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## *The Arts in Curriculum: Aesthetics, Embodiment and Well-Being*

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### **Abstract:**

This issue invites the reader to join the authors in a quest for the meaning of *Arts in Curriculum*; it calls on those reading to see, and not merely look. Drawing on the unique perspectives of educators, artists of diverse forms, and curriculum theorists, the issue invites a consideration of how the unique visions and personal experiences expressed in the issue foster thinking about *Aesthetics, Embodiment and Well-being* and their place in provoking transformation.

**Keywords:** artistic expression; voice; aesthetic response; re-humanization; arts education; self-study; definition of art

At a time in history when it can be said that untruth holds more sway than scientific fact; and at a place in education where the arts are deemed “useless frills” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 2) by most Western politicians and policy-makers, how is it that a passionate community of JCACS Special Issue editors, reviewers and authors is fervently committed to advocating the arts in curriculum? Along with each contributor’s personal motivation for participating in this creative adventure, there has emerged a discernible *leitmotiv*. A web-like network of associative logic (Sullivan, 2009) has insinuated itself into our collaborative effort and has slowly gained momentum around the notion of “perceptivity”, defined by Barone and Eisner as “seeing what most people miss” (1997, p. 93). Seeing and not merely looking, according to Eisner, is as important to the educator as it is to the artist. Indeed, while an information age is busy training its eye on technology, science and math, the enlightened eye of Eisner’s (1991) “educational connoisseur” (p. 6) is paying its respective attention to the underexplored, the overlooked, the disregarded and the otherwise “lost” meaning of a seemingly lost humanity. Behind the opaque appearance of the human artifice, we perceive a potentially thriving humanity caught momentarily between the lines of modern constructivism. How can art help us to rediscover the meaning of aesthetics, embodiment and well-being within such a firmly established worldview?

Trying to define art is like trying to snatch a breath of fresh air into the palm of one’s hand. Compared to the large picture, a mere definition of art is but a small token. Umberto Eco (2004), for example, sees art as beauty; John O’Donohue (2004), in the title of his book, calls beauty “the invisible embrace”; and John Keats (Briggs, 1951) poetically avers beauty *is* truth. As editors of the JCACS Special Issue, therefore, we have found ourselves facing the humbling task of attempting to encompass a very large and very complicated mystery, albeit an intriguing one that holds the elusive possibility of truth. In CACS, thankfully, we have a rich base of arts-inspired literature and arts-based, or arts-informed, methodologies to inspire a releasing of our inner resources and to encourage a letting go of our habitual dependence on external resources. Lighting the vision of many early CACS theorists, John Dewey (1934/1980) reminds us that art constitutes experience. Leo Tolstoy (1897/2009) sees art as a form of human communication; and according to Charles Taylor (1991), artistic expression is the paradigm mode for self-discovery in the modern era. We are rediscovering our “lost” humanity in, and through, artistic expression.

As privileged co-editors of the JCACS Special Issue, we are cognizant of the vital presence of voice. Giving art expression means giving expression to one’s original, authentic voice. Carl Leggo (1991) says that voice is like beach stones: each one unique and incomparable. From our perspective, voice is a way of “being in and doing the work from its inception to its conclusion” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 3). As such, voice *in*-forms aesthetics, *in*-habits embodiment and *in*-fuses well-being. Because voice is expressed through the arts, the visual arts as well as other artistic representations become powerful media for “doing” courageous deeds and for taking daring action. The “act” of art becomes significant when those deeds and those actions inspire social change. Mitchell and Ezcurra (2017) highlight the significance of the arts for resistance which, they observe, is an understudied but critical feature of well-being. To reiterate Dewey (1934/1980), art does not lead us to an experience; art constitutes an experience. When we express art, we come to know ourselves; when we come to

know ourselves, we come to know our wholeness; when we come to know our wholeness, we come to know our humanity.

A dazzling array of unique perspectives and practical suggestions awaits your attention. Within the following pages you will find the oft-evasive Muse feeling right at home and in her element! You will meet a diverse authorship of open-hearted, open-minded educators and therapists, visual artists, graphic designers, poets, dancers, story-tellers and curriculum-provoking, status-quo-disturbing, and otherwise trouble-making scholars and jail-breaking practitioners who have come together serendipitously to showcase their artistry as well as that of others. They tell us why they love what they do, and they share with us what they see and learn through their artistic practice. They suggest ways in which their unique visions and personal experiences might impact curricula in ways that could transform teaching and learning as we know it.

To illustrate the collective energy that comprises this work, we have chosen an image from one of our contributor's artistic offerings. The kaleidoscope symbolizes the JCACS Special Issue both in the dynamic, flexible container it portrays and in the non-static, temporary configuration it contains. We are most grateful to artist and author, Tamara Pearl, for allowing us to share her kaleidoscope images on our cover. Echoing our editorial experience, Pearl writes in her article in this issue, "within the kaleidoscope, the fragments are reflected and integrated in a way that harmonizes them and creates a felt sense of wholeness". Working through the peer review process and beyond, we came to discern the echoes and reflections of what Pearl calls a "deep intersubjective space".

We open the JCACS Special Issue's vernissage with a design shift that occurred in the Calgary Board of Education. "Finding Humanity in Design" co-authors, workshop animators and participants, Erin Quinn, Stephanie Bartlett, Laurie Alisat, Sandra McNeil and Kim Miner share their compelling story through the lens of a poetic métissage. In "Memory and Creativity: Finding a Place Where a Heart May Swirl", Annemarie Cuculiza Brunke tells the story of a Peruvian school administrator and workshop participant, "Heart Swirl", whose memory-work, artistic explorations and self-revelations brought her, in her words, to a place where "everything is possible, to the extent that it is contained in that [creative] space" (Brunke, this issue). Expanding upon Cuculiza Brunke's suggestion for creating an emotionally safe place for facilitating personal and societal transformation, Tamara Pearl introduces the metaphor of a "container" to help us grasp a curriculum of repair through a movement from fragmentation to wholeness. Through her artistic practice, the author brings to light a workable praxis for healing. Next, an educational practitioner and poet, Jodi Latremouille understands the pain of heartbreak and the need for healing, especially as it pertains to the deadening side effects of schooling's rules and regulations. In "Silence, Discipline and Student Bodies", Latremouille's seven poems manage to break open the reader's heart even as they affirm the beautiful reality of life. In "Wild Profusions: An Ode to Academic Hair", Mitchell McLarnon, Carl Leggo and Anita Sinner generously share their "inheritance" with us. While poking fun at themselves (and ourselves) they shine a revelatory light on the often-overlooked places of the dehumanizing effects of institutionalization.

In our next consideration, through their arts-based, hands-on explorations, both educators and future educators in Sheryl Smith-Gilman's article experience the power of the arts for igniting important conversations that would have otherwise been missed. She adapts a "loose parts" open-ended mindset to her university classroom by taking what she first learned from her research as a Reggio Emilia consultant in partnership with Mohawk educators seeking to teach their culture and language to four-and-five-year-old children. For Kathy Browning, it is imperative that her adult student teachers at Laurentian University have the opportunity to learn about their rural identities and northern culture through ready access to local artists' work through a digital archive. Inspired by her award-winning 14 Videos project, the students learned to create their own exemplars as exhibited in the article. Then, in "Seeking Race: Finding Racism", arts-based researcher, Towani Duchscher draws on her beautifully crafted poetic and personal memory narratives about her own schooling to explore embodiment in relation to the null curriculum of schools. In weaving in the responses of audiences to her dance performances, she issues a call for action on the part of educators to create a much-needed change. Momima Khan in "Curriculum as Planned: Who is Affected When Difference is Marginalized?" invites us into the domestic and everyday moments of what she calls a minority mother's stories. These poignant pieces highlight the challenges of addressing religious stigmatization and exclusion, reminding us of the ways in which the curriculum remains a contested space in Canadian classrooms. Speaking through personal vignettes in "Creating the Dance and Dancing Creatively", three dance advocates and scholars lead the reader to understand the tensions and joys of their efforts to integrate dance across teacher education curriculum. Likening the tensions to tight-rope walking, Brittany Harker Martin, Ralph Buck and Barbara Snook illustrate the balance needed to meet curricular ends while seeking the bliss of the endless possibilities that dance affords. In "Epiphany in Waiting", we accompany Anar Rajabali on a lyrical journey that begins with an ocean-side walk before taking a turn to a childhood experience of writing and rejection. In theorizing the space between the present and the past, the author reveals the significance of poetry "as a physical, emotional, and spiritual walking" (Rajabali, this issue). Rachel Rhoades, teaching artist, youth worker and researcher, shares an experience of collaborating with youth and communities to counter structural inequity through applied theatre practice. She illustrates the powerful impact of performance encounters grounded in social, environmental and economic justice between youth artist-educators and their audience.

We bring the collection to a close with the work of Michael Lockett and designer Gabe Wong. While it is their visually-compelling, co-created syllabus that is the heart of their contribution to the issue, the syllabus is accompanied by an audio-file of a conversation that gives us privileged insight into their thought processes. They ask us to consider how a syllabus—conceived through dialogue and attention to design—might be part of a unified teaching experience and a multifaceted aesthetic approach in the classroom.

It has been our privilege to work with visionary artists and curriculum makers and un-makers throughout an awe-inspiring publication process. We are grateful to all our contributors as well as to our reviewers. We would like to thank Lynn Butler-Kisber (2010) for allowing us to adapt her *LEARNING Landscapes* "Reviewer Evaluation Form" to meet the specialized requirements of this issue.

Her lifetime work in the arts has been a significant source of inspiration. Finally, we would especially like to acknowledge those who contributed tirelessly behind the scenes. Maija-Liisa Harju brought a caring and critical eye to the process of the team of guest editors, ensuring that we were well organized and prepared to hand over the reins to JCACS' Managing Editor Holly Tsun Haggarty. We echo the praise that Editor-in-Chief Pauline Sameshima has expressed for Holly, who worked significantly to further refine and prepare each of the pieces for publication. We are grateful to them both. In the end, it is our hope that this special issue will contribute to the burgeoning of art-fully resonant thinking and feeling that is presently inspiring new visions and consolidating new directions in Canadian and international Curriculum Studies.

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