

2006

Essay Review of "The Arts and the Creation of Mind" by Elliot Eisner

James Haywood Rolling Jr.
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/tl>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of The arts and the creation of mind by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching and Leadership by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

The Arts and the Creation of Mind

Eisner, Elliot W. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*.
New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
ISBN: 0-300-09523-6

Reviewed by Dr. James Haywood Rolling, Jr., The School at Columbia University

By happenstance, I am preparing myself to teach in two learning environments that are at least 20 years removed from one another. Having completed my doctoral studies in art education in May 2003, I have gone on to enjoy the unique pleasure of being recruited to join the remarkable faculty of a new elementary school, The School at Columbia University, which opened in New York City on September 17th, 2003. I have been asked to help pioneer a visual arts curriculum architecture that is fully integrated with music, dance, and story theatre pedagogy, as well with the original curriculum architecture we have developed for teaching the reading, writing, mathematics and science content believed in America to be the best means of developing and cultivating the mind of the learner (p. xi). I have also been asked to continue to teach in an adjunct capacity with graduate level art education students—work I thought it best to put on hold until the new school was up and running and the children and their families are had made themselves at home. So it wasn't until January of 2004 that I returned to teach at New York University as an adjunct faculty in their Art Education program.

To be so ensconced in addressing the developmental needs of elementary learners through all of the fine arts, whether, as Eisner puts it, “visual, choreographic, musical, literary, or poetic” (p. xii), while at the same time developing content of relevance to the agenda of beginning artist-researchers in our unique era, is also to reflect upon my own journey from elementary artistic understandings to expertise. How did the arts carry me

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

from point A, to point B—from an elementary education during which time art education was effectively cut from New York City public schools because of fiscal crisis, to a post-secondary education that has prepared me to teach to the varying levels of sophistication between grade school and college?

The answer that comes to mind is that the practise of the arts has shaped me into a life-long learner, my various experiences in the processes and structures, materials and methods of the arts serving “as models of what educational aspiration and practice might be at its very best” (p. xii). It was neither the getting of an education (everyone gets that), nor the tutelage of educators (everyone has those) that have made me what I am today, but rather my *pursuit* of a particular rigor of education. My own pursuit has taken its distinct trajectory through a landscape of the arts—from unschooled discoveries, to curriculum-imposed projects, to the freedom to say what I choose to whatever medium I choose.

By choice, I am writing a review of Elliot W. Eisner’s new book, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, which aims to dispel the persistent policy-making notion that regards the arts “as nice but not necessary” (p. xi). Eisner argues that the “complex and subtle” intellectual demands of the arts have “distinctive contributions to make” in schools, and to the overall process of learning, contributions that are not situated at the periphery of the educational experience, but squarely at its core (p. xii). At the very least, the arts appear to have been just as vital to Eisner as to my own experience. Eisner has worked in the field of art education for over thirty-five years, is a painter himself, and cites the visual arts as a source of his salvation when he was a student at both the elementary and secondary level.

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

The pursuit of an education through the arts has also defined my own journey in the creation of my own mind. If I am now an academic, what is it that I profess? I went through my own equivalent of the Dark Ages during my middle school years. Of that time, I remember neither the teachers, nor the building, nor any of the learning. Those years are covered with a cloak, a traumatic period when I skipped 7th grade such that I started high school when I was 12 years old, cut adrift from my peer group. It was also a period where there continued to be an absolute absence of the arts in my schooling. I was starving by the time I attended New York City's specialized High School of Art and Design; I had kept myself alive by feeding quietly upon stories.

I drew out these stories elaborately in mind, and sometimes on paper. Adults called this daydreaming or being "too serious" a child; I think rather that my imagination was alive and fully engaged in order to compensate for the lack of engagement and emotional connection I suffered in my daily condition as a loner at heart and an African-American in body attending a predominantly white school in an all-white neighborhood in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn during the 1970's. I wore that isolation like a second, hardened skin, which was shed like that of a chrysalis only when I allowed myself to dream. According to Eisner, I led a rich and eventful childhood.

Any contribution I can endeavor to make toward enriching the field of education will be the result of my experiences remaking the world in my mind's eye and enjoying others of my ilk doing the same—such are experiences that can be "secured when one attends to the world with an aesthetic frame of reference and interacts with forms that make such experience possible" (p. xii). It is worth noting that Eisner describes the act of perception as, in the end, a cognitive event. My experience corroborates. As an artist, I

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

initiate cognitive events and fold them into my own experience. Or perhaps I fold my experience over into the events I create.

As Maxine Greene (2001) tells it, the aesthetic frame in education begins with perception, for “it is in the world as it *appears* to us that we look for resemblances, seek out connections, identify possibilities, go in quest of meanings” (p. 12). I once drew large, panoramic, and narrative stick-figure stories as a child as a way of thinking out loud, as a way of constructing my imagined places. I often sketched out pencil markings until the marks resembled my thinking, became an inhabitation, provided a haven for me, and cradled my exposed flesh. Within such experiences I fell in love over and over again—I was right with the world and the world was made right. Within such experiences, I was protected from my threatened undoing, a stranger in a strange land. Making sense of my thoughts also made sense of who I was becoming—an artist. I am a writer now because I am an artist. I am a researcher because I am an artist. When I sing with my choir I am depicting a story, my emotions, and a narrative of my aesthetic experience as an occupant of a story worth retelling. When I practice any art form, I am a deliberate thinker, a shaper of meaningful events. Eisner sets out to tell us why such cognitive events are possible and, also, for the best.

In his introductory statements, Eisner uses profoundly simple language to set the compass for this inquiry, suggesting that education is best understood as “the process of learning to create ourselves” and that “experience is the medium of education” (p. 3). Regarding the latter principle, it might be said that the two-dimensional and three-dimensional documents created at the nexus of a learner’s encounters with new art materials and their own emerging intent, carry in them the *imprints* of that intent, of

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

discoveries made in the manipulation and conversion of the materials into meaningfulness, and in the carefully inlaid processes the learner chooses to leave embedded there in the work for the unsuspecting viewer or audience to happen upon.

Drawing upon Susanne Langer's (1979) concept of the "organ of the mind" in her classic *Philosophy in a New Key*, Eisner states:

We learn to see, to hear, to discern the qualitative complexities of what we taste and touch. We learn to differentiate and discriminate, to recognize and to recall. What first was a reflex response, a function of instinct, becomes a gradual search for stimulation, differentiation, exploration, and eventually meaning. Our sensory system becomes a means through which we pursue our own development. (Eisner, 2002, p. 2)

The pursuit of one's own development is purported by Eisner to be the cornerstone of all learning and a premise that wholly supports the thesis of his book, for the architecture of self requires *all* of the tools of culture. Eisner hypothesizes no hierarchy to exist among "language, the arts, science, values, and the like," that none occupies a greater plateau of importance than the other (p. 2). Taken further, the arts are not merely nice; they are necessary in the construction of a complete educational curriculum. Each tool of culture unlocks new aspects of other tools. A purpose of tools utilized in the manufacture of culture is to work in concert toward the invention of a fully human being, adept in the practices and tool usages required to navigate the structures of those social layers in which one finds oneself embedded. Another purpose is to help dislodge us from the landlocked certainties that bar our access to oceans of human possibility.

Walter Truett Anderson claims that "personal identities would be hard to locate without the network of symbols within which we are defined and the internal monologue

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

with which we continually remind ourselves who we think we are” (1997, p. 263). Our possible selves are fashioned from encounters with new ideas and relationships, untested values, and previously unknown knowledge contents. The individual recollects or **re-cognizes** those learning experiences—recreating, customizing, abandoning, dismantling, and refining memories into a self-awareness that changes its shape with time and circumstance; I fold over new qualities of experience into myself; I fold myself over into my experience. Identity is never fixed, though we often believe it is; if it were fixed, there would be no growth. Identity is not a form in itself, but a shape-shifting domain of possibilities bounded by altering scripts making sense of the world. Multiple identities may be couched in the gaps between these competing texts, bridges offering coherence amidst countervailing stories. The ocean undulates.

In that light, arguments for the utility and importance of both the qualitative arts and the quantitative sciences are essentially counterpoised and equally weighted. All experience is capable of generating inertia in the process of learning and development. The initiation of an aesthetic experience is, qualitatively speaking, a rocket-starter. It can be reckoned as the reception, ignition and transmission of identity material; an aesthetic experience is the conflagration that then consumes our surrounding structures, our scaffoldings, scorches the land, and prompts us to send another rocket into orbit. Perhaps the greater mission of an education through the arts is to ensure and perpetuate multiple aesthetic launchings penetrating the curtain of logic that holds our feet to the ground. How else will we discover what is out there? Once upon a time I was a struggling architecture student and while I was learning to draft drawings with certainty and a plastic triangle, I also learned to wield a free hand.

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

Free-hand Drawing Class

Sometimes a new home is found
in the unlikeliest of places.
On the site of engineered calamity,
of carefully administered abandonment,
the strange chalky odor
of demolished architecture
suspended in mists heavy
above the floorboards of my ruin—
I found shelter
from hard ink nights
from the threat of degrading measurements,
collapsing perspective,
and uneven lines...
within charcoal constructions
softly contoured by my hand
supported firmly
on white sheets of paper—

and the human figure held me safe.

My free hand has been held; yes, the arts have nurtured my well-being, but also my sense of self-discovery. My hand has not been clenched and pulled along; it has been held loosely. My free hand has been given the room to meander; it searches; it leads arts and performance along a curriculum pathway of aesthetic encounters and re-searching. My free hand takes arts learning where I want it to go. While stasis and certainty defines boundaries, a pathway works to defy borders and disrupt boundaries. Eisner uses the clever tool of synopsisizing the path of his main argument as it circuits through each chapter, utilizing a single sentence subheading beneath the chapter title.

At the start of *Chapter One: The Role of the Arts in Transforming Consciousness* education is introduced as “the process of learning how to invent oneself” (p. 1). The arts are shown to be that which can refine and enlarge the imaginative capacity of the organ

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

of the mind to envision its self-inventions. In the Faculty Handbook of The School at Columbia University, the school's perspective on education is described as demanding

an expanded understanding of “literacy” that begins with real-world experiences, out of which pupils discern and construct meaning and significance by reflecting on their own experiences and those of others. By generating intellectual and reflective habits of mind, our teachers prepare children to participate fully in the world (2003, p. 11).

To be fully literate is to be able first to *interpret*—providing harbor so as to dock and unload cargo—and then to *launch* a new round of trade across unfamiliar seas. Traffic to and fro across the territories of alternative sign systems is described by Innis as involving “meanings and messages in all their forms and all their contexts” (1985, p. vii). An integrated educational experience, as we are attempting to constitute at The School, attempts to disrupt the borders separating literacies so that children learn to read and decode messages when they are doing their visual art, learn to speak a second language as they are counting numbers, learn to see visual patterns in the movements of dance. Essential meanings are equally accessible through multiple pathways toward an expanded self-awareness, pathways that may be taken through varied and co-curricular sign systems and lexicons. Systems of knowing and sensing need not be compatible, merely translatable.

As multiple literacies are acquired, expression of self resonates with new versions of self yet to be told. An underdeveloped narrative of self begets an inflexible identity bereft of alternative perceptions and experiences upon which to draw. Within aesthetically literate explorations of personal narrative there is a metaphoric capacity that can momentarily erase the boundaries of larger social definitions, creating movement toward new possibilities, and allowing the influx of unknown experience.

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

Those at the center can imagine what it is to be outside. The strong can imagine the weak. Illuminated lives can imagine the dark. Poets in their twilight can imagine the borders of stellar fire. We strangers can imagine the familiar hearts of strangers. (Ozick, 1989, p.283)

Chapter Two: Visions and Versions of Art Education compares various visions of arts education practice and purports that “a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing” the exemplary possibilities that might very well be found in an alternative approach to arts educational pedagogy (p. 25). Tom Anderson writes:

When art educators recognize that artworks do not stand above and apart from culture, but are in fact embedded in a cultural web; when we recognize that reality is socially constructed, rather than positivistically given; when we recognize that signs and meanings arbitrarily and collectively assigned; and when we recognize that the definition, meaning, and value of art are as different as the cultures in which they exist; then multicultural, content-based art education becomes the model for the postmodern age. (1997, p.72, 73)

Content-based education may be juxtaposed with prevailing art educational models premised on the modernist tenets of universal structures, unadulterated forms, and unaltering elements and principles of design. Universals are maintained as uninterpretable since interpretation is contingent on changes in meaning. Modernist universals are disseminated with the intent to cause change...to cause the heterogeneous to come into conformity. Universalist paradigms are an orthodoxy of the modern era premised in a scientific paradigm that “privileges the logical, the rational...the stable, and the objective” (Walker, 1997, p. 111). Conversely, a postmodern model of art education model would favor the heterogeneous, the multiple, the temporal, the local, and the contradictory” (Walker, 1997, p. 111). A postmodern model of education would thus

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

necessitate a continuum of translations in order for coherent meaning to be attained, doing so within a dispensation of language discourse¹ and textual embeddedness².

A postmodern model of education also presupposes “accepting and embracing multiple, competing, political value bases” (Anderson, 1997, p. 71). In the praxis of “critically examining and making artworks, using [a postmodern] conceptual framework, students therefore may gain access to attitudes, mores, and cultural understandings of themselves as beings in their own culture and of the cultures of others” (Anderson, 1997, p. 71). A base level acquisition of competing values, though a little unsettling, will allow for a multicultural education at its best.

Chapter Three: Teaching the Visual Arts argues that “teaching that does not promote learning makes as much sense as selling that does not promote buying.” Eisner entreats the reader to consider that effectual learning through the arts is neither magically imparted, nor metaphysically acquired as a byproduct of entering the hallowed space of the working art studio. Effectual learning through the arts requires the cultivation of sound and effective teaching habits (p. 46).

In a larger sense, I wonder about the effectiveness of public schooling in an economy that marginalizes the quality of learning that is possible only through the arts. Data suggests that the integration of the arts into the curriculum concept of public education remains an uncompleted mission in spite of successive school reform attempts

¹ “Language helps the child to interpret his experience for others. It is no doubt the case that the language is given sense by the experience, but the process is not all one way. The experience is given sense for the child by the language he uses to communicate it to others” (Radford, 1992, p. 54 as cited in (Wolcott & Gough-Dijulio, 1997, p. 147).

² To interpret is to rename and repackage content for redistribution. Interpretation is preceded by criticality, a sifting for the substance beneath the surface. Interpretation has nothing to do with the intention of the author of the text, since by definition a text has no author or originator (see Barthes, 1977) but rather an

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

in the 20th century. Joan Boyett, vice president of the Music Center of Los Angeles observed the “appalling” statistical evidence that with 45 million students attending 85,000 U. S. public schools, grades K-12, in more than 15,000 school districts with approximately 2.5 million teachers, “the responsibility of reinforcing the teaching of the arts at the district level rests in the hands of only 114 music supervisors and 59 art supervisors—nationwide” (cited in Larson, 1997, p. 3). There are no separate figures available on the number of theater or dance supervisors, leading her to wonder if there are any at all. Facts regarding the frequency of arts instruction to eighth-grade students in the *National Assessment of Educational Progress 1997 Arts Assessment* indicate that 80% of typical eighth-graders attending public and private schools do not receive instruction in dance at all. 74% do not receive any theatre instruction either. Only 43% receive extensive instruction in music (defined as at least 3 or 4 times a week), and only 52% receive extensive instruction in visual arts. Those who do not receive extensive instruction in visual art or music receive instruction once or twice a week, less than once a week, or not at all.

Moreover, in *The Fifth Phi Delta Kappa Poll of Teachers’ Attitudes Toward Public Schools*, a random sample of 4,000 U.S. public school teachers, with 751 respondents, indicates that only 44% would require courses in art to college-bound high school students, and only 43% would require courses in music. That number decreases when the question was directed at what subjects non-college-bound high school students should be required to take. This time, only 36% of responding teachers felt that art or music should be a requirement. Instead, according to 76% of responding teachers, non-

archaeology—layers of sedimentary meaning embedded within other meanings with nary a trace of all those many who may have trafficked and occupied its domain.

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

college-bound students would be much better off being required to take courses in industrial arts and homemaking (Langdon, 1999).

Chapter Four: What The Arts Teach and How It Shows suggests that when assessing learning outcomes and the goals from which they are derived, one must remember that “students learn both more and less than they are taught” (p. 70). As I am grappling with methods for assessing arts learning I am struck by my own insecurity with the depth and breadth of my knowledge bases. It seems at times like so many others know so much more than I do. But I think the point I gain from Eisner’s writing is that there is more to learning than quantity, than the volume my basin holds. Perhaps the greater goal of assessment is to ascertain the connectivity of the elements I possess.

Do the elements cohere? Am I whole, or do I fall apart? Is my knowledge a self-sustaining organism? Does it possess a life of its own? Does my knowing connect with my being? Do all the elements of my knowing have an identity? Does it name itself? Does it resist the names it is given by force of its continuing change? In my own case I feel that all answers to the above are favorable, due in no small part I’m sure to my arts education and the quality of mind it cultivates. Curriculum assessment is inauthentic unless the individual tells of what they know, how they came about knowing it, and why they value what they know. Tests cannot tell, they can only give indication; testers tell, giving interpretation of tests. But in their scoring interpretations, testers only tell what they themselves know; the student’s voice is silenced for the sake of the test.

Sometimes a student “doesn’t get it,” but retains enough for long enough to pass the test. They own little to none of their learning at the end of the process. Sometimes a student gets something the teacher never imagined. Authentic assessment is reflexive; it

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

picks up after itself and organizes the chaos. It mines its artifacts and performances for meaning (Anderson, 1995). Authentic assessment is repetitive; like any good mining operation, it revisits the shaft and extends it as it follows after veins of possible meaning. Authentic assessment does not seek to quantify; it will move a mountain of rubble and drain a bucket of sweat for the small diamond it values. Authentic assessment allows the miner to set their value, seek their bounty, stake their claim and then return their acquisition to open market. Authentic assessment is self-directed and privately owned. Process-folios, facilitated by an instructor but carried out and presented by the learner, may be the best way to manage the process of learning assessment. What have I learned today? What is my evidence?

Chapter Five: Describing Learning in the Visual Arts proposes, “children, of necessity, develop from both the inside out and the outside in” (p. 93). Eisner offers an array of black and white and color children’s paintings and drawings to argue that development is very much like a tensile structure stretched between the past experience of the learner and current need or purpose. Perception is then the product of careful attention to navigating and finding pathways back and forth across such tensions. The images reproduced in this chapter are thus the products of careful attention. The successful navigation of an opportunity to develop a juncture between past experience and current engagement produces a situated learning. The connections that exemplify successful learning also require the acquisition of situated techniques that will exploit the materials made available to the learner to render consciousness readily at hand. The connections that exemplify successful learning also promote the reapplication and reinterpretation of experience the learner has deemed salient and meaningful enough to

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

retain. According to Eisner, the arts offer a way of learning to make our attentions malleable, “help us become aware of ourselves” in a most visceral manner and, at best, help us to “remake ourselves” (p. 112).

The image schemata that constitute our visual culture, our visual and performing arts, and our self-images are those recurring structures of cognition that reinterpret themselves. All knowledge, all learning, all identity, is a reinterpretation. A mind can thus made, remade, unmade, and made over; it is never finished. An interpretation is never the final word or image. Reinterpretation is the processing of thought by revisiting knowledge structures even after they have been carved into form in everyday consciousness, with the ultimate effect of disrupting that form. Disruption precedes translation. Narrative disruptions shave away at the fixity of our language and our knowledge frames. Discourse spins knowledge structures from mind to mind as in a workshop lathe. In the translation of knowledge structures, cognition’s reinterpetive tools are called upon to run across the contours of that knowledge, reshaping knowledge to fit new parameters required for continued individual and social growth.

Vygotsky (1978) argued that mind is socially constructed, generated by dialogue with contextual world. Cultural meanings are moved into mind. Mind is embedded in culture. I suggest that the argument be taken further. Mind re-interprets the contextual. New experience further restructures the reinterpretation. Mind remakes culture’s contexts as they are remade in mind. Just as culture shapes our interpretation of our bodies, our mind can remake those interpretations. Early image repertoires are text-able because they become the bases for expanding social discourses—they become the stories of identity—narratives that help individual’s think about and feel who they are, where

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

they come from, and where they are headed—narratives that constitute the single most powerful agency in constituting and engaging in the discourses that position the self as meaningful, to make a world and call oneself by name.

Stories are created in the covalence between experiential image held in mind and discursive explanatory text. Their bond creates a memorable template for meaning to be retained and conveyed—a story. It is the stories we are able to tell of ourselves that determines who we believe ourselves—and those around us—to be. Those stories are integral to the development of mind, enmeshed in the network of our first experiences, our present memory, our projected possibilities, and our collective understandings. The mind creates these parables upon the archaeology of its first events, first objects, first attempts to navigate through space, and names them familiar. Or renames the unfamiliar as familiar. Or banishes the unfamiliar as unknowable. New familiars, like the archetypal familiars, become the stories we tell over and over again. The language of those stories is comprised of the various strains of metaphor:

We cannot speak without speaking metaphorically—as our spoken languages are constructed from symbolic building materials that are metaphorical in nature. Words are only symbols for their meanings. One symbol, sign, word, object, or idea *represents* another...Our symbolic minds work by implicitly relating different things and processes. Through metaphors, we may relate something we know to something we don't. (Siler, 1990, pp.28, 29)

Chapter Six: The Centrality of Curriculum and the Function of Standards argues, “the curriculum is a mind-altering device” which, in effect, lays out “an agenda for the development of the mind” and the continuing re-creation of the individual in the larger culture (p. 148). Competing perspectives on the utility of standards as a measurement of achievement are explored in this chapter. Concomitant to this discussion, *Chapter Seven:*

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

The Educational Uses of Assessment and Evaluation in the Arts asserts, “not everything that matters can be measured and not everything that is measured matters” (p. 178). Patterns and pathways, however, are not impermeable to interrogation, disruption, dissipation, and evolution. Patterns of individual and cultural identity are subject to both growth and conservation, to dissolution and reconstruction. The identity is a story. We each tend to adhere to an identifiable, repeatable pattern of meanings. Patterns of individual and cultural identity are indeed subject to growth and conservation, to dissolution and reconstruction, but not necessarily to measurement. Discourse creates the socially embedded latticework across which our sustainable patterns—our stories, our images, and our texts are blended and rearranged. Living patterns may be absorbed, or they may be disrupted, but to collect and attempt measure them a particular station of growth would be to kill them. What would be the point? A better investment of resources is in creating and cultivating new locations of growth. Eisner makes a case, I believe, for increasing arts education in our schools rather than standardized testing.

Curriculum creates pathways from the present, normative self to possible selves. If curriculum is a mind-altering device, it is because a normative self and its possible selves engage in a form of play, a theater of simultaneity, of mutual clarification, of social performativity. In a visual culture, the images that we create, images that we encounter, are all presented as self-evidence, wrenching us across the surfaces of the familiar and uncommon experience like a precipitous act of collective memory. And in our present recollection, past and present, near and far, melt and blend together in a “transcognitive” (Sullivan, 2002) alchemy that produces whole new shapings, unforeseeable alloys, molten and fluid identities.

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

The arts in education have the potential to do wonders. The normal, the newly perceived, and the not yet realized may share a new extra-normative frame. They take on alternating shapes in mind. They are no longer fixed. They serve as evidence of social identities reinterpreted in the contexts of various visual and discursive subcultures. They share my lived experience and that of each of my students. They constitute a poststructural society, unhinged, unspecified. They render me, and us, in part and as the whole.

Chapter Eight: What Education Can Learn From the Arts advocates that the promotion of “a love affair between the student and his or her work is one of our schools’ most important aims” (p. 196). Eisner offers the arts as a “model for teaching the subjects we usually think of as academic,” teaching that questions have more than one answer, problems more than one solution; that the way a thing is formed matters just as much as its content and function, and in fact serves to mediate that content and function; that the refining of the imagination—those successive acts of *re*-presenting through some fitting medium our meanderings across previous experience, fresh encounter, and over into the new ideas that arise to mind during such passages—that such refinement invites attention to the qualitative relationships that bind and construct conveyances for our knowledge. Understanding the role in the arts of improvisational meanderings back and forth across content areas and disciplines also teaches the utility of flexible purposing, which Eisner describes as taking advantage of “unanticipated developments” and surprises “in order to realize goals that were not a part of [the] original agenda” (p. 206). As I suggested earlier, when I do a new piece of art, it is possible I will fall in love with

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

it. More significantly, it returns loves to me, calling my name and telling me I have arrived anew at a place all my own, a place of learning, a place of fresh beginnings.

The Meeting

I cannot find my way to beauty
through this positivist paradise of certainty and definition.

This is not the way to the Lost City,
the place of twilight dawn
betwixt memory and imaginings
where time pauses
and synapses fire
in celebration of our vows,
the once again
too infrequent
re-union of my beauty and I.

I find a path to beauty
along medians of ugliness
between minimalism and Madonnas,
overlooking happy niggers and weeping minstrels
atop a plateau of meanings all my own.

I meander along the familiar narratives
the lattice of images precedent and projected
observing unfamiliarities
arisen since last I was here.
I inquire aloud
and at this commencement of
our lush hilltop dialogue;
my beauty responds,
meeting my voice
with a groan of joy rumbling up from the earth between my bare toes.

The city gates shudder,
ringing primordially with the tremors of my beauty awakened.
I have found my way home.

My voice cries out its interpretations—I know its cadence
though I watch silently somehow
aloft in the resonating air
as it carries reports of our consummation
to postmodern citadels

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

this, our new story,
beauty and I.

Through the wind-blown veil
of re-membered experience
of re-cognized events
I plummet again
to crash against the quaking dust
and clutch the face of beauty
as meanings uproot
as imagery redounds
as the hidden text
erupts
until we are again at rest
my body atop a remade land.

A self-portrait of my beauty and I.

Though most have forgotten the way to the Lost City
I will return again.

Chapter Nine: An Agenda for Research in Arts Education reminds the reader that “science is a species of research; research is not a species of science” (p. 209). In his book *Researching Lived Experience*, educator Max van Manen writes,

Because artists are involved in giving shape to their lived experience, the products of art are, in a sense, lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations. (van Manen, 1990, p. 74)

Configurations of knowledge that are positioned to make sense of our human being-ness are sometimes scientific, but they sometimes arts-based. The arts are a form of research; they are the refinements of our common sensibilities that are hewn as stories—spoken, written, drawn, sculpted, painted, performed, or crafted—beautifully efficient shorthand renderings of meaning by which an individual or community finds a

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

way to “materialize a way of experiencing, bring a particular cast of mind out into the world. . .where men [and women] can look at it” (Geertz, 1983, p. 99).

Artist-researchers, across all mediums, contour their wares into the literary, the two-dimensional, the three-dimensional, into the oral and the aural—into the epics, the short stories, and the marginalia that document and project the changing shape of culture and human identity. Just as identity changes shape, these stories are structures in flux, and their expressions are not illustrations of already formulated ideas, but each a “mode of thought” in and of itself. The interplay of story and art and identity is like the fingering of clay, casting our mindsets into “forms where the senses, and through the senses the emotions, can reflectively address them” (Geertz, 1983, p. 120). We are free to grasp at the dimensions, explore the perimeter, cross over the borders and circumnavigate that which internally, cognitively, affectively takes place. We are free to create for ourselves and for others “a format into which experienced events can be cast in the attempt to make them comprehensible, memorable, and shareable” (Olson, 1990, pp. 100-101).

The artist-practitioner also explores possibilities in the broadest sense of the word. To be an artist—a practicing visual, musical, literary or performing artist—is first to inquire, and then to execute the creation of change, learning, and development through narrative and non-paradigmatic methodologies that break down boundaries and open up space for meandering. Outside of the proscribed domains of institutional learning, artist-researchers and artist-practitioners tend to go about learning in a wholly different way. We learn to be nomads once again. We learn to hunt and gather that which we find

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

meaningful. We make totems of the saliencies of our experience. We rediscover the great satisfaction that is derived from thinking that is otherwise.

In *Chapter Ten: Summary and Significance*, Eisner seeks to encapsulate the unique contributions of the arts to the development of human consciousness. I will not do the disservice of attempting to recapitulate his points here; they are each important and make this book worth its purchase price in and of themselves. But I should emphasize that while Eisner does not reject educational outcomes that are extra-artistic, and is even delighted that certain outcomes are cooperatively achieved by the arts in tandem with math and the sciences, Eisner is of the belief that the “most secure justification for the arts in education pertains to what only they are likely to provide” (p. 235).

As an art educator, an artist-researcher and artist-practitioner who seeks to give his best to the principles and practice of lifelong learning, in both elementary and higher educational formats, I would like to suggest that likeminded and progressive educators will also find much to attend to in this aptly timed advocacy for a fully integrated, arts-pervasive curriculum.

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

References

- Anderson, T. (1995). Toward a cross cultural approach to art criticism. *Studies in Art Education*, 36 (4), pp. 198-209.
- Anderson, T. (1997). Toward a postmodern approach to art education. In J. Hutchens & M. Suggs (Eds.), *Art education: Content and practice in a postmodern era*. (pp. 62-73). Reston, VA: National Art Education Association
- Anderson, W. T. (1997). *The future of the self: Inventing the postmodern person*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Barthes, R. (1968). The death of the author. In *Image—music—text*. [Heath, S., Trans.] (1977). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Faculty Handbook of The School at Columbia University. (2003). Retrieved from the website of The School at Columbia University on January 18, 2004 at <http://theschool.columbia.edu/home/community/faculty>
- Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.
- Greene, M. (2001). *Variations on a blue guitar*. New York: Teachers College Press
- Hutchens, J. & Suggs, M. (Eds.) (1997). *Art education: Content and practice in a postmodern era*. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association
- Innis, R. (Ed.). (1985). *Semiotics: An introductory anthology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Langdon, C. A. (1999). *The fifth Phi Delta Kappa poll of teacher's attitudes toward the public schools*. Retrieved from Phi Delta Kappa International website on February 13, 2001 at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/klan9904.htm>

Rolling, J. H. (2006). [Essay review of *The arts and the creation of mind* by Elliot Eisner]. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38 (1), pp. 113-125.

Langer, S. (1979). *Philosophy in a new key*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Larson, G. O. (1997). *American canvas: An arts legacy for our communities*. National Endowment for the Arts.

Olson, D. R. (1990). Thinking about narrative. In B. K. Britton & A.D. Pellegrini (Eds.), *Narrative thought and narrative language* (pp. 99-112). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Ozick, C. (1989). *Metaphor and memory*. New York: Knopf.

Radford, M. A. (1992). Meaning and significance in aesthetic education. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 26 (1), pp. 53-66.

Siler, T. (1990). *Breaking the mind barrier: The artscience of neurocosmology*. New York: Touchstone.

Sullivan, G. (2002). Artistic thinking as transcognitive practice: A reconciliation of the process-product dichotomy. *Visual Arts Research*, 27 (1), pp. 2-12. Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Walker, S. (1997). Postmodern theory and classroom art criticism: Why bother?. In J. Hutchens & M. Suggs (Eds.), *Art education: Content and practice in a postmodern era*. (pp. 111-121). Reston, VA: National Art Education Association

Wolcott, A. G. & Gough-Dijulio, B. (1997). Just looking or talking back? A postmodern approach to art education. In J. Hutchens & M. Suggs (Eds.), *Art education: Content and practice in a postmodern era*. (pp. 143-152). Reston, VA: National Art Education Association