 2005). Dewey (2005) described the anaesthetic as that which makes an individual numb or anesthetized in experiences. The idea of antiaesthetic is similar to, but more of an effect of, limited variations of pattern making achieved through standardization. The standardization of schools, teaching practices, and testing limits the accepted variations of patterns that may be produced by individuals. Moreover, the standardization of education also limits the situational context of the types of patterns that are implemented in schools, teaching practices, and testing.

Positionality

Approaching this research, it was important to consider my researcher positionality and the ways in which my connections to the text and situation are situated. Historically, a hermeneutical approach was intended to produce a type of empirical understanding especially when used as an approach to interpret the words of God for religious audiences (Kinsella, 2006). It was not the intention of this research to produce
answers especially empirical in nature, but rather it is to be understood as a voice of a concerned and critically aware educator raising questions concerning contemporary approaches to educational curriculum and curriculum theory. My background, while colored with biases, is a feature that helps me understand and know things in ways that are unique and situational.

Raised in south central Louisiana in the eighties and nineties during a time when conservative footholds were reshaping the normalized political ideologies, it was difficult to exist as liberally minded as I am now. Political, economic, and religious conversations are frequent topics around any dinner table in the South, but in my childhood home, these conversations tended to express different concerns than homes of friends I would visit. My mother was a public school teacher when I was growing up and is now a principal of a public elementary school in south Louisiana. My father was a lawyer and in the early-nineties was elected judge and has remained on the bench since. Concerned with the quality of education in public schools at the time, my parents opted to send all three of their children to private schools. My formal educational experiences have almost exclusively occurred in private, religious schools. I was enrolled in a public kindergarten and then began first grade at an Episcopal school. In sixth grade, I transferred to the middle school of the same organization. After finishing eighth grade, I moved to a Catholic school and graduated high school from there. While the schools I attended differed in religious orientation, they had many similarities. They were all small and each prided themselves with the missions of addressing specific student needs, having involved parent organizations, and creating climates and cultures of high student achievement, so typical prep schools. Generally it seems that private schools serve as a
continuation of segregation. My experiences draw attention to this issue and are part of how I now understand economic conditions and an individual’s relationship to knowledge.

As an undergraduate, I attended a women’s college. Also, a small private school, it too was proud of the small class sizes and individual attention students received. This experience had a tremendous impact on shaping my personal worldview. There, I formally studied studio art and art history, and I was also able to take extensive coursework on philosophy and feminism. As a feminist, often I find myself in situations in which people condescend this viewpoint. As a public school teacher, there are times when I am seeking to make a point about issues of equality or highlight uses and productions of institutionalized sexism, racism, or classism that have to be at best rethought and at worst unsaid because there are still many who would feel that is outside my scope to address as an art teacher. Students often make pejorative remarks about feminists and those generally serve as daily reminders that this approach and examination of women and marginalized groups’ issues (Olesen, 2011) is not a normalized life practice.

A feminist framework served to inform the ways in which this research approached and developed understandings through critical analysis of cultural objects and their meanings (Olesen, 2011) through a type of textual social analysis. Using feminism to inform my positionality is an inclusive design approach to “textual analyses of these objects and the discourses surrounding them” (Olesen, 2011, p. 133) in a context without absolutes. Researching from a place of postmodern feminist thought guided this critical inquiry in examining specific power relations and how an individual relates to knowledge
and knowledge production (Olesen, 2011). Finally, feminist thought also is concerned
with epistemological questions of knowledge and subjective realities in which “multiple,
shifting identities and selves are produced” (Olesen, 2011, p. 133) which allowed me to
understand the text and situations being researched from multiple places in my identity
and also the multiple identities of the text.

Growing up in a Catholic home and having attended Catholic high school, I have
some understanding about the ways in which religion, especially in the South, pervades
social conditions. As an atheist, it is often unnerving to reveal my beliefs. I have been in
professional situations in which my bosses have initiated Christian prayers and felt
uncomfortable and then made to feel as though the repercussions of reporting would not
result well. Slips of religion and religious ideology, especially Christian, seem prevalent
in the school where I work and, as an atheist, I do not think that I am afforded the same
type of tolerance to my purely secular approach to life, work, school, family, and
research.

Existing as a white, cis-female with a husband and son, who was privately
educated, creates a superficial crust of an un-marginalized lived experience. As
illustrated above, as a liberal, feminist, atheist I know what it is like to feel marginalized
by the dominant normalized discourse in the South. Approaching this research aware of
these areas of bias is intended to produce a more critical type of work. Using an
emerging critical form of these approaches will allow an examination and partial
representation of the intersectionality of power/knowledge relationships (Kamberelis &
Dimitriadis, 2005; Olesen, 2011) in which the visual arts and the notion of aesthetics find
themselves and their relationship to educational curriculum and curriculum theory.
Postmodern Viewpoint

To clearly articulate postmodern conditions is counterintuitive to the existence of the idea itself (Lyotard, 1984; Pinar et al., 2008). The postmodern perspective emerged as a theoretical response reexamining the positions espoused on totalized histories and subject of the self during the Enlightenment (Lyotard, 1984). Histories, perspectives, and the individual self dissolve into meaninglessness in the anti-foundational footholds of postmodernity (Pinar et al., 2008). Social bonds produced through language games give referential positioning of an individual and it is through a postmodernist perspective that existence is understood as a complicated work of woven fragments (Lyotard, 1984). Describing postmodernism is a problematic task because in establishing a hierarchy or ranking of ideas from a totalized perspective, there would be a return to the modern (Lyotard, 1984, 1986/2010; Pinar et al., 2008); however, for the purposes of this study, there is a need to describe the unique ways postmodernism deals with ontological, epistemological, and methodological issues.

Ontologically, it is through participation that subjective realities are constructed (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) and the advancement of technology that has made information itself tremendously accessible has replaced some of the traditional ways of understanding (Pinar et al., 2008). Human existence takes on pastiche crafted though referential experiences with information engendered with hegemony (Lyotard, 1984) in that realities are constructed with past information in a current representation where everything known was manufactured in problematic language (Pinar et al., 2008).

The relationship between the known and the knower is the resulting production of existing power relationships (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Subjective ontological
positionality is reflected epistemologically wherein subjective interactions provide access to experiencing and understanding the lived world (Guba, 1990).

Epistemologically, truth is relative, referential, and indirect (Lyotard, 1984) and experiential sensations are the foundational component by which an individual understands the world (White, 2009).

Methodology in postmodernism relies on democratic participation between the researcher and the subject (Lincoln et al., 2011) and may take the form of any variety of appropriate qualitative approaches. Qualitative inquiry’s rejection of a universal research methodology allows the researcher to use discretion to select an appropriate method, given the context of the research (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2011).

Historical Context

Postmodernism is a theoretical paradigm “whereby the subject of the self is advanced and no objective truth exists” (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 468) and in understanding this theoretical paradigm it is necessary to examine the histories and the context by which it was initiated. The Marxist framework explored by the critical theorist of the Frankfurt School significantly impacted the epistemological and ontological conceptualizations described in modernism (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Lyotard, 1984). The work of the critical theorists relied heavily on Weber’s ideas of interpretivism and deemphasized the Marxist notion of economic determinism; however, the specific work of the theorist Adorno seems to pull the theoretical emphasis of the Frankfurt school back into the material world (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The economic determinism described in Marxist thought gives the critical theorists the means to ascribe cultural, social, and political ideologies to epistemology (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).
The neo-Marxist foundations advanced by the modernist group of critical theorists of the Frankfurt School align with the epistemological beliefs of the social constructivists who seek to understand the realities and falsities that perpetuate the status quo (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). From this modernist perspective, individuals are only able to examine themselves and others and the ways in which they are crafted through the ideological powers functioning to subvert or privilege types of knowledge (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Postmodernists move forward from this and seek to understand the embedded structural conflicts that function to privilege specific types of knowledge and situate power and knowledge as inextricably linked (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Lyotard, 1984; Pinar et al., 2008). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) described the work of the critical theorist Adorno as verging into the postmodern position, noting his shift away from simply understanding toward unseating ideological powers by retheorizing relationships between the material and conceptual. For Adorno, the problem exists in the representation and he formulated an idea of negative dialects to help negotiate individuals and their relationship with production while preserving the tension of the phenomena (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

Currently, education in America is overly reactionary in the implementation of curriculum and instruction. This can be observed in the effects of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Race to the Top initiatives. These government programs generalize, decontextualize, and anaesthetize the curriculum and the educational experiences of students and teachers. From this view, education and curriculum are antiaesthetic and while curriculum theorists such as Pinar (2012) advocated for a
reconceptualization of curriculum theory, there is still space to shift educational practices toward a more aesthetic approach.

Pinar (2012) advocated for curriculum theory to be relative or autobiographical where curriculum acknowledges the historical, political, social, and cultural articulations of the individual. Holistic, but not universal, approaches are needed to align education as an aesthetic experience. Callejo Pérez, Breault, and White (2014) extended Pinar’s (2012) work into discussions about the physical spaces of education, but still more work is needed in understanding the ways in which the system produces and reproduces the antiaesthetic that continues to suppress the transformative powers (Greene, 1995) of individuals.

Although there is ample criticism of postmodernist thought as being fragmented and disorienting, even schizophrenic (Pinar et al., 2008), it allows researchers to borrow or bricolage (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) systems of analysis and interpretation across all disciplines to meet the specific needs of the project. Further problematizing the task of delineating postmodernism is a woven or rhizomatic appearance as illustrated in Figures 1, 2, and 3 (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/2010); however, this appearance functioning as the intermezzo or middle and in the process of becoming is an important idea to me as a researcher. Conceptualizing existence as a rhizome and plateaus of tension “with no culmination point or external end” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975/2010, p. 1459) places no pressure on my work to have direct and specific answers, but only to illuminate situations to help individuals exist more democratically in their relations to knowledge, culture, capital, and politics. The goal of this research is to open a dialogue on the ways that education can be reframed from an aesthetic perspective. The use of a postmodernist
framework allows for my discussion to touch on everything in very particular ways that are critical and relational— aesthetic.

Throughout the process of completing this work, I have also explored the conception of the rhizome through various original illustrations. In *Figure 1*, the rhizome is expressed as a type of grass plant root system and is one of my first visual explorations of the idea.
In this conception, in the layer below the surface, the root system represents the fragmentation of the lived experience. Seemingly there is no beginning or end of the root structure. The roots in this image produce shoots that break through the surface and move upward in the composition. This representation indicates the varying ways the
fragments can be assembled. The blades of grass that are above the surface of the ground represent the varying discourses in operation.

*Figure 2* is a subsequent drawing that I rendered when I was exploring some of the ideas about technology and artificial intelligence (AI) explored later in this work. It is also a rhizomatic conception developed based on representation of neurons. It is less organized, interpreting the chaos of the interactions of the particulars.
Figure 2. Rhizomatic conception as neurons.

Figure 3 was drawn closer to the end of this project and represents the rhizome as threads moving back and forth in space.
Figure 3. Rizomatic conception as threads.

Drawing each of these images helped me to understand and better communicate my ideas in this research. Each drawing represents a different point of understanding and movement through the subsequent research and all are varying interpretations of the connectivity of the ideas in this work manifested by differing contexts.
Statement of the Problem

There is no profit here. The value of this work may never be noticed because it is always in process. From within the process, it is difficult to know the value of the outcome. Aesthetics and the aesthetic experience can in no way be a predictive product. Creating a research study framed with the following theoretical lens created a type of friction. The research that proceeds is in conflict with the theoretical framework assembled because aesthetics and aesthetic theory has undeterminable effects. Fitting this study into this theoretical framework was a pragmatic decision to be able to finish the requirements for the degree. However, it should be understood that I understand the parts that create this whole are very speculative and exist with great friction.

With all of this in mind, this qualitative research study was designed to collect the perceptions of students pertaining to the purpose of education and the process of schooling. Current trends in education focus on pragmatic and positivistic approaches to teaching and learning. Understanding how individuals perceive the purpose of education and the process of schooling, both macro and micro leadership in the field can better support student learning outcomes and tailor curricular decisions to individuals instead of creating generalized and universalized curricula.

This research studied the perception of students’ conflation of the concept of education and the process of schooling. Student-participants understood schooling to be education and their education as schooling with little understanding of the purpose of education beyond that of getting a job. This economic concern is discussed in this work related to curricular decisions and curriculum theory.
Additionally concerning is the swift movement toward a post-human AI age in which automation and AI have significantly reduced or eliminated the need for human laborers. This shift in the economic landscapes presents a challenge to the belief held by students that school and education are necessary to get a job. There is a need to review the purpose of education and the process of schooling in the light of these advancements in technology and the evolving economic landscape.

Research Questions

The specific research questions this study illuminates are:

1. What are students’ perceptions of the purpose of education, and
2. What are students’ perceptions of the process of schooling?

The following research first sets out a theoretical framework of postmodernist aesthetics and developed aesthetic and antiaesthetic lenses through which to examine current practices in schooling and the beliefs of participants about schooling and education. Surveys and interviews generated data, which were collected and analyzed to create a space for discussion about the beliefs of the participants pertaining to school and education.
CHAPTER 2

POSTMODERNIST AESTHETIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“Let’s begin with the past in front and all the things you really don’t care about now, I’d be exactly where I’m at.”

Ween

Theoretical Framework

One might imagine that as a high school art teacher my days are filled with aesthetics and aesthetic experiences; however, aesthetics is only a minor part of teaching and learning in visual arts, in my experience. Also, the existence of visual arts is a marginal one outside of the core academic courses. While one of my goals as a teacher is to create meaningful art-learning experiences situated theoretically in aesthetics, my efforts seem thwarted by what I view as the antiaesthetic that pervades educational discourse in a multifaceted and multi-tiered manner.

As an art teacher, I feel misunderstood by many colleagues, administrators, and even the public at large about what I do in the classroom. Professional developments (e.g., meetings and seminars) that I have been required to attend often do not directly address arts education and instead emphasize core subject areas. Other teachers have made comments to me such as, “just give them a paper and tell them to draw a duck” or “what are y’all doing today? Cutting up and gluing paper?” The lesson plan template that I am instructed to use by administrators that was developed at the district level makes little sense for documenting plans for a subject with a performance-based curriculum.
have had more than one student in my career communicate emphatically to me that what
they were being required to do in art class did not matter, and that they did not need this
class to graduate. Dealing with these issues is difficult and I have come to realize that
they are issues probably generated from a history imbued with political, classist, and
religious ideologies that have shaped the concept of art and aesthetics.

Traditionally, from a Western perspective, aesthetics is conceived as a
philosophical branch discussing sensory values (White, 2009). Framed in this way,
influential theorists such as Kant and Hegel have discursively impacted contemporary
understandings and the use of aesthetics in ways that subjected its existence and
structured it with political, religious, and classist ideologies. While some of the work of
the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School managed to expose and discuss these issues,
it is my hope to continue the conversation and (re)present aesthetics.

Theoretically my position is one of a speculative postmodern, profoundly
influenced by the decentered, rhizomatic conceptualizations (Deleuze & Guattari,
1975/2010) of time, space, and information as viewed in Figures 1, 2, and 3. A
postmodernist theoretical framework epistemologically allows for and understands the
plural, and occasionally incommensurable, new sources of knowledge and is inclusive of
various modalities of understanding (Pinar et al., 2008). The inclusive design allows for
critical examinations of multifaceted contextual issues that could not possibly be
qualified against each other elsewhere (Pinar et al., 2008). Moreover, the postmodernist
conflation of high and low art and culture discredits the concepts of hierarchy and taste in
aesthetics (Pinar et al., 2008). This framework outlines aesthetics in several specific
critical moments to better understand present conceptions and uses of this theory with the
hopes of contributing to the understanding of the impact of antiaesthetics and advancing
the current conversation on aesthetic education.

History of Aesthetics

Noted philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and Hume have shaped axiological
concerns of aesthetics, which has in turn shaped how the modern understanding of
aesthetics has been subjugated by the natural sciences and designated as a lesser branch
of philosophical understanding (White, 2009). While Kant and Hegel’s work is
important to understanding the theoretical lineage of aesthetics, the Greek root aisthetikos
meaning “of sense of perception” offers an understanding of aesthetics untainted by the
structural interpretation offered by their work (White, 2009). The aesthetic, understood
in this archaic way, aligns more closely with a reality or discourse of corporeality in
which the senses mediate the meaning-making process and there is a focus maintained on
the cognitive aspect (White, 2009). Although, even in Plato’s work there is evidence of
his beliefs on the untrustworthiness of the senses regarding the truth making process of
aesthetics, these earlier aesthetic concepts do not inject the ideas of sublimity, taste, or
beauty as integral to an aesthetic experience (White, 2009).

Cartesian influences shifted the aesthetic from the rational notions of the
Enlightenment toward idealisms elucidated by the work of Hume (White, 2009).
Aesthetic concerns began to grapple with the notions of taste and established structures of
aesthetic taste, which relied on human judgments based in feeling, essentially creating a
counter narrative to empiricism (White, 2009). Hume’s work was a critical turn in
aesthetic theory as concerns became fully impregnated with certain types of systems or
principles structuring the understanding of aesthetics (White, 2009). As discussed by
White (2009), Baumgarten’s work further indoctrinated these structuring systems by inscribing the notion of judgment in the concept of aesthetics. Baumgarten, similar to the work of his predecessors, narrowly used the term aesthetics for describing and categorizing notions of judgment while his contemporary Kant advanced the concept of aesthetic ideas inclusive of the judgments of taste dealing with the senses as well as the standard of beauty (White, 2009).

In contrast to meanings associated with the origins of the word aesthetics, Kant (1790/2010) argued aesthetics are concerned with the relation between the objects and the subjects and is not found in the specific features of the object. Kant outlined the three faculties of the mind: cognition, desire, and feeling of pleasure and displeasure (Kant, 1790/2010) and it is within the faculty of feelings of pleasure and displeasure the application to art is made. Kant’s discussions surround the subject-object relationship and his framework for understanding aesthetics exist in a universal and totalizing effect.

In Kant’s aesthetic work, he endeavored to distinguish between the relationship between the subject and the object and the relationship of the form to the object because the judgment of the aesthetic value, which he sees as a type of universal experience, exists not in the object, but in the space of the relationship. Kant (1790/2010) also made distinctions between the notions of good and aesthetic beauty. For Kant, the relationship an individual has to the object itself is significant and our existence is not delineated by the existing objects. He noted, “it is readily seen that to say that it is beautiful and to prove that I have taste what matters is what I make of this representation in myself, not how I depend on the existence of the object” (Kant, 1790/2010, p. 415).
Kant also discussed the idea of free play in his critique of judgment as being the role our imaginative mind has in an aesthetic encounter. For Kant, aesthetics is the link between human freedom and our physical involvement in the world (Kant, 1790/2010). Kant posited,

this state of free play of the faculties of cognition with a representation through which an object is given must be able to be universally communicated, because cognition, as a determination of the object with which given representations… should agree, is the only kind of representation that is valid for everyone. (Kant 1790/2010, p. 422)

Kant problematically asserted a universality of aesthetic was achievable through schematizing an aesthetic universal value and omitting discussion of the context of the object and the subjective and particular pieces. Hegel’s work shifted the aesthetic discussion and began to include this crucial aspect, the object’s situation, and acknowledged the importance of the social context (Hegel, 1807/2010).

Hegel’s work dealt heavily with the role of the human in the creating process distinguishing between replicating and creating art and refocused the concept of aesthetics on art (Hegel, 1807/2010). Hegel viewed creating art as being more than “the conscious production of an external object, [it] can also be known and expounded, and learnt and pursued by others” (Hegel, 1807/2010, p. 547).

The defining feature for Hegel’s argument in this distinction is the role of the Divine. In Hegel’s Lectures on Fine Art, he argued against previous thinking that God’s work only occurred in the natural world by positing, “in art-production God is just as operative as he is in the phenomena of nature; but the Divine, as it discloses itself in the
work of art, has been generated out of the spirit” (Hegel, 1807/2010, p. 550). For Hegel, God’s role in visual arts elevated, in many ways, the ideas represented in the work, “therefore the work of art stands higher than any natural product which has not made this journey through the spirit” (Hegel, 1807/2010, p. 549).

In his work, Hegel desired to diminish the little distinctions Kant made regarding art and its cognitive role and worked to contextualize art in terms of thinking or consciousness instead of outside of thinking (Hegel, 1807/2010). To do this, Hegel expanded Kant’s idea of free play loosely stating, “the universal and absolute need from which art…springs has its origin in the fact that man is a thinking consciousness, i.e., that man draws out of himself and puts before himself what he is and whatever else is” (Hegel, 1807/2010, p. 550). Hegel’s ideas move further from Kant with the implication that aesthetic reaction is a universally conceived of particulars and that “we must see how beauty as a whole decomposes into its particular determinations” (Hegel, 1807/2010, p. 551). Additionally, Hegel’s ideas contrasted those of Kant concerning the subject and object relationship and in the object relation to the self. Hegel posited the separation of the idea and the shape as “their indifference and inadequacy to each other” (Hegel, 1807/2010, p. 555). These distinctions greatly influence Hegel’s ideas on aesthetics as something that is divine in nature and that ultimately is determinate of life.

Marx had some concern for art and the aesthetic as “a form of socially important production” (Rose, 1984, p. 79) and his work serves as a critical turn in the conceptualizations of individuals and their relations to material and production that were furthered by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School. Marx (1844/2010) moved away from the pervasive idealism of Kant and Hegel and his thoughts on consciousness
and cultural considerations in *The German Ideology* are applicable to aesthetic theory. Marx posited, “conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour” (Marx, 1844/2010, p. 655). The Marxist notion of consciousness differed from Hegel and Kant in that Marx believed it was in the material experiences that consciousness develops.

Marx (1844/2010), more concerned with the praxis and context of these interactions of experience, described consciousness as something that can “never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process” (p. 656). There is a loss of the previously described universality of experience in Marx’s work; he posited, “men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.” (Marx, 1844/2010, p. 656). Where Hegel and Kant discussed the aesthetic as a universal commonality—feelings and judgments—reached as a societal consensus, Marx asserted the idea of man as an individual whose consciousness is shaped by the relationships to material and production.

Historically, the concepts inscribed within aesthetics have evolved; however, through this history there is a commonality and emphasis on the external through this lineage (White, 2009). The systems and principles of aesthetics developed to handle nature, beauty, and taste in their respective ways and are long-standing foundations—for good or for bad—on which contemporary aesthetic perspectives are staked out. The advent of postmodern thought allows a speculative examination of the history of and current conceptualizations of aesthetics.
Postmodernism and Aesthetics

The universal aims of modernity sought to create a new world of existence in which everything would be totalized, perpetuating a grand narrative of human progress (Lyotard, 1984; Lyotard, 1986/2010), and can be seen manifested in the previously outlined theories. Movement away from modern approaches, which were delineated by a type of universalization privileging certain types of knowledge (Lyotard, 1984) toward postmodern theoretical understanding of the now—without privilege or hierarchy yet within a situated context (Pinar et al., 2008) is an effect of chronology but also one of historical paradigmatic shifts. Lyotard (1984) wrote of these epistemic and ontological breaks indicative of postmodern thought in his arguments against the idea of the grand narrative of the modern era redefining knowledge in a postmodern framework as “not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable” (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxv). For Lyotard, knowledge can exist groundless, immeasurable with other ideas or forms of knowledge and allows an understanding of the world where individuals are able to explore “the question of the expression of thought” (Leitch, 2010, p. 1468) as opposed to the thought itself.

The reconciliation of the idea of aesthetics remains difficult with the postmodernist rejection of notions of foundations and transcendental conditions. Gadamer (1996) cited the turn away from the Kantian ideas of transcendental aesthetics as prompted by the work of Schiller who “formulated it [aesthetics] as an imperative: Live aesthetically!...chang[ing] it from a methodological presupposition to one of content” (p. 82). The idea of living aesthetically presents the challenge to approach
everyday encounters with objects, texts, and interactions, even what we observe, and be
cognizant of its effects on the senses. In this process, “we sublate (aufheben) the
discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence”
(Gadamer, 1996, p. 97) as a means of understanding the world and ourselves.

The pluralism of postmodernist thought, the conflation of high and low art (Pinar
et al., 2008), and the notion that with advancements in technology art seldom finds
existence in a unique and particular place (Benjamin, 2008) have ruptured the structures
that have delineated a work of art and aesthetic a priori. Consequently, postmodernism
allows anything to be interpreted as art and subsequently reduced art to a banal or null
existence (Baudrillard, 2005).

Understanding this framework for the existence of art is important to continue the
discussion of aesthetics. Historically, art and aesthetics are conflated, used
interchangeably, or described as an experience of making art; however, the distinction
drawn by Gadamer (1996) is an important one. Forms and subjects, indifferent of
“whether or not the object is real, whether the scene is the stage or whether it is real life”
(Gadamer, 1996, p. 89) should both be considered works of art framed in aesthetic
experience. The concept of art here is broad and manifests in the fragmented, isolated
splinters of forms and subjects that construct our realities. What individuals do with
art— the bringing of the fragments and all of their histories together to make a whole in a
spatial and temporal context, a type of pattern making—that is aesthetics (Greene, 2001).
Aesthetic experiences involve more than just the production of artworks (Dewey, 2005;
Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1988, 1995) and serve to connect the cognitive and somatic
functions of an individual in a holistic, but not universalized, perspective.
Aesthetics, then, may be understood as a concept that is fundamentally comprehensive in its nature and while this seemed problematic for Gadamer (1996) in describing the aesthetic consciousness, he maintained “understanding belongs to the encounter with the work of art itself, and so this belonging can be illuminated only on the basis of the *mode of being of the work of art itself*” (p. 100). Aesthetics, for Gadamer, represented a “hermeneutical phenomenon—but not at all in the sense of a scientific method” in which “aesthetic too is a mode of self-understanding” and “self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other” (pp. 100, 97, 97). This hermeneutical quality of the meaning-making process or pattern making of aesthetics is embedded within a bricolage of ideological contexts—social, cultural, and political (Gadamer, 1996)—and understanding these various ways individuals relate to the forms of art they encounter is intrinsically part of and sculpts the aesthetic.

Adorno (1991), whose sociological inquiry concerning the culture industry and the standardization and commodification of culture and, by default art, deeply relied on Marxist critiques of capitalism. In the modern era, as works of art became easily duplicated through advancements in technology a societal shift toward realism lessened the role of the imagination in interactions with the world around (Adorno, 1991). Adorno, concerned with the industrial reproduction of reality, wanted to create awareness of the possible and often nefarious natures of these conditions. The impact of Marxist thought on Adorno’s work is clear in his discussions of culture and his likening it to industry by positing the difference between culture and the practical or everyday life evaporate through the commercialization and commodification of cultural artifacts. From
Adorno’s perspective of culture as a social construct, he recognized the idea of culture was not an essential element of practical life.

In a relationship described as dubious, Adorno’s (1991) ideas on culture address the contrary relationship between art and culture. Adorno (1991) posited, “it is not only through its manifest practical intentions, but rather through its mere existence – indeed, precisely through its impractical nature – that art manifests a polemic, secretly practical character” (p. 116). He described the idea of the artist as always having “meant the non-conforming spirit” (Adorno, 1991, p. 119) and that it is “through the sacrifice of its possible relation to praxis, the cultural concept itself becomes an instance of organization” (Adorno, 1991, p. 117). The idea that the way in which art lives is through its death in organization provides insight into the way in which art functions in society as “a lubricant for the system, into something which exists for something else, into untruth, or into goods of the culture industry calculated for the consumer” (Adorno, 1991, p. 117). However, art’s codependency on organization is necessary to make its way into cultural experiences (Adorno, 1991).

Adorno’s work coalesced with the ideas presented by Bourdieu on cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984) used much of the same framework from Marxist thought on praxis, context, and capital to describe the ways in which one’s ability to function appropriately in a culture provides an allotment of capital. For Bourdieu (1979/2010), this idea, begins with a transgression that is in no way aesthetic: it has to abolish the sacred frontier which makes legitimate culture a separate universe, in order to discover the intelligible relations which unite apparently incommensurable ‘choices’, such
as preferences in music, and food, painting and sport, literature and hairstyle. (p. 1669)

The patterning of these selections of taste creates a type of currency that allows individuals to move into and participate within various social groups. The more diverse and comprehensive an individual’s abilities are at creating these varying taste patterns the more fluid movements may become.

Bourdieu (1979/2010) indirectly described the relationship of power between the classified and the classifier by positing, “culture also has its titles of nobility—awarded by the educational system—and its pedigrees, measured by seniority in admission to the nobility” (p. 1665). He saw education as having a major impact on shaping the type of ideas and styles that are widely accepted as culturally normative which is related to the previous discussion of Adorno’s work and art’s link to the organization. Power operates between the organization and art, and functions to determine who produces art and the type of art that can be produced (Adorno, 1991) and this power relationship “predisposes taste to function as markers of ‘class’” (Bourdieu, 1979/2010, p. 1665).

Adorno and Bourdieu’s work discussed culture analogously where cultural capital operates as social currency and allows people access into spaces they would otherwise not be admitted (Adorno, 1991; Bourdieu, 1984). The set of classifications developed by their works acknowledged the inherent power relations between organizers of society and the organized (Bourdieu, 1979/2010). In this framework, the aesthetic consciousness becomes contingent on the individual’s relationship to an economic station or means of production; individual taste and understanding in an aesthetic way is determined by a collective capitalist economic classification (Bourdieu 1979/2010). In this way,
experiences and knowledge and the aesthetic consciousness become situated in a highly contextualized existence embedded with the very hegemonic ideological relations that produce them (Pinar, 2012).

Aesthetics conceptualized in this postmodernist perspective, understood as an hermeneutical phenomenon (Gadamer, 1996) where the subjects and forms exist as works of art with their historical, political, cultural and social contexts (Pinar, 2012) allows the incommensurable bits of realities that alone are insignificant to exist in an interwoven moment of tremendous understanding of the world and of the self (Greene, 2001).

Aesthetic Education, Curriculum, and Instruction

As described by Gadamer (1996) and Greene (2001), aesthetics is a highly qualitative mode of interpretation and experience, fundamentally comprehensive by nature, which exists momentarily in subjective realities. Generally, traditional P-12 public schools rely on quantifiable, positivistic theoretical approaches to inform curriculum and instructional materials and methods. For example, the cultures of high stakes testing and prescriptive teaching models produced as effects of NCLB further perpetuated by the Race to the Top initiative seem to exist outside of an understanding of an aesthetic consciousness. At a national level with criterion-based tests to the local level where curriculum planners create tests that are used districtwide, what is often tested are decontextualized, ahistorical, and apolitical facts and does not account for the various ways of knowing indicative of an aesthetic consciousness.

Maxine Greene spent most of her career working to create a conversation dealing with aesthetics and aesthetics experiences to shift and shape the educational discourse toward understanding and theorizing education in an aesthetic way. While her work has
possibly made it easier for individual teachers to implement pedagogical practices framed in aesthetics, theoretically there has been little to no change conceptually to the idea of the educative product. Shifting towards an aesthetic theoretical conception in education would mean understanding knowledge and meaning not as static concepts (Greene, 2001) and reconceptualizing them as dynamic and altered based on the vantage point of each student (Pinar et al., 2008). These differing vantage points can become a specific focus of aesthetic engagement by working to “comprehend how each of us, unique persons with unique life histories, can move inside works created by quite different human beings and actually discover ourselves there” (Greene, 2001, p. 22). Clearly for Greene, understanding these differing vantage points is an empathetic way of knowing others and ourselves.

Through an aesthetic education, individuals enter and operate in multiple spheres of meaning through various modes of experiences and more specifically for Greene (2001) “‘aesthetic education,’ then, is an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements” (p. 6). Theoretically, aesthetic education is more than mandating visual or performing arts classes and should offer students educational experiences that transcend the sum of its parts in that it offers individuals, learners and teachers space to operationalize their functions in a perpetual state of becoming (Pinar et al., 2008). This concept of aesthetic education would aim to transform learners from a reproducer of one decontextualized meaning or pattern to a producer of multiple interdisciplinary patterns of meaning.

The postmodern nature of knowledge is subjective and plural (Lyotard, 1984), and learning is a situated process where learners are actively producing the content they
come to know (Greene, 2001), creating meanings that exists outside of words in the subjective individual consciousness (Eisner, 2002). This plural qualitative existence of knowledge accepts form as content (Eisner, 2002) and requires leaps of imaginative thinking to connect these forms—pattern making— to existing knowledge to create multilayered understandings of the world. In this framework, the knowledge of most worth is the individual’s understanding through their relationships with cultural, economic, and political contexts.

Framing learning and the educative process as an aesthetic engagement becomes both a somatic and mental practice. Learners should be understood through a historical perspective through which the cultural, political, and economic contexts of the individual are not ignored, but critically examined, and understood by not only the learner but also by peers, teachers, and larger school communities (Pinar et al., 2008). Epistemologically, aesthetics should be concerned with knowledge that is socially constructed and teaching within an aesthetic framework should be concerned with facilitating aesthetically whole experiences through which learners are able to create multiple interdisciplinary patterns of meaning.

Aesthetics is an interdisciplinary approach to learning and the curriculum cannot be planned or predicted rather “a curriculum in aesthetic education, then is always in process, as we who are teachers try to make possible a continuing enlargement of experience” (Greene, 2001, p. 28). The expansion of experiences subsequently allows individuals to know more and to see more, strengthening the ability to create meaningful patterns and connections with knowledge, which is both liberating and educative (Greene, 2001).
Relationship to Dissertation

Through this research, I hope to understand the antiaesthetic climate and (re)present an argument and a framework for aesthetic education on a theoretical level. Essentially, this work seeks to understand the effects of the (mis)use and (mis)understanding of art and aesthetics in P-12 education. It is my belief and concern that art and aesthetics have been implemented in such a way that has resulted in the subjection and marginalization of visual arts curriculum, the compartmentalization and standardization of all of the disciplines, the tired and institutionalized physical appearance of most school buildings, and an ahistorical and apolitical approach to understanding and teaching students. While this research probably cannot offer particular solutions to these issues, I hope to present ideas in a discursive way that will continue conversations began by Eisner and Greene that have been interrupted for some time now.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

“Art is not what you see, but what you make others see.”

Edgar Degas

Unraveling the Problem

During my professional career as a visual arts teacher in public schools, I have devoted a tremendous amount of time to thinking deeply about the existence of art, broadly from a cultural perspective and more specifically in public high schools. My accounts of interactions with individuals in and out of the school setting often made me question why I teach art, why I believe art programs should be in public schools, and the role of experience with visual arts in identity formation.

More recently, my scope of inquiry has expanded, zooming out to consider questions of aesthetics. Problematizing these questions is the historical conflation of art and the idea of a work of art with that of aesthetics. These problems are compounded by social shifts toward a postmodern paradigm and have become more pronounced. I am intrigued and concerned with the ways in which the concept of aesthetics is subjugated and not used as a larger theoretical approach or worldview. This limited or micro-aesthetic view permeates society and subsequently educational theory and the educational process creating conditions of antiaesthetics. This epistemological disagreement may not be reconcilable; however, through this work I seek to understand these issues and to discuss critically the contexts that have developed around the function of visual arts in
public schools. From a larger view, an intended goal of this research was to understand more fully students’ perceptions of the purpose of education and the process of schooling. Within the positivistic paradigm, schools target educating a labor force to serve the needs of the economy. Compounded by the pragmatic focus, education becomes engrained with an economic value of earning a living wage. This formula does little to meet the needs of human existence and fulfill individuals or give them an outlet of expression, creative or otherwise. These outlets of expression are marginalized by the focus on core academic coursework and are often only accessible to those with economic or temporal means.

Recently, a link in my Twitter feed led to an article written by Laura Zabel (2016), the Executive Director for an organization providing support programs for artists called Springboard for the Arts based in Minnesota. Zabel described ways in which the economy affects the lives and work of artists. The relationship between the economy and sources of knowledge and production is an interesting and prevalent area of inquiry of “post discourses” (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011) and Zabel’s critical examination and description of programs with potential to positively impact the economic sphere while supporting individuals who make a living as working artists, is situated in this framework. Zabel, while tangential to the focus of this work, reaffirmed this notion that human lives and experiences are naturally interdisciplinary. Reflecting on my experiences as a high school teacher, education seems to offer few interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning. Also, from a theoretical standpoint, the overreliance and use of positivistic frameworks functioning to standardize and compartmentalize disciplines and sources of knowledge (Pinar, 2012) reduces an
individual’s interdisciplinary engagements and diminishes pluralistic modalities of knowing. Dewey’s (2005) notion of the “anaesthetic” described uniformity and the use of mechanical devices in educational experiences that function to numb the senses. Current educational approaches, guided by generalized and normalized structures and practices framing educational engagements in a compartmentalized fashion impact an individual’s ability to connect (Dewey, 2005; Greene, 1988). Making connections or patterns between old and new knowledge is a powerful component of the meaning-making process (Eisner, 2002).

There are many physical and temporal constraints that greatly affect teaching and learning in schools, which function to subvert interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge and life. For example, physical structures of school buildings separate and compartmentalize knowledge and ways of knowing (Callejo Pérez et al., 2014), which impacts the ways that students make connections across disciplines and engenders beliefs about specific modes of knowledge acquisition. Bell schedules function to regulate the time students and teachers have with materials and with each other without regard for the specific needs of individuals. Teacher-student ratios of 1:30 are not uncommon and thinly stretch the teacher making meeting the needs of individual students in meaningful ways virtually impossible.

While these are issues that affect all of the disciplines, in my experience, the impact on the visual arts is unique. At many schools, visual arts are offered as an elective or connection course and are not required for graduation. This marginalized existence can perpetuate negative societal perceptions of art in schools. Furthermore, the innate interdisciplinary nature of visual arts curriculum is incongruent with the structure and
compartmentalization of the physical and temporal constraints placed on learning and
knowledge. While I must concede that these ideas are based on my reality and
experiences and realize that school models such as Montessori or schools dedicated to
fine arts such as magnet schools may operate differently, the effects of the antiaesthetic
on a theoretical, national level remain and can be seen in the general positivistic nature of
education and educational research. St. Pierre (2011) described the need to discuss
conflicting notions and think deeply and critically on the confluences that marginalize
aesthetic curriculum, reduce opportunities for true interdisciplinary learning, and create
(mis)uses of aesthetics in educational research, theory, and practices. This work seeks to
move forward a conversation of (re)presenting aesthetic conceptions as an ontological
configuration through which individuals understand their existence in the world.

It is not my intention to conflate the meanings of interdisciplinary and aesthetics;
however, the two describe a similar understanding to educational approaches. Eisner
(2002) and Greene (1995, 2001) in part discussed the importance of interdisciplinary
educational experiences as a feature of aesthetic experiences in which the role of the art-
making process is an aesthetic engagement and advocated for arts integration across
disciplines. Eisner (2002) and Greene (1995, 2001) both worked to advance a change in
the understanding of aesthetics and have made significant contributions to the field on
which I personally rely as a professional art teacher. The work of Eisner (2002) and
Greene (1988, 1995, 2001) has been important and transformative in the field of arts
education. This work seeks to continue and advance their conversations in a direction
that stretches the concept of aesthetics theoretically, as one that is a comprehensive
interdisciplinary approach to education. Greene (1995) discussed aesthetic experiences
in the classroom as those in which individuals are engaged in the art-making process and Eisner’s (2002) work emphasized the role of art in identity formation and its epistemological role in the meaning-making process. Their work seems affected by the (mis)representations of aesthetics that have pervaded and shaped aesthetics historically. Moving forward requires working to develop an understanding, however fleeting, of how art and aesthetics function in society, theory, and the educational process. In my view, the lack of understanding and (mis)use of aesthetics has created an anaesthetic, as Dewey (2005) described, or antiaesthetic climate. Through a methodological bricolage of hermeneutical conversations with texts and analysis of the woven web of context, I hope to provide insights into ways in which our conceptions of education, schooling, and aesthetics can be (re)framed and (re)understood to continue the conversation.

Approach

Approaching this research inquiry from a qualitative position aligned appropriately with the methodological processes being used. Using a bricolage approach created a type of critical ontology through the exploration of “that which is not readily apparent to the ethnographic eye” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 23). Furthermore, a qualitative approach is conducive to capturing the often-ambiguous results of a hermeneutical process (Kincheloe et al., 2011).

Purpose

A primary purpose of this qualitative interview study was to better understand a student’s perspective on the purpose of education. Through a brief survey, I identified three participants to conduct in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews collecting interviewees’ thoughts, feelings, and attitudes regarding the purpose of education.
Questions also explored their ideas on the differences and/or similarities between the notion of education and that of schooling. This purpose is supported by the preceding theoretical discussions on art and aesthetics in both concrete and abstract ways. Understanding the ways in which students connect education and school could lead to better alignment of pedagogical schooling approaches with theoretical educational conceptions.

This research also generated an understanding from students’ perceptions of the impact of education and schooling for economic purposes. Generally, American schools are tasked with creating a labor force for economic conditions, which is a difficult task as economic landscapes become more and more unstable with the advent of technology and automation. Considering that schooling in Georgia is compulsory until the age of 16, students are forced to participate in a system increasingly focused on quantitative data and universalized approaches that work to prepare students for a job that may or may not exist when they graduate. The interviews conducted in this study examined the students’ perceptions of the parallels and/or incongruences of their experiences over the last 13 years of P-12 schooling with their understandings of what they believe is the purpose(s) of education.

Through the analysis and interpretation of the interview data, my goal was to glean insight into students’ perceptions of the counterparts of education and schooling and the ways in which the application of a positivist framework on the learning environment, curriculum, and educational theory have impacted student attitudes on the purpose of education. The researcher viewed this research study as vital, considering the onset of the deterioration of the labor force as automation rapidly increases. If the
purpose of education is to get a good job and those jobs no longer exist, a critical
dialogue should be opened to discuss the nature of schooling and education in order to
more appropriately align educational endeavors and the needs of American society.

Research Questions

This study seeks to contribute to educational conversations on curriculum and
curriculum theory and more specifically aesthetics and curriculum theory. Collected
viewpoints of students on the purpose of education provided the data on their perceived
alignment of education and schooling, which was analyzed and interpreted. From the
perspective of Adorno (1991), it is important to question the role of the machine and the
contact points of the culture industry and exactly how much of this is being produced
from the top down. If what is being produced by the culture industry is overly realistic
(Adorno, 1991), there is no need for an individual to create imaginative patterns to make
sense of the world. This research seeks to illuminate and draw conclusions based on
1. What are students’ experiences and perspectives on the purpose of education; and
2. What are students’ opinions on the effectiveness of schooling meeting those purposes
identified within the context of the larger theoretical discussion of aesthetics.

These broad research questions served to frame the semi-structured interviews
that were conducted, and while they may seem unrealistic questions to ask this research
to answer, it was important to frame the questions from a broad perspective to allow as
much movement between the data generated and questions to enable an organic approach
to tailoring the research questions as the study progressed. This idea is further explained
as an issue of hermeneutics in ensuing methodological discussions.
Exploring Methodology as Bricolage

Bricolage

The interdisciplinary approach indicative of methodological bricolage (Kincheloe et al., 2011) is an important feature and has strong parallels to the concept of aesthetics, which this work seeks to (re)frame. The bricolage as a methodological approach emerged as a subjective response to better meet the needs of qualitative researchers dealing with rapidly changing social and technological landscapes and “reflects an evolving criticality in research” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 167). Bricolage is a broad, multidisciplinary approach to research in which the researcher relies on multiple available knowledges to “move beyond the blinders of particular disciplines and peer through a conceptual window to a new world of research and knowledge production” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 168).

Kincheloe et al. (2011) drew a parallel between research bricolage and the way a handyman would tinker to complete a task. As a mode of analysis, Kincheloe et al. (2011) described tinkering as “a high-level cognitive process involving construction and reconstruction, contextual diagnosis, negotiation and readjustment” (p. 168) and in this way the researcher works to insert their self into the object of their research (Gadamer, 1996). The movement back and forth—inserting the self, diagnosing, and readjusting—creates a necessary “conceptual distance that produces a critical consciousness” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 169) and researcher reflexivity is engendered in the process.

Understanding bricolage as a methodological approach rather than a set procedure creates a space to explore “numerous modes of meaning making and knowledge production” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 169) and also provided a way for the researcher to
recognize these differences, in all of their pluralisms, through a variety of interpretive strategies. This approach is not delineated by a specific process or methodology, but instead created a flexible space for the researcher to approach inquiry with an appreciation for the complexity of analysis (Kincheloe et al., 2011). The methodological bricolage assembled here aims to untangle and understand issues of the antiaesthetic in educational theory and practice and reframe education as aesthetic, where multiple interdisciplinary patterns are not only made but also encouraged and even insisted.

Hermeneutics

In the hermeneutical tradition, this research did not seek a specific quantifiable answer; instead, this research should be viewed as a conversation to more clearly articulate a place of understanding (Kinsella, 2006). Interpretations of data are presented from the subjective reality of the researcher. Because the analysis emphasized understanding and interpretation over verification of data (Kinsella, 2006), the opportunity for rich description of the experience becomes expanded.

Critical hermeneutics. Critical hermeneutics is an integral element within bricolage. Kinsella (2006) described its pervasive and often unrecognized nature as an aspect of all qualitative research in that the researcher is relying on interpretative strategies to produce meanings. In the hermeneutical tradition, the researcher’s aim is not to reveal any type of final or definite truth (Steinberg, 2012), but instead serves to “clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place” (Gadamer, 1996, p. 295). Hermeneutics is not a method for understanding, but an opportunity to examine the specific contextual conditions that have coalesced in a woven nature (Gadamer, 1996).
The hermeneutical process originated as an approach to understanding ancient and religious texts and although there is a long history of implementation, rarely has this approach been used in educational research (Kinsella, 2006). Often criticized for being conceptually vague, Kinsella (2006) described hermeneutics as “comfortable with ambiguity” (para. 6). The ambiguity in this approach does provide a space for the researcher to move back and forth between themselves and the interview text creating a conversation or dialogic understanding (Kinsella, 2006); “the true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between” (Gadamer, 1996, p. 295). Gadamer (1996) moved away from the notions of ideals and truths of the Hegelian dialect and described the hermeneutical process within a neo-Marxist framework concerned with deconstructing realities where no particular truth(s) exist. The hermeneutical process is an infinite one that in which the “discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished” (Gadamer, 1996, p. 298).

Critical hermeneutical approaches are contextual and interpretive illuminations of understandings developed from a situated location (Kinsella, 2006). This presupposition of a situation “means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it” (Gadamer, 1996, p. 301). Gadamer (1996) acknowledged the biases present within the interpreter and the impossibility of being able to separate these prejudices from an understanding; however, Gadamer’s work concerning hermeneutical approaches is not critical, as he neglects issues of power and the relationship between power and knowledge (Kinsella, 2006). Kinsella (2006) extended Gadamer’s (1996) hermeneutical approach into the critical realm describing the need first for the conscious
acknowledgement that specific voices are marginalized and also for the conscious inclusion of those voices.

Cultural studies. While the field of cultural studies generally has a difficult time being fully articulated and delineated (Giardina & Newman, 2011), there are some approaches in this contested field that will be applicable and provide novel insight to this research. The sociological nature of the research questions fits well inside an approach with cultural studies footing. Cultural studies concerns itself with bodily articulations and the production and accumulation of movements within a society (Giardina & Newman, 2011). The study of these movements through a cultural studies viewpoint allows for, insists rather, the examination of the political landscape of the event or text (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Examining the “political dimension of representational practices” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 110) seems to be an extension of the economic conditions and claims made by Adorno (1991).

Cultural studies provide opportunities for an interdisciplinary approach to research (Steinberg, 2012) and alignment with the nature of human existence. The dialogical approach of cultural studies (Giardina & Newman, 2011) is also an analogous feature of the conversational perspective of this research. Because of the limitations of truth and final outcomes of the hermeneutical research (Kinsella, 2006), cultural studies creates space for criticality in conversations of inquiry (Giardina & Newman, 2011). Furthermore, the acknowledgment of the engendered political, economic, and cultural ideologies that manifest in the performativity of bodily articulations (Giardina & Newman, 2011) invites an expanded use of Adorno’s (1991) concept of the culture industry.
Methodological Bricolage in Action

A methodological bricolage rooted in critical conversational and cultural methods created an attempt to transcend the positivistic constraints that are enforced by the dominant hegemonic structure, which pervade educational research (Finley, 2011) and produce a highly qualitative place of understanding. This place of understanding can be viewed as an aesthetic one. Finley (2011) championed these actions as a type of resistance to normalized research practices through which stories of normalized hegemonic practices are told and retold. From a critical hermeneutical tradition (Kinsella, 2006), this research hopes to create a type of performative resistance (Finley, 2011) through which a space where aesthetic understanding of education can be briefly maintained.

Participants

In this study, the participants were collaborators and contributors to the conversations produced. Participants were asked to participate on a volunteer basis and no compensation was given for their participation. The participants for this study were derived from convenience sampling (Glesne, 2011) and parental consent and student assent was obtained at the school, district, and university levels appropriately. The participants in this study were students in a public high school expected to graduate in May 2017. Twenty-three participants were asked to contribute their time and input on a survey. Six participants returned the appropriate parental consent and student assent forms. From the participant pool of students who responded to the survey, three individuals were selected to interview. The interviews with the students had a semi-
structured organization allowing for the researcher and participant to approach the interview in an open-ended fashion (Glesne, 2011).

Generating a participant sample for this study was a concern and many considerations factored into delineating individuals that would be asked to participate. Access and age were critical factors in determining the group of students for this research. The natures of the research questions lend themselves to studying students who are near the end of their time in P-12 schooling. Reflecting and drawing on experiences and connecting them to their lives and their futures seems to naturally coincide with the end of public P-12 schooling.

This school year, I was assigned a senior advisement group. The advisement groups were created alphabetically and assigned to the teachers selected for this grade level. The students assigned to me share alphabetic proximity, but offered a diverse cross section of the senior class. Convenience sampling, often thought of as undesirable (Mertens, 2015), in this context provided access to a group of students chosen free from the biases of the researcher that may have otherwise colored the selection participant pool.

The school attended by the participants is located in a large middle-Georgia public school district with high minority and poverty rates. This high school received Title I funding from the federal government, had a total enrollment of approximately 1,200 students, and was one of seven public high schools in the district.

My role as the participants’ advisor created concerns that require some attention. As their advisor, I met with them once a week for 25 minutes during a scheduled time period during the school day. Each week, there are activities performed and information
disseminated that is provided from the lead senior advisor. There are activities that promote school spirit such as the homecoming door-decorating contest as well as activities that encourage and help students apply to college or find jobs. These circumstances created a unique relationship between these students and myself, differing from that of a traditional classroom teacher. However, there were several students in this group that have been or were currently being taught by the researcher in an art class, which factors into the interactions between the researcher and participants. The researcher’s relationship with the participants was one framed by mutual respect in a community of learners.

Student information was available through the student data management system, Infinite Campus, as their advisement facilitator. The group of students to be surveyed totaled 23 and was comprised of 12 males and 11 females, all on track to graduate May 2017. Racial demographics were as follows and are identified exactly as listed on the student information page: six black/African American males, seven black/African American females, four white males, three white females, two Hispanic/Latino males, and one Hispanic/Latina female. There were two students served by the Program for Exceptional Children who received special education supports and one student identified as receiving Response to Intervention supports on a tier level unknown. Five students were identified as Gifted and the remainder of the students received regular educational services.

Creating a numbering system ensured anonymity of the participants. Each participant was assigned a set of initials and participants were referred to consistently by
these initials throughout the research study. These identifying initials correspond to the surveys and if applicable, to the subsequent interviews.

Data Collection

Survey and interview data was produced and collected. First, the survey-generated data allowed the researcher the information needed to select the three participants asked to sit down with the researcher to answer the interview questions for this study. The survey helped the researcher identify research participants that offered diverse and dynamic high school educational experiences and future plans in the hopes of capturing both broad and in-depth responses to the questions asked. Movement forward in the project was dependent on these responses generated to the open-ended free response survey questionnaire and the researcher determined the specific participants for the interview portion of the study. The researcher did however hope to express in this study the most variety in the interview participant population and hoped to interview at least three students: one student planning on attending a traditional four-year college or university, one planning to enter the work-force directly, and one undecided student. However, the students’ who returned the appropriate parental consent and student assent documents were not diverse in this way and all indicated post-secondary plans of attending college or university.

Research Strategies

Surveys

In the context of this research study, the survey provided a strategy to narrow down the participants to be interviewed. The survey administered to the participant sample consisted of four general open-ended questions and the format of the survey can
be viewed in Appendix A. These questions were developed to glean a general idea of the post-secondary plan of the participant as well as insight into their views on education and schooling. The brief survey consisted of these five free-response questions:

1. What are your plans after high school?
2. List some things that you have learned in school and some things you have learned out of school.
3. Where do you think you have learned the most? In or out of school? Why?
4. Do you think there is a difference between the concept of education and what you do in school?
5. Do you feel your education and schooling has prepared you for your future? Briefly explain why or why not.

The questions generated were crafted in a way to evoke information of interest to the researcher. Question number one was asked specifically to aid in identifying specific participants to be interviewed. Superficially, the interest was in a broad cross-section of three general categories of high school graduates: undecided, college-bound and entering the work force. However, it was also of interest to understand the ways their plans have been shaped by their thoughts and attitudes concerning education and schooling. Question two was developed to gain insight specifically on the participants’ view on education. Leaving the question vague and open-ended in the wording was intentional to avoid projecting personal beliefs held by the researcher. Inquiring into the beliefs the participant held on the difference between education and schooling was developed to gain insight into how matched an experience education and schooling was for the participant. And lastly, insight into feelings of readiness for the future was an area of interest in that
this information speaks to the alignment or discontinuity of the participants’ education and schooling and ability to thrive as an adult.

The surveys were administered after obtaining the appropriate approval, consent, and assent during the school day during the weekly advisement meeting time limited by a 25-minute class period. The classroom where the survey was administered is the regular meeting place of the group of student participants and the surroundings were familiarly arranged as they were throughout the school year. The surveys were coded with a participant number so that student identities remained anonymous and were stored in a secure location in the researcher’s office.

Interviews

Interviews of three participants took place after the survey had been administered and analyzed. The interviews were held in the same classroom setting used for the administration of the surveys and took place after the school day. The interviews lasted approximately between 20 and 25 minutes and were recorded by the researcher using an audio recording device. No identifying information was contained on the audio recordings other than the previously assigned participant number to protect the anonymity of the participants.

The interview format used a semi-structured approach (Mertens, 2015) and was more of a conversation based on the responses from the previous survey data. The semi-structured approach provided a conversational feeling in the hope of reducing any anxieties the interviewee may have had (Mertens, 2015). These interviews expanded on ideas from the survey questions and response and the researcher was responsive to new
ideas presented by the interviewees. The semi-structure of the interview questions were heavily based on the previously administered survey.

Data Analysis

This research inquiry generated two forms of data, demanding specific and unique forms of analysis. The first data set produced emerged from the surveys administered to the participants. The surveys were analyzed and coded with emergent themes in the responses. Without a particular response in mind, the researcher was interested in moving forward with interviews with participants who seemed like they would have the most information to offer on the three general categories of students mentioned previously. Three students were selected to interview who would offer in-depth data across a wide span of student types. Data generated from the subsequent survey questions were also considered by the researcher when selecting the participants for the interviews. More specific rationales and explanation for choosing participants to interview will be discussed after the presentation of the survey data.

The conversational interview data was coded using an open-ended and emergent coding process. This approach aligned with the overall purpose of this research and lessened the limitations that may have risen from predetermined codes (Glesne, 2011; Mertens, 2015). First, using a chunking method, the researcher was able to identify broad themes in the conversations. From these general themes, the researcher was able to determine more specific trends using line-by-line coding to identify the particulars of the conversations. Member checking of the interview data was used to ensure dependability of the researcher’s interpretation of the emergent themes and ideas from the conversations (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). In a hermeneutically aesthetic position, the
researcher was then able to move between the text generated by the conversations to examine the plural relationships that existed and functioned to provide an interpretive place of understanding (Kinsella, 2006; Steinberg, 2012).

Summary

In summary, while there are much larger issues of aesthetics that should be addressed, the highly contextual and relativistic nature of the idea does not lend itself to large quantitative studies. This small, localized inquiry initiative provided insight into the beliefs and ideas held by students nearing the completion of their high school senior year. This time in students’ lives is brimming with hope and possibility for the future. Asking questions that invite reflection on their time spent in school and receiving an education seems natural, yet often in the tested and quantified positivistic environment their voices are subjugated by and reduced to test scores which give little indication of their ability to function and participate in the world. This research aimed to open a discussion on the alignment of education and schooling and better understand, from the perspective of the student, the ways these ideas relate.

Aesthetics, as outlined in this work, seems to offer an alternative and comprehensive approach in which the student gains their voice in a movement away from pragmatic and positivistic approaches to education that are heavily focused on conditions of the economy. The ideas of aesthetics presented here, have the potential to impact the institution of education in transformative and systemic ways; however, that is not to say that they should be used in a universal and general way. The conversations this research produced may not have significant impact on the educational experience of these
participants, but may alter the future of the educational climate and landscape for future students.

Moving away from antiaesthetics and toward aesthetics in education presents challenges to the accepted positivist principles that currently regulate educational discourses (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). While this research cannot address many of these challenges, it can be used to understand a specific situation and present an example of a type of process in education that has the potential for transformative results.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

“I’m afraid that if you look at a thing long enough, it loses all of its meaning.”

Andy Warhol

Frequently when I am finished watching the students leave the building from my duty post after school, I visit the other side of the building. On the other side, the “academic side” as one of our administrators refers to it, are the offices for the professional learning department, the counselors, and the hallways where the disciplines of history, English, math, and science are taught. Most days I check my school mailbox and drop off paperwork to the counselors’ offices or have a meeting. Occasionally, I will stop and chat with some of my teacher friends who work on this side of the building.

Recently, I was speaking with a few teachers in the social studies department about political issues, in the light of the recent national election. A veteran social studies teacher close to retirement caught me off guard by asking me about the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). He was talking about other government programs and, probably because I came into the room, began to wonder about the NEA, its purpose, and why our government should be involved with the preservation and promotion of the arts. Honestly, I was unsure of how to answer the question; what is the point? And how do I explain this to someone who admittedly does not even have art hanging in his house? In sort of a scramble, I tried the best I could to answer his question. It was not a hostile environment, yet I felt like I could not gather my thoughts quickly and concisely to
provide an adequate answer to his question. Why should the government be involved in this endeavor? Why should the arts be taught in schools? Why should art be publically funded? All of these questions have been investigated by decades of research and I am well-read on these issues, but I had taken for granted that others would hold a similar outlook. My surprise shocked me, even though I know not everyone sees the value in the discipline of an arts curriculum, as evidenced by its prioritization in academic circles and its location in the school building where I spend every school day.

While there are many questions this anecdote raises that could not be answered or investigated through this research, the story does encapsulate some of the questions I aimed to explore here. This research seeks to provide a heuristic for understanding the (non)existence of aesthetics and the type of multidisciplinary, multicultural, holistic approach innate in the discipline of art and art education within the discrete process of schooling and the larger conception of education. While there is an assumption on the part of the researcher that schooling is an isolated process within the larger conception of education, the following surveys and interviews conducted address this question specifically. Students’ perceptions of the purpose of education and the process of schooling are explored by this study through open-ended survey questionnaires and subsequent interviews with participants with an intended goal of developing a hermeneutic of the fragments of this time and space.

Procedure

Parental consent forms were distributed to 23 participants and a small sample of participants returned the appropriate documentation to proceed in this study. A total of six participants returned the appropriate consent and assent forms. The data collected on
the written open-ended surveys (from participants MG, EE, AH, HH, PF, GO) were analyzed to determine the participants for the subsequent audio-recorded interviews (MG, GO, PF). All direct quotes from the interview data sources were edited appropriately for utterances; the meaning of the data was not affected.

Personally knowing these individuals that are included in this research study informed the way each of their responses were contextualized, analyzed, and understood and by exploring the reciprocal relationships between the texts generated by data and the context of the whole is a method of understanding and not necessarily one of interpretation (Gadamer, 1996; Kincheloe et al., 2011). The procedural outline of this study existed as an abstract, evolving, and responsive idea. The unity and agreement of the particulars and the universal is speculative in nature and perhaps composed of halves that do not add up (Adorno, 1991). However, this work will present a point of understanding not quantifiable, explored through movements from point to point within the context of the whole.

In analyzing the survey and interview data, quick sweeping movements were made between the data point being explored and the contexts in which the data points were situated. Figure 4 provides a reduced, two-dimensional visualization describing the movement between and around the ideas investigated in this work. The movements were not forced or structured but instead allowed for an organic movement through the material being explored. Similarly, the results described here are presented in this manner to preserve the understandings produced. The presentation of the data will subsequently be followed by discussions of emergent themes and theoretical
considerations. These ideas will be organized into thematic headings to provide context for the theoretical discussion of the data.

Figure 4. Hermeneutical approach visualization.

Data

Surveys

Several themes emerged from the written survey data that will be explored more in depth; however, there are some initial and somewhat surprising materializations that merit discussion. All of the participants indicated they intend to attend a four-year college immediately after high school. Prior to administering the surveys, it was a hope that there would be a variety of plans exposed and participants for the subsequent
interviews would be selected, in part, due to their differing responses to this particular question to gain perspectives from students who would be pursuing different post-secondary goals. All of the responses gathered in this study are from students who do intend to attend a traditional four-year college. The demographics of the students who completed the survey are diverse racially and economically; however, they all have supportive families who have prioritized school and education in the hope of successful futures for these students. This came to light in the follow-up interviews in which each participant mentioned the role of their family, mainly parents, in some specific manner.

Outside of this single commonality of each participant planning on attending a four-year college after high school, not much could be generalized after reading over each survey. They all struck me as unique, differing in approach to formulating their answers and in the individual attitude of their answers. There were common words and phrases across each of the surveys such as “book smart,” “set curriculum,” “social skills,” but each participant described or used a turn of phrase in a distinct, nuanced manner which may speak to the lack of access to or understanding of what exactly they are spending their time doing in school and the way in which this process fits within the whole.

Learning in school versus learning out of school. With the survey, participants were asked to describe specific things learned in and out of school and the responses were varied. There was some interesting overlap and use of terms used to describe what was learned. Four of the six participants listed specific disciplines under the heading: “Learned IN school” with history or social studies being the most frequent with three mentions. The second most-mentioned discipline was math. Delineating themes that
presented in each category of what is learned in school and what is learned out of school was difficult. For example, the idea of social norms or related ideas such as manners or how to interact with others was found listed in both categories on the surveys and MG listed “how to act in social situations” in both categories on the survey. This was explored further in a subsequent interview with this participant.

EE and AH had very clear and organized ideas in the responses given on the survey. AH indicated in the “Learned IN school” category “book intelligence” and “the importance of achievement” and contrasted “street smarts” and “the importance of qualities non-related to school” as things “Learned OUT of school.” Similarly, EE indicated the subjects of math and history and “different social norms” in the “Learned IN school” category and in the “Learned OUT of school” category listed: “The worth of life,” “what to truly expect in college,” and “critical thinking skills.” Both of these participants, in varying use of language and with distinct approaches to the question, described the skills of analysis and synthesis needed to make meaning of life and the criticality needed to connect information across the discrete disciplines or “book intelligence” identified in the “learned IN school” category.

EE and AH also responded most clearly to question four asking about the difference between education and school. AH stated, “Yes, I believe that the concept of education indicated learning certain material which I do not experience in school.” And went on to describe a lack of value or significance placed on qualities that lead to success in life. When responding to the same question of the difference between education and schooling, EE described a type of universalized approach in schooling that may not be an appropriate education for all. EE stated, “Whereas in school, a person is labeled as
“smart” just on their ability to sit still in a desk for a few hours. Traditional school only caters to one type of learning form, but education goes beyond the walls that are given.” This response also indicated a belief that schooling is a process subsumed by educational endeavors.

In contrast, HH indicated in the response to question four no difference between the concept of education and what is done in school. However, looking back to the response AH gave to the previous question on the survey there was some indication of a distinction. Question three pertaining to where they believe they learned the most, was answered by HH stating they believed they learned the most in school. But a closer reading of the answer to this question indicated this student transferred schools in the middle of the high school experience. In the last question on the survey, a more detailed explanation is given regarding this specifically by describing the school they left as a very small private Christian school and they were “surrounded by people just like me that believed the same things as me.” This sudden change in environment to a place where, as they described, the people are “completely different than me and don’t believe everything I believe” has colored the responses given throughout the survey and explains their description of school being a place where they have learned to stand up for what they believe in on a personal level and also a place where they have learned to understand different types of people. These sentiments were offered by the other participants as being indicative of learning out of the school environment. But for this participant, the public school experience has been what has expanded their tolerance and understanding of others whereas the other participants who have spent their entire school careers in public schools indicated that while this may also occur in school mostly, learning social
norms or respect is an out of school learning experience. A discussion of public versus private schooling also arose during the interview with MG that is of note and will be discussed.

Personalized curriculum. Other themes that emerged in varying degrees in the survey responses were ideas related to curriculum and the lack of choice in learning, subject matter, and relevance of what is presented in schools. This was further explored in greater detail in an interview with PF. Mentioned by PF, GO, MG, EE, and AH in various manifestations were ideas about students not having the opportunity to choose what is taught in schools. GO’s last thought on the survey is the lamentation, “I just wish I could have chosen what I was learning.” This is an interesting sentiment expressed by this participant because they are a seven-year member of the band. Band is an elective and mostly a choice made by the students at this particular school. Fine Arts and Fine Arts curriculum will play a larger role in the data collected during the interview process, but here is an initial glimpse as to how this begins to factor into this discussion.

Unknown to me at the time of the initial survey and interviews was the fact that each of these participants was currently enrolled in at least one of the Fine Arts courses offered at this school. Earlier in this work, I shared an anecdote about my frustration regarding students being dumped into the visual arts classes that I teach at this same school. But here are six students who have chosen to take courses offered by the Fine Arts department, five of who responded to the surveys indicating lack of choice or relevance of curriculum offered at school. As EE described, “In school everything is based off a curriculum, where someone decides what we are supposed to know. Outside of school, there isn’t a limit or a supposed to. There’s just knowledge.” This distinction made by
EE is also shared by the responses from MG in their description of the concept of education as being created and set by board officials and is not necessarily what will be the most beneficial to the student considering the particular major they planned to pursue. PF, who confirmed these feelings in a follow up interview, provided the most overt example of this theme. In the first of several instances, PF listed under the category “Learned IN school,” “unimportant courses” and went on to elaborate on this idea in responding to survey question three when they stated, “I have learned more out of school in terms of life. In school, I am taught and expected to learn many useless items that won’t influence my future.” PF also expressed in the response to question four that, “school contradicts the development of one from experiencing life.”

School and education. The particular responses of each participant surveyed varied greatly; however, each discussed ideas about school and education though their own personal experiences. Four of the six participants responded indicating they had learned the most or what really mattered to them as an individual outside of school. AH’s response indicated they learned “a relatively equal amount in and out of school” and what has been learned from each “varies in importance and how impactful it may be in my life/future.” HH answered the question through the experience of moving from a small Christian private school to the large racially and economically diverse public school and this participant’s response is colored by that experience greatly as mentioned previously. But to a large extent, the survey data indicated that there is a perceived difference between what is done or learned in school and what is learned out of school and emphasized the importance of the learning occurring outside of school. What was less clear in the survey data was how the participants associated school and education
with their ideas expressed pertaining to learning in school and out of school. In many of
the survey responses, respondents used schooling and education interchangeably, so it
was unclear exactly what the intended meaning of each was by the participants. AH and
EE conveyed the most concise meaning of schooling and education, both speaking to the
idea that school is a smaller piece within the larger concept of education.

Interviews

The participants chosen for a follow up interviews (MG, GO, PF) provided less
 clear initial ideas about how schooling and education fit together on their survey
responses. GO and MG at points used the terms school and education almost
 interchangeably. PF conveyed a more clear delineation of these ideas in the survey
responses, but when interviewed, it became clear to me that there was still some
ambiguity in usage and how exactly these ideas fit together for this individual.
Interestingly and unknowingly, the participants selected for the follow-up interviews
were also all members of at least one advanced Fine Arts course offered at school. PF, a
current member of an auditioned choir, has been enrolled in chorus classes since middle
school. GO has been a member of the band since middle school and MG has been a
member of advanced orchestra as well as an auditioned choir class.

Economic concerns. The interviews each began as an expansion of the questions
posed in the survey and each interview took its own course as the participants’ responses
shaped and formed the subsequent questions posed. The interview data presented with
similar and also newly identifiable emergent themes. All of the participants expressed
concerns of the relevance of what was being taught and learned in the school setting—a
theme that began to emerge in the initial survey data. But in the interviews, this theme
became linked to one of an economic concern. Both PF and MG provided details of this nature mentioning AP course work completed with a passing score earned on the AP exam would earn them college credit that they would then not have to pay for as part of their college tuition. MG made more specific mention of this in relation to the public school versus private school. Because this participant was enrolled in these AP classes in a public school there were no personal costs associated to taking the course or the AP exam whereas private school counterparts did in fact have to personally pay not only private school tuition, but also to take the AP exam administered by College Board.

PF also mentioned the burden of having to pay for courses perceived as unnecessary or lacking relevance to their future and being able to earn this credit in high school alleviated this financial burden. But PF felt that it was difficult to retain and apply all that was learned in the high school setting especially when recalling experiences taking AP course work. PF stated his ideas about what is learned in school,

it teaches you- school teaches you a lot of things and hopes you will grab onto something and just go with it while being piled up with other things that can impede and just squash your aspirations. I’ve had moments where I just thought I was just never going to be good at science because I didn’t know how to- I didn’t know how to list the events of the Civil War in order because I just thought, oh, I won’t be able to graduate if I don’t get this grade higher and I won’t be able to do college if I don’t know this. (Participant PF)

This participant adamantly and consistently through the interview revisited the lack of applicability of what was taught and expected to be learned, describing specifically how the method of testing impacted the lack of retention.
Relevance of the curriculum. Aside from finances, this theme of relevance also emerged in the interview data and described relevance pertaining to both the participants’ academic course work and surprisingly their coursework in the department of Fine Arts. Each presented their own versions of a perceived disconnect in the transferability of the skills learned in their Fine Arts Classes. Interestingly and importantly, both GO and MG described what was learned in their respective Fine Arts classes as a skill that perhaps connoted issues of economic or exchange value.

The lack of understanding of the impact of not only their Fine Arts curriculum but coursework outside of this field was illuminated repeatedly in the interview with PF. They stated, “But most of the other things that you learn aren’t really applicable in life.” This was followed by the sentiment that not every student would have the cause to use or be interested in learning about subject that might be interesting to others. This data described a lack of connection between sources of knowledge and also the content of these types knowledge. PF suggested that the impact of the format of the presentation of the course work and its design as a teaching-to-the-test format, specifically citing the models of instruction and testing used in AP courses prevented the long-term retention of the information and knowledge gained through the course. PF stated,

I’ve taken AP classes ever since my freshmen year we are taught content that is supposed to help us gain credit for college… The knowledge that you learn from the content- it’s only good for the test you’re taking you can’t really use it outside. For example, in classes they’re always structured to mimic and mock an exam. It gives you extra practice for the test, but what comes after the test? How can you apply the concept you learned in class outside of the test? (Participant PF)
Furthering this idea, PF described the lack of connectivity between the disciplines of the high school courses. Again, PF mentioned the lack of student choice in coursework and linked this idea to one of economic concerns explaining that coursework students were enrolled in that would not benefit them in the future were a waste of time and money. This issue seemed like a bigger challenge for PF when thinking about the future and the cost of college and being made to take general education requirements that may not be relevant to their anticipated higher education degree work.

GO and MG similarly expressed a perceived lack of relevance of some of the coursework completed as high school students related to disciplines both in and out of Fine Arts. GO struggled to identify the transferable skills of being able to play the clarinet in an advanced manner and the dexterity motor skill control needed for success in the future as an anesthesiologist. In an exchange during the interview, there were moments of pause thinking about how these could be related and finally relied on the widely held belief by “they” stating, “Well they say people who usually do music and art and stuff are usually better at school or whatever.” Subsequently, GO expressed that this skill and advanced course work in an instrument served little purpose to education, but described its impact as more social in nature stating,

Well I guess it’s put me in front of people performing- like one-on-one and stuff like that so. But just playing an instrument, I am not really doing anything with that. I don’t know. It got me around people it formed friendships. (Participant GO)

MG also indicated having friends and social support in both choir and orchestra. MG further described these courses as commodities that would provide an advantage when
applying to college. For MG, the content of both choir and orchestra are skillsets that can be built upon.

Familial pressures. The interviewees also felt familial pressures to do well in school. Additionally, some of the conflation of the terms school and education seems to have been enforced by the parents of the participants. GO noted parental pressures to go to school to get a good education. MG revealed a similar experience being a child of a professor in higher education, describing that school and education were used in a synonymous manner at times and there was an expectation of post-secondary schooling as being part of this education. Each, in their own way, viewed post-secondary education as being a means to an end in that they all expressed in varying accounts related to a way in which they would be able to find a well-paying job upon completion.

Personalized curriculum. Throughout each interview, the students expressed in different contexts their wish for a more tailored school experience, both in current high school coursework and also in their future university studies. The rationale provided by the interviewees was deeply rooted in economic concerns. For example, MG used the knowledge of least likely majors to set the application submitted to college apart from others in the hopes of receiving extra scholarship money when they stated,

To be honest, my dream school is University of North Carolina but it’s a public out-of-state school so it is really expensive to go there plus really hard to get in. But on their common app when I was applying we looked up the least likely majors and Latin American studies had like two graduates or something like that and that sets me apart from other people who want to major in like biology and you know law, chemistry, and you know all of the medial sciences or whatever.
So it’s just unique and I think that will help me get into colleges. (Participant MG)

The main area of concern for interviewees was not having to pay for coursework that they perceived as irrelevant to their major area of study. All of the participants interviewed did not express any perception of connectivity between the core academic coursework they had participated in throughout their high school years. Each had a difficult time expressing the role or impact their studies in the Fine Arts had on their overall development and achievements in other areas of their schooling. Meaning, either Fine Art courses do not have an impact, the students fail to see the impact, or the schools/teachers fail to make the connection of the impact of the arts on a student’s schooling.

School and education. Overall, there was a subtle and pervading sense of uncertainty emanating from the participants during the interview process. Each struggled to formulate their ideas in a way that portrayed a cohesive view of their attitudes concerning the focus of the research question. Schooling and education were frequently used interchangeably. When the interview questions were directed specifically to clarify what their responses meant, interviewees hesitated and even backtracked on previous statements. The purpose of education and the process of schooling were novel questions for these participants.

Data Analysis and Theoretical Discussions

The emergent themes from both the interview and survey data provide some interesting areas to discuss. Economic issues, commodification, divisions of discipline and labor, and capital all relate back to previous ideas discussed pertaining to Adorno
Following are discussions of the emergent themes within the context of the theoretical framework developed earlier in this work. Specifically, consideration will be paid to the aesthetic and antiaesthetic frameworks previously outlined. Generally speaking, the interview participants had a difficult time expressing a cohesive conception of the purpose of education, schooling, and the interplay between the two indicating that this issue is not manifested in the way that I had imagined.

Economic and Financial Concerns

The participants’ anxieties regarding the financial obligations of higher education warrant a discussion in the context of the aesthetic framework. This theme pervaded all three of the interviews and they each expressed genuine concern about managing to afford post-secondary schools. There was a tone of disdain when discussing coursework that they were not interested in or that they perceived as not relevant to their intended major. Schools are structured to react to and fulfill the demand and needs of the labor force. In this light, the purpose of an education would align accordingly and result from economic purposes.

The production of knowledge relating to the economy in this way is descriptive of the economic determinism explored previously. The commodification of education in this way allows the domination of use value (Adorno, 1991) and the utility of education, or perception of that pervaded in the discussions in the interviews. This ends-oriented focus allows little room for enjoying the process of becoming educated and also significantly impacts the ideas formed in individuals about the purpose of education and how schooling serves this purpose.
The economic concern relates more to the idea of use value of education whereas the financial concerns held by the students interviewed is related to issues of access to education. Also, viewing educational opportunities as possibly having a financial burden will require those pursuing education in schools to rank courses and only pursue those that may directly contribute to their degree. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches to programs of study may be stifled or completely reduced, resulting in further bifurcation of aesthetic approaches and education and schooling.

These economic and financial concerns also further perpetuate the stratification and separation of the disciplines. As programs of study become more and more specific, the need for multiple sources of knowledge becomes less significant. If school, specifically higher education, becomes financially burdensome, a reduction of the sources and types of knowledge may result. The consciousness that results from this effect is uncritical and antiaesthetic. Greene (2001) and Pinar (2012) encouraged the advantages of multiple ways of knowing and opening sources of knowledge especially through the study of the arts. The economic and financial stresses expressed by the participants will have a limiting effect in both of these areas.

Adorno (1991) indicated that under capitalism all production is for the market and this example of the anxieties and fears of the cost of pursuing higher education is evidence of the use value of education dominating the exchange value and is the antithesis of Greene’s (2001) conception of aesthetic education. The financial and economic issues restrict the spaces available for the reflective and participatory engagements that are necessary for developing an aesthetic consciousness. Another consideration of these economic and financial issues is the impact on determining what
areas of knowledge are most valuable. The effect is prescriptive and predictive forms of curriculum. According to Greene (2001) aesthetics and aesthetic education are unpredictable and expansive, but these limitations of economic and financial origin predict what should be learned and how it is to be learned. Allowing the utility of knowledge to determine an education emphasizes the ends over the means decontextualizing knowledge.

The participants in this study viewed education as a form of capital and used school to grow and expand their choices. Earning a high school diploma loaded with AP credits ensures them access to higher education opportunities that will position them accordingly with career opportunities. The capital acquired and spent by these individuals in this way does not necessarily equate to knowledge or a raised consciousness and instead indicates the value of the utility of the knowledge. Adorno (1991) suggested capital’s effect is not immediate or emancipatory but instead only integrates and dominates further. Considering the responses of the participants describing their plan to spend their school capital, it is interesting to frame their thoughts in the context provided by Adorno (1991). Is this process ultimately one of integration and domination? And how interestingly to think they may believe that their experience of higher education will allow them (economic) freedoms in their futures.

Commodification and Fetishization of the Arts

Participants interviewed, in their own particular way, were actively using their involvement in the arts as a commodity or economic currency on their transcript or resume in the hope that it would set their application to colleges and universities apart from other applicants. In my role as an art teacher, I see an all too common practice of
the fetishization of the arts. This exchange displaces the intrinsic properties of the arts for the sake of the ends (Adorno, 1991). Art in schools becomes marginalized because it is stigmatized in this way by capitalism. Reduced to content on a resume or transcript, engagement in the arts is misappropriated and takes on a material relationship with ideological forces.

Division of the Disciplines and Relevance

The data derived from the surveys and interviews speaks to the participants’ view of the division and structure of the disciplines. The data additionally indicated a perceived lack of relevance or transferability of information between the disciplines. Whether this is itself a phenomenon or an effect of the phenomenon is indeterminable, but one nonetheless infers the compartmentalization and isolated existence of knowledge in this model of education. The participants provided several anecdotes on the ways in which what was being learned was irrelevant and isolated. Learning in this isolated manner leads to decontextualized, ahistorical, and apolitical understandings of the world (Pinar et al., 2008). The concern raised by the participants regarding the relevancy of what was being learned and taught in their schooling experience is not overly shocking; however, it may indicate a type of internalization of overly pragmatic and positivistic approaches to curriculum and instruction. This seems to indicate that the division of the disciplines is so atomized that the ability to synthesize and cross reference information and knowledge across the disciplines is not an implicit outcome of teaching and learning. There is only a speculative unity (Adorno, 1991) in the relationship between and of the disciplines.
Adorno (1991) described a similar example using labor that is wonderfully applicable here. Division of labor assigns different parts of the manufacturing process to increase efficiency, productivity, and profit. The division of the disciplines in schools similarly is to ensure efficiency and productivity of the teacher labor force. This fragmentation of the whole creates incompatible components for students to reassemble, leading to perceived lack of relevance and transferability of information and knowledge. Adorno suggested these divisions pertaining to labor are effects from the outside; this effect of division of the disciplines also permeates from the outside. As the institution internalizes and reacts to the standardizations of curriculum in the form of high-stakes testing and other universalizing devices, the curriculum becomes decontextualized beyond recognition of relevance. These parts or halves do not add up, but maintain a feature of speculative unity (Adorno, 1991) perhaps fooling us into believing the impact is more significant than it actually is.

The loss of educational relevance for students, specifically pertaining to the arts, may be a result of the testing frameworks that govern the other academic disciplines. Grading, standardized procedures, and end-of-course tests that regulate the implementation and instruction of the core curricula affect the students’ perceptions of the importance of classes. The lack of these testing and standardized structures of much of the Fine Arts curricula may have a significant contribution to how (non)relevant these courses are and add to the way in which Fine Arts are marginalized.

Each of the interview participants expressed that much of what was learned in schools would be useless to them in their futures. This is an incredibly narrow view of what and how they have been spending their lives doing.
The fragmentation and universalization characteristics of the schooling experience are antiaesthetic in nature. Fostering a lack of criticality in thought and knowledge production may have detrimental effects on society as a whole as well as misshape or misconstrue perceptions of the purpose of education and process of schooling. In the current political climate and mass dissemination of half-truths and falsities, students more than ever need access to spaces where they can develop a critical consciousness with which to interpret their world.

Conclusions

At this time, it is necessary to revisit and readdress the research questions driving this study. The students’ perceptions of the purpose of education and the process of schooling were broad issues addressed in both survey and interview processes. The application of the aesthetic and antiaesthetic lenses illuminated the ways in which the atomization and the standardization of the curriculum and schooling process have affected the experiences and the types of relationships to knowledge formed by students. The research questions shifted toward understanding the purpose of schooling as a means for economic success in the future as well as understanding the relevance or lack of perceived relevance of what is taught and learned in schools. Also changing the landscape of the driving questions of this research were the sentiments offered about student voice and choice in what is taught and learned in school.

The effect of the atomization and standardization of the learning and schooling process has made it difficult for students to understand that education outside of school exists and may take on dramatically different forms. For them, education was school and education outside of school also looked like school and was very closely tied to creating
and maintaining economic success. The role of school for these students was aiding them in going to more school so that they could have a good job and be economically stable.

Additionally, these students had a difficult time making connections between the disciplines learned in school because of the antiaesthetic climate. The atomization and standardization of the curriculum creates a direct path to knowing with one advisable pattern to get there. When I was thinking back to how I visualized my own experiences and existence as rhizomatic and what that looked like in Figures 1, 2, and 3, I had an idea about what the standardization and atomization would look like based on what the participants in this study described. In Figure 5, the rhizomatic conceptualization of the standardized practice of school, I attempted to render what the students’ existence and experiences in this framework would look like. The drawing is geometric and has direct routes to points that represent knowledge or experience. It is overall a ridged expression derived from the data analysis in this research expressing the structured nature of the current schooling experience.
Figure 5. Rhizomatic conceptualization of the standardized practice of schooling.
CHAPTER 5  
FURTHER DISCUSSIONS  

“Nothing is less real than realism. Details are confusing. It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things.”

“I often painted fragments of things because it seemed to make my statement as well as or better than the whole could.”

Georgia O’Keeffe

As this research moved forward and the research questions became more tailored as they responded to the data, and other tangential concerns and issues should be addressed. Technical and isolated fixes are no longer adequate. To sufficiently address the issues faced in these complex and uncertain economic and political times, the use of a complex praxis is needed to evaluate, analyze, and address these issues in a systemic, holistic manner. Interdisciplinary approaches are necessary both in and outside of school for a concerted effort to reimagine the possibilities for our future.

National Endowment for the Arts

The recent presidential election has marked a new era; Donald J. Trump’s candidacy and subsequent presidency have created an overwhelming amount of personal anxieties affecting a vast amount of my existence, but also has equally concerning relevance for my professional existence. The anecdote that opened Chapter Four takes on new significance in the light of the new administration’s announcement regarding the proposed cuts to the NEA and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). For
organizations that occupy only about 0.003 percent of the federal budget (Greenberger, 2017), their financial need is a moot point in the argument for their dismemberment. While the existence of these organizations has been threatened before by other conservative administrations, there is still a concern derived from the established record of erratic behavior of this administration that there will be follow through of this plan.

Cutting the NEA and NEH is nothing more than a symbolic attack on the arts, humanities, and a public voice. The NEA has an impact in every state in America. The organization awards grants, supports publications, and supports artists in the fields of visual arts, theatre, dance, music, design, literature, media arts, musical theatre, opera, folk and traditional arts, and art education. Defunding these organizations is an attack on the freedoms and access individuals have in the public sphere such as freedom of speech and expression. Publicly funding art is extremely important; otherwise, there would be no access to or space for the public’s voice through visual and other modalities of expression. President Trump’s proposed defunding of these organizations sends the message they may be fearful of the possibility the public will express dissent. What the public thinks should not be censored or stifled by fear from the ruling administration. The voice of the artists, writers, educational programs, and the like supported by the NEA and NEH is a necessary part of how our society negotiates the complicated and multilayer existence we share.

Defunding these organizations has little impact on saving the overall budget in the country, but would have a more than significant symbolic impact on freedoms that are often taken for granted. In the earlier anecdote, I was unprepared to answer my colleague’s question about the NEA and the recent news of the current administration’s
plans have made me realize the importance of not just the organization, but being able to clearly and rationally explain how it functions and why it is important in our society.

Art and aesthetics is virtually part of every experience that humans have. Design, mainly good design, goes unnoticed by most. Yet many love their iPhone and how it looks and feels, or really enjoy looking at a billboard that caught their attention, or appreciate the ergonomics of their favorite chair. These considerations of design rely on competency of art and aesthetics and, without them, many things may not feel comfortable. The NEA and NEH are integral to supporting programs that offer access to and support the education of the vital disciplines of the arts. They offer a type of equitability in access to programs that often only the economically- or location-advantaged person have access to. They are worth the 0.003 percent of the national budget and their value outweighs their financial burden.

The Process of Schooling and the Purpose of Education

Process of Schooling

This study’s research questions framed the conception of schooling as a process. And while it occurs over time for an individual, there is much more focus and emphasis placed on the products of schooling than the benefits reaped from the process. To a large degree, the data assembled here paint perceptions of school and what is learned in schools as governed by what one participant characterized as “someone else.” Who this “someone else” is was not clearly identified by this particular participant, but the state and federal government have produced a curriculum rooted in efficiency. Learning needs an appropriate amount of time and space according to Greene (2001) and Pinar (2012) and is a constant state of becoming. This process is by definition not one of efficiency
and has unknowable individual outcomes and yet the bureaucracy of schools and enforcing business models on this institution has been largely accepted as appropriate practice.

Schools are a technical solution to answering the purpose of education. The conceptions of education I hold are more than the sum of the parts of schooling and life experiences. Through this research, the participants demonstrated a difficulty expressing what, if any, purpose of education had outside of their schooling experience. Schools are, to a large extent, merely managing people for social compliance, perpetuating a narrow pragmatic view of learning—a perspective clearly affirmed and articulated by each of the interview participants in this study.

Purpose of Education

While this work does not clearly or precisely answer the research question of the purpose of education, there have been some movements or at least some vibrations in the tectonics of this idea. From this work, we can understand that there is a lack of understanding of what education exactly means. And perhaps it is just one of those ideas that means something different to everyone. There is no conclusive evidence offered here to affirm either of these statements, but what has been made clear is that under the present implementation of education policy there are pervading side effects of how students regard its purpose.

The relationship between education and the economy is concerning for many of the reasons outlined previously, but also in the context of technological advancements. Every two years computers are doubling in memory and speed (Hughes, 2014). Within the field of computer science, automation and AI are an evolving area that is also rapidly
and dramatically changing. While there are vast and complex differences in the goals urged by the computer science field and the educational field concerning AI and automation, there will be a significant impact made by its presence and growth on the economy, society, schools and education.

Technology and Education

Considering some of the literature explored (Foley, 2014; Hughes, 2014; Knight, 2015; Schaffer, 2016; Turkle, 2011) and the implications pertaining to the economy, education, and society in general, technology, when fully integrated into our lives, could potentially isolate humans to the point of extinction. The singularity, the moment when “everything will become technically possible, including robots that love,” (Turkle, 2011, p. 25) will completely alter the way humans interact and the meaning of human existence. The public discussion of this issue addressing the moral and ethical issues that have already and will continue to arise is necessary; what is at stake is everything.

Automation and the creation of machines that can perform human tasks of seeing, thinking, and responding appropriately or intelligently in interactions with the world are altering the structures of human labor (Nerhus, 2014). These changes in the labor force have a direct and specific connection to the field of education. Historically and currently, the educational system strives to produce individuals prepared to meet the demands of the labor market. In the United States, this has meant a focus on industrialized labor and more recently STEM initiatives driving learning outcomes associated with technological skills. The idea of “technological unemployment” is not new in the field of economics and has been discussed as early as the 1930s by economists. But this theory has been displaced with the belief that these technologies will continue to create new job
opportunities more rapidly than automation minimizes the need for human laborers (Hughes, 2014).

As automation becomes bathed in artificial intelligence, the skills that can be automated will become increasingly more sophisticated. Low-paying and skilled-jobs will be reduced. There will also be a reduction in the number of jobs that require more cognitive skills, such as medical diagnosis and legal and financial services (Hughes, 2014). With the marriage of AI and automaton and rapid technological advances, no job is completely safe from human displacement. Hughes (2014) and Turkle (2011) suggested the role of technology in sex and human intimacies is escalating rapidly, reducing the need for human-to-human contact, thereby cheapening the need for companionship and an overall acceptance of this reduction in personal intimacy as normal. This psychological risk is explored comprehensively in Turkle’s (2011) work as she described our human vulnerabilities as we embrace technology. She also examined technology’s role in shaping what we want out of our human existence.

Concerning the educational field specifically, the use of technologies and AI have immediate implications that are vastly different and distinct from issues that will arise in the future regarding its uses. In the present, teachers’ and students’ use of these technologies is mainly to facilitate and organize learning experiences and environments that are responsive to individual needs (Cumming, 1998; Pedrazzoli, 2010; Welham, 2008) but as Turkle (2011) asserted, these advancements are not without psychological risks that should be considered—especially in a field where young people are being shaped and molded into adult citizens.
The ontological shift of information and knowledge regarding the human experience and the reduction of human involvement brought on by AI systems capable of self-learning will impact education via societal and economic pressures of the labor market. These ontological concerns of knowledge and the human existence supplant technology’s role and AI in the changing epistemological landscape of the educational field. Similar to technology becoming the pedagogy, a concern should be the technology becoming the ontology of our existence. While teachers may be overly concerned with technologies using AI overtaking their jobs, the real concern of human obsoleteness should be addressed.

All of this is to say that these trends in automation and AI are having an exponential effect in the reduction of the labor market. If these trends continue at this rapid pace, there is a significant need to address the conception of education within this context. The data in this research did show there was a belief held by the student participants that higher education was necessary for a type of future economic and job securities. The fact is that automation and AI advancements will continue, as a generation of students moves through the institution of education maintaining the belief that there will be economic and job securities on the other side.

Technology’s impact on education, regardless if there is a completely automated labor market or only a significant reduction in the need for human labor, will redefine what the purpose of education will be and also have an impact on the manner in which schools are used to fulfill this purpose. While I am not an expert in the overlap of AI and education, I do think that in the future there will be less need for schools to have missions so directly linked to economic demands and career readiness. Shifting the mission of
education away from the demands of the economy could reduce the pragmatist focus and effects on learning outcomes. The data in this study point to the perceived lack of relevance and uselessness of knowledge learned in schools which could be attributed to undercurrents of positivism and pragmatist theoretical frameworks operationalized in the form of high-stakes testing and standardizations of curricula. Shifting toward an aesthetic framework and developing critical consciousness in students may better meet the need of the individual students as opposed to the current structure developed to meet the needs of the labor market in the most efficient manner possible.

Curriculum Theory Model

The following is a proposed curriculum theory model generated in the light of this work. It was developed to offer an alternative view from the current positivistic trends currently informing the vast approaches to teaching and learning in the United States. This model should be viewed as a starting point for further discussions that desperately need to take place in educational discourse. What is proposed is in no way an answer or to be considered as fixed in time or place, but only as a contribution to the conversation from an alternate perspective. Art and aesthetics have infinite gifts to give education and schooling and allowing consideration of their application of theoretical advancement is perhaps long overdue.

Model Name

Transformative aesthetics.

Model Definition

Transformative aesthetics is concerned with transforming individuals toward critical intellectual consciousness through acknowledgment of time, space, culture,
economy, political, and historical makeup of individuals through aesthetic experiences. This model seeks to understand and address education as a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2012) through the individual’s context.

Historical Context

Framed by the amalgamation of critical theory, aesthetics, and postmodernism, transformative aesthetics curriculum theory understands curriculum as a complicated conversation (Pinar, 2012). The critical theorists of the Frankfurt school inform the critical aspects of this theory model. Specifically, the work of Adorno (1991) is relevant, as he called into question the inherent power relations between culture and the organizers of the culture, specifically in the production of art. Critically understanding the individual cultural, economic, and political power that shapes experiences and external relations necessitates the formation of the critical consciousness. Bourdieu (1979/2010) who also considered an individual’s relationship to the varying expressions of capital provided theoretical support in this area. Through the critical theorist lens, it is understood that nothing operates in an apolitical context.

Providing insight into aesthetics are the works of Dewey (2005), Eisner (2002), and Greene (1988, 1995). Aesthetic experiences involve more than just the production of artworks (Dewey, 2005; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1988, 1995) and serve to connect the cognitive and somatic functions of an individual in a holistic perspective. Using a Deweyan interpretation of aesthetics as “perception and enjoyment” (Dewey, 2005, p. 48), transformative aesthetics seeks to create space where individuals participate in socially meaningful ways to unlock untapped imaginative resources (Greene, 1995) to create a critical consciousness.
Through the lens of postmodernism, critical theory and aesthetics are operationalized as subjects work to decenter themselves. Lyotard (1984) illuminated a new way of viewing the self as a decentered subject positing, “a self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before” (p. 15) and existence is “no longer a horizon of universalization” (Lyotard, 1986/2010, p. 1466). The entire object-subject relationship is being redefined and is now being viewed with skepticism and cynicism (Pinar et al., 2008). The postmodern interpretation of the self is an important feature of this curriculum theory model, for it is through the complex relationships of our existence that an individual comes to know him or herself.

Aims

The aim of transformative aesthetics curriculum model is to transform learners into critically aware, aesthetically engaged, motivated, life-long intellectuals. Gestalten in nature, this model delineates an educational experience that transcends the sum of its parts in that it offers individuals, both learners and teachers, space to operationalize their functions in a perpetual state of becoming. This model considers an individual’s relationship(s) to culture, community, space, and how politics and power have shaped an individual’s relationship to knowledge and the learning process in general. Occurring through dialogical negotiations, this curriculum theory encourages learners and teachers to have ongoing conversations to inform their personal intellectual inquiries.

Critical awareness, in part, is achieved through the presentation of multiple sources of knowledge to the learner and creating spaces where the learner is able to understand how they relate to these new sources of knowledge. Becoming critically
aware is an ongoing process that requires learners to have meaningful discussions with people unlike themselves. Developing critical awareness of the ideologies that inform an individual’s multi-layered existence through the structures with which they interact requires the individual to first be aware of the contexts in which they are situated and then followed up with analysis.

Framing learning as an aesthetic engagement becomes both a somatic and mental practice. This curriculum model encourages and allows space for both corporeal and mental aesthetic learning engagements. It is important that both the body and the mind are supported by the curriculum and that there are appropriate physical and abstract spaces where learners are able to operate and manage their own aesthetic experiences.

Transformative aesthetics aims to foster a critical understanding of the political circumstances of the educational process. In a capitalist society, it is important to understand how knowledge, culture, and economic and political capital are gained and used to understand circumstances and, if necessary, work to change them to improve quality of life. Having an understanding of these functions is imperative to creating a socially aware consciousness able of decentering normalized unjust ideologies.

Critical intellectualism is the product of implementing curriculum based theoretically on transformative aesthetics. Learners and teachers are able to become part of a larger critical social consciousness by first becoming critical intellectuals individually. This is the aim of systemic enactment of the curriculum theory outlined below.
Knowledge

Knowledge is a socially constructed meaning-making process mediated by the exchange of language, including signs and symbols articulated expressively outside of spoken words. Because the nature of knowledge is subjective, it is also situational in that learners are actively producing the content they come to know. The assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge requires an internalization of the external signs and symbols negotiated in social experiences.

Considering language as an opaque media, individuals are not able to “see” explicit meanings in signs and symbols. Rather, meaning exists outside of words in the subjective individual’s consciousness (Eisner, 2002). This plural qualitative existence of knowledge accepts form as content (Eisner, 2002) and requires leaps of imaginative thinking to connect these forms to existing knowledge to form multilayered understandings of the world.

Transformative aesthetics answers the curriculum question of what knowledge is of most worth not by delineating a specific set of standards but instead considers the context of the individual. The knowledge of most worth is the individual’s understanding of their relationship to ideological powers informing their cultural, economic, and political contexts.

The Learner

In transformative aesthetics curriculum theory, the learner is to be understood as a work of art. What is being produced is more than just a combination of formal qualities, which are important, but also a cultural, economic, and political context of each individual that is more than that of the sum of their parts. Here, the learner as a work of
art operates nicely for several significant reasons. Traditionally, art is something that is admired and learners should be admired for undertaking the processes of becoming a critical intellectual. Art is also importantly understood though an historical lens. Learners should also be understood though a similar historical perspective where the cultural, political, and economic context of the individual is not ignored, but critically examined and understood by not only the learner but also by the peers, teachers, and larger school community.

Learning

Epistemologically, transformative aesthetics is concerned with knowledge that is socially constructed. The nature of the social constructions formed though subjective interpretations and internalizations rely on situated learning experiences though which learners can somatically interact and negotiate dialogically to internalize knowledge to produce critical consciousness. Transformative aesthetics is an interdisciplinary approach to learning. This humanities approach allows for the assimilated and accommodated knowledge to connect to prior knowledge and experiences that may be outside the disciplinary field of the new knowledge. This approach enables students to create connections that do not occur when curriculum is standardized and compartmentalized into separate disciplines.

As learners are presented with multiple and new sources of knowledge, discussion of these ideas and concepts will promote and offer multiple interpretations of the knowledge. Through this process, learners will encounter cognitive dissonance, which will provide deep layers to the meanings they create in their subjective realities. When learners share their individual consciousness though further dialogue with their peers and
facilitators, intersubjective meanings will emerge, creating a shared social consciousness. Negotiating individual and shared consciousness through internalizing external stimuli creates multiple, deep layers of understanding. This process needs support initially for young learners, possibly through aided or guided reflection and most importantly time and space.

Teaching

Teaching in transformative aesthetics is concerned with facilitating aesthetically whole experiences through which learners are able to become intellectual critical thinkers. Teachers, like students, are also in the process of “becoming.” Transformative aesthetics fundamentally seeks to engender learning as a life-long process and accumulated knowledge and meaning persist beyond death though social relationships. The main pedagogical models operating in this theoretical framework are semiotic, performative, and critical pedagogies. While each have distinct features, all work and build from each other and are combined in different amalgamations to fit the needs of the individual in a given moment.

Semiotics is inextricably linked to and delineates our social experiences presupposing the experiences of individuals. Signs and symbols mediate the learning experiences producing infinite interpretations with unpredictable outcomes (Stables & Gough, 2006). Semiotic pedagogy emblemizes the consideration of multiple points of view, although always in the context of the individual’s collateral experiences and because there is often overlap in the interpretations and meanings derived, cognitive dissonance is achieved (Smith-Shank, 1995; Stables & Gough, 2006). Cognitive dissonance is a key feature in the epistemology of social constructivism (West &
Wicklund, 1980). This dialogical negation, facilitated by teachers, is the process by which learners reconcile points of view in disagreement and meanings are connected to acquired knowledge.

The use of performative pedagogy creates mental and somatic connections and is closely linked to the formations of identity (Butler, 1990/2010). These performances occur in response to and are informed by cultural and political contexts (Francombe, 2013). Through corporeal articulation, learners are able to operate cognitively and physically to resolve problems, communicate, and better understand their identity though the contexts in which it was constructed. This qualitative understanding and representation of identity, knowledge, and meaning-making is an implicit activity. As teachers use performance as an explicit pedagogical practice, an enhanced understanding of the implicit practices develops in learners that may have previously gone unnoticed or worse have been misunderstood (Francombe, 2013).

The use of critical pedagogy in this framework seeks to help learners understand the diverse and often fragmented perspectives of oppressed contemporary cultures. Also, critical pedagogy will allow individuals to understand and analyze their own relationships with capital, culture, and politics. With this awareness, there is a hope that learners and teachers will be able to decenter normalized hegemonic structures, which function to marginalize, and create spaces where all individuals may come to find intellectual freedom. Here, the use of critical pedagogy is based on the work of Freire (1970) who posited two distinct stages in his model of critical pedagogy. The first is the recognition of the oppression and the commitment to transform oppressive situations and the second,
post-transformation, disseminates the pedagogical practice to all people “in the process of permanent liberation” (Freire, 1970, p. 54).

Teachers in transformative aesthetics are just as much learners as they are facilitators in the learning process. Teaching is the humbling practice of allowing others to share their own experiences of the learning process and serve to aid the learner in deep ongoing reflections in their personal meaning making process.

Evaluation

Evaluation of learning in transformative aesthetics is qualitative, formative, and ongoing. There is no emphasis placed on rank and students are promoted based on pass/fail. Learners who receive passing marks move forward in the curriculum and learners who do not qualify for promotion receive remediation specific to their needs until they are able to meet the passing requirements. Ongoing discussions and debates help teachers identify specific needs of the individual that may need additional attention. Portfolios of learners’ works are kept and used by teachers and learners for evaluations. Teachers may use portfolios to document student growth and learners use the portfolio as a means of purposeful reflection on prior understanding and to identify and correct previous misunderstandings. In the curriculum, learners may summatively demonstrate their knowledge through performance, writing, and oral defenses.

Here, evaluation is about ensuring individuals have the skills to think critically about the world in which they live and exist. Through this model, learners work to create their own evaluative processes of critical self-reflection to carry forward into adulthood.
Current Supporting Literature

Currently, Pinar et al. (2008) and Pinar’s (2012) work aligns with some of the main themes addressed in transformative aesthetics curriculum theory. Pinar’s acknowledgment of the political context of an individual by the curriculum is necessary and often remains unaddressed by educational reform movements. Callejo et al. (2014), authors of the book *Curriculum as spaces: Aesthetics, community, and the politics of place*, also speak to the importance of understanding the relative nature and context of the individual when developing curricula. This book seems to function as a pedagogical extension of the theoretical work of Pinar and addressed the need to envision curriculum spaces, both concrete and abstract, to meet the specific needs of individuals and communities. These works (Callejo et al., 2014; Pinar et al., 2008; Pinar, 2012) both theoretically support transformative aesthetics curriculum theory in their acknowledgement of the political nature of curriculum and in the effort for individuals to gain understanding of their relationships with cultural, economic, and political contexts.

The Ideal School

Students are grouped by social and cognitive functions and abilities. The teacher-to-learner ratio is 2:9. Teachers work in pairs to facilitate small groups of learners’ experiences and rely heavily on dialogic negotiations to ensure learning goals are being met. There is collaboration across all levels and disciplines and subject matter is addressed from interdisciplinary perspectives.

The ideal school considers and facilitates both the abstract and physical space individuals need to experience the curriculum. The spaces are situated locally and are used as tools to understand larger cultural, social, economic, and political contexts of the
world. As learning, teaching, and knowledge are all created by the context so too is the physical school. Physical schools are constructed to help meet the needs of the individuals of their location. There is a sense of ergonomics to the space and functionalities of the school and the environment may be easily manipulated to facilitate differing needs of the moment. Teachers and students work to self-sustain their learning environment.

Conclusion

Aesthetics has the power to transform curriculum and curriculum theory. This work has outlined an aesthetic framework, operationalized art and aesthetics within the framework, and proposed a model of curriculum theory applicable to the process of schooling that would have a transformative effect on the way we think about and precede with education.

Being an art teacher, or any teacher I would imagine, in the current system of pragmatist and positivist orientations is exhausting. Students and teachers regardless of content area spend their day in compartments of knowledge, time, and space. These limiting constraints prevent teachers and students from fully realizing their potential. By focusing on test scores and meeting arbitrary proficiency indicators, there has been a loss of the individual and development of critical intellect. The impact will play out for generations until there is a serious reconfiguration of the process of schooling and what it means to be educated.

The economic landscape has held our schools’ missions for too long. Advancement in technology and AI has impacted human interactions in significant ways and are beginning to impact our relationship with the need for labor. Aesthetics is not the
sole solution to these issues we are facing, but it does offer a way to critically view and engage with the larger world around us. It is problematic to address each issue as an isolated particular, much like we approach the teaching of the disciplines. Aesthetics and its gestalt nature allow a critical view of the whole and the relationship of and between the particulars. Everything is connected.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT
Participant number (used for identification purposes)

Survey questions:

1. What are your plans after high school?

2. List some things you learned in school and some things you have learned out of school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learned IN school:</th>
<th>Learned OUT of school:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Where do you think you have learned the most? In or out of school? Why?

4. Do you think there is a difference between the concept of education and what you do in school?
5. Do you feel your education and schooling has prepared you for your future? Briefly explain why or why not.
Monday, November 7, 2016

Ms. Claire Amy Schultz  
Mercer University  
TRC College of Education  
1400 Coleman Avenue  
Macon, GA 31207

RE: Aesthetics, the Purpose of Education, and the Process of Schooling (H1611301)

Dear Ms. Schultz:

On behalf of Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 28-Oct-2016 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 50.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(ies) per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 07-Nov-2016. The protocol expires on 06-Nov-2017. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:
New Mercer Student Minimal Risk application for qualitative research study using a survey and semi-structured interviews.

NOTE: Please report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or concomitant forms and all accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our Satisfaction Survey and help us improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Ava Chambless-Richardson, M.Ed., CIP, CIHRP  
Associate Director of Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)  
Member  
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization’s (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."

Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance  
Phone: 478-301-4-001 | Email: ORC_Mercer@Mercer.edu | Fax: 478-301-2329  
1501 Mercer University Drive, Macon, Georgia 31207-0001
A Qualitative Research Initiative  
Informed Assent for Participants Ages 14-21  
Aesthetics, the Purpose of Education, and the Process of Schooling

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators at Mercer University are doing a research study where we are trying to learn about what you think about education and schooling.

Procedures
You will be asked to complete a brief survey and possibly answer interview questions in a small group or as an individual. You have the right to refuse to have your information included in the research. Refusing to include your information will not jeopardize you receiving any services related to your current coursework at Howard High School.

Questionnaires. The survey questions are four open-ended response questions that you will complete during advising period and should take no longer than approximately 15 minutes. The questions ask you to explain what you think the purpose of education is and how the process of schooling is related to this purpose.

Videotaping. No videotaping will be used.

Interviews. If you are selected for an interview, the interviews will take place after the regular school day in room 501 at Howard High School. The interview session will take no longer than 25 minutes and may be individual or small group. The interview questions will be an expansion of the survey questions and allow you to have more time to describe your thoughts and feelings about education and schooling. The interviews will be audio recorded so that the researcher can more accurately capture your voice. The recordings will be kept confidential and you will not indicate your identity in the recordings. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

Potential Risk and Discomforts
There are no perceived risks or discomforts that may be associated with the study.

Potential Benefits of the Research
The benefits of participation in the research may not directly assist you; however, these questions may cause you to reflect on your personal education and schooling process.

Confidentiality and Data Storage
Your name will not be associated with your responses and only an assigned coded number will identify you. At no time will your name be associated with the results of the research. However, any identifying information you provide while being audio taped will never be used as part of the research or associated with the results of the study.
A Qualitative Research Initiative
Informed Assent for Participants Ages 14-21
Aesthetics, the Purpose of Education, and the Process of Schooling

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators at Mercer University are doing a research study where we are trying to learn about what you think about education and schooling.

Procedures
You will be asked to complete a brief survey and possibly answer interview questions in a small group or as an individual. You have the right to refuse to have your information included in the research. Refusing to include your information will not jeopardize you receiving any services related to your current coursework at Howard High School.

Questionnaires. The survey questions are four open-ended response questions that you will complete during advisement period and should take no longer than approximately 15 minutes. The questions ask you will allow you to explain what you think the purpose of education is and how the process of schooling is related to this purpose.

Videotaping. No videotaping will be used.

Interviews. If you are selected for an interview, the interviews will take place after the regular school day in room 501 at Howard High School. The interview session will take no longer than 25 minutes and may be individual or small group. The interview questions will be an expansion of the survey questions and allow you to have more time to describe your thoughts and feelings about education and schooling. The interviews will be audio recorded so that the researcher can more accurately capture your voice. The recordings will be kept confidential and you will not indicate your identity in the recordings. Only the researcher will have access to the recordings.

Potential Risk and Discomforts
There are no perceived risks or discomforts that may be associated with the study.

Potential Benefits of the Research
The benefits of participation in the research may not directly assist you; however, these questions may cause you to reflect on your personal education and schooling process.

Confidentiality and Data Storage
Your name will not be associated with your responses and only an assigned coded number will identify you. At no time will your name be associated with the results of the research. However, any identifying information you provide while being audio taped will never be used as part of the research or associated with the results of the study.